

# Common Causes of Fragments

In order to avoid writing fragments, a student should be alert to these facts:

**1. An -ing word is not a definite verb; it will not make a sentence.**

Suppose that you overheard a little boy say, "I going home." You wouldn't think about his poor grammar because he is too young to know better. But when adults speak, they say, "I am going home." This shows that an -ing word always needs a helping verb to make a sentence. The chief helpers include such words like is, am, are, was, and were.

**2. Certain words called "subordinators" can change a sentence into a fragment.**

Look again at the sentence, "I am going home." Suppose you add *if*, a subordinator: "If I am going home ...." Do you see that the subordinator changed the sentence to a fragment? A reader is left wondering, "What if ....?" We need to complete the sentence by adding a main part (independent clause) for the subordinate fragment to depend on. We might write something like this:

- a. "If I am going home, I will need my coat and hat." Here a new independent clause follows the subordinate clause (the fragment part). Notice the comma.
- b. "I will need my coat and hat if I am going home." Here the new independent clause comes first. There is no need for a comma in this case.

You should be very familiar with these subordinators:

After	before	than	when	which
Although	if	that	where	what
As	in order that	though	whereas	why
As if	provided that	till	whether	how
As long as	since	unless	while	
Because	so that	until	who, whom, whose	

**3. An explanatory phrase or group of words does not make a sentence.**

Suppose a student wrote, "I like to watch sports." He realized that the sentence was vague, so he added, "Such as hockey." Then he remembered that he likes to watch sports on television, so he added, "When they are on television." Now he has this:

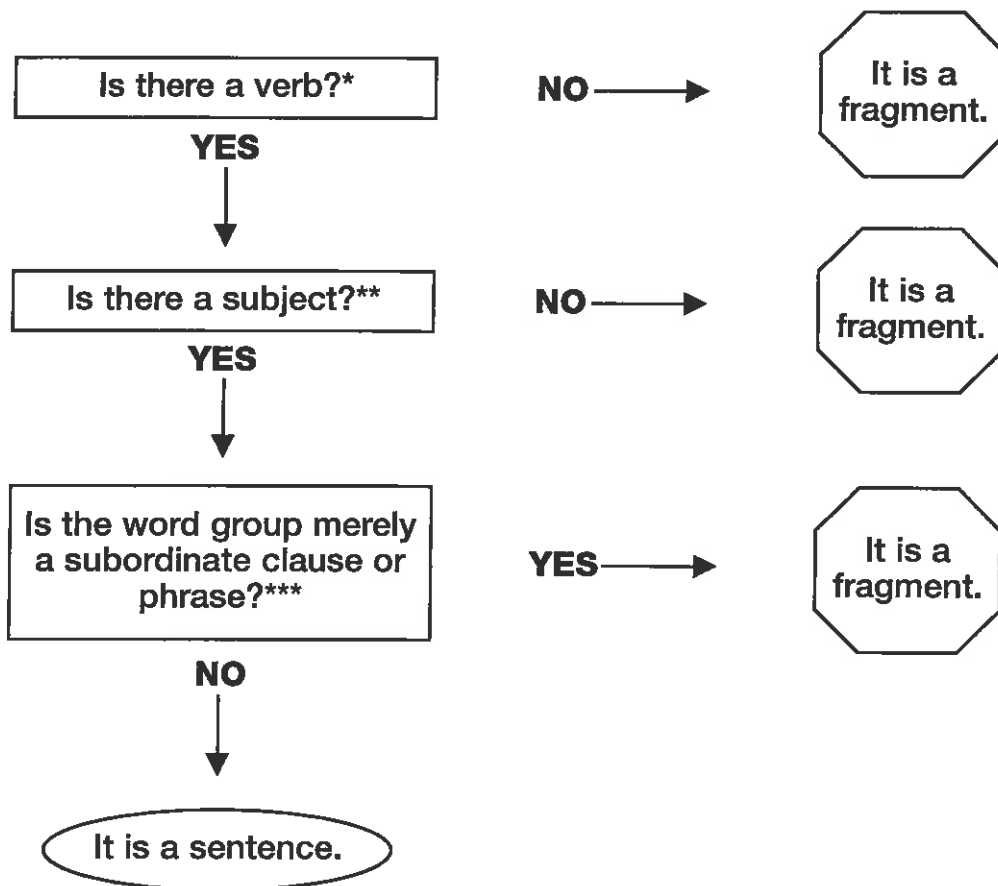
"I like to watch sports. Such as hockey. When they are on television."

Look closely; you will see that the last two "sentences" aren't really sentences at all. One is only an explanatory phrase and the other is a subordinate clause. If the student combines the pieces with the independent clause, he will no longer have any left-over fragments:

"I like to watch sports, such as hockey, when they are on television."

L. Perkins, 1977  
(SCSU Writing Clinic)

## Test for sentence completeness



\* Do not mistake verbals for verbs.

\*\* The subject of a sentence may be *you*, understood.

\*\*\* A sentence may open with a subordinate clause, but the sentence must also include an independent clause.

***If you find any fragments, try one of these methods of revision:***

1. Attach the fragment to a nearby sentence.
2. Turn the fragment into a sentence.

**EXERCISE 19-1** Repair any fragment by attaching it to a nearby sentence or by rewriting it as a complete sentence. If a word group is correct, write "correct" after it. Example:

One Greek island that should not be missed is Mykonos/, <sup>a</sup> ~~A~~ vacation spot for Europeans and a playground for the rich and famous.

- a. Listening to the CD her sister had sent, Mia was overcome with a mix of emotions. Happiness, homesickness, nostalgia.
  - b. Cortés and his soldiers were astonished when they looked down from the mountains and saw Tenochtitlán. The magnificent capital of the Aztecs.
  - c. Although my spoken Spanish is not very good. I can read the language with ease.
  - d. There are several reasons for not eating meat. One reason being that dangerous chemicals are used throughout the various stages of meat production.
  - e. To learn how to sculpt beauty from everyday life. This is my intention in studying art and archaeology.
1. The panther lay motionless behind the rock. Waiting silently for its prey.
  2. Mother loved to play all our favorite games. Canasta, Monopoly, hide-and-seek, and even kick-the-can.
  3. With machetes, the explorers cut their way through the tall grasses to the edge of the canyon. Then they began to lay out the tapes for the survey.
  4. The owners of the online grocery store rented a warehouse in the Market district. An area catering to small businesses.
  5. If a woman from the desert tribe showed anger toward her husband, she was whipped in front of the whole village. And shunned by the rest of the women.