

The Complete Sentence

Recognize a *complete sentence* when you see one.

A complete sentence has three characteristics:

- First, it begins with a capital letter.
- In addition, it includes an end mark—either a period [.], question mark [?], or exclamation point [!].
- Most importantly, the complete sentence must contain *at least* one main clause. A main clause contains an independent subject and verb and expresses a complete thought.

Check out these examples:

The *banana* rotting at the bottom of Jimmy's book bag *has soaked* his biology notes with ooze.

Did you notice the cricket swimming in your cup of tea?

I cannot believe that you tried one of those disgusting chocolate-broccoli muffins!

If a main clause exists in the sentence, you can attach whatever other sentence elements you need. Look at the additions to the main clause below. All of the additions keep the original main clause complete.

A bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth.

Buzzing around the picnic table, *a bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth.*

A bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth, stinging the poor boy's tongue, which swelled up as big and as blue as an eggplant.

Because it smelled the peach-flavored bubble gum, *a bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth.*

A bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth and tickled the poor boy's tonsils.

Taking a wrong turn, *a bumblebee flew into Peter's open mouth*, but it buzzed back out before Peter swallowed.

Avoid an accidental fragment.

Sometimes you might begin a group of words with a capital letter, then conclude with an end mark, but forget to insert a main clause anywhere in the mix. When this happens, you have written a fragment, a major error in writing. Read the examples that follow:

Because hungry sharks flashed on the surface of the waves.

No main clause = a fragment.

Spilling the hot spaghetti sauce all over his new suede shoes.

No main clause = a fragment.

To buy nice jewelry for his greedy girlfriend Gloria.

No main clause = a fragment.

For example, a mailbox stuffed with bills, two dozen messages on the answering machine, an uppity cat, and a dead lawn.

No main clause = a fragment.

And peeked into the room, risking the wrath of Mrs. Mauzy, who has no patience for students walking into class late.

No main clause = a fragment.

Read the revisions below. You will see that adding a main clause completes the thought:

Because hungry sharks flashed on the surface of the waves, Mike and Sarah decided to return their surfboards to the car.

Leonardo grabbed the pot handle with his bare hands, ***spilling the hot spaghetti sauce all over his new suede shoes.***

Danny sold half of his comic book collection ***to buy nice jewelry for his greedy girlfriend Gloria.***

For example, April found ***a mailbox stuffed with bills, two dozen messages on the answering machine, an uppity cat, and a dead lawn.***

Sherry turned the doorknob ***and peeked into the room, risking the wrath of Mrs. Mauzy, who has no patience for students walking into class late.***

