

Sentence Structure

1. In academic writing, sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop (.) or a question mark (?).
2. Each sentence must be able to stand alone and make sense on its own.
3. Each sentence has
 - a **subject**, which is the person or thing that the sentence is about; and
 - a **predicate**, which is what is said about the subject. The predicate must have at least one **verb** (doing word).

Subject	Predicate
The book	<i>arrived</i> in the mail today.
He	<i>bought</i> a new car yesterday.
Mary and John	<i>went</i> on a camping holiday in the South Island.
Operators of machines	<i>should be given</i> further training.
The room	<i>had been cleaned</i> recently.
Moving house	<i>can be</i> very stressful.
Collecting wood for the fire	<i>took</i> a long time.
Looking after the animals	<i>was</i> Jane's responsibility.
Dancing	<i>is</i> good for the soul.

The above sentences are called **simple sentences**. They contain only one verb each. The verbs in the sentences above are in italics.

Ask yourself these questions to determine whether a group of words is a sentence:

1. Do the words make sense on their own?
2. Are the words a complete thought?
3. Does the sentence begin with a capital letter and end with either a full stop or a question mark?
4. Are the grammar and punctuation correct?

Adapted from: Murphy, E. M. (1989). *Effective writing: Plain English at work*. Longman.

Four sentence types

Make your writing more interesting for the reader by using a variety of sentence structures.

Simple Sentences

Simple sentences contain only one verb. They are also known as independent clauses. The verbs in the sentences below are underlined.

For example:

The outcomes are negotiated at the beginning of the process.
Some unintended outcomes may occur.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences join two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) using a joining word (i.e., a coordinating conjunction: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). The joining words in the sentences below are underlined.

For example:

The outcomes are negotiated at the beginning of the process, but some unintended outcomes may occur.
Children move through the stages of cognitive development at different rates, and some children do not reach the more advanced stages.

Complex Sentences

Complex sentences have an independent clause (i.e., a simple sentence) and one or more subordinate/dependent clauses. Dependent clauses give extra information and are dependent on the rest of the sentence for meaning. Both the independent and the dependent clauses have subjects and verbs, but the independent clause is a complete thought, and the dependent clause is not. The dependent clause starts with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., because, if, until, while, after, since). If the subordinate clause comes first, add a comma. The dependent clauses in the sentences below are underlined.

For example:

After adjusting journal entries, the final financial statements are prepared.
Students may initially engage in an activity because it is fun.

Complex-Compound Sentences



Compound-Complex sentences join at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. The dependent clauses in the sentences below are underlined, and the compound sentences are in *italics*.

For example:

Since creative forms of therapy have become more popular, therapists report that music therapy promotes coping for trauma survivors, and clients report that dance therapy reduces their anxiety and depression.

Students often find intrinsic motivation because of their interest in an activity, so it is important for teachers to identify the students' interests before planning a lesson.

According to Nicol (1987), the performance of grazing ruminants is impacted by their intake of pasture, and this will depend in part on the characteristics of the pasture, which include pasture composition, height, breaking strength, and composition.

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[Writing Skills Guide](#)

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