

## Literacy Tips



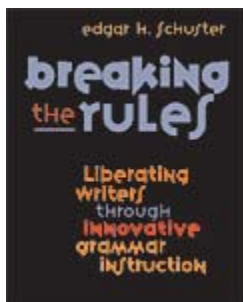
Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #36: Sentence Fragments – Good or Bad?

Writing complete sentences can be difficult for students. They need to be taught to recognize the four common sentence problems that can occur: fragment, comma splice, run-on, and rambling. You can find background information on this in the *Write Source 2000* handbook, pp.86-87. There are also blackline masters in the language program binder for practice. Most of you have already taught some form of a sentence unit early on in the year; however, below are some additional thoughts and mini-lessons that focus just on the use of fragments.

You might consider approaching with your students the intentional use of fragments. This is a controversial issue for many writing teachers. Ruth Culham states in her book, *6+1 Traits of Writing*, "Although using fragments in writing has not always been accepted practice, it is now common in contemporary writing classrooms to encourage the creative use of fragments as a way to add style and energy to the piece." Maybe by allowing students to "break the rule," they may actually learn the rule!



*breaking the rules:  
Liberating Writers Through  
Innovative Grammar  
Instruction* by Edgar H.  
Schuster

- Host a "Fragment Bee." Have students stand at their desks and "Go Around the World" by calling out a sentence or a fragment to each student. If students identify it correctly, they remain standing. If they miss, they sit down. Say: "Is this a sentence or a fragment?" This oral game allows students to hear the difference between a sentence and a fragment.

My cousin, Luke. (fragment)

Come inside now. (sentence)

This is your snowboard. (sentence)

Who didn't want. (fragment)

The ugly old witch. (fragment)

- After hearing fragments orally, follow this up with identifying sentences and fragments in written language. Use blackline masters from the *Write Source 2000* language program (7th grade: pp.541-542 and 8th grade: pp.503-506). If students are having difficulty identifying fragments in written format, remind them to read the sentences aloud.

[www.heinemann.com/shared/products/E00478.asp](http://www.heinemann.com/shared/products/E00478.asp)



Another tip is to write the following phrase on a sentence strip:

I believe that...

Demonstrate for students how to place this in front of a questionable sentence to determine whether it is a fragment or not.

*I believe that...* My cousin, Luke.

(Students can hear that this is a fragment.)

*I believe that...* This is your snowboard.

(Students can hear that this is a sentence.)

*I believe that...* The ugly old witch.

(Students can hear that this is a fragment.)

- Use a favorite young adult novel in which the author does intentionally use fragments to add style and energy to the piece of writing. Discuss with your students this practice. Do they like the sound of the piece? Does breaking the fragment rule add to or take away from the writing? Look closely at the student friendly rubric in the *Write Traits* kit for Sentence Fluency. Then challenge your students to add a bullet point to each score (1-6) that reflects their understanding of the use of fragments in writing. Or does your class believe that fragments (intentional or not) should be assessed under the trait of mechanics/conventions? Hopefully posing that question will cause a lively debate. I know it does among English teachers!

Example

6 pt: I use fragments every now and then to add to the rhythm of my writing.

1 pt: I have used fragments, but I have not used them intentionally. They distract the reader.

