

University Writing Center

Sentence Structures and Sentence Types: Building Blocks for Clearly Communicating Ideas

What is a Sentence?

A sentence is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A sentence is an independent clause.

Examples The man ran.

The man ran behind the building.

The man ran behind the building because he was trying to elude the gangsters.

A sentence can contain one word or multiple words.

Examples Stop. Go. Run. Give the money to the cashier. ("You" is the implied subject.)

Three structures form sentences: Phrases, Dependent Clauses, and Independent Clauses.

1. Phrase: a group of two or more words missing either a subject (**S**), a verb (**V**), or both. A phrase is not a sentence.

Examples

If needed (subject missing)

To this end (verb missing)

At once (both subject & verb missing)

S (noun)

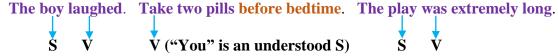
2. Dependent Clause: contains both a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought, thus, cannot stand alone. A dependent clause is not a sentence.

Examples



3. Independent Clause: contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought; it is a sentence.

Examples



Remember: The only sentence structure that expresses a complete thought is the **independent clause.** The **dependent clause** and **the phrase** are dependent structures that depend upon an independent clause to clarify their meaning.

Sentence Types

The four sentence types are **simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.** To accurately determine the **sentence types**, you must first be able to identify the **different sentence structures** contained within the sentences (see page 1 of this handout for sentence structures).

Simple Sentence: contains only one **independent clause** and no **dependent clauses**. A simple sentence can contain phrases.

Examples

We can give more money. (Contains only one independent clause)

If needed, we can give more money. (Contains one phrase and only one independent clause)

We can give more money to the presidential campaign. (Contains only one independent clause and one phrase)

If needed, we can give more money to the presidential campaign. (Contains two phrases and only one independent clause)

We can give more money and donate more volunteer time to the presidential campaign. (Contains only one independent clause and one phrase)

Compound Sentence: contains two or more **independent clauses** joined by both **a comma and a coordinating conjunction** or by a **semicolon**, **conjunctive adverb**, and a **comma**, or by a **semicolon**.

Examples

I am going to the Black Arts Festival in Winston Salem, so I am going to save my money. (Contains only two independent clauses that are joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. Also, contains two phrases.)

The Festival begins in August: therefore, we need to get our ticket by the end of July. (Contains only two independent clauses that are joined by a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, and a comma)

If not by then, the tickets may sell out by the first of August: I am going to get my tickets today. (Contains two independent clauses and a semicolon)

Complex Sentence: contains only one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

Examples

Since we have raised enough to support three candidates, we can give more money to the presidential campaign. (Contains one dependent clause and one independent clause)

If needed, we can give more money to the presidential campaign after we raise money for the local candidates. (Contains one independent clause, one dependent clause, and three phrases)

Compound-Complex Sentence: contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

Example

After we donate to the presidential campaign, we will raise more money, and we will reserve those funds for local candidates. (Contains one dependent clause, two independent clauses, and one phrase)