Recognize a complete sentence when you find 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 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.

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.