SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

It's a good idea to avoid fragments in the papers you write for your classes. A fragment is a piece of a sentence that usually depends on a nearby sentence to complete its meaning. A complete sentence has at least one independent clause with a subject and a verb. To correct a fragment, you might first try attaching it to the previous or the following sentence. Another option is to develop it into a sentence by adding whatever is missing—a subject, a verb, or both.

I. Fragmented clauses—Some fragments are dependent clauses. They have a subject and a verb, but they begin with a subordinating word that links them to another sentence. Words which are used as subordinating words include such as, after, although, because, if, that, unless, when, which, who, until, whereas.

Examples:

1. I always shop there. Because the prices are low.

"Because the prices are low" is a dependent clause, not a sentence.

Revision: I always shop there because the prices are low.

2. You never have a bill smaller than a hundred. Which makes me wonder about you.

"Which makes me wonder about you" is a dependent clause, not a sentence.

Revision: You never have a bill smaller than a hundred, which makes me wonder about you.

3. You expect other people to help you. Whereas I pay my own way.

"Whereas I pay my own way" is a dependent clause, not a sentence.

Revision: You expect other people to help you, whereas I pay my own way.

II. Fragmented phrases—A phrase is a group of closely related words. Prepositional phrases, verbal phrases, parts of a compound predicate, and appositives are sometimes written as fragments.

Examples:

1. He bought a used car. In spite of my warnings.

The word group beginning with "in spite" is a prepositional phrase, not a sentence.

Revision: He bought a used car, in spite of my warnings.
2. She brought a list of the things we needed. Such as bug spray and charcoal.

   The word group beginning with "such as" is a prepositional phrase, not a sentence.
   Revision: She brought a list of the things we needed, such as bug spray and charcoal.

3. I couldn't board the plane. Having forgotten my passport.

   The word group beginning with "having" is a verbal phrase, not a sentence.
   Revision: I couldn't board the plane, having forgotten my passport.

4. I spent the day walking the streets. Wondering how to get to the art show.

   The word group beginning with "wondering" is a verbal phrase, not a sentence.
   Revision: I spent the day walking the streets, wondering how to get to the art show.

5. He wondered when Tom had lost all of his friends. And gambled away the family fortune.

   The word group beginning with "and gambled" is part of a compound predicate, not a sentence.
   Revision: He wondered when Tom had lost all of his friends and gambled away the family fortune.


   1977 Toyota is an appositive phrase, a word group with a noun renaming a nearby noun.
   Revision: They arrived in a big car, a 1977 Toyota.

7. I spent my summers in Milledgeville. The city that houses the state mental asylum.

   The word group beginning with "the city" is an appositive phrase, not a sentence.
   Revision: I spent my summers in Milledgeville, the city that houses the state mental asylum.

III. Checking for sentence fragments—Check each group of words punctuated as a sentence to make sure that it meets these three criteria:

1. It must have a subject.
2. It must have a finite verb, not just a verbal phrase.
3. Unless it is a question, it must have at least one clause that does not begin with a subordinating word.

If you have trouble identifying fragments, try reading your papers from the last sentence in a paragraph to the first. This technique might reveal if a group of words depends on a nearby sentence to complete its meaning.