

# Sentence Structure

A sentence is a collection of words assembled in such a way that they present a complete thought or idea. There are four sentence structures in English: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences.

Mastering these different types of sentences will allow you to highlight varying relationships between ideas, improve your written expression and add variety to your writing.

## 1. Simple sentences:

A simple sentence is the easiest type of sentence to construct, and they are formidable in academic writing because they allow you to convey ideas in a clear and simple manner.

A simple sentence consists of a **subject**, **verb** and **object**. The **subject** is the noun (at the beginning of the sentence) being or doing the action to follow. The **verb** is the action word which describes what the noun is being or doing. The **object** comes after the verb and is the result of the action taking place.

### Examples:

*Michael and Adam studied Biology.*

*This course includes practical report writing.*

*This research examines the health effects of secondhand cigarette smoking in pregnant women.*

*The government argues that a solution to the COVID-19 pandemic can be reached by setting up mass vaccination campaigns throughout the country.*

## 2. Compound sentences:

A compound sentence is composed of two or more simple sentences which can stand on their own as complete sentences. You write a compound sentence when you have decided that the simple sentences are related or have an implied logical relationship. These simple sentences can thus be joined together in three ways:

- Using a coordinating conjunction: *and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so*
- Using a semi-colon (;)
- Using a semi-colon (;) and a conjunctive adverb: *however, therefore, furthermore, in contrast, similarly, for example, for instance, undoubtedly, nonetheless, hence, accordingly, consequently, thus*

## Examples:

*Michael and Adam studied Biology, **but** Jessica studied music and drama.*

*This course includes practical report writing; an exercise designed to encourage critical thinking in students.*

*The government argues that a solution to the COVID-19 pandemic can be reached by setting up mass vaccination campaigns throughout the country; **however**, its success depends heavily on the population's willingness in getting vaccinated.*

### 3. Complex sentences:

To understand complex sentences, we first need to understand dependent and independent clauses. An **independent clause** is a simple sentence which can stand on its own. On the other hand, a **dependent clause** is a part of a sentence (containing a **subject** and a **verb**) which cannot stand on its own, since it does not express a complete thought. However, **dependent clauses** are quite useful in academic writing because they add extra information and help to communicate complex ideas.

A complex sentence connects an independent clause with one or more dependent clauses. These two clauses can be linked by a subordinate conjunction placed at the beginning of a **dependent clause**: *although, because, once, just as, whereas, unless, even though, while, even if, as, before, whenever, since, provided that, wherever, whether, so that, than, rather than.*

Note: **Dependent clauses** may be located before or after the **independent clause**.

## Examples:

***Even though** these results are accurate, a larger study is still needed to prove the credibility of the findings.*

*The director would not sign the contract **unless** a lawyer was present.*

***When** he finishes university, Richard hopes to move to Canada.*

*Richard hopes to move to Canada **when** he finishes university.*

#### 4. Compound-complex sentences:

As you may have guessed, this sentence type combines a compound sentence with a complex one. Essentially, compound-complex sentences consist of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

These sentences are indeed tricky, and they take some practice to write. It is advisable to use them only if you do have something complex to express and you feel that it would be best expressed in one sentence.

#### Examples:

*David was confused about the assignment that was due on Tuesday, **so** he asked his tutor for help.*

*While the first study was too general, the second study was too narrow **and** it was conducted without ethics approval.*

*We were all delighted **when** Nathan came home; he had been away so long!*

*Although John loves to write, he did not have a lot of time to do so lately, **for** he has been reading numerous novels.*

#### Some additional tips:

- Remember that a sentence only conveys one (main) thought.
- Ultimately, the type of sentence structure you choose is up to you. Your choice should be guided by what you feel the reader needs in order to be carefully guided through your ideas.
- Choose to write simple sentences more often than not (practice all four sentence structures, with a particular focus on simple sentences).
- Avoid composing sentences which are too long for the reader to grasp.
- If you can clearly combine **subject**, **verb** and **object** then you are well on your way to communicating clear ideas.

Adapted from:

University of Adelaide, Australia. Sentence Structure. Available at: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au> (accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021).

Lincoln University, New Zealand. Sentence Structure. Available at: <https://tl.lincoln.ac.nz> (accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021).

Liberty University, United States. Sentence Construction. Available at: <https://www.liberty.edu> (accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021).

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