

Sentence Fragments

In order to be considered a sentence, a group of words must have a complete subject and a complete verb. A group of words lacking either subject or verb, or both, and punctuated as a sentence is called a sentence fragment. Look at the following:

1. As always, is eating almond croissants.
[Who is eating? The subject is missing.]
2. Henrietta, attired in a gaudy robe with polka dots.
[What did Henrietta do? The verb is missing.]
3. In the early morning light.
[Who did what? Both subject and verb are missing.]

To correct a fragment, subject and/or verb must be added.

1. Add a subject:
Henrietta, as always, is eating almond croissants.
2. Add a verb or part of a verb:
Henrietta, attired in a gaudy robe with polka dots, *licked* the whipped cream. or
Henrietta *was attired* in a gaudy robe with polka dots.
3. Add a subject and a verb:
Henrietta smiled in the early morning light.

Note that length is no criterion for a sentence. *He ate* is a complete sentence, while *Playing the guitar while singing along, in the early morning light* is not a complete sentence. It is a sentence fragment because it is missing a subject and at least part of a verb.

A dependent clause punctuated as a sentence is also considered a fragment. Though it has both a subject and a verb, it can't stand alone.

Consider these clauses:

Because Henry had a sore knee.

What happened because of Henry's having a sore knee? Another clause, an independent one (that is, able to stand on its own), must be added to correct the fragment error:

Because Henry had a sore knee, Henrietta walked the dog.

If the dependent clause cue or subordinating conjunction (*because, if, when, although, before, after, unless, until, while . . .*) is dropped, a full sentence will result.

Henry had a sore knee. [Now we have a statement, not a reason attached to something else.]

Consider this:

Until Henry was ready to cook dinner for Henrietta.

This dependent clause cannot stand on its own and is a fragment if punctuated as a full sentence. There are two solutions:

1. Attach the clause to an independent clause:

Until Henry was ready to cook dinner for Henrietta., they ordered take-out.

2. Drop the subordinating conjunction, releasing the subject and verb so that they become an independent clause:

Henry was ready to cook dinner for Henrietta.