

# THE COMPLETE SENTENCE

## Recognize a complete sentence when you find one.

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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 has at least one **main clause**. Each main clause contains a **subject** and a **verb**. Together, this pair expresses a complete thought.

Read 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!

Once a main clause exists in the sentence, you can attach other sentence elements to communicate additional information.

Consider the additions to the main clause below:

**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 watermelon-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 had a chance to swallow.

## **Avoid an accidental fragment.**

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Sometimes you begin a group of words with a capital letter, then conclude with an end mark, but forget to insert the essential **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 = fragment.

Spilling the hot spaghetti sauce all over his new shoes.

No main clause = fragment.

To buy nice jewelry for his greedy girlfriend Gloria.

No main clause = fragment.

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

No main clause = fragment.

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

No main clause = fragment.

Now read the revisions below. Notice 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 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 angry cat, and a dead lawn.**

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

