Unit 3: Sentence Fragments

Units 3, 4, and 5 provide strategies for and practice with identifying complete sentences and fixing the most common sentence problems: fragments and run-ons. Unit 3 focuses on identifying and correcting sentence fragments.

**Definition:** Sentence fragments are incomplete thoughts that have been punctuated as if they were sentences.

**Example:** A sentence like this one, for example.

**Teaching Tips**

- Students often find it difficult to recognize fragments and thus to eliminate them from their writing. Why? They are assailed with fragments every day—when they think, when they converse, when they write dialogue, and even when they read.

  Expert writers use fragments to fit their style and the occasion. If students are to use fragments effectively in their writing, then first they need to be able to distinguish between fragments and complete thoughts.

- The example above illustrates the most common fragment error: An incomplete thought that is really an extension of a preceding thought is punctuated as if it were a separate sentence. These mistakes often occur in explanations and examples.

  The easiest way to correct this kind of error is simply to attach the offending fragment to the sentence before it by removing the preceding period, adding a comma (if necessary), and changing the uppercase letter to lowercase. Alternatively, you can turn the fragment into a sentence by adding a subject or other needed words.

  **Sentence with fragment:** I always admired Gandhi. The great Indian leader.

  **Correction:** I always admired Gandhi, the great Indian leader.

  **Alternative:** I always admired Gandhi. He was a great Indian leader.

- Students also can be reassured that fragments in quoted dialogue are perfectly correct since we so often leave out words when we speak.

**Mini-Lesson**

Since students experience the most trouble identifying sentence fragments when the fragments are combined with a related thought, exercises should include the complete thoughts that set up and mask the fragments as well as the fragments themselves.
To get your students used to proofreading for fragments, write some of the common patterns on the board—complete thoughts followed by fragments that are examples, explanations, and other related phrases—and then ask for ideas about how to correct each one. Some students will want to add words to make the fragment a separate sentence while most will probably want to attach it to the preceding thought. Go through the appropriate punctuation changes. In some cases no punctuation may be needed, in some a comma will need to be inserted in place of the period, and for lists or examples you may need a dash or colon.

Here are a few examples and possible corrections:

**Example:** These are the contenders. Martha, Maya, and Frances.
**Correction:** These are the contenders: Martha, Maya, and Frances.

**Example:** He was lost in his own world. Dreaming of daring deeds in distant lands.
**Correction:** He was lost in his own world, dreaming of daring deeds in distant lands.

**Example:** We’ll get lunch. After we do our shopping.
**Correction:** We’ll get lunch after we do our shopping.

**Example:** You will enjoy the performance. But not for long!
**Correction:** You will enjoy the performance—but not for long!

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**Answers**

**Page 17, Message in a Grid**
Fragments: 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12. **Answer:** Russia

**Page 18, Maze**
**Answer Key:** The correct path goes through: 1. My aunt has a bright red umbrella. 2. A strong wind broke my umbrella. 3. Umbrellas have a long, interesting history. 4. Will it rain tonight? 5. My umbrella didn’t keep my feet dry! 6. A few lightning bolts are sixty miles long. 7. I love to hear rain on the roof. 8. Didn’t you wear your boots? 9. I always lose my umbrellas. 10. Do you know what to do in a thunderstorm? 11. The weather is often hard to predict. **Bonus:** 1. Umbrellas used as sunshades are called parasols. 2. The Romans used parasols.
Message in a Grid

What is the largest country in the world? ______________________________

Directions: Find the answer to this question in the grid below by correctly identifying the sentence fragments in the following exercise. Circle the number of any example that is a fragment. Then, circle the letter in the grid that matches. The first fragment has been identified for you.

1. Jacqueline loved her dog.
2. A Great Dane named Raina who was almost a perfect pet.
3. Raina was playful, loving, gentle, smart, and obedient (usually).
4. She did, however, have one or two bad habits.
5. Like getting too excited sometimes when Jacqueline took her for a walk on her leash.
6. Which made Jacqueline think that she was holding back a horse rather than a dog.
7. You see, Raina weighed over 140 pounds.
8. And was almost four feet tall and very powerful.
9. Making her very hard to restrain if she saw another dog, a squirrel, or some other small animal.
10. What did Jacqueline do in such a situation?
11. She spoke to Raina in a serious, commanding voice.
12. And then looked for a tree, a park bench, or something else very solid that she could hold on to for dear life!

3 2 7 4 12 10 6 11 9 5 1 8
B R E A U Z S M S I L A
Sunny and warm tomorrow.

The weather is often hard to predict.

A chance of showers today.

The Romans used parasols.

My grandmother’s parasol made of silk.

Endmarks

**Sentence Fragments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name _______________________________</th>
<th>Date ________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Maze**

**Directions:** Trace a path from start to finish that passes through 11 complete sentences. Avoid sentence fragments, for they act as blocks!

**Bonus:** Can you find two more complete sentences that are not on the correct path to the end?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>START</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A strong wind broke my umbrella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My aunt has a bright red umbrella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbrellas used as sunshades are called parasols.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbrellas have a long, interesting history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most lightning stays within clouds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few lightning bolts are sixty miles long.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My umbrella didn’t keep my feet dry!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t you wear your boots?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love to hear rain on the roof.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rain not stopping the football game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mixture of rain, sleet, and very wet snow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three people under one umbrella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightning often striking tall buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much good in a hurricane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grandmother’s parasol made of silk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark clouds, making rain seem very likely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know what to do in a thunderstorm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The weather is often hard to predict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny and warm tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A chance of showers today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**END**