

# Avoiding Sentence Fragments

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A fragment is punctuated to look like a sentence. However, lacking one or more of the elements required to make a sentence, a fragment is only a part of a sentence. A complete sentence must have a subject (a noun about which the rest of the sentence provides information), a verb (a word expressing action or state of being), and it must express a complete thought.

A sentence is made up of one or more clauses. There are two types of clauses: independent and dependent. An independent clause can stand alone as a sentence because it has *a subject, a verb, and a complete idea*. (Example: You can borrow my book.) A dependent clause has a subject and a verb, but it *does NOT express a complete idea*. It cannot stand alone; the dependent clause needs more information to complete it. (Example: When we get home. This dependent clause leaves the reader asking, "What will happen?")

Don't mistake a dependent clause for a complete sentence. To form a complete sentence, a dependent clause must be joined with an independent clause. (Example: When we get home, you can borrow my book.)

These **dependent clauses** often begin with **subordinating conjunctions** which will tip you off that it will require more information to complete the thought.

If you use one of the subordinating conjunctions to begin your sentence, remember to check to see if you have attached the dependent clause it created to an independent clause. Here is a list of some of the most common subordinating conjunctions which introduce dependent clauses: although, after, as, as if, until, since, whether, when, while, than, where, that, because, whereas, though, except, if, unless, whenever, in order that.

Subordinate conjunctions are not the only clues that a group of words is really a dependent clause instead of a sentence. **Verbal phrases** are created when a word which looks like **a verb doesn't function like a verb** but rather as a noun, an adjective, or adverb. You can usually spot these verbs because they **end in -ing or -ed and are not preceded by a helping verb**. (Example: Running through the house. Steeped in tradition.) These verbal phrases need more information in order to form a complete sentence; therefore, they are fragments.