

# Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences

..... a practical handout

## Introduction

Experienced writers use a variety of sentences to make their writing interesting and lively. Too many simple sentences, for example, will make your writing sound choppy and immature while too many long sentences will make your writing difficult to read and hard to understand. This handout explains three different types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex.

Before we begin, there are a few terms that need to be defined:

<b>Noun</b>	A person, place, thing, or idea	Ex: dog, school, rubber ducky
<b>Verb</b>	An action or state of being	Ex: jumped, felt, are, were
<b>Subject</b>	A noun or set of words that acts out the verb	Ex: The yellow puppy
<b>Clause</b>	A structure that has a subject and a verb	Ex: The yellow puppy barked.
<b>Independent Clause</b>	A structure that has a subject and verb. It expresses a complete idea that can stand alone.	Ex: The yellow puppy barked at the black cat.
<b>Dependent Clause</b>	A structure that has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. It cannot stand alone	Ex: When the yellow puppy barked
<b>Coordinating conjunctions</b>	A word that connects words, phrases, or clauses (for, or, and, yet, nor, so, but)	Ex: The yellow puppy barked, and the black cat jumped.
<b>Subordinating conjunctions</b>	A word that connects an independent clause to a dependent clause	Ex: After the yellow puppy barked, the black cat jumped.

## Simple Sentence

A simple sentence only has one independent clause. An independent clause has a **subject** and a **verb** and expresses a complete thought.

### Examples:

Some **students** **like** to study in the morning.

The green **dish** **broke**.

The **llama** **spit**.

Sometimes, simple sentences have compound structures. There are four main types of compound structures:

- Compound subject: A subject that has two parts that are often connected with a coordinating conjunction.

**Example:** **Cassidy** **and** **Arturo** **like** to study in the morning.

*(“Cassidy” and “Arturo” are two separate nouns. When they are connected together using “and,” they create a compound subject.)*

- Compound verb: A verb that has two parts often connected with a coordinating conjunction.

**Example:** **Alicia** **goes** to the library **and** **studies** every day.

*(In this example, “goes” and “studies” are two separate verbs that make a compound verb. The coordinating conjunction, “and” connects them.)*

- Compound direct object: A noun that receives the action of the verb. To find the direct object, you can usually ask “who?” or “what?”

**Ex:** The green **dish** **hit** the **ground**.

*(What did the dish hit? The ground. When “ground” is added to the rest of the sentence, it shows where the dish broke. The ground receives the action.)*

- **Compound prepositional phrase:** A phrase that begins with a preposition (see our prepositional phrase handout for more information).

**Ex:** *The llama spit at the man's head.*

*(The word, “at” is a preposition. This means that “at the man’s head” is a compound prepositional phrase.)*

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## Compound Sentence

A compound sentence has two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (**for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so**). Except for very short sentences, a comma goes right before a coordinating conjunction.

### **Examples:**

**I tried** to speak Spanish, **and** my **friend tried** to speak English.

**Alejandro played** football, **so** **Maria went** shopping.

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## Complex Sentence

A complex sentence has one independent clause and one to two dependent clauses. A complex sentence always has a subordinating conjunction (because, since, after, although, when...) or a pronoun (who, which, and that).

If a dependent clause has a subordinating conjunction and is located at the beginning of the sentence, a comma should be used to separate it from the independent clause.

### **Examples:**

*Complex sentences using subordinating conjunctions*

**When he handed** in his homework, **he forgot** to give the teacher the last page.

The **teacher** returned the homework **after she** noticed the error.

The **students** are studying **because** **they** have a test tomorrow.

*Complex sentences using relative pronouns*

**I** **have** a friend **whose** **hair** **is** pink.

**This** **is** the book **that** **everyone** **is** talking about.

The **book**, **which** **is** out of print, **is** one of my favorites.

#### References

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