

THE WRITING CENTER

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<http://www.bryant.edu/ace>

Call ahead for an appointment with a student Writing Consultant or a professional Writing Specialist.
Drop-ins also welcome and accommodated whenever possible.

Avoiding Sentence Fragments

What is a sentence fragment?

A sentence fragment is *part* of a sentence, which when treated as a complete sentence, with a capital letter at the beginning and a period at the end, does not work. A fragment may lack an important sentence element such as a subject or a verb, thus confusing readers by leaving out important information. Another term for a sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. Sometimes students have a hard time grasping that a fairly long sentence can be a fragment. Reviewing the subject and verb requirements might help.

Example of a missing subject:

Began pumping water out of the basement. (Who or what began pumping water?)

Example of a missing verb:

The insurance company responsible for the costs. (What did the company do?)

Sentences should have a subject (the do-er, or the thing talked about) and a verb (word that shows the action in a sentence). Question yourself about the missing element:

Example: Yet also needs to establish a family counseling program.

- Who or what needs to establish the program?

Example: The new policy to determine scholarship size on the basis of grades rather than on a basis of need.

- What does the new policy do? What are you trying to say about the policy?

Sometimes students use "verbals" instead of real verbs and think they have a complete sentence. "Verbals" are gerunds (-ing forms of the verb) and infinitives (to & verb). The verb has to be an active form, not an "ing" or "to" form.

Examples: The laboratory testing the samples for traces of platinum. **OR** The laboratory to test the samples for traces of platinum.

- The correct sentence would use "will test" or "is testing" or "tested"

Subordinating words like "although," "because," "that," "since," and "which" can sometimes cause a problem. These types of words at the beginning of a sentence create a clause, and clauses can't stand on their own (hence the sentence fragment). Such words tell the reader to expect more from the sentence. A fix would be to either remove the subordinating word or connect the fragment to another sentence.

Example: Everybody loves the town. Which has led to rapid population growth and a rise in property values.