

## 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**: This is the person or thing that the sentence is about. And,  
a **predicate**: This is what is said about the subject.  
This part 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).

A **compound sentence** is one in which two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) are joined together, using a "joining word" (i.e. a conjunction).

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 which has both:

**an independent clause** (i.e. a simple sentence) and  
**one or more subordinate/dependent clauses**. Dependent clauses give extra information.

Both the independent and the dependent clause have subjects and *verbs* but one is a complete thought and the other one isn't.

The **independent clause** is a **complete thought**; the subordinate clause is dependent on the rest of the sentence for meaning.

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.

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

**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 either a full stop or a question 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.