



Sentence Structure

Sentence Structures

Formal English sentences have three basic structures: simple, compound and complex.

Simple Sentence

A simple sentence contains one **Independent Clause (IC)**.

The clause consists of 1 subject + 1 **verb** which can stand *independently* as a sentence:

The student learned.

Common error: sentence fragments

If there is **no verb**, there is **no clause**; therefore a sentence cannot exist.

Expansion of parent involvement, a regular theme in policy initiatives.
[A verb is needed between the two things.]

Common error: misplaced modifier

Frogs are a hazard in the wet season. Driving home one night, hundreds of them were blocking the road.

The 1st sentence is good; the 2nd begins with a phrase whose function is to add information about the subject – but the subject is ‘hundreds of [frogs]’. Frogs can’t drive. The sentence should be:

Driving home one night, we counted hundreds of them blocking the road.

Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is one **Independent Clause (IC)** joined to another **Independent Clause (IC)** by a conjunction word or semi-colon.

IC, + IC (clause – comma – **co-ordinating conjunction** – clause)

*Later born children **produce** more personal pronouns, **and** they **develop** more advanced conversational skills than the first-born child.*

IC; IC (clause – semi-colon – clause)

Glasgow was the second city to have an underground railway system; London was the first.

Common error: comma splice

This occurs when a comma is used instead of the co-ordinating conjunction, adverbial conjunction, or semi-colon:

Glasgow was the second city in the world to have an underground railway system, London was the first.

Complex Sentence

When an **Independent Clause (IC)** is joined by a **Dependent Clause (DC)** or a **Relative Clause (RC)**, a complex sentence is formed.

(1): Subordination: an additional clause *depends on* the independent clause for meaning

IC + DC (Ind. Clause – **sub-ordinating conjunction** – Dep. Clause)

*We will make a new world **if** no love exists in this one.*

(2): Relativity: an additional clause is *relative to* an independent or dependent clause

A **Relative Clause** always begins with a **relative pronoun** – **who, which** or **that**. A relative pronoun comes immediately after a noun, so it 'represents' that noun:

*The girl **who** lives next door **is learning** to speak Greek, **which** sounds different to English, so she **downloaded** an app **that** explains the pronunciation.*

Compound-Complex Sentence

Many sentences combine compound and complex structures.

If no love exists in this world, we will make a new world, and we will give it walls, and give it a knocker that resonates like a diamond falling to a jeweller's felt.

Source: Belmont, W. & Sharkey, M. (2009). *The easy writer: formal writing for academic purposes* (2nd ed.). Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia.

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