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Quick and Handy Grammar Review Articles: Complete Sentences and Sentence Fragments

Sentences and Sentence Fragments

The basic structure in language is the sentence. A sentence is composed of at least two elements: a subject and a verb. Of course, there may be other parts of speech used in addition to the subject and verb. A complete sentence, though, must have at least one subject and one verb, and it must express a complete idea. Let's examine the following:

The tiny, smooth, shiny white mouse

Is this group of words a complete sentence? Look closely. Find a noun. There it is: the word **mouse**. **Mouse** is the subject of the sentence. Now look for a verb. None of the other words in the group is a verb. No verb? No complete sentence. Now let's examine another group of words.

smiled happily at everyone at the dinner table.

Is this group of words a complete sentence? In this group, we find a verb: **smiled**. Who smiled? We don't know because there is no subject. No subject? No complete sentence. Let's analyze another group of words.

Nigel died.

Here we have only two words. The word groups in the first two examples had six and eight words but they were not complete sentences. Is *Nigel died* a complete sentence? Well, **Nigel** is a noun and serves as the subject. **Died** is a verb. So we have both a subject and a verb. The words express a complete idea. Therefore, although it composed of only two words, *Nigel died* is a complete sentence.

Let's look at a few more word groups:

1. Joe left his coffee cup on top of the car.
2. spilled her drink all over the new white rug
3. the man with the tattoo of two snakes
4. in the afternoon after the end of the difficult French examination
5. the pilot chewed her fingernails during the terrible storm

Which ones are complete sentences? In number one, **Joe** is the subject and **left** is the verb. This makes a complete sentence. In the second sentence, **spilled** is the verb, but *who* spilled the drink? We don't know because there is no subject. Number two is incomplete. In grammar language, an incomplete sentence is called a sentence fragment. In sentence number three, we have a subject, *the man*, but no verb. This is also a fragment. In the fourth sentence, we have three prepositional phrases (*in the afternoon, after the end, of the difficult French examination*). However, we have *no subject* and *no verb*. Number four is also a sentence fragment. The last sentence has a subject (the pilot) and a verb, and expresses a complete idea. For this reason, it is a complete sentence. Thus, the only two complete sentences are number one and number five.

Quick and Handy Grammar Review Articles *Continued*:

Incomplete Ideas – The Sentence Fragment

Sometimes a clause has a subject and a verb, but it is still not a complete sentence because it does not present a complete idea. Let's take a look at these examples:

Carla loves
Wan Bo is buying
The teacher explained

In these three examples, we have subjects and verbs, but we need *objects* to make complete sentences. What (or whom) does Carla love? What is Wan Bo buying? What did the teacher explain? We must add more information in order to make a complete sentence:

Carla loves cold pizza.	Carla loves Jim.
Wan Bo is buying a new wig.	Wan Bo is buying the grammar textbook.
The teacher explained the answer.	The teacher explained dependent clauses.

Independent Clauses

A subject and verb taken together form a clause. When a clause forms a complete idea and can stand by itself, it is called an **independent clause**. In order to form a complete sentence, there must be at least one independent clause.

Clauses beginning with subordinating conjunctions – Dependent clauses

A dependent clause has a subject and a verb. However, it begins with a subordinating conjunction so it cannot stand alone. It is not a complete sentence. Let's analyze the following example.

Barbara wrote a long paragraph.

This is an independent clause and a complete sentence. We place a period at the end. Now we will add a subordinating conjunction at the beginning of the clause:

After Barbara wrote a long paragraph

The addition of the conjunction **after** changes the clause from independent to *dependent*. We are waiting for more information at the end, so it is incomplete. In order to make a complete sentence, we must add an *independent clause*:

After Barbara wrote a long paragraph, she went for a walk.

Now we have a complete sentence. Whenever a clause begins with a subordinating conjunction, it will be a dependent clause and an incomplete sentence. Examine the following examples:

1. If you love me, you will let my mother stay with us for a month.
2. Because it is raining, we cannot have a picnic.
3. When she saw her ex-boyfriend, Carol became angry.
4. Although Wiemer has a lot of money, he doesn't have any friends.
5. Ms. Witherspoon sold the house after her father died.
6. Yao studied extra vocabulary because he wanted to get a good grade.

In the first four examples, the sentence begins with a dependent clause. The second clause (an independent clause) is necessary to form a complete sentence. The last two sentences show that the dependent clause may also go in the middle of the sentence.

Exercise 1:

Write F next to a sentence fragment and explain why it is so (no subject, no verb, not a complete idea).

Write C next to complete sentences.

1. ____ Nestor shaved his beard _____
2. ____ When I see her _____
3. ____ Loves to read in the kitchen _____
4. ____ Macey likes to look out the window _____
5. ____ If you really need my help _____
6. ____ The nurse helped the sick doctor _____
7. ____ The incredibly large scar on his nose _____
8. ____ Is a beautiful day today _____
9. ____ The dog barked all night long _____
10. ____ Because the sun is so hot _____

Exercise 2:

Write F next to a sentence fragment and explain why it is so (no subject, no verb, not a complete idea).

Write C next to complete sentences.

1. ____ Every day, go to work early _____
2. ____ After the very exciting game _____
3. ____ Before lunch, Hanna worked out _____
4. ____ Never in my whole life _____
5. ____ Nancy loves _____
6. ____ Giovanni hates _____
7. ____ Sarah dislikes fish _____
8. ____ Because Maya is so nice _____
9. ____ Giovanni hates _____
10. ____ The Baka family sang and danced all night. _____

Exercise 3:

Place a period after an independent clause. Place a comma after a dependent clause and complete the sentence by adding an independent clause. If the idea is not complete, add words to complete it. The first two are done for you.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. After she got home from work | <u>After she got home from work(,) Gertrude ate a delicious dinner.</u> |
| 2. I never cook on Sundays(.) | <u>[independent clause]</u> |
| 3. When Kristie walked into the room | _____ |
| 4. If you need a little money | _____ |
| 5. Mark loves | _____ |
| 6. Before Rita left for the movies | _____ |
| 7. Othelia is a very happy woman | _____ |
| 8. Robert hates | _____ |
| 9. Because Lester is so lazy | _____ |
| 10. It rained all day and all night | _____ |

Exercise 4:

Place a period after an independent clause. Place a comma after a dependent clause and complete the sentence by adding an independent clause. If the idea is not complete, add words to complete it. The first two are done for you.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. The doctor explained | _____ |
| 2. I always wash the dishes. | _____ |
| 3. Although Pat studied hard | _____ |
| 4. This computer is very fast | _____ |
| 5. After I watched the late night news | _____ |
| 6. I can't believe that Rocco is buying | _____ |
| 7. In the late fall, all the leaves on the trees | _____ |
| 8. Roberto really loves | _____ |
| 9. Because Lee is such a good student | _____ |
| 10. It snowed on Monday and Tuesday | _____ |

Exercise 5:

Correct the mistakes in the following sentences. If there are no mistakes, leave the sentence as is.

1. The processor answered
2. Hilda cried
3. Although Mary studied for six hours yesterday
4. The very tall basketball player hates
5. After I watched my favorite tv show
6. Robert cleaned the house.
7. When Robert finished cleaning
8. In the late afternoon, the soccer players
9. Study in the library and have a cup of coffee in the cafeteria.
10. The beautiful movie star kissed

Exercise 6:

Correct the mistakes in the following sentences. If there are no mistakes, leave the sentence as is.

1. The doctor performed the operation.
2. Early in the morning, just before breakfast
3. Harry never flew in a plane in his whole life
4. Before they finished their evening walk
5. The plane landed on time.
6. The book says that
7. Jimmy was so angry that he yelled at
8. The bird flew away.
9. After he returned from his last voyage, the very old sailor
10. While Matilda was watching the three-hour movie

Exercise 7:

Label the subject and the verb in the following sentences.

1. The incredibly talented doctor did the operation early in the morning.
2. Joe returned late.
3. The big, ferocious lion ate the thin hyena.
4. They finished the job early.
5. The car, the truck, and the motorcycle collided at the intersection.

Exercise 8:

Label clauses as independent or dependent.

1. The basketball player scored six points after she hurt her ankle.

Clause 1: _____

Clause 2: _____

2. While Carlo was driving to work, he listened to the radio.

Clause 1: _____

Clause 2: _____

3. If you really want me to help you, I will be there at 7:00 p.m.

Clause 1: _____

Clause 2: _____

4. They finished the work before the boss came back from lunch.

Clause 1: _____

Clause 2: _____

5. Because question number 7 was so difficult, the professor did not count it in the grade.

Clause 1: _____

Clause 2: _____

Answer Key*Exercise 1: Complete and incomplete sentences.*

1. C Nestor shaved his beard
2. F When I see her [This is a dependent clause. You need an independent clause to make a complete sentence]
3. F Loves to read in the kitchen [There is no subject]
4. C Macey likes to look out the window.
5. F If you really need my help [This is a dependent clause. You need an independent clause to make a complete sentence]
6. C The nurse helped the sick doctor
7. F The incredibly large scar on his nose [There is no verb]
8. F Is a beautiful day today. [There is no subject]
9. C The dog barked all night long.
10. F Because the sun is so hot [This is a dependent clause. You need an independent clause to make a complete sentence]

Exercise 2: Complete and incomplete sentences.

1. F Every day, go to work. [There is no subject]
2. F After the very exciting game [This is a dependent clause. You need an independent clause to make a complete sentence]
3. C Before lunch, Hanna worked out.
4. F Never in my whole life [There is no subject or verb]
5. F Nancy loves [This is an incomplete thought. What or whom does Nancy love?]
6. C Sarah dislikes fish
7. F Giovanni hates [This is an incomplete thought. What or whom does Giovanni hate?]
8. F Because Maya is so nice [This is a dependent clause. You need an independent clause to make a complete sentence]
9. C Giovanni loves fried chicken.
10. C The Baka family sang and danced all night.

Exercise 3: Independent and dependent clauses and sentence fragments.

2. I never cook on Sundays(.) [independent clause]
3. When Kristie walked into the room(.) she was surprised.
4. If you need a little money(.) I can lend you some.
5. Mark loves [Stella] or [cold pizza].
6. Before Rita left for the movies(.) she called her sister.
7. Othelia is a very happy woman(.)
8. Robert hates [loud people] or [spicy food].
9. Because Lester is so lazy(.) he never finishes his homework.
10. It rained all day and all night(.)

Exercise 4: Independent and dependent clauses and sentence fragments.

1. The doctor explained [the treatment]
2. I always wash the dishes(.)
3. Although Pat studied hard(.) he still failed the test.
4. This computer is very fast(.)
5. After I watched the late night news(.) I went to sleep.
6. I can't believe that Rocco is buying [a new car.]
7. In the late fall, all the leaves on the trees [fall down.]
8. Roberto really loves [Angela] or [to swim in the ocean.]
9. Because Lee is such a good student(.) he always gets high grades.
10. It snowed on Monday and Tuesday(.)

Exercise 5: Error Correction.

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|--|---|
| 1. The processor answered | [The processor answered the student's question.] |
| 2. Hilda cried. | [Correct] |
| 3. Although Mary studied for six hours yesterday | [Although Mary studied for six hours yesterday, she still had two chapters to study.] |
| 4. The very tall basketball player hates | [The very tall basketball player hates to run laps around the gym.] |
| 5. After I watched my favorite tv show | [After I watched my favorite tv show, I cooked dinner.] |
| 6. Robert cleaned the house. | [Correct] |
| 7. When Robert finished cleaning | [When Robert finished cleaning, he took a nap.] |
| 8. In the late afternoon, the soccer players | [In the late afternoon, the soccer players practiced for the big game.] |
| 9. Study in the library and have a cup of coffee in the cafeteria. | [John and Barbara study in the library and have a cup of coffee in the cafeteria.] |
| 10. The beautiful movie star kissed | [The beautiful movie star kissed the handsome actor.] |

Exercise 6: Error Correction.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The doctor performed the operation. | [Correct] |
| 2. Early in the morning, just before breakfast | [Early in the morning, just before breakfast, Carla went jogging.] |
| 3. Harry never flew in a plane in his whole life. | [Correct] |
| 4. Before they finished their evening walk | [Before they finished their evening walk, Richard and Joe stopped in Yelta's house for coffee.] |
| 5. The plane landed on time. | [Correct] |
| 6. The book says that | [The book says that you should cook the rice for twenty minutes.] |
| 7. Jimmy was so angry that he yelled at | [Jimmy was so angry that he yelled at the referee.] |
| 8. The bird flew away. | [Correct] |
| 9. After he returned from his last voyage, the very old sailor | [After he returned from his last voyage, the very old sailor died.] |
| 10. While Matilda was watching the three-hour movie | [While Matilda was watching the three-hour movie, she ate popcorn.] |

Exercise 7: Label the subject and the verb in the following sentences.

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|---|
| 1. The incredibly talented doctor did the operation early in the morning. |
| Subject: doctor, Verb: did |
| 2. Joe returned late. |
| Subject: Joe, Verb: returned |
| 3. The big, ferocious lion ate the thin hyena. |
| Subject: lion, Verb: ate |
| 4. They finished the job early. |
| Subject: They, Verb: finished |
| 5. The car, the truck, and the motorcycle collided at the intersection. |
| Subject: car, truck, motorcycle, Verb: collided |

Exercise 8: Label clauses as independent or dependent.

- | |
|---|
| 1. The basketball player scored six points after she hurt her ankle.. |
| Clause 1: Independent, Clause 2: Dependent |
| 2. While Carlo was driving to work, he listened to the radio. |
| Clause 1: Dependent, Clause 2: Independent |
| 3. If you really want me to help you, I will be there at 7:00 p.m. |
| Clause 1: Dependent, Clause 2: Independent |
| 4. They finished the work before the boss came back from lunch. |
| Clause 1: Independent, Clause 2: Dependent |
| 5. Because question number 7 was so difficult, the professor did not count it in the grade. |
| Clause 1: Dependent, Clause 2: Independent |