

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A **SENTENCE FRAGMENT** fails to be a sentence in the sense that it cannot stand by itself. It does not contain even one independent clause. There are several reasons why a group of words may seem to act like a sentence but not have all of the components required to make it a complete thought:

- **It may locate something in time and place with a prepositional phrase or a series of such phrases, but it is still lacking a proper subject-verb relationship within an independent clause:** "In Japan, during the last war and just before the armistice." The preceding sentence accomplishes a great deal in terms of placing the reader in time and place, but there is no subject, no verb.
- **It describes something, but there is no subject-verb relationship:** "Working far into the night to salvage her little boat." This is a verbal phrase that wants to modify something; the real subject of the sentence (about to come up) is probably the *she* who was working so hard.
- **It may have most of the content of a sentence but still be missing an important part of a verb string:** "Some of the students working in Professor Espinoza's laboratory last semester." Remember that an *-ing_verb form* without an auxiliary form to accompany it can never be a verb. Verbs ending in an *-ing* show progression, but do not define the tense of the action. Auxiliary verbs attach the time in which the action occurs. Auxiliary verbs include "are, was, were, has been, have been," among others. Because our sample sentence is in the past tense, simply attaching the auxiliary verb "were" to the beginning of our progressive verb "working" clarifies to the reader that the students' actions occurred in the past.
- **It may even have a subject-verb relationship, but it has been subordinated to another idea by a dependent word and so cannot stand by itself:** "Even though he had the better arguments and was by far the more powerful speaker." This sentence has a subject, *he*, and two verbs, *had* and *was*, but it cannot stand alone because of the dependent phrase (subordinating conjunction) *even though*. We need an independent clause to follow this dependent clause: ". . .the more powerful speaker, he lost the case because he didn't understand the jury."

Stylistic Fragments:

There are occasions in which a sentence fragment can be stylistically effective, exactly what you want and no more: "Harrison Ford said he would be more than willing to take on another Indiana Jones project. In a New York minute." As long as you are clearly in control of the situation, this is permissible, but the freedom to exercise this stylistic license depends on the circumstances. Perhaps your final paper is not the place to experiment -- or, then again, maybe it is. Ask your instructor.