Beginning writers often wonder how they can make their writing more complex. Varying the sentence structure can help better express ideas, create relationships, and create a more dynamic rhythm between your ideas. If these various sentence types are understood and manipulated, as a writer, you can make more informed decisions about the presentation and style of your words. The four sentence types are the **simple/complete sentence**, **the compound sentence**, **the complex sentence***,* and the **compound-complex sentence**.

Simple/Complete Sentence
The simple sentence is one independent clause punctuated with a . ? or !

Chocolate cake with butter cream icing is delightful.
I love eating mint chocolate chip ice cream!
Would you walk 500 miles for a good cupcake?

Compound Sentence
The compound sentence is two or more independent clauses conjoined in one of four ways.

1. **independent clause, (*coordinating conjunction*) independent clause.**
   Conjunctions are words that link ideas together. The words for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so (FANBOYS) are used to show the relationships between the different clauses.

   Sam ate the chocolate cake**, *but*** he would have preferred vanilla.
   Danielle took a bite of the chocolate chip cookie**, *and*** she chewed it slowly.

2. **independent clause; (*conjunctive adverb/transitional phrase*), independent clause.**
   Please see our handouts on semicolons, transitional words, and commas for more information.

   Lisa wrote Ally's name on the cake**; *however*,** she spelled the name wrong.
   The bread was made today**; *also*,** the cookies were dipped earlier this morning.

3. **Independent clause (;) independent clause.**
   Use the semicolon to combine two related independent clauses. Please see our semicolons handout for more information.

   Jessie unlocked the front door early**;** a line of customers were already waiting.
   Julie dipped the cookies**;** Andrea took the cookie pans out to the store.

4. **independent clause (:) independent clause.**
   Use the colon when the second clause amplifies or explains the first clause. See our colon handout for more information.

   Jacob dropped the cake on the floor**:** the five layer tiered cake was too heavy.
   The oven roared to life**:** it was time to begin baking.

Complex Sentence

The complex sentence is one or more dependent clauses plus one independent clause. Please see our handout on clauses and phrases for more information about clauses.

Dependent clause | Dependent clause | Independent clause

Although it is not recommended, before placing the cookies in the oven, I ate some raw cookie dough

Independent clause | Dependent clause | Dependent clause

The storm has driven away the customers despite our massive sale on cookies because it is raining so hard.

Compound-Complex Sentence

The compound-complex sentence is one or more dependent clauses plus two or more independent clauses. The rules for conjoining the dependent and independent clauses are the same as for compound and complex sentences, though it is important to note that in compound-complex sentences, dependent clauses are usually connected by commas.

Dependent clause | Independent clause | Dependent clause | Dependent clause | Independent clause

After our shift was over, Jeremy and I cleaned the glass cases while Lisa and Anne counted out the drawers; since everyone worked together, we got to leave early.

Independent clause | Dependent clause | Dependent clause | Independent clause | Dependent clause | Dependent clause | Independent clause

Mom loves éclairs when the custard is warm; although Dad also likes éclairs as well, he cannot eat them when the custard is warm, and it leads to many arguments.

Using these Sentence Patterns

Although these sentence patterns are extremely useful in providing variety within your paragraphs, it is important to avoid overusing any particular sentence structure. Too many short sentences may make your language sound choppy whereas too many long sentences will make your writing sound long-winded. So, writing becomes about balance and rhythm. Using these tools helps you create powerful writing. When your structure reflects the ideas you are communicating, you are using your strategies in the best way possible.

****This handout was inspired from John Haslem's Sentence Pattern and Punctuation handout, who relied heavily upon the Harbrace College Handbook, 12th edition, for word lists and definitions of grammatical terms.*