

# ELIMINATING SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Online: [www.ufv.ca/writing\\_centre](http://www.ufv.ca/writing_centre)

The goal of writing is to communicate ideas to a reader. The sentence fragment is an error that hinders the communication process because it can confuse your meaning. **Every sentence must contain a subject and a verb and must express a complete thought. If it does not, it is a sentence fragment.** The problem with having sentence fragments in your writing is that they leave the reader with an unfinished thought. The confused reader must then take a guess about how to complete the thought.

To avoid sentence fragments, you first must be able to identify subjects and verbs.

## About subjects and verbs:

A sentence is about something or someone. This who or what the sentence speaks about is called the subject. The word (of words) that tells what the subject is or does is called the verb. It is usually easier to find the verb, also called the action word, first.

Example: The rain fell all day.

The verb is fell. What fell? Rain. Rain is the subject.

## These are the most common type of sentence fragments:

- Dependent word fragments
- ing* and *to* fragments
- Added detail fragments
- Missing subject fragments

If you can identify these types of fragments, you can eliminate them from your writing.

## DEPENDENT WORD FRAGMENTS

### How to recognize dependent word fragments:

Example: I decided to stay in college. After I researched the job market.

A word like “after” is a clue that a dependent clause is coming. A dependent clause, as the name suggests, depends on another statement to complete the thought. “After I researched the job market” is a dependent clause. It leaves us hanging. So what happened next? Because it cannot stand on its own, this dependent clause is a sentence fragment.

Here are some more dependent clause clues:

After	If, even if	when, whenever
although, though	in order that	where, wherever
as	since	whether
because	that, so that	which, whichever
before	unless	while
even though	until	who, whoever
how	what, whatever	whose

Whenever you start a sentence with one of these words, be careful that you have completed the thought.

**How to fix the dependent-word fragment:**

Attach it to the sentence before or after it. Example:

I decided to stay in college after I researched the job market.  
or  
After I researched the job market, I decided to stay in college.

**-ING AND TO FRAGMENTS**

**How to recognize *ing* fragments:**

Examples:

Scientists spent hundreds of hours in the lab. Trying to find a cure.

In the novel, the oldest son plans to join the priesthood. Knowing the profession will restore respect to his family.

The word groups above that contain *ing* words are sentence fragments, since they contain no subjects. (Who was *trying*?) The subject must actually be in the sentence to make it complete.

**How to fix *-ing* fragments:**

Attach the fragment to the sentence before or after it. Example:

Scientists spent hundreds of hours in the lab, trying to find a cure.

Add a subject and change the verb to the correct form:

In the novel, the oldest son plans to join the priesthood. He knows the profession will restore respect to his family.

**Recognizing and fixing *to* fragments:**

When *to* appears at or near the start of a word group, a fragment sometimes results.

Example: Strong odours have been used since the earliest times. To purge demons and cure diseases.

The second word group is a fragment, since it has no subject. (What purges?) It can be corrected by adding it to the preceding sentence:

Strong odours have been used since the earliest times to purge demons and cure diseases.

**ADDED DETAIL FRAGMENTS**

**How to recognize added detail fragments:**

Added detail fragments lack a subject and a verb. They often begin with one of the following words:

also	except	including
especially	such as	for example

Examples: Extensive travelling led to the development of many devices. For example the snowshoe, the toboggan and the birch bark canoe.

The women's suffrage movement was active in Canada. Especially in the prairie provinces.

The second word groups in these examples are fragments.

### **How to fix added detail fragments:**

To correct them, you can do one of three things:

1. Attach the fragment to the sentence before it, using a comma.

Example: The women's suffrage movement was active in Canada, especially in the prairie provinces.

2. Add a subject and verb to the fragment.

Example: Extensive travelling led to the development of many devices. These devices included the snowshoe, the toboggan and the birch bark canoe.

3. Change words as necessary to make the sentence part of the preceding sentence.

Example: In Canada, the women's suffrage movement was especially active in the prairie provinces.

### **MISSING SUBJECT FRAGMENTS**

#### **How to recognize missing subjects fragments:**

Example: Hamlet's speech builds upon the ghost's commands. And begins by addressing that departed figure.

The second half of this example is a fragment because it is missing a subject. (What begins?)

#### **How to correct missing subject fragments:**

1. Attach the fragment to the preceding sentence. Example:

Hamlet's speech builds upon the ghost's command and begins by addressing that departed figure.

2. Add a subject. Example:

Hamlet's speech builds upon the ghost's command. The speech begins by addressing that departed figure.

#### ***The Writing Centre at the University of the Fraser Valley***

- *promotes and researches writing as a foundational activity connected to critical thinking and learning in a post-secondary setting,*
- *provides a confidential service offering writing instruction to students who wish to become effective writers in their fields of study, and*
- *engages in dialogue with UFV's community of learners about the teaching of writing in discipline areas.*

*The Writing Centre*