

# The Writing Center

## Fixing Fragments

**What is a fragment?** A fragment is an incomplete sentence. It may look like a sentence and even have correct punctuation, but it is missing one of the three elements required to make the sentence complete. These three elements are:

- A subject: This is a noun or noun phrase—a person, place, or thing—that does the main action of the sentence.
- A verb: An action word that is connected to the subject
- A complete thought

Examples of sentences: *Bob studies*. Subject (*Bob*) + verb (*studies*) = sentence that expresses a clear, complete thought.

*Bob studies before a big test*. This is also a sentence containing the same subject and verb as well as a subordinate clause that provides more information while still expressing a complete thought.

Sentences that are incomplete and become fragments often run into one of the problems below:

1. Subordinate Clause Fragments: These are also called dependent clauses. They may contain a subject and a verb, but the presence of a subordinate conjunction, a relative pronoun, or a relative adverb keeps the subordinate clause from being a complete sentence.

Ex. *Before Bob studies for the big test next Tuesday*.

While this has a subject (*Bob*) and a verb (*studies*), the word *before* (a subordinate conjunction) means that this idea is not complete.

**How do I fix this?** Subordinate clause fragments can often be fixed two ways:

- Remove the subordinate conjunction, relative pronoun, or relative adverb.

*Bob studies for the big test next Tuesday*.

- Add a main clause that connects to the subordinate clause:

***Bob must read his textbook*** before he studies for the big test next Tuesday.

Or,

Before Bob studies for the big test next Tuesday, ***he must read his textbook***.

Note: When the subordinate clause is at the beginning of the sentence, it is connected to the main clause with a comma. No comma is necessary when the subordinate clause appears after the main clause.

2. Appositive Fragments: Appositives are noun phrases that often provide extra information or description. While they might seem lengthy enough to be sentences, if they lack a verb, they are fragments.

Ex. *The frantic student, a classmate of Bob's.*

This has a noun that could function as the subject (*The student*), but there is no verb.

#### **How do I fix this?**

- Add a verb: *The frantic student **is** a classmate of Bob's.*  
Or,
- Connect the appositive to a verb/ verb + predicate to make a main clause: ***The frantic student, a classmate of Bob's, felt unprepared for the test.***

3. Participial Phrase Fragments: These fragments have action, but no subject. The phrases will often begin with a word ending in -ing or -ed or an irregular past participle.

Ex. *Trying to study the night before the test but feeling too exhausted to stay awake.*

#### **How do I fix this?**

- Add a main clause. If the clause will precede appositive, that often means adding in who or what was doing the action plus a linking verb:  
***The student was** trying to study the night before the test but **was** feeling too exhausted to stay awake.*

You can add a main clause after the participial phrase that provides more information:

*Trying to study the night before the test but feeling too exhausted to stay awake, **the student drank several cups of coffee.***

4. Infinitive Phrase Fragment: Infinitives are to + a verb. Infinitive phrase fragments are usually missing a subject.

Ex. *To study more effectively than simply cramming the night before the test.*

**How do I fix this?** Connect it to a main clause: *To study more effectively than simply cramming the night before the test, **Bob decided to plan several study sessions a week before the test.***

Or, **Bob decided** to study more effectively than simply cramming the night before the test.

5. Afterthought Fragments: These fragments usually begin with a connecting word/phrase such as: *for example, additionally, also, such as* etc. They provide clarifying information, but they are not appropriately attached to a main clause or placed correctly within a sentence. Often, beginning writers have a complete sentence and then realize they want to add extra information that they write down in an incomplete sentence, leading to the afterthought fragment:

Ex. *Often, students need to plan better for more effective studying. For example, scheduling several study sessions a week before the test.*

The first sentence is complete. The second is an afterthought fragment.

**How do I fix this?** One of two ways:

- Attach the afterthought to the previous sentence: *Often, students need to plan better for more effective studying, for example, by scheduling several study sessions a week before the test.* Or: *Often students need to plan better, for example, scheduling several study sessions a week before the test, for more effective studying.*
- Include the missing subject and verb in the afterthought fragment: *Often, students need to plan better for more effective studying. For example, **students can schedule** several study sessions a week before the test.*