Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. Many readers, teachers, editors, and writers consider fragments to be unacceptable because fragment errors suggest that the writer is unable to recognize or sustain a complete thought. Of course, there are exceptions for which fragments are acceptable; however, in most academic and business writing, complete sentences are expected. In order to avoid fragment errors and to proofread for fragment errors, you must be able to recognize complete sentences. Remember that to be a complete sentence, a group of words must have all of the following:

1. at least one independent (main) clause
2. a complete thought
3. a capital letter at the beginning
4. terminal punctuation at the end (period, question mark, or exclamation point)

For more information, consult the Writing Center handout titled Phrases, Clauses, Sentences.

Dependent (Subordinate) Clause Fragments

Even though they contain subject-verb groups, dependent clauses (also called subordinate clauses) are not grammatically complete sentences. Look for the subordinator that signals a dependent clause. These words may be subordinating conjunctions or relative pronouns: even though, if, because, whenever, although, or which. When attached to independent clauses, dependent clauses are acceptable; however, they cannot stand alone.

- When the people in our family eat dinner late at night.
- Because the door was locked.
- Which Kelly borrowed from a friend.

Phrase Fragments

Phrases are word groups; however, they do not contain subject-verb groups and therefore cannot be considered sentences. Sometimes, however, phrases do contain verbs or verb forms. Be careful not to treat verb phrases and verbal phrases as if they were subject-verb groups.

- Leaving the farm and going to the city.
- To sing in the chorus.
- After the storm.
- The cat, the dog, the mouse, and the tiger.
- Happier than ever before in our lives.

Correcting Fragment Errors

http://www.tc.cc.va.us/writcent/handouts/grammar/frag.htm
There are several ways to correct fragments. Always choose the method that is most logical for expressing the idea you are presenting.
1. Supply the missing subject or verb or both.

- Original: The door in the bedroom.
- Revision: The door in the bedroom was locked.
- Original: Leaving the farm and going to the city.
- Revision: They were leaving the farm and going to the city.

2. Rewrite to create an independent clause.

- Original: To sing in the chorus.
- Revision: My friends sing in the chorus.

3. Remove the subordinator (dependent clause signal) to create an independent clause.

- Original: When the people in our family eat dinner late at night.
- Revision: The people in our family eat dinner late at night.
- Original: Because the door was locked.
- Revision: The door was locked.

4. Connect the fragment to a logically related sentence before or after.

- Original: I cannot find the scissors. Which Kelly borrowed from a friend.
- Revision: I cannot find the scissors which Kelly borrowed from a friend.
- Original: Depressed by their grades in chemistry. Pat and Chris decided to study together for the exam.
- Revision: Depressed by their grades in chemistry, Pat and Chris decided to study together for the exam.

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