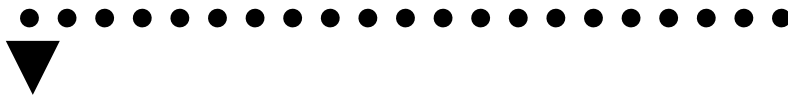


# FRAGMENT TIP 1



## 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.



**chompchomp.com**

©1997 - 2012 by Robin L. Simmons  
All Rights Reserved.