



## SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

*Related Handouts:* See TERMS TO KNOW: Vital Sentence Elements, Clauses and Sentence Types, and Prepositional and Verbal Phrases

### THE PRINCIPLE

A sentence fragment is a partial sentence. It may dress like a sentence (start with a capital letter, end with a period), but something is missing.

To be grammatically complete, a group of words must name something or someone (that's the **subject**) and must express a complete thought about it (in the **predicate**, which must contain a **verb**).

### THE PROBLEM:

A sentence fragment may be incomplete because it

- Is missing a subject, OR
- Is missing a verb, OR
- Is missing both a subject and a verb, OR
- Does not finish expressing its thought.

The sentence fragments in the following paragraph are underlined:

Although Lance Armstrong got most of the publicity. He was not the only amazing cyclist in the 2005 Tour de France. Ivan Basso also had an excellent showing. And rode to two stage wins in the Giro d'Italia as well. He is a superb cyclist. David Zabriski, who rode for team CSC and got a great start but unfortunately crashed in the team time trial and had to drop out of the race. But Lance Armstrong is in a class by himself. Winning seven Tours after recovering from cancer. Which is a phenomenal accomplishment. Bravo!

**THE SOLUTION:** (You'll need to refer to **TERMS TO KNOW** for definitions of the terms in bold type)

- 1) Although Lance Armstrong got most of the publicity.

This word group contains a **subject** (Lance Armstrong) and a **predicate** with a **verb** (got most of the publicity), but it does not finish expressing its idea. That's because the word "although," a **subordinate conjunction**, turns the whole thing into a **subordinate** or **dependent clause**. To finish expressing its thought, it needs to be attached to the **independent clause** that follows it:

Although Lance Armstrong got most of the publicity, he was not the only amazing cyclist in the 2005 Tour de France.

- 2) And rode to two stage wins in the Giro d'Italia as well.

Here we have a **predicate** with a **verb** (“rode”) but no **subject**. We can tell from the previous sentence that Ivan Basso is the one who rode to two stage wins, but he’s not in this sentence. The subject needs to be in the same sentence as its verb:

Ivan Basso also had an excellent showing and rode to two stage wins in the Giro d’Italia as well.

- 3) David Zabriski, who rode for team CSC and got a great start but unfortunately crashed in the team time trial and had to drop out of the race.

As long as it is, this is not a complete sentence, even though it has a **subject** (David Zabriski) and appears to have several **verbs** (rode, got, crashed, had to drop out). The problem is that all those verbs occur within a **relative clause**, starting with the **relative pronoun** “who”: who rode for team CSC and got a great start but unfortunately crashed in the team time trial and had to drop out of the race. All of that is part of the **complete subject**, describing David Zabriski. But there is no **predicate** – nothing to complete the statement about Mr. Zabriski. One way to complete this fragment would be to add a predicate (in italics):

David Zabriski, who rode for team CSC and got a great start but unfortunately crashed in the team time trial and had to drop out of the race, *is another promising cyclist.*

Another solution is simply to remove the word “who,” turning everything that follows it into a **complete predicate**. (Without the **relative pronoun** “who,” it no longer qualifies as a **relative clause**.)

David Zabriski rode for team CSC and got a great start but unfortunately crashed in the team time trial and had to drop out of the race.

- 4) Winning seven Tours after recovering from cancer.

There is no **subject** here (Lance Armstrong, the one who won seven Tours, isn’t inside the sentence) and no **verb** either (the –ing verb forms “winning” and “recovering” are **participles**, but they don’t count as verbs). The whole phrase can be attached to the previous sentence:

But Lance Armstrong is in a class by himself, winning seven Tours after recovering from cancer.

- 5) Which is a phenomenal accomplishment.

Fragments that start with “which” are common, but not correct. This is another **relative clause**, starting with the **relative pronoun** “which.” When you see it isolated like this, it’s easy to realize that it’s not a complete sentence. Usually, the best way to fix a “which” fragment is to attach it to the previous sentence, because chances are the word “which” refers to something in that sentence – in this case “winning.”

But Lance Armstrong is in a class by himself, winning seven Tours after recovering from cancer, which is a phenomenal accomplishment.

- 6) Bravo!

Yes, this too is a fragment, but a forgivable one. Using an *occasional* fragment for emphasis is not a mortal sin! But use them sparingly if at all, and don’t leave your meaning, as well as your sentence, incomplete.

**TIP:** Did you notice how easy it is to spot fragments when you see them in isolation instead of reading them in the context of a whole paragraph? If you are prone to writing sentence fragments, try reading your paragraphs out loud and *backwards*: last sentence, then next to last, and so forth. This will force you to see the sentences as isolated units and may make it easier to notice if they are incomplete.