

# Avoiding Sentence fragments

## Introduction

Sentence fragments are punctuated as though they are sentences, but they lack one or more essential elements of a sentence. They often occur unintentionally in writing and can confuse the reader. They are three things you can do to help determine whether something you have punctuated as a sentence is really a sentence or a sentence fragment. Try all three tips and see if they help you.

### Tip 1

Read aloud any potential sentence or sentence fragment and consider whether someone just reading **that one statement** would think the statement is incomplete. Try this with the following and see if you can determine which examples are fragments.

Writing clearly. ✗ A fragment.  
(Your reader would probably wonder who you were talking about.)

The team delivered the material on time. ✓ A sentence.

The secretary who sits at the front desk. ✗ A fragment.  
(Your reader would probably be wondering what you wanted to say about this secretary.)

Despite what I said. ✗ A fragment.  
You reader is probably thinking "Hey?"

Write clearly. ✓ A sentence.  
(This sentence is a command and has the implied subject **you**.)

In a manner that impressed everyone. ✗ A fragment.  
(Again, this is likely to evoke "Hey?")

The company was an amazing success. ✓ A sentence.

Se is a very good speaker. ✓ A sentence.

If you can. ✗ A fragment.  
(Your reader would probably be wondering what you are talking about.)

She was a wonderful person. ✓ A sentence.

The product sold very well. ✓ A sentence.

Which surprised me. ✗ A fragment.

(Your reader would be wondering what you were referring to.)

## Tip 2

A sentence that makes a statement and is not a question can be turned into what is known as a tag question. Tag questions ask for confirmation of a sentence. Sentence fragments cannot be turned into tag questions.

**Consider the following sentences and fragments.**

### Sentences

The team delivered the material on time.

The team delivered the material on time, **didn't it?**

Write clearly.

Write clearly, **won't you?**

The company was an amazing success.

The company was an amazing success, **wasn't it?**

She is a very good speaker.

She is a very good speaker, **isn't she?**

She was a wonderful person.

She was a wonderful person, **wasn't she?**

The product sold very well.

The product sold very well, **didn't it?**

### Fragments

The secretary who sits at the front desk. ✗

(You cannot say **The secretary who sits at the front desk, doesn't she?** You might be tempted to say **The secretary sits at the front desk, doesn't she?** However, that is the tag question for the sentence **The secretary sits at the front desk.**)

Despite what I said. ✘

(You are not likely to think you can turn this fragment into a tag question.)

In a manner that impressed everyone. ✘

(You are not likely to think you can turn this fragment into a tag question.)

If you can. ✘

(You might be tempted to say **If you can, can't you?** However, if you think about it carefully you should see that such a question is not asking for confirmation of whether you can actually do something.)

Which surprised me. ✘

(You can turn the sentence **It surprised me** into the tag question **It surprised me, didn't it?** However, you cannot ask for confirmation of whether **which** surprised me.)

## Tip 3

A sentence that makes a statement and is not a question can also be turned into a simple yes/no question. Sentence fragments cannot be turned into yes/no questions. Consider the following sentences and fragments.

### Sentences

The team delivered the material on time.  
Did the team deliver the material on time?

Write clearly.  
Will you write clearly?

The company was an amazing success.  
Was the company an amazing success?

She is a very good speaker.  
Is she a very good speaker?

She was a wonderful person.  
Was she a wonderful person?

The product sold very well.  
Did the product sell very well?

### Fragments

The secretary who sits at the front desk. **X**

(You cannot say **Does the secretary who sits at the front desk?** You might be tempted to say **Does the secretary sit at the front desk?** However, that is the yes/no question for the sentence **The secretary sits at the front desk.**)

Despite what I said. **X**

(You are not likely to think you can turn this fragment into a tag question.)

In a manner that impressed everyone. **X**

(You might be tempted to say **Was it in a manner that impressed everyone?** However, that is the yes/no question for **It was in a manner that impressed everyone.**)

If you can. **X**

(You can probably see quite easily that this fragment cannot be turned into a simple yes/no question. But be careful here because complete sentences with an **If ... then...** structure also cannot be turned into yes/no questions. **For If... then...** structures use tips 1 and 2.)

Which surprised me. **X**

(You can turn **It surprised me** into the simple yes/no question **Did it surprise me?** However, you cannot turn **Which surprised me** into a yes/no question.)

## Repairing sentence fragments

It is often quite easy to repair fragments by joining them with the preceding or following sentence. In each of the following examples there is one sentence and one fragment. See if you can identify the fragment and join the fragment and the sentence to produce one sentence.

### Examples

They are available in a variety of colours. For example, purple, pink, and blue. **X**

(They are available in a variety of colours; for example, purple, pink, and blue. **✓✓**)

The woman giving the presentation. She was very nervous. **X**

(The woman giving the presentation was very nervous. **✓**)

The company was a success. Doubling its profits in three months. **X**

(The company was a success, doubling its profits in three months. ✓)

The man cancelled the trip. Because the weather was so bad. ✗

(The man cancelled the trip because the weather was so bad. ✓)

He didn't like that book. The suggestion being that one race should rule the world. ✗

(He didn't like that book, with its suggestion that one race should rule the world. ✓)

By the way, turning each of the new sentences into a tag question or a simple yes/no question is quite easy as shown here:

### Examples

They are available in a variety of colours, for example, purple, pink, and blue.

**(Tag question:** They are available in a variety of colours: for example, purple, pink, and blue, aren't they?

**Yes/no question:** Are they available in a variety of colours; for example, purple, pink, and blue?)

The woman giving the presentation was very nervous.

**(Tag question:** The woman giving the presentation was very nervous, wasn't she?

**Yes/no question:** Was the woman giving the presentation very nervous?)

The company was a success, doubling its profits in three months.

**(Tag question:** The company was a success, doubling its profits in less than three months, wasn't it?

**Yes/no question:** Was the company a success, doubling its profits in three months?)

The man cancelled the trip because the weather was so bad.

**(Tag question:** The man cancelled the trip because the weather was so bad, didn't he?

**Yes/no question:** Did the man cancel the trip because the weather was so bad?)

He didn't like that book, with its suggestion that one race should rule the world.

**(Tag question:** He didn't like that book, with its suggestion that one race should rule the world, did he?

**Yes/no question:** Didn't he like that book, with its suggestion that one race should rule the world?)

## Avoiding Sentence fragments Quiz

*For each set of statements, click on ALL those that are sentences and not fragments.*

- End the meeting at noon.
- Ended the meeting at noon.
- Could end the meeting at noon.
- Could we end the meeting at noon?
  
- Two boxes that were delivered yesterday.
- Two boxes delivered yesterday.
- Two boxes yesterday.
- Two boxes were delivered yesterday.
  
- The speaker is booked for 2pm.
- The speaker is booked.
- Although the speaker is booked at 2pm.
- Despite the fact that the speaker is booked at 2pm.

*For each of the following pairs of statements, choose the BEST repair that removes the presence of a fragment.*

Our factory makes many tools. For instance, hammers, wrenches, and screws.

- Our factory makes many tools. Examples: hammers, wrenches, and screws.
- Our factory makes many tools, hammers, wrenches, and screws.
- Our factory makes many tools; for instance, hammers, wrenches, and screws.
- Our factory makes many tools. Hammers, wrenches, and screws.

Two new employees were hired. Because two others retired.

- Two new employees were hired with two others retired.
- Two new employees were hired because two others retired.
- Two new employees were hired, two others retired.
- Two new employees retired; because two others retired.

The manager agreed to the plan. The indication being that she is ready for change.

- The manager agreed to the plan, indicating that she is ready for change.
- The manager agreed to the plan. She is ready for a change.
- The manager agreed: indicating a readiness for change.
- The indication being that she is ready for change. The manager agreed to the plan.

## **Answers**

*For each set of statements, click on ALL those that are sentences and not fragments.*

- End the meeting at noon. ✓
- Ended the meeting at noon.

- Could end the meeting at noon.
- Could we end the meeting at noon? ✓

- Two boxes that were delivered yesterday.
- Two boxes delivered yesterday.
- Two boxes yesterday.
- Two boxes were delivered yesterday. ✓

- The speaker is booked for 2pm. ✓
- The speaker is booked. ✓
- Although the speaker is booked at 2pm.
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*For each of the following pairs of statements, choose the BEST repair that removes the presence of a fragment.*

Our factory makes many tools. For instance, hammers, wrenches, and screws.

- Our factory makes many tools. Examples: hammers, wrenches, and screws.
- Our factory makes many tools, hammers, wrenches, and screws.
- Our factory makes many tools; for instance, hammers, wrenches, and screws. ✓
- Our factory makes many tools. Hammers, wrenches, and screws.

Two new employees were hired. Because two others retired.

- Two new employees were hired with two others retired.
- Two new employees were hired because two others retired. ✓
- Two new employees were hired, two others retired.
- Two new employees retired; because two others retired.

The manager agreed to the plan. The indication being that she is ready for change.

- The manager agreed to the plan, indicating that she is ready for change. ✓
- The manager agreed to the plan. She is ready for a change.
- The manager agreed: indicating a readiness for change.
- The indication being that she is ready for change. The manager agreed to the plan.