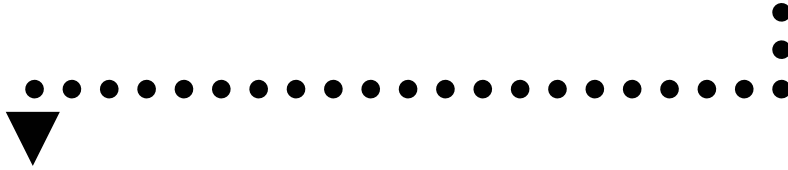


# FRAGMENT TIP 1



Recognize a *fragment* when you see one.

A fragment is an ***incomplete sentence*** that will begin with a capital letter and conclude with an end mark—usually a period [.] but sometimes a question mark [?] or an exclamation point [!]. The fragment will not, however, contain a main clause, the one grammatical unit essential to every sentence. A main clause looks like this:

**Subject** + **Verb** = **Complete Thought**.

When you write fragments, you indicate that you cannot control a sentence, the most basic building block of writing. As a result, your reader will not look favorably upon your composition.

Every sentence must pass **three tests** before you can call it complete.

Test 1 - Find the verb.

Every sentence must have a verb. Verbs express action or link information to the subject. Look at the complete sentences that follow:

The happy calculus students **shouted** and **laughed** in the cafeteria.  
Dr. Ribley **had curved** the grades on their midterm exam.  
Other students **were** upset at the noise.

When you are proofreading a sentence, you will sometimes find a **verbal** instead of a **verb**. A verbal is unable to change form; you cannot, for example, add **s** or **ed** to the end of one. Read the examples below:

The happy calculus students **shouting** and **laughing** in the cafeteria.  
Dr Ribley **having curved** the grades on their midterm exam.  
Other students **being** upset at all of the noise.

These last three examples are fragments because they fail Test 1.

Test 2 - Find the subject.

If you find an action verb in the sentence, the subject is whoever or whatever is doing that action. If, on the other hand, you find a linking verb, such as **am**, **is**, **are**, **was**, or **were**, the subject is **usually** whoever or whatever comes **before** the verb. Here are two sample sentences:

The **refrigerator** hummed in the kitchen. [**What** was **humming**? The fridge!]  
The **coffee maker** was annoyed. [**What** was **annoyed**? The coffee maker!]

Sometimes writers assume that we know who or what the subject is, so they leave it out. Read the example that follows:

The coffee maker was annoyed. And the next morning hissed more than usual.

**What** hissed? The coffee maker did. Unfortunately, **coffee maker** is not part of the word group beginning with **And**. As a result, this word group is a fragment because it fails Test 2.

Test 3 - Find the complete thought.

Between every capital letter and end mark, you must find a complete thought. A subordinate clause, for example, has both a subject and a verb. However, the clause also begins with a subordinate conjunction such as **because**, **if**, or **since**; or a relative pronoun such as **who**, **which**, or **that**; or a relative adverb such as **when**, **where**, or **why**. These opening words keep the subject and verb from expressing a complete thought. Look at the example below:

When Kara caught sight of her ex-boyfriend Rob.

When Kara saw Rob, what happened? We don't know because the thought is incomplete. This word group is thus a fragment because it fails Test 3.

## Quick Test

**Directions:** Put an X on the line if the word group is a fragment. Write OK on the line if the word group passes the three tests for a complete sentence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When Sammy discovers the empty carton of vanilla ice cream, he will explode with anger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Jeanne, engrossed with another trashy romance novel, did not realize the meatloaf was still in the freezer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Alex needs to bring home some roses if he wants Mimi to forgive him for flirting with Helen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Belching black exhaust that suffocated the drivers who followed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The can of whipped cream that Diane used to squirt into the mouth of Santana, her beagle.



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