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.