

SENTENCE ERRORS

FRAGMENTS

Main clauses (or complete sentences) require a subject, a verb, and a sense of completion. When these sentences are missing any of these components, we consider it a fragment.

Example:

Was jogging down the road. (FRAGMENT – No Subject)

Janet was jogging down the road. (COMPLETE SENTENCE)

Example:

My computer problems with some software (FRAGMENT – No Verb)

My computer is having problems with some software. (COMPLETE SENTENCE)

Example:

As Tony walked down the street. (FRAGMENT – No Sense of Completion)

Tony walked down the street. (COMPLETE SENTENCE)

SOLUTION

Ask yourself the following questions when you check your sentences:

- 1) Do I have a subject?
- 2) Do I have a verb?
- 3) Is there a sense of completion?

If the sense of completion step is difficult for you, then you might look for subordinators at the beginning of the sentence (usually indicating a subordinate clause, which by itself is not a sentence -> but a fragment).

ACCEPTABLE FRAGMENTS

Typically, in college composition, sentence fragments are unacceptable. However, occasions exist where fragments are acceptable.

SHORT ANSWERS

If you ask a question, then you may be permitted to have a fragment as an answer (as long as the answer is extremely brief).

Example:

Are you going to the dance tonight? Yes.

(Notice how the word YES is a sufficient answer to the question. Although, you might answer in a complete sentence, which is much better: Yes, I am going to the dance tonight).

INTERJECTION-ONLY EXCLAMATORY SENTENCES

If you use an interjection to form an exclamatory sentence, then a sentence fragment is permissible.

Example:
Wow!

(Notice the exclamatory sentence allows for one word to make up the entire sentence, although you might relate the word to the entire context of the exclamation for specificity: Wow, I hope Lori finds her lost dog!)

EXERCISE

Decide whether the following conditions allow for an acceptable fragment. Write AF for acceptable fragment, or write F for an unacceptable fragment.

- ___ 1. Is Jonathan coming to the party? Yes.
- ___ 2. My wife and I.
- ___ 3. Went running down the path by the stream for while.
- ___ 4. Holy cow!
- ___ 5. Although Jared loves to receive gifts,
- ___ 6. When can Jacob come over for dinner? Ten O'clock.
- ___ 7. When is it appropriate to kiss a girl? You should kiss a girl when.
- ___ 8. What is he doing? Running down the road to his father's house.
- ___ 9. Why?

MISSING WORDS

Creating a document can be made unnecessarily difficult because of our inability to self-correct sentence level errors. One error in particular is missing words (both in handwriting and in typing).

Everyone misses words constantly. In fact, the average designer/writer probably misses one or two words for every two to three paragraphs.

Missing words (especially articles, such as a, an, the) is common for English Language Learners and/or foreign students.

Regardless of the missing word/s, oftentimes the message can be understood. In some cases, the words seem to appear in our reading, but are not actually there.

Some theorists have posited that because the brain processes information much faster than the hands (or vice versa), words are often missed accidentally.

Missing words can occur more often due to language disorders and conditions which affect the brain including:

Dysgraphia

Dyslexia
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Stroke
Brain Lesions
Traumatic Brain Injury
Temporary Brain Injury
Aphasia
Agrammatism
Dementia
Alzheimer's Disease
Oscillopsia (Jumpy Eyes)
Nystagmus

SOLUTIONS

1. TRY READING YOUR WORK ALOUD

The easiest method for finding the areas where missing words occur is by reading the document/project aloud. If you do not find the word itself, you may find yourself stumbling on a particular area of your document/project; take this cue as a hint to investigate and possibly revise.

2. ASK FOR A PEER REVIEW

The next easiest method for finding the areas where missing words occur by having another reader review the document/project.

FUSED (OR RUN-ON) SENTENCES

Fused sentences occur when two main clauses (or two complete sentences) are connected without proper punctuation.

Example:

Martha went to the store she bought some bread. (FUSED SENTENCE)

Martha went to the store and she bought some bread. (FUSED SENTENCE)

Notice that there are two main clauses (i.e., two complete sentences) within these fused sentences:

Martha went to the store.

+

She bought some bread.

SOLUTIONS

1. Repair this fused sentence by separating into two complete sentences.

Example:

Martha went to the store. She bought some bread. (FIXED)

2. Repair this fused sentence by adding a semi-colon between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Martha went to the store; she bought some bread. (FIXED)

3. Repair this fused sentence by adding a semicolon, a conjunct, and comma between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Martha went to the store; moreover, she bought some bread. (FIXED)

4. Repair by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Martha went to the store, and she bought some bread. (FIXED)

5. Repair by changing one of the sentences into a subordinate clause by adding a subordinator

Example:

When Martha went to the store she bought some bread. (FIXED)

SPLICES (OR COMMA SPLICES)

Splices occur when two main clauses (or two complete sentences) are connected by a comma. Since coordinating conjunctions must accompany commas when connecting sentences, splices are incorrect.

Example:

Harry likes Stacy, she likes someone else. (SPLICE)

Notice that there are two main clauses (or two complete sentences) within this splice:

Harry likes Stacy.

+

She likes someone else.

SOLUTIONS

1. Repair by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Harry likes Stacy, but she likes someone else.

2. Repair this splice by separating into two complete sentences.

Example:

Harry likes Stacy. She likes someone else.

3. Repair this splice by adding a semicolon between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Harry likes Stacy; she likes someone else.

4. Repair this splice by adding a semicolon, a conjunct, and comma between the two complete sentences.

Example:

Harry likes Stacy; however, she likes someone else.

5. Repair this splice by changing one of the sentences into a subordinate clause by adding a subordinator

Example:

Harry likes Stacy although she likes someone else.