



The Secret's in the Sentence

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If you're serious about writing, you need to get serious about sentences. Find out how successful writers use the full range of sentence types and structures to engage their readers and get the job done.

**To get started, we need to know what a sentence is.**

1. A sentence is a group of words that makes complete sense by itself. In its simplest form, a sentence may consist of just a noun and verb or even a single word.
2. At their simplest, sentences are built with two parts: a subject and a predicate.

**What's a subject?**

The subject is the part of the sentence that names the doer of the action or who or what is being talked about.

**What's a predicate?**

Whatever is said about the subject is called the predicate. The predicate must contain a verb.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE
Birds	<i>fly.</i>
My brother Neil	<i>works at the Clyde dam.</i>
The woman next door	<i>is chopping firewood.</i>
The girl down the road	<i>delivers pamphlets.</i>

# So what types of sentence are there?

## 1 The Simple Sentence

The most natural sentence structure is the simple sentence. It is the first type our children learn to speak and is by far the most common sentence in the spoken language of people of all ages.

A simple sentence contains **only one clause**.

### What's a clause?

A clause is a short statement that contains a subject and a predicate. A clause can be part of a larger sentence or it can stand on its own as a simple sentence.

A simple sentence can be as short as one word, but usually, it will have a subject as well as a predicate. A simple sentence may also have modifiers.

### What's a modifier?

A modifier is a word, phrase or clause that adds description. All of the following are simple sentences because each sentence contains only one clause.

- *Run!*
- *Children run.*
- *Under the sun, the children run.*
- *Under the sun, the children run towards the water's edge.*
- *Under the shimmering summer sun, the children run towards the bright water's edge.*

## » When to use the simple sentence

### To state a fact

- *On 1–2 June 2015, a low-pressure system moved slowly to the southeast across the South Island.*
- *The proposal reduces the community board's legal liabilities.*

### To display a list

- *The Ministry for Primary Industries has a number of residue monitoring programmes associated with the Animal Products Act, the Food Act, and the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act.*
- *A community board is not able to acquire, hold, or dispose of property.*

### To give precise directions

- *The open meeting will be held from 4 pm to 6.30 pm at the Coronation Hall on Portobello Road.*
- *A transfer of ownership is recommended.*

### Keep in mind

Simple sentences grab your reader's attention, conclude arguments, and state facts, but you need to use them with care. Too many short, simple sentences will make your writing childish and choppy, while too many long simple sentences will make your writing difficult to understand. When you write simple sentences, add transitional phrases to connect them to your surrounding sentences.

## 2 The Compound Sentence

A compound sentence consists of two or more independent clauses (or simple sentences) joined by co-ordinating conjunctions. You can remember these conjunctions by the acronym FANBOYS — for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

- **Simple:** *New Zealand is a rich country.*
- **Simple:** *Still, it has many poor people.*
- **Compound:** *New Zealand is a rich country, but still it has many poor people.*

A compound sentence is most effective when you use it to create a sense of balance or contrast between two or more equally-important pieces of information.

- *Christchurch has a lively club scene, but Dunedin has better music.*
- *I like an apple, but my brother likes a mango.*
- *I asked him a question; he replied correctly.*
- *He failed two times, yet he was not disappointed.*

## » When to use compound sentences

### To combine similar ideas

- *The project will make tight corners safer, and we will build a shared cycle / pedestrian path.*
- *Lead is ubiquitous in the environment and background levels are reported in routine monitoring in New Zealand.*

### To compare and contrast ideas

- *Sections of the road have been widened, but we need to reconfigure them to make pathway and cycleway widths consistent.*
- *The work in this area has been challenging yet very rewarding.*

### To convey cause and effect

- *We invite interested people to the session, so that they can learn about the project.*
- *The land is not zoned residential, nor does the community wish to see development.*

### Keep in mind

Compound sentences are very natural for English speakers. Small children learn to use them early on to connect their ideas, avoid pausing, and allow an adult to interrupt

*Today at school, Mr Moore brought in his pet rabbit, and he showed it to the class, and I got to pet it, and Kate held it, and we coloured pictures of it, and it ate part of my carrot at lunch, and...*

If you overuse compound sentences, your writing will seem immature.

### 3 The Complex Sentence

Unlike the compound sentence, the complex sentence contains clauses that are not equal. It will have one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

#### Take a look at the following examples

1. Simple Sentence: *My friend invited me to a party. I did not want to go.*
2. Compound Sentence: *My friend invited me to a party, but I did not want to go.*
3. Complex Sentence: *Although my friend invited me to a party, I did not want to go.*

In the first example, there are two separate simple sentences. The second example joins them together into a single sentence with the co-ordinating conjunction "but," but both parts could still stand as independent sentences because they are entirely equal. In the third example, the sentence has changed quite a bit: the first clause, "Although my friend invited me to a party," has become incomplete or a dependent clause.

When you write the subordinating conjunction "although" at the beginning of the first clause, you make it clear that the fact that your friend invited you is less important than, or subordinate to, the fact that you do not want to go.





## » When to use the complex sentence

### To build a chain of reasoning

- *Although this site has a short record for deriving long-term trends, the data is of high quality with a frequent recording interval and an instrument accuracy of +1mm.*
- *If we want to meet treated water quality regulations, we need to identify the likelihood of pathogens and other contaminants in our source waters to help us determine the most appropriate combination of soft and hard infrastructure.*

### To show relationships between ideas

- *With ownership of the building changing, the community board will no longer be liable for maintenance costs.*
- *The supplier was placed on the national surveillance list because one result was reported above the New Zealand MPL of 0.5 mg/kg.*

### To show time relationships

- *When the design phase has finished, we will organise a number of open community meetings across the district.*
- *After the reporting of two incidents of negative behaviour towards officers, body cameras were issued.*

### **Keep in mind**

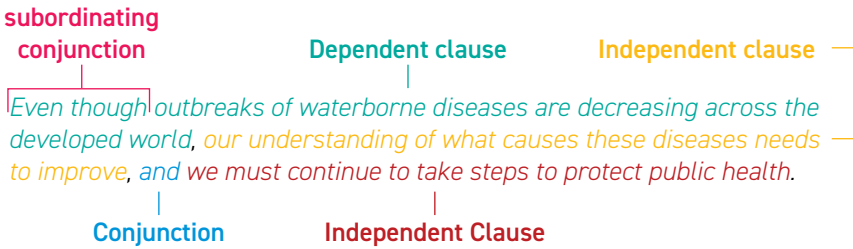
Think of the complex sentence as a sort of verbal equation. The complex sentence will allow you to show relationships between multiple ideas and build chains of reasoning. We use phrases and clauses as building blocks to convey our complex ideas to our readers.

### **Punctuation Notes**

If your complex sentence begins with an independent clause, a comma is not used between the clauses. If your complex sentence begins with a dependent clause, then a comma is used after the dependent clause.

## 4 The Compound-Complex Sentence

A compound-complex sentence combines elements of both compound and complex sentences. It consists of at least two independent and one or more dependent clauses. The compound-complex sentence will serve the same purpose as a complex sentence. You can tailor the amount of information you wish to provide by adding independent and dependent clauses.



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