



Palm Beach Atlantic University
Center for Writing Excellence

Sentence Types

By Hannah Menendez

Are you constantly plagued by run-ons, comma splices, and fragments in your papers? Do you want to jazz up your essays with sentence variation but aren't sure how? Many of you need a little help understanding sentence types! If so, this is the tip sheet for you!

What is a sentence?

A sentence is made up of a subject + predicate (verb). Easy enough, right? But think about these sentences:

“Because I didn't understand him.”

“Going to ask him a question.”

In the first example, we have a noun, **I**, and a verb, **did**. However, this sentence is still a fragment. Why? The word “because” at the beginning makes the words into a **dependent clause**, which on its own is not a sentence. Now look at the second example. Again, **going** is a verb, and **him** and **question** are nouns, but this sentence is still a fragment. The nouns **him** and **question** are not the subject of the sentence—those words are not the ones doing the action, “going.”

Now let's put the sentences together with a little addition: “Because I didn't understand him, I'm going to ask him a question.” This sentence is complete: the phrase “because I didn't understand him” has something to describe, and **I am** is the subject and predicate (verb). Got it? Okay, now let's move on to sentence types!

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence has no clauses, either dependent or independent. It consists of one or more subjects and one or more predicates (verb).

“My sister came to my house today.” “I gave a gift to my friend on her birthday.” “Yesterday Marie took her dog to the vet.” “This painting is ugly.” A simple sentence typically has no punctuation unless it has a list or interjection in it (see the Commas tip sheet for further information on punctuated lists and interjections/interruptions). Notice that a simple sentence can have **phrases** in it: “to my house today,” “on her birthday,” “to the vet.” However, a **phrase** does **not** have both a subject and a verb within it, and a **clause** has **both** a subject and verb contained with the clause.

Complex Sentences

These are a bit trickier! A complex sentence consists of a simple **sentence** plus one or more **dependent clauses**. Remember, a dependent clause will have its own subject and verb, but cannot stand alone on as a sentence. Dependent clauses often begin with words (called **subordinating conjunctions**) such as “who,” “that,” and “which,” or will begin with **subordinating adverbs** such as: “because,” “therefore,” “although,” “though,” “if,” “since,” “before,” “where,” “when,” “how,” etc. Let’s turn our simple sentences into complex sentences:

“My sister came to my house today *because she wanted to borrow my vacuum cleaner.*”

“*Although I don’t have much money,* I gave a gift to my friend for her birthday.”

“Yesterday, *since he was sick,* Marie took her dog to the vet.”

“*When I saw the painting,* I thought it was ugly.”

Notice that when a sentence begins with a dependent clause, you need to put a comma at the end of the clause before the rest of the sentence. If the dependent clause is after the main sentence, you don’t need to put a comma (compare the first example with the other three).

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences consist of two or more **independent clauses** (a.k.a. complete sentences). Compound sentences can be join in one of four ways: with a **comma and coordinating conjunction** (and, or, nor, but, for, so, yet), a **semicolon** (;), a **colon** (:), or an **M-dash** (—).

“I don’t have much money, *but* I gave a gift to my friend for her birthday.”

“My sister came to my house today; she wanted to borrow my vacuum cleaner.”

“Yesterday Marie took her dog to the vet: he was sick.”

“I saw the painting—it was ugly!”

Note: semicolons and commas and coordinating conjunctions are **only** used in compound sentences. Colons are used before any type of explanatory material, such as a list, a single word, or an independence clause as in the example above. M-dashes are emphatic punctuation and may be used in place of commas, colons, or semicolons for added emphasis.

Compound-Complex Sentences

Two or more independent clauses and two or more dependent clauses.

“Though I don’t have much money, I bought a gift for my friend for her birthday, and then my sister came over to my house because she wanted to borrow my vacuum cleaner.”