

## Sentence Fragments: Overview

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Sentence fragments are grammatically incomplete sentences. While fragments can be found in advertising and informal writing, they are viewed as a serious problem in academic and business writing. This handout provides a way to “test” sentences that may be fragments; it also provides strategies for revising fragments and reviews common types of fragments.

A sentence is fragmented when it is missing a subject, verb or object. For example,

*Running through the forest.* (Missing subject and verb)

*The blue shirt.* (Missing verb)

*I like.* (Missing object)

## “Testing” for Fragments

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Try the following strategy to help determine whether your “sentence” is really fragment:

It is true that \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your suspected fragment here) \_\_\_\_\_.

If the sentence makes sense, you have a complete sentence; if something seems missing, you probably have a fragment in need of revision. (Note that this strategy does not work with questions.)

## Challenge

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Try to find the six fragments in the following paragraphs. If you’re not sure about a sentence, use the strategy above to test for fragments.

A recent cyanide spill in Romania has drawn worldwide attention. The January 30, 2000, incident occurred when a dam at a gold mine broke and released 100,000 cubic metres of toxic sludge into the Szamos River, which flows into Hungary’s Tisza River. The scale of the resulting ecological disaster was vast. Killing virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River. Which is home to 19 of the 29 species of protected fish in Hungary (WWF, 2000b). Besides killing over 100 tonnes of fish, the spill also endangered seabirds and other wildlife and affected drinking water supplies for cities along the affected waterways (WWF, 2000b). The most serious cyanide spill ever (WWF, 2000a). Although there have been other serious spills recorded.

This unprecedented case of freshwater pollution has also focused public attention on a number of other issues: inadequate environmental monitoring and response measures in many countries in Eastern Europe. Secondly, problems in enforcing international agreements related to trans-border pollution (WWF, 2000a). And, finally, woefully inadequate penalties for corporate polluters. According to one report, the company responsible for the January 30 spill was fined only \$166 US (WWF, 2000a).

## References

World Wildlife Fund. (2000a). The biggest ever freshwater disaster in Central and Eastern Europe.

Available at Panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=1850.

World Wildlife Fund. (2000b). WWF demands immediate government action on toxic spill.

Available at Panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=1848.

## How Did You Do?

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*The six fragments appear in bold type.*

A recent cyanide spill in Romania has drawn worldwide attention. . . . The scale of the resulting ecological disaster was vast. **Killing virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River. Which is home to 19 of the 29 species of protected fish in Hungary (WWF, 2000b).** Besides killing over 100 tonnes of fish, the spill also endangered seabirds and other wildlife and affected drinking water supplies for cities along the affected waterways (WWF, 2000b). **The most serious cyanide spill ever (WWF, 2000a). Although there have been other serious spills recorded.**

This unprecedented case of freshwater pollution has also focused public attention on a number of other issues: inadequate environmental monitoring and response measures in many countries in Eastern Europe. **Secondly, problems in enforcing international agreements related to trans-border pollution (WWF, 2000a). And, finally, woefully inadequate penalties for corporate polluters.** According to one report, the company responsible for the January 30 spill was fined only \$166 U.S. (WWF, 2000a).

## Two Strategies for Fixing Fragments

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Using the “It is true that . . .” test, we see that something seems missing in the sentence below:

It is true that **[killing virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River.]** To fix the problem, try the following two strategies:

- **Attach the fragment to an adjoining sentence with a comma.** Here’s the resulting sentence in this case: *The scale of the resulting ecological disaster was vast, killing virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River.*
- **Rewrite the fragment so that it passes the “It is true that” sentence test.** (Hint: identify the main action and try starting the sentence with the “doer” of that action.) Here’s the resulting sentence in this case: *The scale of the resulting ecological disaster was vast. The spill killed virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River.*

## Typical Fragments Patterns

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### Starting a Sentence with “Which” or “In which”

- **Fragment:** The spill killed virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River. **Which is home to 19 of the 29 species of protected fish in Hungary.**
- **Fixed:** The spill killed virtually all aquatic life in a 400-metre stretch of the Tisza River, which is home to 19 of the 29 species of protected fish in Hungary.

\***Note:** You can start a sentence with “Which” if it is a question.

### Starting a Sentence with “For example”

- **Fragment:** Viruses are resistant to antibiotics. **For example, the common cold and flu viruses.**
- **Fixed:** Viruses, such as the common cold and flu viruses, are resistant to antibiotics.
- **Fixed:** Viruses are resistant to antibiotics. For example, penicillin is ineffective against ... flu viruses.

\* **Hint:** You can start a sentence with “For example” as long as a complete thought follows that opening.

### Starting a Sentence with “Although”

- **Fragment:** This was the most serious cyanide spill ever. **Although there have been other serious spills.**
- **Fixed:** This was the most serious cyanide spill ever, although there have been other serious spills.
- **Fixed:** This was the most serious cyanide spill ever; however, there have been other serious spills.

### “ -ing” Participles Pretending to be the Main Verb in a Sentence

- **Fragment:** Many universities are seeking private sector funding. **Budget cutbacks being one reason.**
- **Fixed:** Many universities are seeking private sector funding because of budget cutbacks.
- **Fixed:** Many universities are seeking private sector funding. Budget cutbacks are one reason.