Conventions and Presentation
Editing Level 1: Conventions

Discriminating Fragments

Many writing teachers feel it's OK to occasionally bend the rules of formal grammar and usage in writing, but only after learning what those rules are. Why are they so picky about that part? They want to make sure that when you bend those rules, you'll be doing it intentionally and with a clear purpose in mind. Also, to be effective, rule bending has to come in small doses. For example, an occasional fragment can be powerful. A writer who writes primarily in fragments may distract and confuse readers.

In his classic survival story *Hatchet,* Gary Paulsen uses fragments frequently. One very powerful moment comes at the end of the first chapter. A small plane in which the hero, Brian, was riding has crashed in the remote wilderness and the pilot has had a heart attack. One word sums up Brian's thoughts and feelings at this moment: "Alone." This single word is an effective fragment, but Paulsen also uses it as the entire final paragraph of that chapter. A one-word paragraph? Most unusual. Why might that work in this instance?

Alone.

A Warm-Up: Part 1

To figure out when or why you should use fragments, you need to be able to tell the difference between a fragment and a complete sentence. So let's begin with some definitions. On the following page, write down your first thoughts without looking at any reference books.

1. A complete sentence is

_____

_____

2. A fragment is

_____

_____

Now use your personal definitions to help decide whether each item below is a complete sentence or a sentence fragment. Put an FR (for fragment) in the blank to mark each group of words that does not form a complete thought.

HINT: Length is not always a good indicator!

___ 1. As I was crossing a busy street carrying two heavy bags of groceries and trying to hold my little sister's hand.

___ 2. I don't know how some people manage to get going in the morning without eating breakfast.

___ 3. Dogs ran.

___ 4. The plan.

___ 5. Anger!

___ 6. Run!

___ 7. Good grief!

___ 8. Running for cover.

___ 9. Keep safe.

___ 10. On the other hand, if we have time after dinner.

Share and Compare

Meet with a partner to share and compare your definitions and then your responses to each of the exercises. Do you and your partner agree on your definitions? Did you identify the same fragments from our list of possibilities? Complete the following steps.

1. Turn any two fragments from the preceding list into complete sentences.

2. Take time to clarify your definitions of *fragment* and *complete sentence,* using any resources available in your classroom.

A Warm-Up: Part 2

In each of the next two writing examples, the writer has used sentence fragments. Read each example aloud carefully, and underline any fragments you notice. Then decide if you feel the use of fragments is effective or just distracting.

Example 1

Winter is a long season where I live. Snow, ice, cold. More snow. Then more ice and cold. It all begins in late October and doesn't let up until well into April. I don't like it, but I've learned to live with it.

- ☐ This was a very effective use of fragments.
- ☐ I found these fragments just plain distracting.

Example 2

Recently. A small gelato shop. Opened in my neighborhood. In case you don't know, gelato is Italian. Ice cream. They have so many. Great flavors. Hazelnut. Raspberry. Lemon. Pistachio. Really delicious. Try them. All.

☐ This was a very effective use of fragments.

☐ I found these fragments just plain distracting.

Making Fragments Rock

Now it's your turn. Choose any topic (including one from our list). Then write a short piece in which you use just one or two fragments on purpose. No accidental fragments, please! Make them effective. Use them to draw attention to a particular word, phrase, or idea. Remember, effective fragments do the following things.

- Make sense because they gain meaning from the surrounding sentences
- Emphasize a particular word or idea
- Sometimes answer a question raised by the writer (What did I need more than anything? Food.)

Possible topics:

★ My topic _____

- A pesky brother, sister, cousin, pet
- A food you can keep
- Frustration with _____ (you name it)
- A tough habit to break
- Why I do (or don't do) well on tests
- The best person I know
- I don't know why it bothers me, but . . .

Prewrite for 3–5 minutes. Draw, list details or questions, or read a passage that makes good use of fragments. Then write your draft on scratch paper. Underline your fragment(s).

Share and Compare

Share your writing with a partner or in a writing circle. As you listen, see if your ear picks up a fragment the writer is using. After that writer finishes, share what you heard. See if it matches what the writer underlined. Talk about fragments you found especially effective.

A Writer's Questions

As a writer, do you have to be careful about when or where you break the no-fragments rule? Why? What do you think when you run across fragments in the writing you read? Do they bother you, or do you think they sometimes add to voice?

Editing Level 2: Presentation

No Rules Poetry

In Sharon Creech's *Love that Dog,* the main character, Jack, is frustrated with being asked to write poetry. He claims that poetry is really just about making short lines. Do you agree or is there more to it?

As you'll see in this lesson, lines of poetry can be long or short, and they can comprise whole sentences, fragments, phrases, or single words. Sometimes the lines rhyme, sometimes not. The rhythm may be obvious or subtle. And that's not all. Sentences within poems may span many lines or just one line each. What's more, poems can follow the usual conventions of punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and spelling, or they can break all the rules. They come in countless shapes, as well. Behind every decision is a poet trying to get a message across in a way readers will remember, and perhaps return to many times.

A Warm-Up

Your teacher has gathered a variety of poems for you to explore and read. Spend some time looking first, then choose as many as you think you can share aloud in your writing circle within about 10–12 minutes.

As you make your choices, notice the following about each poem.

- Length
- Format
- Words per line
- Alignment (left side of page, centered, shaped, etc.)
- Use of single words, phrases or fragments, whole sentences
- Use of rhyme
- Rhythm and readability

Don't worry too much about message right away. Sometimes that doesn't strike you until you have read a poem several times. Poems should be read again and again, perhaps at different times in your life. As you and others share aloud, record favorite titles and poets' names on the following list.

	Poem Title	Poet's Name
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

(Use your own paper if you need to make a longer list.)

Choose one poem that stood out from the others. Maybe you were caught up in the message or you just liked the sound of it. Share your thoughts about it here.

My thoughts about _____ (Title)

_____

_____

_____

Share and Compare

Make a class list of some of the poems that interest you. Is there any one poet whose work you'd like to explore further?

The Finishing Touch

Here are some starts (just a few lines) to three poems, each with a very different style. Read each partial poem aloud, carefully, in your writing circle. Listen for ideas that stay in your heads—words, phrases, or images that speak to you or capture your imagination. Choose one poem to finish, and take about five minutes to add as many lines as you think of. Give your poem a title.

Poem 1

Sometimes
when your head
and heart
are full of too many people
shouting
too many cars
rushing
too many doors
slamming

Poem 2

On the front wall of my math classroom
Next to a picture of Pythagoras
My teacher had written
  "Life is hard—write it down."
On the back wall of my English classroom
Next to a photograph of Dr. Seuss
My teacher had written

Poem 3

I have collected things
for as long as I can remember–
Age 1–family faces
Age 4–sticks and frogs
Age 5–friends
Age 6–shells and rocks
Age 7–teachers' comments
Age 8–favorite games
Age 9–favorite books

Share and Compare

Be ready to share your poem with the whole class. Take turns reading your poems aloud, from the beginning, not just from where you started writing. How difficult was it to fit into the rhythm and thinking of another poet?

A Writer's Questions

What is your experience with poetry? In your opinion, is writing poetry harder than writing an essay or story? Is writing poetry just about making short lines?

Presentation Matters

Whether you like, love, tolerate, or really dislike poetry, you probably have an opinion about what makes a good poem. Here's a chance to put your ideas together in writing a poem of your own. Follow these six steps:

1. Take out the small object you brought with you to kick off your writing today.

2. Hold it in your hand, turning it over and over to really appreciate its surface features. Look at it closely, noticing small details you may never have noticed before.

3. If you have a jeweler's loupe (small magnifying glass), use it to notice even more details about this object.

4. Ask yourself, "What does this make me think of?" The memories or associations it calls up may surprise you.

5. Make some notes on scratch paper. Write whatever comes into your head—as fast as you think of it. Don't shut anything out. Keep this up for 2–3 minutes.

6. Then begin your poem. Make it as long or short as you wish. Write for about ten minutes. Remember, the poem doesn't have to be about the object itself, though it can be. It could also be about any memories or experiences that object calls to mind.

7. As time permits, share your poem with a partner or in a writing circle.