The fragment is a major problem for many student writers. A thought may be clear in a writer's mind, but on paper the expression of this idea may be incomplete because it does not include a subject, a verb, or a complete thought. In this section, you will improve your ability to spot fragments (incomplete sentences), and you will learn how to correct them. This practice will help you avoid fragments in your own writing.
Here, for example, is a typical conversation between two people in a laboratory. It is composed entirely of fragments, but the two people who are speaking have no trouble understanding each other.

Doug: Had any test results yet?
Nelida: Nothing statistically significant.
Doug: Not good.
Nelida: Back to step one.

Rewritten in complete sentences, this brief conversation might go as follows:

Doug: Have you had any test results yet?
Nelida: The results were not statistically significant.
Doug: That is not good.
Nelida: We will have to go back to step one.

In the first conversation, misunderstanding is unlikely since the two speakers stand face to face. Seeing the other's gestures and hearing the intonations in the other's voice help each one grasp the other's meaning. These short phrases are enough for communication because the speakers are using more than just words to convey their thoughts. They understand each other because each one has no difficulty completing the thoughts in the other's mind.

In writing, however, readers cannot be present to observe tone of voice, gestures, or other signals for themselves. They cannot be expected to read the writer's mind. For a reader, only words grouped into sentences and sentences grouped into paragraphs can provide clues to the meaning. Because writing often involves thoughts that are abstract and even complex, fragments cause great difficulty and sometimes result in total confusion for the reader.

**EXERCISE 1**

The following conversation could have taken place between two airline pilots. Rewrite the conversation in complete thoughts (or standard sentences). Remember the definition of a sentence:

A complete sentence has a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Chandra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Got everything?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra:</td>
<td>Everything but the new flight plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Twenty minutes until takeoff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra:</td>
<td>Looks like nasty weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Hopefully no flocks of birds in our flight path.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra:</td>
<td>What about deicing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Done!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra:</td>
<td>A full plane today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Ready?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra:</td>
<td>Good to go.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversation rewritten in standard sentences

Nick:
Chandra:
Nick:
Chandra:
Nick:
Chandra:
Nick:
Chandra:
Nick:
Chandra:

Remember that when you write in complete sentences, the results may differ from the way you would express the same ideas in everyday conversation with a friend.

Although you will occasionally spot incomplete sentences in professional writing, you may be sure the writer is using these fragments intentionally. In such cases, the fragment may be appropriate because it captures the way a person thinks or speaks or because it creates a special effect. A student developing his or her writing skills should be careful to use only standard-sentence form so that every thought will be communicated effectively. Nearly all the writing you will do in your life—business correspondence, papers in school, or reports in your job—will demand standard-sentence form. Fragments will be looked upon as a sign of ignorance rather than evidence of a creative style!

WHAT IS A FRAGMENT?

A fragment is a piece of a sentence.

A group of words may appear to be a sentence, but if one of the following elements is missing, the result is a fragment.

a. The subject is missing:
   is setting the trap
b. The verb is missing:
   the hunter in the woods
c. Both the subject and the verb are missing:
   in the woods
d. The subject and verb are present, but the group of words does not express a complete thought:
   The hunter set
HOW DO YOU CORRECT A FRAGMENT?

1. Add the missing part or parts.
   
   **Fragment:** across the lake  
   **To be added:** subject and verb  
   **Complete sentence:** I swam across the lake.

   The prepositional phrase across the lake is a fragment because a prepositional phrase cannot function as the subject or the verb in a sentence. Furthermore, the words across the lake do not express a complete thought.

2. Join the fragment to the sentence where it belongs.
   
   If you look at the context in which a fragment occurs, you will often find that the complete thought is already present. The writer did not recognize that the fragment belonged to the sentence that came just before or to the sentence that immediately followed. Therefore, another way to correct a fragment is to join the fragment to the sentence that precedes it or to the sentence that immediately follows it. Which sentence you choose depends on where the information in the fragment belongs. Study the example below.

   **Incorrect:** In the middle of the night, I swam. Across the lake. The water was cool and inviting.
   **Correct:** In the middle of the night, I swam across the lake. The water was cool and inviting.

   Fragments can exist in a writer's work for a number of reasons. A writer may become careless for a moment or may not fully understand how all the parts of a sentence work. If the writer does not have a clear idea of what he or she is trying to say, fragments and other errors are more likely to occur. Sometimes another try at expressing the same idea may produce a better result.

EXERCISE 2

Correcting Fragments by Adding the Missing Parts

Make each of the following fragments into a complete sentence by adding the missing part or parts.

1. returned to the sea (add a subject)

2. a bird on the oak branch (add a verb)

3. between the island and the mainland (add a subject and a verb)

4. the hawk in a soaring motion (add a verb)
Correcting Fragments That Belong to Other Sentences

Each of the following passages contains two or more fragments. First, read each passage carefully. Then place a check in front of each fragment you find.

EXERCISE 3

5. the fishing boats in the harbor [add a verb]

6. dropped like a stone into the water [add a subject]

7. the crescent moon [add a verb]

8. carried the fish to the tree [add a subject]

9. the fisherman put [complete the thought]

10. into the net [add a subject and a verb]
Finally, draw an arrow to indicate the sentence to which the fragment belongs. An example follows:

Adelle assisted the dancers. She stood backstage during the performance. 
Between numbers. She helped the ballerinas change costumes.

1. Fishing is one of the oldest sports in the world. And can be one of the most relaxing. A person with a simple wooden pole and line can have as much fun as a sportsman. With expensive equipment. For busy executives, overworked teachers, and even presidents of nations. Fishing can be a good way to escape from the stress of demanding jobs.

2. The first electric car was built in 1887. It was sold commercially. Six years later. At the turn of the century, people had great faith in new technology. In fact, three hundred electric taxicabs were operating in New York City by 1900. However, electric cars soon lost their popularity. The new gasoline engine became more widely used. With our concern over pollution. Perhaps electric cars will become desirable once again.

3. Tiger Woods is famous for his success as a championship golfer. He is also known for his work with children. In Anaheim, California, Tiger has recently opened a learning center. For fourth to twelfth graders. Children can apply for a wide range of classes. Including robotics, creative writing, forensics, and photography. Eventually, the center will serve five thousand children. Tiger is planning the construction of other centers around the country. At a cost of five million dollars apiece. He is grateful for his loving and supportive family. And wants to help less fortunate children.

WHAT IS A PHRASE AND HOW MANY KINDS OF PHRASES ARE THERE?

A phrase is a group of words belonging together but lacking one or more of the three elements necessary for a sentence.

Fragments are usually made up of phrases. These phrases are often mistaken for sentences because they are words that go together as a group. However, they do not fit the definition of a sentence. Do not confuse a phrase with a sentence.

The English language has six kinds of phrases, and you should learn to recognize each one. You have already studied three of these kinds of phrases in Chapter 3.
The Six Types of Phrases in English

1. **Noun phrase**
a noun with its modifiers:
   - many large round stones

2. **Prepositional phrase**
a preposition with its object and modifiers:
   - among the large round stones

3. **Verb phrase**
a main verb with its helping verbs and modifiers:
   - were sweetly singing
   - has slowly vanished

4. **Infinitive phrase**
the word to with the base form of the verb and any other words that complete the phrase:
   - to move gracefully

5. **Participial phrase**
a present or past participle and the other words that complete the phrase:
   - moving gracefully
   - greatly encouraged
   The participial phrase functions as an adjective:
   - Moving gracefully, the skater looked like a ballet dancer.
   - Greatly encouraged, the coach decided she was ready for competition.

6. **Gerund phrase**
a present participle and the other words that complete the phrase:
   - moving gracefully
   The gerund phrase functions as a noun:
   - Moving gracefully was the skater’s best quality.

Like the verb phrase, the infinitive phrase, the participial phrase, and the gerund phrase are all formed from verbs. However, these phrases do not function as verbs in sentences.

**INFINITIVE PHRASE**
An infinitive phrase usually functions as a noun.

**Infinitive phrase as subject**
*To continue this argument would be useless.*
Infinitive phrase as object
She began to move gracefully.

NOTE: The word to can also be used as a preposition, as in I wrote to my son.

See whether you can distinguish between the infinitive phrases and the prepositional phrases. In each of the following sentences, label the italicized phrase as an infinitive phrase (INF) or prepositional phrase (PP).

1. I stopped by his office to say goodbye.
2. The trail of evidence led directly to him.
3. We were lucky to have discovered his fraudulent activities.
4. The manager had forced him to tell the truth.
5. His leaving will be a relief to the staff.

PARTICIPIAL PHRASE
How Is the Participle Formed?
The present and past participles are formed from the base verb:

Present participle: base verb + -ing
running, looking, trying

Past participle: base verb + the regular past tense ending -d or -ed

disappointed, folded, turned

or

base verb + irregular past tense form
told, gone, given,

Below are the same participles given above, this time with words that might complete their phrases.

Examples of present participial phrases:
running home, looking very unhappy, trying hard

Examples of past participial phrases:
greatly disappointed, folded incorrectly, turned slightly
told tearfully, gone quickly, given gratefully

How Does a Participial Phrase Function?
A participial phrase functions as an adjective in a sentence. By studying the following sentences, you can observe how the above phrases can be used in complete sentences. These phrases function as adjectives for the noun or pronoun that follows them.
GERUND PHRASE

The gerund is formed from the present participle. Along with any words that go with it, the gerund phrase functions as a noun. As such, it can be the subject or the object of a sentence.

Gerund phrase as subject:  
Long-distance running is strenuous exercise.

Gerund phrase as object:  
I like long-distance running.

Practice

See whether you can distinguish between participial phrases and gerund phrases. In each of the following sentences, label the italicized phrase as a participial phrase (P) or a gerund phrase (G). Remember, the participial phrase functions as an adjective. The gerund phrase functions as a noun.

1. Standing totally still, the child hoped the bee would fly away.  
   G

2. Playing the violin is not easy.  
   P

3. The athlete will try deep-sea diving.  
   G

4. Waiting patiently, we ordered something to drink.  
   P

5. Edited slowly and carefully, the essay was much improved.  
   P

EXERCISE 4

Identifying Phrases

Identify each of the underlined phrases.

1. In the past, play was usually unsupervised.  
   Participial phrase (P)

2. Parents seldom made “play dates” for their children.  
   Participial phrase (P)

3. Playing on the street or in a vacant lot was the norm.  
   Gerund phrase (G)

4. Expecting to be entertained, children today often complain of being bored.  
   Participial phrase (P)

5. They depend on video games to structure their time.  
   Participial phrase (P)

6. Parents are spending money on too many movies and video games.  
   Participial phrase (P)

7. What is wrong with boredom?  
   Participial phrase (P)

8. Blessed with restless energy, children could find more creative ways to play.  
   Participial phrase (P)
9. They need to play outside and get more exercise.

10. A community service project could be a more beneficial outlet for their energy than watching television.

**Identifying Phrases**

The following sentences come from a paragraph by John Steinbeck. Identify each of the underlined phrases.

1. At dawn Cannery Row seems to hang suspended out of time in a silvery light.
2. The splashing of the waves can be heard.
3. Flapping their wings, the seagulls come to sit on the roof peaks shoulder to shoulder.
4. Cats drip over the fences and slither like syrup over the ground to look for fishheads.
5. Silent early morning dogs parade majestically.
6. No automobiles are running then.

**EXERCISE 6**

Identify each of the underlined phrases.

1. For years scientists debated the existence of global warming.
2. In the last five years, the serious debate has ended.
3. Pouring more and more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, humans are causing the earth to grow warmer.
4. Massive sections of ice are melting in the Arctic and Antarctic.
5. Sea levels are projected to rise gradually.
6. Warming a full degree Fahrenheit since 1970, the oceans are fueling more intense typhoons and hurricanes.
7. **By the year 2050,** more than a million animal species worldwide may be extinct.

8. **We could be approaching** the point of no return.

9. **Curbing greenhouse gases** is now a worldwide emergency.

10. **Congress needs to regulate** greenhouse gases.

---

**THE THREE FUNCTIONS OF THE PRESENT PARTICIPLE**

The present participle causes problems for students working with sentence fragments. Because the participle is used sometimes as a verb (in a verb phrase), sometimes as an adjective (in a participial phrase), and sometimes as a noun (in a gerund phrase), it causes a good deal of confusion for students.

The present participle can function in three different ways.

1. The participle functions as a *verb* in a *verb phrase.*
   
   *The student was taking an exam.*

2. The participle functions as an *adjective* in a *participial phrase.*
   
   *Taking an exam, the student felt stressed.*

3. The participle functions as a *noun* in a *gerund phrase.*
   
   *Taking an exam can be stressful.*

In each of these cases, the present participle is part of a phrase. Remember, a phrase is not a sentence.

**EXERCISE 7**

**Using the Present Participle in a Verb Phrase**

Below are five present participles. Add a helping verb to each one and use this verb phrase to write a complete sentence of your own. An example follows:

**Present participle:** sitting

**Verb phrase:** is sitting

**Sentence:** The couple is sitting on the balcony.

1. building __________________________

2. crying __________________________

3. traveling __________________________

4. writing __________________________

5. thinking __________________________
EXERCISE 8
Using the Present Participle in a Participial Phrase
Each of the following phrases contains a present participle. Use each participial phrase to compose a sentence in which the phrase functions as an adjective. An example follows:

Present participle: sitting
Participial phrase: sitting on the balcony
Participial phrase used as an adjective in a sentence: Sitting on the balcony, the couple enjoyed the moonlight.

1. building a house

2. crying over the broken vase

3. traveling in Mexico

4. hastily writing the letter

5. thinking about the problem

EXERCISE 9
Using the Present Participle in a Gerund Phrase
Each of the following phrases contains a present participle. Use each gerund phrase to compose a sentence in which the phrase functions as a noun. An example follows:

Present participle: sitting
Gerund phrase: sitting on the balcony
Gerund phrase used as a noun in a sentence: Sitting on the balcony is relaxing.

1. building a house
2. crying over the broken vase

3. traveling in Mexico

4. hastily writing the letter

5. thinking about the problem

**HOW DO YOU MAKE A COMPLETE SENTENCE FROM A FRAGMENT THAT CONTAINS A PARTICIPLE?**

When a participle is used incorrectly, the result is often a fragment. Here are three ways to turn a fragment containing a participle into a sentence.

**Fragment: He talking in his sleep.**

1. Correct the main verb of the sentence.
   a. Add a helping verb (such as *is* or *was*) to the participle to form a verb phrase:
      
      **He was talking in his sleep.**
   b. Change the participle to a different form of the verb (such as the past tense).
      
      **He talked in his sleep.**

2. Use the participle as an adjective, being sure to provide a subject and verb for the sentence.

3. Use the participle as a noun in a gerund phrase.

   **Talking in his sleep revealed his innermost thoughts.**

**EXERCISE 10**

Correcting the Fragment That Contains a Participle

Make four complete sentences from each of the following fragments. Use the following model as your guide.
Fragment: using the back stairway
   a. He is using the back stairway. (verb phrase)
   b. He uses the back stairway. (simple present tense)
   c. Using the back stairway, he got away without being seen. (participial phrase used as an adjective)
   d. Using the back stairway is not a good idea. (gerund phrase used as a noun)

1. moving out of the house
   a. ____________________________
   b. ____________________________
   c. ____________________________
   d. ____________________________

2. talking on the telephone
   a. ____________________________
   b. ____________________________
   c. ____________________________
   d. ____________________________

3. driving the car down Highway 60
   a. ____________________________
   b. ____________________________
   c. ____________________________
   d. ____________________________

EXERCISE 11
Correcting the Fragment That Contains a Participle
The following passage is made up of fragments containing participles. Rewrite the passage, creating complete sentences. Use any of the three correction methods discussed on page 90.

I walking through the deserted apartment building. Poking around in piles of junk. Broken furniture left behind. The brick walls crumbling. Water dripping from an overhead pipe. Two children playing in the dismal hallways. Waiting for someone to restore the building to its former glory.
Correcting the Fragment That Contains a Participle

The following passage has four fragments containing participles. Place a check in front of each fragment. Then rewrite the passage using complete sentences. Use any of the four correction methods discussed previously.

Finally at age 42 taking my driving test. I felt very nervous. My son was sitting in the back seat. All my papers sitting on the front seat. The inspector got into the car and sat on my insurance form. He looked rather sour and barely spoke to me. Trying not to hit the curb. I parallel parked surprisingly well. I managed to get through all the maneuvers. Now tensely waiting for the results.

Correcting Fragments

Rewrite each fragment so that it is a complete sentence.

1. early morning a time of peace in my neighborhood
2. the gray mist covering up all but the faint outlines of nearby houses
3. the shapes of cars in the streets and driveways
4. to sit and look out the window
5. holding a steaming cup of coffee
6. the only sound the rumbling of a truck
7. passing by on the highway a quarter mile away
8. children all in their beds
9. no barking dogs
   
10. in this soft, silent dreamworld

**Correcting Fragments**

Each of the following groups of words is a phrase. First, name each phrase. Then, make each phrase into a complete sentence.

1. two champion boxers
   
   Name of phrase: two champion boxers
   
   Sentence: Two champion boxers are punching each other at the sound of the bell.

2. to watch the fight
   
   Name of phrase: to watch the fight
   
   Sentence: He gratefully supported the referee to watch the fight.

3. in the ring
   
   Name of phrase: in the ring
   
   Sentence: The fighters are punching each other in the ring.

4. are punching each other
   
   Name of phrase: are punching each other
   
   Sentence: At the sound of the bell, two champion boxers are punching each other in the ring.

5. at the sound of the bell
   
   Name of phrase: at the sound of the bell
   
   Sentence: Two champion boxers gratefully supported the referee to watch the fight at the sound of the bell.

6. gratefully supported
   
   Name of phrase: gratefully supported
   
   Sentence: The referee gratefully supported the fighters to watch the fight at the sound of the bell.

7. to referee the fight
   
   Name of phrase: to referee the fight
   
   Sentence: Two champion boxers gratefully supported the referee to referee the fight at the sound of the bell.
8. the screaming fans
   Name of phrase: ________________________________
   Sentence: ________________________________

9. by the second round
   Name of phrase: ________________________________
   Sentence: ________________________________

10. knocked unconscious
    Name of phrase: ________________________________
    Sentence: ________________________________

MASTERY AND EDITING TESTS

TEST 1

Recognizing and Correcting the Fragment

The following description of people on a dance floor at the Peppermint Lounge appeared in The New Yorker in the 1960s. The description is made up entirely of fragments. Rewrite the description, making each fragment into a sentence.

Recognizing and Correcting the Fragment

The following paragraph contains seven fragments. Read the paragraph and place a check in front of each fragment. Then rewrite the paragraph, being careful to use only complete sentences.

That afternoon the street was full of children. Taking a shower in the rain. Soaping themselves and rushing out into the storm. To wash off the suds. In a few minutes, it was all over. Including the rubdown. The younger children took their showers naked. Teetering on the tips of their toes and squealing to one another. The stately coconut palm in one corner of the patio thrashed its branches high over the dripping children bouncing on the cobblestones.

Editing Student Writing: Recognizing and Correcting the Fragment

The following paragraph contains six fragments. Read the paragraph and place a check in front of each fragment. Then rewrite the paragraph, being careful to use only complete sentences.

We called it our house. It was only one room. With about as much space as a tent. Painted in a pastel color with a red-tiled roof. The front window reaching nearly from the sidewalk to the roof. We could look up and down the street.
Sitting indoors on the window seat. Our kitchen was a small narrow area. With
the brick stove and two benches to serve as shelves. Three steel bars and a
short piece of lead pipe from a scrap heap to make a grate.

Editing Student Writing Using Editing Symbols

As you learned in Test 4 of Chapter 4 (page 74), instructors often use editing
symbols to mark errors in student writing. The editing symbol for a fragment is
frag. In the paragraph below, find five fragments [frag] and five errors
in subject-verb agreement [agr]. Mark each error with the commonly used
editing symbol, and then correct the errors on the lines provided following
the paragraph.

My younger brother is happy about his first job at McDonald’s. The most
popular fast food restaurant. His cousin and a friend also works here. His
uniform, a blue and white striped shirt with blue pants, are provided for free.
One of the employees show him the register. Everyone learn all the different
jobs. Either the manager or the trainer tell him about the importance of
patience. Getting along with other people, too. You start at the bottom.
Slowly working up the ladder. After six months, a supervisor reviews your
work. Some workers in the group get a raise and become crew trainers.
One big disadvantage. Low pay!

Five corrected fragments

1. _____________________________________________________________

2. _____________________________________________________________

Answers will vary.
3. __________________________________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________________________________

Five subject-verb agreement corrections

Subject | Correct form of the verb
---|---
6. ______________ | ______________
7. ______________ | ______________
8. ______________ | ______________
9. ______________ | ______________
10. ______________ | ______________

Exploring Online

Go to www.cengage.com/devenglish/scarry/writersworkplace to find the Writer’s Online Workplace, a website designed for students using this book. You will find links to handouts, interactive quizzes, and other online resources as you explore the following topics:

- sentence fragments
- verbal phrases (infinitive, participial, and gerund phrases)
EXAMINING AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR FRAGMENTS

1. Advertising companies devote a great deal of their time and attention to market research. This research helps the company target its message to the most likely audience for its product or service. Who is the advertiser in this newspaper ad? Who is the intended audience? What is the product or service being advertised?

2. Like many advertisements we see in magazines and newspapers, this Bankers Trust Company advertisement is made up of short, snappy constructions that are not always complete sentences. Advertisers write in this way because they want to attract our attention. However, when we write for school or for work, our compositions must be made up of only complete sentences. Review the advertisement at the left. Each of the three paragraphs contains mostly fragments. Underline each fragment you can find. With your classmates, rewrite the ad correcting all the fragments. Consider all the different answers and judge them for correctness. If needed, review the two ways to correct a fragment (page 81).
PORTFOLIO SUGGESTION

Choose a product or a service that particularly appeals to you. Clip newspaper or magazine ads, or both, that deal with this product or service. Take notes on television ads or billboard ads. Review them at a later time for possible use in comparison or contrast essays.