

## SENTENCE BUILDING: AVOIDING FRAGMENTS

Modifiers in various ways add to or expand upon the basic elements of a sentence. In writing that imitates the choppy rhythm of speech, modifiers sometimes appear separately. In ordinary writing, make sure modifiers become part of a complete sentence. The following kinds of modifiers cause **sentence fragments**.

1. **Prepositions** link nouns or their equivalent to the rest of the sentence. They are words like *at, in, of, with, before, after, by, for, about*. Together, the preposition and the noun make up a **prepositional phrase**. Normally, a prepositional phrase can become part of a complete sentence without any added punctuation.

**Fragment:** He suitor drove up to the door. *In a battered Ford.*

**Revised:** He suitor drove up to the door *in a battered Ford.*

2. An **appositive** is a second noun placed next to another noun. Normally, use a *comma* rather than a period to separate the two nouns: my pet, *the hamster*; John, *her husband*.

**Fragment:** He carried in his latest purchase. *A home computer.*

**Revised:** He carried in his latest purchase, *a home computer.*

3. A **verbal** is a part of a verb lifted out of its original sentence and used as a modifier. A verbal often tells us which one or what kind. It helps us focus on who or what is meant. It then becomes part of the sentence without any added punctuation.

**Verb:** He enviously looked at the people. *They were basking in the sun.*

**Verbal:** He enviously looked at the people *basking in the sun.*

**Verb:** The court's decision freed several men. *They had been sentenced to death.*

**Verbal:** The court's decision freed several men *sentenced to death.*

Sometimes a verbal merely adds optional information. Use a *comma* instead of a period to show a break between the verbal and the rest of the sentence.

**Fragment:** There were always guests in their house. *Laughing and talking.*

**Revised:** There were always guests in their house, *laughing and talking.*

4. **Adjectives** and **adverbs** cause fragments when a period separates them from what they modify. Like the other modifiers, adjectives and adverbs often carry other material along with them. Use a *comma* instead of a period to show a break.

**Fragment:** We looked at the mountains. *Gorgeous in the early sunlight.*

**Revised:** We looked at the mountains, *gorgeous in the early sunlight*

**Fragment:** He would come in for a beer. *Usually late at night.*

**Revised:** He would come in for a be, *usually late at night*

Punctuate the following passages in such a way as to avoid sentence fragments. (Change lower-Case letters to capitals as required.) In the space at the end of each passage, put the following: *No* (for “no punctuation”) if the second part is a prepositional phrase; *C* (for comma) if the second part is some other kind of modifier; *P* (for period) if the second part is a complete sentence in its own right.

1. Oil was first tapped in the Rockies in 1861 \_\_\_\_ near Florence in Colorado. \_\_\_\_
2. We were always working \_\_\_\_ hauling wood for the fireplace and doing other chores. \_\_\_\_
3. Her brother had dropped from sight \_\_\_\_ he was living in the woods in Oregon. \_\_\_\_
4. The boys in junior high no longer act like little gentlemen \_\_\_\_ sitting up straight talking clearly, and so on. \_\_\_\_
5. We always left the key outside \_\_\_\_ under the mat. \_\_\_\_
6. She cited statistics on muscle power and cranial capacity \_\_\_\_ disapproving the stereotype of the “weaker sex.” \_\_\_\_
7. The theater was closed for repairs \_\_\_\_ the roof had fallen in. \_\_\_\_
8. Early trappers came to the Rockies \_\_\_\_ for beaver pelts. \_\_\_\_
9. His followers were mostly young people \_\_\_\_ idealistic and impractical. \_\_\_\_
10. We found the car on the off ramp \_\_\_\_ wedged in between a truck and the railing. \_\_\_\_
11. He hated the impersonal atmosphere \_\_\_\_ a common problem in a commuter college. \_\_\_\_
12. I study over the weekend \_\_\_\_ on weekdays the dorms are far too noisy. \_\_\_\_
13. Frank was a good announcer \_\_\_\_ with just the right mixture of comment and straight reporting. \_\_\_\_
14. I like a varied schedule \_\_\_\_ it makes school less tedious and boring. \_\_\_\_
15. Carl was always going to parties \_\_\_\_ sometimes two or three times a week. \_\_\_\_
16. The place was becoming a ghost town \_\_\_\_ many buildings were empty. \_\_\_\_
17. The oldtimers spent their time in the local bar \_\_\_\_ talking about livestock and crops. \_\_\_\_
18. We saw yet another movie \_\_\_\_ about aliens from a distant galaxy. \_\_\_\_
19. He always checked for spiders \_\_\_\_ shining his flashlight into dark corners. \_\_\_\_
20. The stranger collapsed \_\_\_\_ stunned by the blow. \_\_\_\_