

Sentence Types and Functions

Choosing what types of sentences to use in an essay can be challenging for several reasons. The writer must consider the following questions: Are my ideas simple or complex? Do my ideas require shorter statements or longer explanations? How do I express my ideas clearly? This handout discusses the basic components of a sentence, the different types of sentences, and various functions of each type of sentence.

What Is a Sentence?

- A sentence is a complete set of words that conveys meaning. A sentence can communicate
 - a statement (I am studying.)
 - a command (Go away.)
 - an exclamation (I'm so excited!)
 - a question (What time is it?)
- A sentence is composed of one or more clauses. A clause contains a subject and verb.

Independent and Dependent Clauses

- There are two types of clauses: independent clauses and dependent clauses. A sentence contains at least one independent clause and may contain one or more dependent clauses.
- An independent clause (or main clause)
 - is a complete thought.
 - can stand by itself.
- A dependent clause (or subordinate clause)
 - is an incomplete thought.
 - cannot stand by itself.

You can spot a dependent clause by identifying the subordinating conjunction. A subordinating conjunction creates a dependent clause that relies on the rest of the sentence for meaning. The following list provides some examples of subordinating conjunctions.

- | | |
|----------|---------------|
| • after | • although |
| • as | • because |
| • before | • even though |
| • if | • since |
| • though | • when |
| • while | • until |
| • unless | • whereas |

Independent and Dependent Clauses

Independent clause: When I go to the movies, **I usually buy popcorn.**

Dependent clause: **When I go to the movies,** I usually buy popcorn.

Independent clause: **I don't like the ocean** because sharks scare me.

Dependent clause: I don't like the ocean **because sharks scare me.**

What Are the Different Types of Sentences?

Sentences are divided into four categories: simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.

Simple Sentences

Definition	A simple sentence contains one independent clause.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Johnny rode his bike to school.• Who is your best friend?• She ate her lunch, took a walk, and went back to work.

Compound Sentences

Definition	A compound sentence contains two independent clauses. A coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) often links the two independent clauses and is preceded by a comma.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She wanted to go on vacation, so she saved up her money.• I like apples, but my sister loves bananas.• Tim loves to read, and he also loves to hike.

Complex Sentences

Definition	A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. A complex sentence will include at least one subordinating conjunction .
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She went to class even though she was sick.• As John was arriving to work, he realized he forgot his lunch.• While I enjoy classical music, I prefer rock and roll because I play the drums.

Compound-Complex Sentences

Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A compound-complex sentence combines complex sentence and compound sentence forms. A compound-complex sentence contains one or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although she felt guilty for missing her friend's birthday, she took her out to dinner the next day, and they had a great time.• I try to eat healthy food, but because fast food is so convenient, I cannot maintain a healthy diet.• If he got the job, he would have to commute 50 miles to work, so he decided the job was not worth it.

What Are the Functional Purposes of each Type of Sentence?

Because each type of sentence can serve various functions, the writer should use the type of sentence that best communicates the purpose of his or her idea.

- Choose the sentence type that will most clearly and accurately convey the logic of your idea.
- Consider the amount of information your readers need, and consider the links the readers need to process the information.
- Vary sentence structures to pace your readers through your argument.

Functions of Simple Sentences

Use simple sentences when presenting a limited amount of information. Although simple sentences may be shorter, they are not any less academic than other sentence types.

To declare a direct statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, I will give background information about my project. • This conclusion is supported by extensive evidence.
To display a simple list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researchers created their hypothesis, conducted some tests, and drew their conclusions. • My evidence comes from journal articles, periodicals, and books.
To give concise directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please consider my application for the internship. • Turn to Table 1 in the appendix.
To ask a question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the true meaning of the poem? • What will this study mean to medical research in a decade?

Functions of Compound, Complex, and Compound-Complex Sentences

Compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences can serve similar purposes. The writer can tailor the amount of information he or she provides by adding independent and dependent clauses to simple sentences.

To combine similar ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compound: Recycling is an effective way of helping the environment, and everyone should recycle at home. • Complex: Since recycling is an effective way of helping the environment, everyone should recycle at home. • Compound-Complex: Since recycling is an effective way of helping the environment, everyone should recycle at home; we can all work together to protect our planet.
To compare or contrast ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compound: Van Gogh was a talented and successful artist, but he had intense personal issues. • Complex: Although he was a talented and successful artist, Van Gogh had intense personal issues. • Compound-Complex: Although he was a talented and successful artist, Van Gogh had intense personal issues; indeed, many say his inner turmoil contributed to his beautiful art.
To convey cause and effect or chain of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compound: The researchers did not come to the correct conclusion, so they restructured their hypothesis.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex: Since the researchers did not come to the correct conclusion, they restructured their hypothesis. • Compound-Complex: Since the researchers did not come to the correct conclusion, they restructured their hypothesis, and they will attempt the experiment again.
To elaborate on a claim or extend reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compound: Cell phones should not be permitted in class, for they distract students and teachers. • Complex: Since cell phones distract students and teachers, they should not be used in class. • Compound-Complex: Since cell phones distract students and teachers, they should not be used in class, and I encourage faculty to forbid their use.

Activity 1

Directions: Identify the sentence type. Circle any coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. Underline independent clauses once and dependent clauses twice. Then, explain what function the sentence is performing.

1. *Harry Potter* was rejected from many publishers before J.K. Rowling found success.

Sentence type: _____

Function: _____

2. Even though the patients showed various symptoms, the clinical study found that lack of sleep contributes to the inability to focus, irritability, and poorer health.

Sentence type: _____

Function: _____

3. More and more students are relying on online databases to find sources.

Sentence type: _____

Function: _____

4. The business analysts proposed higher numbers for next quarter, and they expect to exceed those numbers the following quarter.

Sentence type: _____

Function: _____

5. Homeless teens face intense obstacles, but when it comes to schooling, they do have the chance to receive an education if they enroll in a special program.

Sentence type: _____

Function: _____

Activity 2

Directions: Practice composing your own sentences given the information provided. Consider what sentence type will be best to express the information.

1. You are telling the reader about three important qualities of a character in a book.

Sentence: _____

2. You are showing both sides of an argument.

Sentence: _____

3. You are wondering about the types of resources available to students at SJSU.

Sentence: _____

4. You are describing a sequence of events.

Sentence: _____

5. You are providing extensive detail about a particular event.

Sentence: _____

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. Complex; convey a chain of events
2. Complex; compare/contrast ideas
3. Simple; declare a simple statement
4. Compound; combine similar ideas
5. Compound-complex; elaborate on a claim, cause/effect

Answer Key for Activity 2

Since answers will vary, bring your sentences from this activity to the Writing Center so you can review them with a tutor.