

Writing and Tutorial Center

What Makes A Sentence?

In academic writing, a sentence is a complete thought requiring a subject, a verb, and punctuation.

A **subject** is the person, place, or thing doing the action in a sentence.

A **verb** is the action or state of being in the sentence.

A **phrase** is a group of words without both a subject and a verb.

A **clause** is a group of words with a subject and a verb.

An **independent clause** can stand alone as a sentence.

A **dependent clause** can't stand alone; it needs an independent clause to complete the thought.

A **subordinator** or **subordinating conjunction** is a word that turns a clause into a dependent clause (e.g. because, although, if).

A **fragment** is an incomplete sentence—missing a subject, verb, or complete thought.

Draw a line between each grammar term [left] and the corresponding example of its usage [right]:

Phrase
Clause
Subordinator
Independent Clause
Dependent Clause
Fragment
Subject
Verb

The exhibit opened with a disco ball.
because the neon sculpture exploded
The muralist <i>painted</i> a ten-story face.
under the Williamsburg Bridge
Although the gallery was tiny,
The designer sketches rapidly.
The <i>muralist</i> painted a ten-story face.
Wearing mismatched shoes on purpose.

COMMON SUBORDINATORS (SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS)

These introduce dependent clauses, showing relationships such as time, cause, condition, and contrast.

Time: after as as soon as before by the time once since [time] till until when whenever while	Condition: if even if in case provided that unless assuming that as long as on condition that	Cause & Effect: because since [cause] as in order that so that now that given that	Purpose or Result: so that in order that	Comparison or Manner: as as if as though just as the way	Contrast or Concession: although even though though whereas while [contrast] in spite of the fact that despite the fact that
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IDENTIFY AND CORRECT

For each line, decide whether it is a F (Fragment), I (Independent Clause), or D (Dependent Clause). Then fix any fragments by rewriting them as complete sentences:

EXERCISE

Sentence or Fragment	F / I / D	Correction (if needed)
After the pop-up closed.		
The sculpture melted in the sun.		
While the curator gave her speech.		
Because the paint fumes were intense.		
The zine fair buzzed with energy.		
On top of the shipping container.		
Although she forgot the projector.		

Challenge: Combine two lines into one complete sentence using a subordinator.

THE FRAGMENT SITUATION

Fragments = incomplete sentences. They're missing a subject, a verb, or a complete thought. In academic writing (especially in Lit Crit and writing classes) they're usually not acceptable. Professors will notice. Professors will care. So why do we use them all the time? Because fragments are everywhere outside of formal writing:

In speech:

"Too late."

"Coming with?"

Listeners can easily fill in the gaps.

In advertising and journalism:

"No rules. Just right."

"A city on edge."

These are short, punchy, and dramatic. Editors love them.

In creative writing:

"The silence. The flicker of streetlights. A sense of something missing."

Used deliberately, fragments can create rhythm, mood, or emphasis.

In college essays?

Use with caution. If you're writing an analytical or argumentative paper, stick with complete sentences unless your instructor tells you otherwise.