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.