

Complete Sentences

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Quick and Handy Grammar Review

COMPLETE SENTENCES AND SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A. 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 example to the right:

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. Which ones are complete sentences?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Joe left his coffee cup on top of the car. | 1. <i>Joe</i> is the subject and <i>left</i> is the verb. This makes a complete sentence . |
| 2. spilled her drink all over the new white rug | 2. <i>Spilled</i> is the verb, but who spilled the drink? We don't know because there is no subject. Number 2 is incomplete. In grammar language, an incomplete sentence is called a sentence fragment . |
| 3. the man with the tattoo of two snakes | 3. We have a subject, <i>the man</i> , but no verb. This is also a fragment . |
| 4. in the afternoon after the end of the difficult French examination | 4. We have three prepositional phrases (<i>in the afternoon, after the end, of the difficult French examination</i>). However, we have <i>no subject</i> and <i>no verb</i> . Number 4 is also a sentence fragment . |
| 5. The pilot chewed her fingernails during the terrible storm. | 5. This sentence has a subject (<i>the pilot</i>) and a verb, and expresses a complete idea. For this reason, it is a complete sentence . |

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B. 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.

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.

Quick and Handy Grammar Review cont.

C. 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 example to the right:

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 can also go after the independent clause.

Exercise 1

Write F next to a sentence fragment and explain why (no subject, no verb, dependent clause, incomplete 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 | _____ |
| _____ 11. Every day, go to work early | _____ |
| _____ 12. After the very exciting game | _____ |
| _____ 13. Before lunch, Hanna worked out | _____ |
| _____ 14. Never in my whole life | _____ |
| _____ 15. Nancy loves | _____ |
| _____ 16. Our teacher suggested | _____ |
| _____ 17. Sarah dislikes fish | _____ |
| _____ 18. Because Maya is so nice | _____ |
| _____ 19. Giovanni likes | _____ |
| _____ 20. The family sang and danced all night | _____ |

Exercise 2

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.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 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 | <u></u> |
| 4. If you need a little money | <u></u> |
| 5. Mark loves | <u></u> |
| 6. Before Rita left for the movies | <u></u> |
| 7. Othelia is a very happy woman | <u></u> |
| 8. Robert hates | <u></u> |
| 9. Because Lester is so lazy | <u></u> |
| 10. It rained all day and night | <u></u> |
| 11. The doctor told | <u></u> |
| 12. I always wash the dishes | <u></u> |
| 13. Although Pat studied hard | <u></u> |
| 14. This computer is very fast | <u></u> |
| 15. After I watched the late night news | <u></u> |
| 16. I can't believe that Rocco is buying | <u></u> |
| 17. In the late fall, all the leaves on the trees | <u></u> |
| 18. Roberto really loves | <u></u> |
| 19. Because Lee is such a good student | <u></u> |
| 20. It snowed on Monday and Tuesday | <u></u> |

Exercise 3

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

1. The professor 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. Studied in the library and had
a cup of coffee in the cafeteria.

10. The beautiful movie star kissed

11. The doctor performed the operation.

12. Early in the morning, just before breakfast

13. Harry never flew in a plane in his whole life

14. Before they finished their evening walk

15. The plane landed on time

16. The book says that

17. Jimmy was so angry that he yelled at

18. The bird flew away

19. After he returned from his
last voyage, the very old sailor

20. While Matilda was watching the three-hour movie

Exercise 4

Circle the subject and underline the verb in the following sentences.

1. The incredibly talented doctor performed 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 5

Label the clauses as independent or dependent.

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