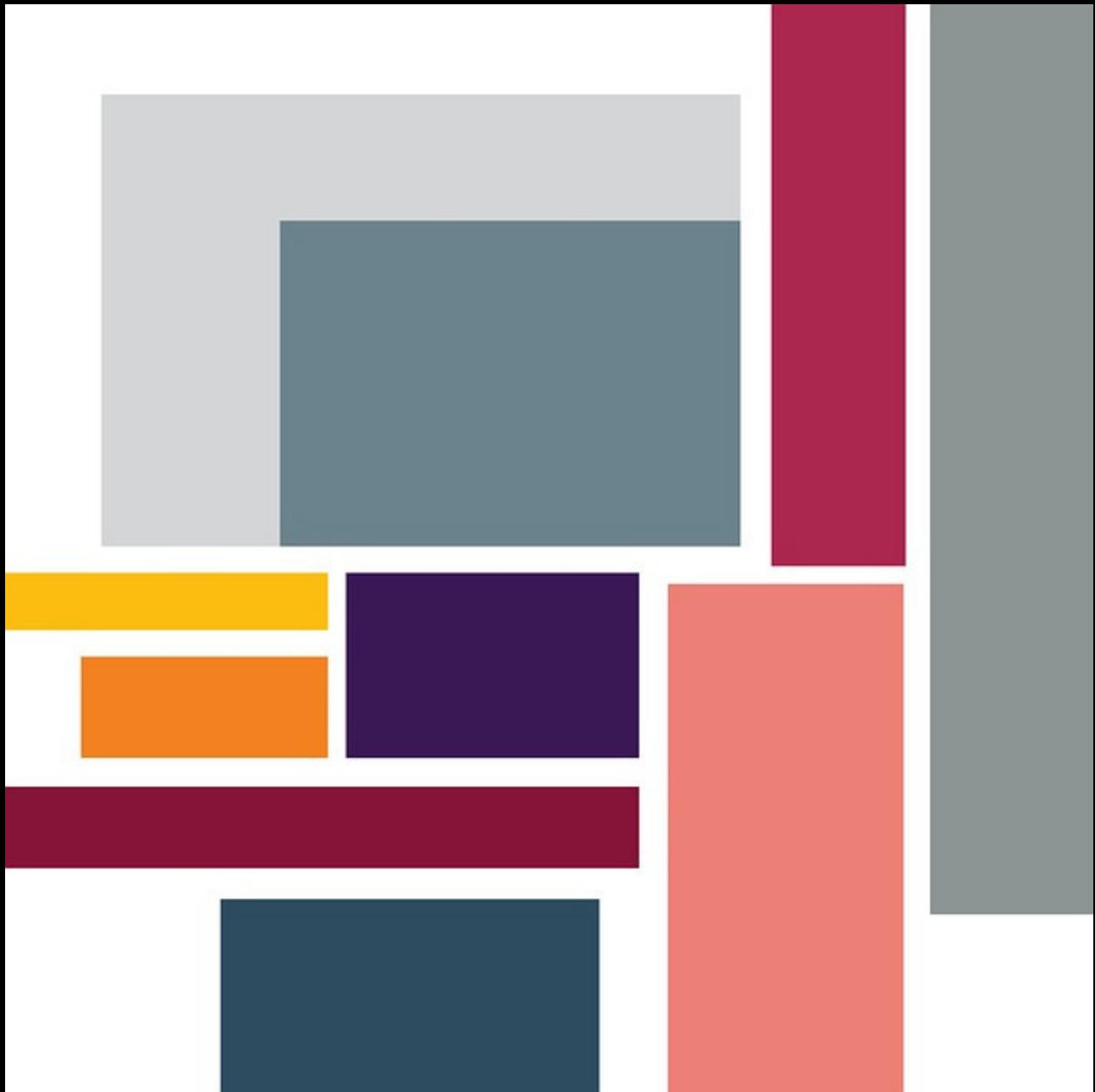


Fragments and Jumbled Sentences



Fragments and Jumbled Sentences Lesson & Exercises

Every sentence must contain two elements: a subject (noun, pronoun, or gerund) and a main verb that corresponds to it (predicate). A clause that lacks these elements cannot be a sentence. Instead, it is a fragment.

Particularly when statements are long and contain multiple clauses, errors can be challenging to identify. The following pages cover some common types of fragments as well as how to fix them.

- 1) Gerunds replace verbs
- 2) Conjunctions
- 3) Relative and non-essential clauses

Gerunds Replace Verbs

Gerunds are formed by adding *-ing* to verbs, e.g., *to have* → *having*; *to do* → *doing*; *to think* → *thinking*.

Gerunds look like verbs but act like nouns. As a result, a clause that contains only a gerund cannot be a sentence. Instead, it is a fragment.

Note that *to be*, the most common verb in the English language, is irregular: its conjugated forms are different from the infinitive.

	Present	Past
Singular	is	was
Plural	are	were

To turn a fragment containing a gerund into a sentence, replace the gerund with a conjugated verb.

Fragment: Heralds **being** the predecessors of modern diplomats: they traveled under the orders of kings or noblemen in order to convey messages or proclamations.

Sentence: Heralds **were** the predecessors of modern diplomats: they traveled under the orders of kings or noblemen in order to convey messages or proclamations.

Conjunctions

There are two main types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating.

Coordinating, or FANBOYS (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So), conjunctions join two independent clauses (compound sentence).

Subordinating conjunctions join an independent clause and a dependent clause (complex sentence).

After	Before	Though	Whenever
Although	Despite	Unless	Whereas
As	If	Until	Whether
Because	Since	When	While

A clause that begins with a conjunction must also contain a verb. An *-ing* word cannot be used instead.

Fragment: John Breckinridge came close to winning the 1860 United States presidential election, although **holding** strong personal convictions that made it difficult for him to navigate a moderate course.

Sentence: John Breckinridge came close to winning the 1860 United States presidential election, although **he held** strong personal convictions that made it difficult for him to navigate a moderate course.

In addition, a clause that begins with a conjunction cannot generally act as a standalone sentence. It must be combined with a second, independent clause to form a sentence.

Fragment: Lions and great white sharks may boast the most famous jaws in the animal kingdom. **But** other creatures have jaws that are much faster.

Sentence: Lions and great white sharks may boast the most famous jaws in the animal kingdom, **but** other creatures have jaws that are much faster.

Note that in informal writing, it is considered acceptable to occasionally begin a sentence with a FANBOYS conjunction for stylistic effect. In more formal situations, however, this construction should generally be avoided.

There is less flexibility surrounding subordinating conjunctions. For all intents and purposes, a single-clause sentence should never begin with this type of transition.

Fragment: **Although** it is estimated that around 10 meteorites come crashing to Earth from outer space every **day**, **Researchers** discover only a few meteorites each year.

Sentence: **Although** it is estimated that around 10 meteorites come crashing to Earth from outer space every **day**, **researchers** discover only a few meteorites each year.

Unlike coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, **conjunctive adverbs** can be used to begin complete sentences. Common examples include *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, and *meanwhile*.

Sentence: It is estimated that around 10 meteorites come crashing to Earth from outer space every day. **However**, researchers discover only a few of these rocks each year.

In addition, it is redundant and grammatically unacceptable to place conjunctions at the beginnings of two consecutive clauses. If one clause begins with a subordinating conjunction, the following clause should not begin with a coordinating conjunction. Either one or the other should be used.

Incorrect: **Although** Santiago had trained hard for the marathon, **but** he was unable to finish the entire course.

Correct: **Although** Santiago had trained hard for the marathon, **he** was unable to finish the entire course.

Correct: Santiago had trained hard for the marathon, **but** he was unable to finish the entire course.

Relative and Non-Essential Clauses

Relative pronouns are used to join clauses. They include:

- Which
- Who
- Whose
- That
- When
- Where

A statement (not a question) that begins with a relative pronoun cannot normally stand alone as a complete sentence. Instead, it must be joined to an independent clause.

Fragment: Deborah Willis is a renowned photographer. **Who** uses her work to convey stories about family life.

Sentence: Deborah Willis is a renowned photographer **who** uses her work to convey stories about family life.

Fragment: The microscopic residents of Monterey Canyon make food from rocks and harvest energy from methane. **That** seeps out from the ocean floor.

Sentence: The microscopic residents of Monterey Canyon make food from rocks and harvest energy from methane **that** seeps out from the ocean floor.

A relative pronoun can also be used to begin a non-essential clause (*which, who*, set off by commas) or an essential clause (*that*, not set off by commas) embedded in the middle of a sentence.

Such clauses must always contain a main verb that corresponds to the subject of the sentence.

For example, consider the following.

Fragment: George C. Williams, who was one of the most important thinkers in the field of evolutionary biology.

The problem here is that the verb *was* “belongs” to the relative pronoun *who*, the subject of the new clause. It does not correspond to the subject of the main clause, *George C. Williams*.

In addition, the construction *comma + who* suggests that a non-essential clause is beginning, but there is never a second comma to end the clause – the sentence ends without a resolution.

The fastest and easiest way to turn this fragment into a sentence is to remove *comma + who*, eliminating the relative clause and making the entire sentence into a single main clause.

Sentence: George C. Williams **was** one of the most important thinkers in the field of evolutionary biology.

Now the verb *was* clearly belongs to the correct subject.

When sentences are short, this type of error is relatively easy to catch. When they are longer, however, it is very easy to get “lost” in them and to lose track of what verb belongs to what subject. The result often a jumbled sentence. This is a particular danger when you are writing quickly, or at the last minute (or both).

Fragment: George C. Williams, who was one of the most important thinkers in evolutionary biology, and who made a number of lasting contributions to his field.

In the above sentence, we can identify what appears to be a non-essential clause (*who was...biology*) because it begins with *who* and is surrounded by commas. If we cross it out, however, we are left with:

Fragment: George C. Williams...**and who made** a number of lasting contributions to his field.

Clearly this is not a sentence. Making it into a sentence, however, is relatively simple: since the first word after the end of a non-essential clause is typically a verb, we can cross out all the excess words before the verb.

Sentence: George C. Williams...~~and who~~ made a number of lasting contributions to his field.

With the elimination of those two words, the fragment suddenly becomes a sentence. And when we plug the non-essential clause back in, we get something much clearer:

Sentence: George C. Williams, who was one of the most important thinkers in evolutionary biology, **made** a number of lasting contributions to his field.

Another possible solution is to remove the non-essential clause entirely.

Sentence: George C. Williams **was** one of the most important thinkers in the field of evolutionary biology and **made** a number of lasting contributions to his field.

An additional, less common problem occurs when a writer loses track of a sentence and creates the end of a non-essential clause when there is no beginning.

Fragment: George C. Williams was one of the most important thinkers in the field of evolutionary **biology, made** a number of lasting contributions to his field.

Sentences like these can be tricky because the beginning looks fine; it’s the end that appears to need fixing. In cases such as these, however, the second comma followed by a verb is your clue that a non-essential clause needs to be created in order to correct the sentence.

Sentence: George C. **Williams, who** was one of the most important thinkers in the field of evolutionary **biology, made** a number of lasting contributions to his field.

In addition to relative clauses, two other common types of phrases can be used non-essentially.

Appositives begin with nouns.

Correct: Mobile robot technology, **a technology** historically used by both the military and the police, is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Participial phrases begin with participles, either present (*-ing*) or past (*-ed*).

Correct: Mobile robot technology, **having** become popular with both the military and the police, is now become widespread at businesses and hotels.

Correct: Mobile robot technology, **used** by both the military and the police, is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Like relative clauses, these phrases cannot stand on their own as sentences.

Fragment: **A technology** historically used by both the military and the police.

Fragment: **Having** become popular with both the military and the police.

Correct: **Used** by both the military and the police.

When these phrase types are used non-essentially, you can treat them exactly like relative clauses.

Fragment: Mobile robot technology, **a technology historically used by both the military and the police**, and it is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Reduce: Mobile robot technology, ~~a technology historically used by both the military and the police~~, and it is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Cross out: Mobile robot technology...~~and it~~ is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Sentence: Mobile robot technology, **a technology historically used by both the military and the police**, is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Clauses beginning with *that* can have similar problems. Although these clauses are essential to the meaning of a sentence, they can be removed to reveal problems with grammatical construction.

Fragment: The mobile robot technology **that has historically been used by both the military and the police** and that is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

When the essential clause is crossed out, the statement that remains is clearly ungrammatical.

Cross out: The mobile robot technology ~~that has historically been used by both the military and the police~~ and that is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

In the above version, the verb *is* belongs to *that* – the subject of the essential clause. To correct the sentence, we must restore the verb *is* to the main subject, *The mobile robot technology*.

Crossed out: The mobile robot technology ~~that has historically been used by both the military and the police~~ and ~~that~~ is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Sentence: The mobile robot technology **that has historically been used by both the military and the police** is now becoming widespread at businesses and hotels.

Exercise: Fragments and Jumbled Sentences

For the following exercises, turn any fragment into a sentence by adding/removing the fewest possible words and adjusting the punctuation as necessary. Some of the sentences may not contain an error.

1. Shirley Jackson, best known for her shocking short story "The Lottery," and who was born in San Francisco in 1916.
2. George Washington and General Lafayette were great friends but coming from widely disparate backgrounds and had little in common.
3. Between 1903 and 1913, the British suffragettes, a group devoted to helping women win the right to vote, resorted to increasingly extreme measures to make their voices heard.
4. Many scientists are baffled by the appearance of *Yersinia pestis*. A fungus that has been destroying bat populations throughout the United States in recent years.
5. The plan to overhaul the country's higher education system being a model for moving other desperately needed projects forward.
6. Patients who receive anesthesia during surgery are put into a semi-comatose state, not, as many people assume, a deep state of sleep.
7. Recent findings from research on moose, which have suggested that arthritis in human beings may be linked in part to nutritional deficits.
8. A new study has reported that the physical differences among dog breeds are determined by variations occurring only about seven genetic regions.
9. George Barr McCutcheon, a popular novelist and playwright, is best known for a series of novels. That are set in the fictional Eastern European country of Graustark.
10. Because small companies generally lack the financial resources to upgrade their software and set up protective barriers, so their security systems can be hacked more easily than those of large ones.
11. Human computers, who once performed basic numerical analysis for laboratories, and they were behind the calculations for everything from the first accurate prediction of the return of Halley's Comet to the success of the Manhattan Project.

12. Nicollet Island, an island in the Mississippi River just north of Minneapolis, and which was named after cartographer Joseph Nicollet.
13. Lan Samantha Chang is a critically acclaimed novelist. Who counts among her influences authors as varied as Charlotte Brontë and Edgar Allan Poe.
14. The Rochester International Jazz Festival takes place in June of each year and typically attracting more than 100,000 fans from towns across upstate New York.
15. Brick nog, a commonly used construction technique in which one width of bricks is used to fill the vacancies in a wooden frame.
16. Telling the story of Odette, a princess turned into a swan by an evil sorcerer's curse, *Swan Lake*, one of the most popular ballets, was fashioned from Russian folk tales.
17. Simone Fortini is a choreographer who was born in Italy but moved to the United States at a young age. Becoming known for a style of dancing based on improvisation and everyday movements.
18. Although eighteenth-century European sailors were convinced that citrus fruits could cure scurvy, a disease caused by a severe deficiency of vitamin C, but classically trained physicians dismissed that theory because it did not conform to prevailing beliefs about disease.
19. Batsford Arboretum, a 55-acre garden that contains Great Britain's largest collection of Japanese cherry trees and it is open daily to the public for most of the year.
20. Rodin purposely omitted crucial elements such as arms from his sculptures, although his consistent use of the human figure attesting to his respect for artistic tradition.

Answers: Fragments and Jumbled Sentences

1. Shirley Jackson, best known for her shocking short story "The Lottery," was born in San Francisco in 1916.
2. George Washington and General Lafayette were great friends but **came** from widely disparate backgrounds and had little in common.
3. Correct
4. Many scientists are baffled by the appearance of Yersinia **pestis**, a fungus that has been destroying bat populations throughout the United States in recent years.
5. The plan to overhaul the country's higher education system **is** a model for moving other desperately needed projects forward.
6. Correct
7. Recent findings from research on moose **have** suggested that arthritis in human beings may be linked in part to nutritional deficits.
8. Correct
9. George Barr McCutcheon, a popular novelist and playwright, is best known for a series of **novels that** are set in the fictional Eastern European country of Graustark.
10. **Because** small companies generally lack the financial resources to upgrade their software and set up protective barriers, ~~so~~ their security systems can be hacked more easily than those of large ones.
OR:
~~Because~~ small companies generally lack the financial resources to upgrade their software and set up protective barriers, **so** their security systems can be hacked more easily than those of large ones.
11. Human computers, who once performed basic numerical analysis for **laboratories**, **were** behind the calculations for everything from the first accurate prediction of the return of Halley's Comet to the success of the Manhattan Project.

12. Nicollet Island, an island in the Mississippi River just north of **Minneapolis**, **was** named after cartographer Joseph Nicollet.
13. Lan Samantha Chang is a critically acclaimed **novelist**, **who** counts among her influences authors as varied as Charlotte Brontë and Edgar Allan Poe.
14. The Rochester International Jazz Festival takes place in June of each year and typically **attracts** more than 100,000 fans from towns across upstate New York.
15. Brick nog **is** a commonly used construction technique in which one width of bricks is used to fill the vacancies in a wooden frame.
16. Correct
17. Simone Fortini is a choreographer who was born in Italy but moved to the United States at a young **age**, **becoming** known for a style of dancing based on improvisation and everyday movements.
18. **Although** eighteenth-century European sailors were convinced that citrus fruits could cure scurvy, a disease caused by a severe deficiency of vitamin C, **but** classically trained physicians dismissed that theory because it did not conform to prevailing beliefs about disease.

OR:

- ~~Although~~ Eighteenth-century European sailors were convinced that citrus fruits could cure scurvy, a disease caused by a severe deficiency of vitamin C, **but** classically trained physicians dismissed that theory because it did not conform to prevailing beliefs about disease.
19. Batsford Arboretum, a 55-acre garden that contains Great Britain's largest collection of Japanese cherry **trees**, **is** open daily to the public for most of the year.
 20. Rodin purposely omitted crucial elements such as arms from his sculptures, although his consistent use of the human figure **attested** to his respect for artistic tradition.