Fragments
Fragments are not complete sentences.

What makes a sentence complete?
A sentence is complete when:

• it has a subject and a verb
• it expresses a complete thought (it can stand alone)
A fragment can’t stand alone

Imagine you are sitting on a bench, waiting for the bus. A man comes running up to the bus stop and yells, “Instead of the right time!”
You might wonder, oh, is he afraid the bus is going to arrive at the wrong time?

Or you might wonder if he sees a bus coming that you haven’t spotted yet.

But the meaning isn’t complete by itself. The thought can’t stand alone.

It’s a fragment.
Why are fragments hard to spot?

- Because we use them all the time in our speech (to clarify a preceding point without repeating the whole sentence).
Why are fragments hard to spot?

- Because often a fragment is caused by a punctuation error, and when read with the sentence before it, (or the sentence following it), it may actually “sound right” and express a complete thought.
Why is it okay to use fragments in speech but not in writing?

While in speech it’s common and acceptable to use fragments, we expect “formal” writing to be more precise, more planned (except when writing dialogue).
Fragments are most often a continuation of the previous sentence. You may choose to reconnect the fragment with the previous sentence, but be sure to check for meaning and emphasis first. You may decide to turn the fragment into its own complete sentence instead.
There are three common fragment types:

- fragments that rename the noun
- fragments that modify the verb
- -ing fragments
If you spot a “sentence” you think might be a fragment, you can try using the “I realize” method to find out whether or not it is a complete sentence:

Put the words “I realize” before the “sentence” and see if it makes sense.
For example:
I realize instead of the right time.

If it doesn’t make sense (like this one from our man at the bus stop), your “sentence” is a fragment.

Or: I realize the bus came at the wrong time yesterday.

If it makes sense, like this one does, your sentence is complete.
Note:
The “I realize” method doesn’t work for questions or commands.
Examine the following sentences, using the “I realize” method to determine whether or not they are fragments.

- I entered my apartment and saw an unexpected guest. A cat in the middle of my living room.
- Joe is really upset. Because someone broke a window in his car.
- College gives you a new perspective. Opening your eyes to a whole new world.
Once you have identified the fragments, decide which common fragment type each one is.

• Does it rename the noun?
• Does it modify the verb?
• Or is it an -ing fragment?
Then go back and fix each set of “sentences” by combining them correctly to form new complete sentences.

(Remember to think about meaning and emphasis. Are there sets that would be better written as two sentences?)