

RECOGNIZING AND AVOIDING SENTENCE FRAGMENTS



A sentence fragment is, essentially, an **incomplete sentence**. It generally consists of a dependent clause that needs to be joined to an independent clause to create a complete thought. Because it is an incomplete sentence, readers will have trouble making meaning from your words.



Dependent clause fragments are the most common kind of fragment, but there are others, including **missing piece fragments** (where the subject or verb is missing).



Sample Fragment Explained

e.g., I stayed up late last night.

The above sentence is a **complete sentence** (independent clause). It contains a subject and predicate.

e.g., I drank an excessive amount of coffee today.

The above sentence is also a **complete sentence** (independent clause). It contains a subject and predicate.

e.g., Because I stayed up late last night.

The above sentence is a **dependent clause fragment**. Without the **dependent clause cue word** *because*, the sentence is independent. With the addition of the word *because*, it is a fragment: without an independent clause attached, the thought is incomplete, and the reader will not know what occurred because of your late night.

Dependent clause cues and signals are also known as **subordinating conjunctions**.

e.g., Because I stayed up late last night¹, I drank an excessive amount of coffee today².

e.g., I drank an excessive amount of coffee today² because I stayed up late last night¹.

- 1 Dependent clause
- 2 Independent clause

Both sentences above are effective solutions to the sentence fragment.



When joining dependent and independent clauses, comma usage changes depending on the order. **Use a comma** when the **dependent clause** comes first; **omit a comma** when the **independent clause** comes first.



Avoiding Sentence Fragments

- 1 Watch for **dependent clause cue words** (ie., subordinating clauses).

Dependent clause cue words are words that turn independent clauses (“Her notes were carefully crafted”) into dependent ones (“Though her notes were carefully crafted...”). If the dependent clause is joined to an independent one, it forms a grammatically complete sentence; if not, it is a sentence fragment.

Some common dependent clause cue words include the following: because, although, even if, when, whenever, despite, unless, after



- 2 Proofread carefully by **reading aloud** and paying attention to **periods** and **semicolons**.

Remember that proofreading and revision are not the same activities. **Proofreading** involves reading for **lower-level issues** (sentence structure, punctuation, verb tense, etc.), while **revision** involves reading for **higher-level issues** (argument, logic, evidence, analysis, etc.). Both are important components of the writing process.

