

FRAGMENTS

A sentence fragment is only part of a sentence, which means that it is only part of an idea or a thought. A sentence fragment is called a fragment because it does not make a complete statement about a topic.

Fragment:

Which is what I said. (to what does which refer?)

Being a lifeguard. (what about being a lifeguard?)

Sentence:

I believe that he is lying, which is what I said.

Being a lifeguard allows him to sit in the sun all day and be paid for it.

Fragments are not, in and of themselves, incorrect. But papers should have few fragments, and any fragments they do have should be fragments the writer has chosen to use because they are appropriate and because they "work." Inadvertent fragments hurt the efforts of writers to express their thoughts because fragments are only pieces of thoughts. They leave readers wondering what it is the writer is trying to say. For this reason, you want to be able to spot, and to correct, all inadvertent fragments in your papers. Here are two common sources of inadvertent fragments and the ways to fix them.

Inadvertent Fragments:

- (1) Watch out for sentences that have only an "-ing" form of a verb. A present participle (the "-ing" form of the verb: seeing, being, wanting, etc.) by itself will not create a verb that makes a statement about something.

FRAGMENT: John being a good cook.

To be a complete sentence, you must use a finite form of a verb:

SENTENCE: John is a good cook.
John is becoming a good cook.

- (2) Often writers create sentence fragments when they try to shorten sentences that they think are growing too long:

FRAGMENTS:

The battle, having lasted more than two days, turned into a pointless tug of war. **A situation that was intolerable to the generals on both sides.**

Seeing that no one would win, the generals of the two armies ordered retreats. **Which was an unsatisfactory solution to the leaders of these two countries.**

In both of these cases, the fragment (in boldface type) is really a subordinate element of the full sentence that comes before it. These fragments can be easily fixed by reattaching the subordinate element (the fragment) to the sentence to which it belongs.

SENTENCES:

The battle, having lasted more than two days, turned into a pointless tug of war, a situation that was intolerable to the generals on both sides.

Seeing that no one would win, the generals of the two armies ordered retreats, which was an unsatisfactory solution to the leaders of these two countries.

NOTE: Do not become obsessed with cutting down the length of sentences just because they run to two or three lines. Long sentences can be just as effective as short sentences. In writing longer sentences, the things you have to be concerned with are making sure your reader can see the relationships among your ideas, and that you are not overloading the sentence with too many new ideas.