12a What is a sentence fragment?

A sentence fragment looks like a sentence, but it’s actually only part of a sentence. That is, even though a sentence fragment begins with a capital letter and ends with a period (or question mark or exclamation point), it doesn’t contain an independent clause. Fragments are merely unattached phrases or dependent clauses.

**Fragment**
The telephone with redial capacity. [no verb]

**Correct**
The telephone has redial capacity.

**Fragment**
Rang loudly for ten minutes. [no subject]

**Correct**
The telephone rang loudly for ten minutes.

**Fragment**
Because the telephone rang loudly. [dependent clause starting with subordinating conjunction because]

**Correct**
Because the telephone rang loudly, the family was awakened in the middle of the night.

12b How can I recognize a sentence fragment?

If you tend to write sentence fragments, you want a system for recognizing them. Box 12-1 on the next page shows you a sentence test for checking that you haven’t written a sentence fragment.

**Exercise 12-1** Identify each word group as either a complete sentence or a fragment. If the word group is a sentence, circle its number. If it’s a fragment, tell why it’s incomplete. For help, see Box 12-1.

**Example**
Because gold is shiny, flexible, and scarce. [Fragment: starts with a subordinating conjunction (because), creating dependence, and lacks an independent clause to complete the thought; see Box 12-1]

1. Making gold ideal for a variety of uses.
2. Provides brilliance to coins, jewelry, and artwork.
3. Because gold combines easily to strengthen copper, silver, or nickel.
4. The melting point of gold is 1,945 degrees Fahrenheit.
5. Although tons of gold lie under the oceans.
What are major ways of correcting fragments?

Once you’ve identified a sentence fragment (12b), you’re ready to correct it. You can do this in one of two ways: by joining it to an independent clause (12c.1) or by rewriting it (12c.2).

12c.1 Correcting a sentence fragment by joining it to an independent clause

One way that a sentence fragment can be corrected is by joining it to an independent clause—that is, a complete sentence. The first two examples
below deal with dependent-clause fragments; the examples following the Alert examine fragments with missing subjects and/or verbs.

**FRAGMENT**  Because the ice was thick. [Although this word group has a subject (ice) and verb (was), it starts with the subordinating conjunction because.]

**CORRECT**  Because the ice was thick, icebreakers were required to serve as rescue ships. [By adding a comma and joining the fragment to the independent clause icebreakers were required to serve as rescue ships, a complete sentence is created.]

**CORRECT**  Icebreakers were required to serve as rescue ships because the ice was thick. [By joining the fragment to the independent clause Icebreakers were required to serve as rescue ships, a complete sentence is created.]

**ALERT:** Be careful with all words that indicate time, such as after, before, since, and until. They aren’t always subordinating conjunctions. Sometimes they function as ADVERBS—especially if they begin a complete sentence. At other times, they function as PREPOSITIONS. When you see one of these words that indicate time, realize that you aren’t necessarily looking at a dependent-clause fragment.

**Before,** the whales had responded to classical music. [This is a complete sentence in which Before is an adverb that modifies the independent clause the whales had responded to classical music.]

**Before the whales had responded to classical music,** some crewmembers tried rock and roll music. [If the word group before the comma stood on its own, it would be a sentence fragment because it starts with Before functioning as a subordinating conjunction.]

**FRAGMENT**  To announce new programs for crime prevention. [To announce starts an infinitive phrase, not a sentence.]

**CORRECT**  The mayor called a news conference last week to announce new programs for crime prevention. [The infinitive phrase starting with to announce is joined with an independent clause.]

**FRAGMENT**  Hoping for strong public support. [Hoping starts a present-participle phrase, not a sentence.]

**CORRECT**  Hoping for strong public support, she gave examples of problems throughout the city. [The present-participle phrase starting with Hoping is joined with an independent clause.]

**FRAGMENT**  Introduced by her assistant. [Introduced starts a past-participle phrase, not a sentence.]

**CORRECT**  Introduced by her assistant, the mayor began with an opening statement. [The past-participle phrase starting with Introduced is joined with an independent clause.]
What are major ways of correcting fragments?

**12c.2 Correcting a sentence fragment by rewriting it**

A second way that a sentence fragment can be corrected is by rewriting it as an **INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**—that is, a complete sentence. The first two examples below deal with dependent-clause fragments; the others examine fragments with missing subjects and/or verbs.

- **FRAGMENT** *During the long news conference.* [*During functions as a preposition—starting a prepositional phrase, not a sentence.*]
  - **CORRECT** *Cigarette smoke made the conference room seem airless during the long news conference.* [*The prepositional phrase starting with *during* is joined with an independent clause.*]

- **FRAGMENT** *A politician with fresh ideas.* [*A politician starts an appositive phrase, not a sentence.*]
  - **CORRECT** *Most people respected the mayor, a politician with fresh ideas.* [*The appositive phrase starting with *a politician* is joined with an independent clause.*]
SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

CORRECT  It was hard to breathe during the long news conference. [The prepositional phrase starting with During is rewritten to become a complete sentence.]

FRAGMENT  A politician with fresh ideas. [A politician starts an appositive phrase, not a sentence.]

CORRECT  She seemed to be a politician with fresh ideas. [The appositive phrase is rewritten to become a complete sentence.]

EXERCISE 12-2  Find and correct any sentence fragments. If a sentence is correct, circle its number. For help, consult 12a through 12c.

EXAMPLE  Many communities prohibit the building of cellphone transmission towers. Which they consider to be unsightly.

Many communities prohibit the building of cellphone transmission towers, which they consider to be unsightly.

1. Although telephone companies always need to build more towers to fulfill the increasing demand for cellphone service.

2. The companies are hard-pressed to find suitable locations, especially on the densely populated east and west coasts of the United States.

3. While the equipment that runs the towers usually fits out of sight in the church basement. The tall antenna is concealed inside the steeple.

4. Strapped for funds. Churches are often eager to rent space to telecommunications companies.

5. The reconstruction preserved the historic architecture, hid the tower, and even left room for the bats and pigeons. That traditionally inhabited the original steeple.

12d  How can I fix a fragment that is part of a compound predicate?

A compound predicate contains two or more verbs. When the second half of a compound predicate is punctuated as a separate sentence, it becomes a sentence fragment.

FRAGMENT  The reporters asked the mayor many questions about the new program. And then discussed her answers among themselves. [And then discussed starts a compound predicate fragment, not a sentence.]

CORRECT  The reporters asked the mayor many questions about the new program and then discussed her answers among themselves. [The compound predicate fragment starting with and then discussed is joined to the independent clause.]

CORRECT  The reporters asked the mayor many questions about the new program. Then the reporters discussed her answers among themselves. [The compound predicate fragment starting with And then discussed is rewritten as a complete sentence.]
EXERCISE 12-3  Go back to Exercise 12-1 and revise the sentence fragments into complete sentences. In some cases, you may be able to combine two fragments into one complete sentence.

12e  What are the two special fragment problems?

Two special fragment problems sometimes involve lists and examples. Lists and examples must be part of a complete sentence, unless they are formatted as a column.

You can connect a list fragment by attaching it to the preceding independent clause using a colon or a dash. You can correct an example fragment by attaching it to an independent clause (with or without punctuation, depending on the meaning) or by rewriting it as a complete sentence.

FRAGMENT  You have a choice of desserts. Carrot cake, chocolate silk pie, apple pie, or peppermint ice cream. [The list cannot stand on its own as a sentence.]

CORRECT  You have a choice of desserts: carrot cake, chocolate silk pie, apple pie, or peppermint ice cream. [A colon joins the sentence and the list.]

CORRECT  You have a choice of desserts—carrot cake, chocolate silk pie, apple pie, or peppermint ice cream. [A dash joins the sentence and the list.]

FRAGMENT  Several good places offer brunch. For example, the restaurants Sign of the Dove and Blue Yonder. [Examples can’t stand on their own as a sentence.]

CORRECT  Several good places offer brunch—for example, the restaurants Sign of the Dove and Blue Yonder. 

CORRECT  Several good places offer brunch. For example, there are the restaurants Sign of the Dove and Blue Yonder.

12f  How can I recognize intentional fragments?

Professional writers sometimes intentionally use fragments for emphasis and effect.

But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant.

—Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”
COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ON SENTENCES

Being able to judge the difference between an acceptable and unacceptable sentence fragment comes from years of reading the work of skilled writers. For ACADEMIC WRITING, most instructors don’t accept sentence fragments in student writing until a student demonstrates a consistent ability to write well-constructed, complete sentences. As a rule, avoid sentence fragments in academic writing.

EXERCISE 12-4 Revise this paragraph to eliminate all sentence fragments. In some cases, you can combine word groups to create complete sentences; in other cases, you must supply missing elements to revise word groups. Some sentences may not require revision. In your final version, check not only the individual sentences but also the clarity of the whole paragraph. Refer to sections 12a through 12e for help.

(1) Some teenagers and young adults. (2) Are continually on instant messaging almost every moment that they are using their computers. (3) Which are rarely turned off. (4) According to America Online (AOL), the most popular instant-messaging service. (5) 195 million people use its instant-messaging service. (6) Creating more than 1.6 billion messages per day. (7) Becoming an integral part of the social fabric of our world. (8) Instant messaging has replaced the telephone, and even some e-mail. (9) For millions of young adults. (10) As a result, AOL and its main rivals, Microsoft and Yahoo. (11) Continue to add new features to their instant-messaging services.

CHAPTER 13
Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

13a What are comma splices and run-on sentences?
Comma splices and run-on sentences are somewhat similar errors: One has a comma by itself between two complete sentences, and one has no punctuation at all between two complete sentences.

A comma splice, also called a comma fault, occurs when a comma, rather than a period, is used incorrectly between complete sentences. The word splice means “to fasten ends together,” which is a handy procedure, except when splicing has anything to do with sentences.

A run-on sentence, also called a fused sentence and a run-together sentence, occurs when two complete sentences run into each other without any