

Sentence Structure

- Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark (a full stop, a question mark, or an exclamation mark).
- Each sentence should consist of a complete thought and be able to stand alone and make sense.
- Each sentence must have a **subject** (the person or thing doing the action).
- Each sentence must have a predicate with at least one **verb** (doing word).

A sentence is a group of words that is a complete thought on its own. Every sentence must have a **subject** and a **predicate**. The subject is who or what the sentence is about, while the predicate is what is said about the subject. The subject is always a noun, pronoun, or group of words that function in the same way as a noun. The predicate must contain a *complete* verb, but it can also contain any amount of extra information that gives more meaning to the verb

Subject	Predicate
My daughter	<i>Arrived</i> home today
He	<i>Bought</i> a new car yesterday
Mary and John	<i>Went</i> on a camping holiday in the South Island.
Dancing	<i>Is</i> good for the soul.
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
Operators of machines	<i>should be given</i> further training.

The above sentences are called **simple sentences**.

A **compound sentence** is one in which two or more simple sentences are joined together, often by the words *and* or *but*.

For example:

My daughter is coming home today *and* the two boys will arrive tomorrow.

Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the roads, *but* cyclists think drivers don't give them enough room.

A **complex sentence** is one in which one or more *subordinate clauses* (giving extra information) are added to the sentence.

For example:

The old man, *who was looking very ill*, limped slowly along the footpath.

Although they are bad for me, I love eating chips.

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

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 an appropriate punctuation mark?
4. Finally ask yourself: Are the grammar and punctuation correct?

Adapted from:

Murphy, E. M. (1989). *Effective writing: Plain English at work*. Melbourne, Australia: Longman Cheshire.