SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

Fragments are incomplete sentences. They lack a subject or a complete verb, or fail to express a complete thought.

Examples –

Jean washing the new car.
Although Jean washed the car.

The term fragment is misleading because it suggests something small, but length has nothing to do with writing complete sentences. A sentence can consist of a single word: Run! The subject “you” is understood.

Look at the following long trail of words. Although it begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, is it a sentence?

Fragment After the team won the first game of the playoffs and appeared ready to sweep the series with little chance of facing serious competition.
Although it looks like a long sentence, these words do not express a complete thought. Readers are left wondering. After the team won the first game, then what happened?

One of the most common kinds of sentence fragment is the phrase.

Fragment After delaying it several weeks, Jeff finally began his term paper. On the subject of religious cults in America.
Sentence After delaying it for several weeks, Jeff finally began his term paper on the subject of religious cults in America.

Fragment After final exams, we’re going camping at Yosemite. To relax, catch some fish, and breathe fresh air.
Sentence After final exams, we’re going camping at Yosemite to relax, catch some fish, and breathe fresh air.

Fragment Growing up in a large, poor family in the Appalachian Mountains. He feared that a college education would be an impossibility.
Sentence Growing up in a large, poor family in the Appalachian Mountains, he feared that a college education would be an impossibility.
Sentence He grew up in a large, poor family in the Appalachian Mountain, and he feared that a college education would be an impossibility.

Another type of fragment is a noun followed by a modifier with no main verb.

Fragment The plant Venus, known to have a rough surface scarred by volcanoes and quakes.
Sentence The plant Venus is known to have a rough surface scarred by volcanoes and quakes.
Dependent Clauses as Fragments

Dependent clauses cannot stand alone as complex sentences. But because they contain a subjects and verbs, they often end up as fragments. Dependent clauses can be spotted by the kinds of words that introduce: subordinating conjunctions like after, although, as, because, and if or relative pronouns like who, which, and that.

Fragment
The world’s oldest living trees are the bristlecone pines. Which grow in California.

Sentence
The world’s oldest living trees are the bristlecone pines which grow in California.

Fragment
Slave importation was outlawed in 1808. Although 250,000 more were imported illegally in the next fifty years.

Sentence
Slave importation was outlawed in 1808 although 250,000 more were imported illegally in the next fifty years.

Fragments can be corrected in two ways:

a. create a complete sentence by adding missing elements
b. attach the fragment to a related sentence to state a complete thought

When a dependent clause begins a sentence, use a comma after it. If the independent clause comes first, do not use a comma.

Examples-
James is working out twice a day because he wants to try out for the Olympics
Because he wants to try out for the Olympics, James is working out twice a day.

Do not connect a dependent clause to an independent clause with a semicolon. Semicolons may only be used to join two independent clauses or sentences.

Examples-
INCORRECT – Since Jack and Jean had left earlier by car; we flew to San Diego.
CORRECT- Since Jack and Jean had left earlier by car, we flew to San Diego.
CORRECT – We flew to San Diego; Jack and Jean drove.

One of the best ways to avoid sentence fragments is to read your written work aloud. Your voice will often detect an incomplete sentence. Another tip: Don’t be fooled by the length of a so-called sentence. A long string of words without an independent clause is still a sentence fragment, despite its length.

Connelly, Mark, Get Writing. 2007. The Thomson Corp.
1. Believe it or not, there is a set of rules about how to display the American flag. Which the War Department wrote in 1923.

2. Citizens may display their flags any time they want to. Although it is traditional to fly them only from sunrise to sunset.

3. The White House, unusual because its flag flies both day and night.

4. The sight of the flag above Baltimore’s Fort McHenry inspired Francis Scott Key to write “The Star Spangled Banner.”

5. The player hitting the ball.

6. The child left the party. Because he was tired and hungry.

7. The red towel is lying on the desk; which is not where it belongs.

8. Since my father is a chemist. It is the profession I intend to follow.

9. While the Senate was debating the bill on stem cell research and considering nominees for the federal courts.

10. Trapped by falling debris after the earthquake struck.