What is a sentence fragment?
A sentence fragment lacks either a subject or a verb, or is simply not a complete thought because it begins with a word (like if or when) which makes it dependent on another sentence. For example, the first group of words below is a complete sentence. The second is a sentence fragment.

- These refrigerants have not been manufactured since 1995. When the federal government banned the use of CFCs.

How can I tell if I have a sentence fragment?

- Does your sentence have a subject? If you answered NO, then you probably have a sentence fragment. YES, then go on to the next point.

- Does your sentence have a verb? If you answered NO, then you probably have a sentence fragment. YES, then go on to the next point.

- Does your sentence express a complete thought? If you answered NO, then you may have a sentence fragment. Your sentence may have both a subject and a verb, but might actually be a subordinate clause because it does not express a complete thought (see underlined example above). Subordinate clauses cannot stand alone as sentences. YES, then you probably don’t have a sentence fragment. If you’re not sure, check with your instructor or a writing tutor in the Learning Center.

If I have a sentence fragment, what can I do about it?
You can fix a sentence fragment by taking one of two approaches:

- Attach the fragment to a nearby sentence. Often, the fragment is really a subordinate clause, which you can attach to a neighboring sentence using a comma.

  These refrigerants have not been manufactured since 1995, when the federal government banned the use of CFCs.

Sometimes, the fragment is a phrase, which has either a subject or a verb, but not both. Phrases often contain verbs ending in –ing, which can’t function as the main verb in a sentence:

  The government banned these refrigerants in 1995. Recognizing the harmful effect CFCs have on the environment.

Revisions:

  The government banned these refrigerants in 1995, recognizing the harmful effect CFCs have on the environment.
  -- OR --
  Recognizing the harmful effect CFCs have on the environment, the government banned these refrigerants in 1995.

- Turn the fragment into a complete sentence. It may make sense to turn a subordinate clause into a complete sentence.

  Instead of:
  These refrigerants have not been manufactured since 1995. When the federal government banned the use of CFCs.

  Revision:
  These refrigerants have not been manufactured since 1995. The federal government banned the use of CFCs in that year.