

## Identifying Sentence Fragments

A fragment is an incomplete sentence; in other words, it is missing one of the crucial grammatical elements that makes a sentence able to stand on its own. Fragments can be caused by leaving out subject or a verb in a sentence (see below) or by adding a subordinating word to the beginning of an otherwise complete sentence. Fragments can be very short or very long ~ the length is not the deciding issue.

- **Example One:** I had watched the news. I knew what I was up against on the morning of September 24, 2002.  
*Unlinked, simple sentences.*
- **Example Two:** Having gouged out his eyes in disgrace of the mere sight of the children he has created with his mother. *Fragment -- missing a subject [in other words, we don't know who gouged out his eyes].*
- **Example Three:** Traditional intellectuals being people of higher class, have a higher education, or a highly thought of job. *Fragment -- missing a stand-alone verb ["being" can't stand-alone; the verb could be changed to "are," though].*
- **Example Four:** Although the story depresses audiences or readers because of too fearful ending.  
*The word "although" takes this otherwise complete sentence and makes it unable to stand on its own; removing "although" or adding a complete sentence to the end of this subordinating clause would correct the fragment.*

**Strategy #1: Transform the questionable sentence with a "tag question." If the transformation is possible, then the sentence is complete. If not, it is a fragment.**

1. It's a great party.

- A. It's a great party, isn't it?
  - B. Is it a great party?
- Sentence*

2. Enjoyed the baseball game on Saturday.

- A. Enjoyed the baseball game on Saturday, [didn't he / she / they?]  
*Fragment -- we have to add something ("he / she / they") in order to make the transformation "sound right."*

**Strategy #2: Insert the questionable sentence into a nest sentence. If the transformation is possible, then the sentence is complete. If not, it is a fragment.**

Sample nest sentence: They refused to believe the idea that \_\_\_\_\_.

**1. Doing math problems isn't one of Bill's favorite activities.**

A. They refused to believe the idea that doing math problems isn't one of Bill's favorite activities.  
*Sentence*

**2. The wind howling through the trees last night.**

A. They refused to believe the idea that the wind howling [was] through the trees last night.  
*Fragment -- we have to add something ("was") in order to make the transformation "sound right" -- not a sentence.*

**3. If you started tomorrow at 3:00 p.m.**

A. They refused to believe the idea that if you started tomorrow at 3:00 p.m [then something would happen].  
*Fragment -- we have to add something ("then something would happen") in order to make the transformation "sound right" -- not a sentence.*