Eliminating Sentence Fragments

Many sentence fragments are easy to identify – they lack a subject, a verb or both. But one variety may be confusing precisely because it does contain a subject and a verb.

• Fragment: Because I went to the beach.  
This fragment has a subject – I – and a verb – went.

So what makes this example a sentence fragment? To fully understand the problem, it may be helpful to review independent and dependent clauses. A clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb. But only independent clauses can stand on their own, as complete sentences. Here is why:

• An independent clause expresses a complete thought.  
  I went to the beach

• A dependent clause does not express a complete thought.  
  Because I went to the beach

It may seem ironic that adding a word could make this group of words less complete, but consider that dependent clauses seem to hang in suspense, without resolution. Dependent clauses may begin with words such as while, before, after, if, since, although, unless, until, when, where, since. These are called subordinating words.

To eliminate fragments, writers have two principal options:

• Connect the dependent clause to an independent clause  
  Because I went to the beach, I didn’t get the mail Thursday.

• Eliminate the subordinating word.  
  I went to the beach.