

Chapter 1 : Sentence Structure and Sentence Problems

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Table des matières



Objectifs	3
I - Sentence Structure	4
1. Definitions	4
2. Types of Sentence Structures	4
2.1. <i>Simple Sentence</i>	5
2.2. <i>Compound Sentence</i>	5
2.3. <i>Complex Sentence</i>	6
2.4. <i>Compound-Complex Sentence</i>	6
3. Exercice	6
4. Exercice	6
5. Exercice	7
II - Sentence Problems and How to Fix Them	8
1. Sentence Problems	8
1.1. <i>Run-ons</i>	8
1.2. <i>Fragments</i>	9
1.3. <i>Choppy Sentences</i>	9
1.4. <i>Stringy Sentences</i>	10
2. Exercice	10
3. Exercice	10
4. Exercice	10

Objectifs

In this chapter, Students will be able to :

- differentiate between the different sentence structures and practice writing them.
- identify the various sentence problems and learn how to fix them.

Sentence Structure



This section of the chapter deals exclusively with the structure of sentences in English. This is supposed to be a revision of what 2nd year students already dealt with in their first year, more precisely, towards the end of their first academic year. Second year BA students are to be taught both paragraph and essay writing, and since sentences are the building blocks of both paragraphs and essays, assisting students in mastering the different sentence structures would, it is assumed, be of high utilitarian value.

1. Definitions

Prior to discussing sentence structure, it pays to provide definitions for a number key terms, without which the somehow intricate details of sentence structure will fail to sink in. Consider the definitions below :

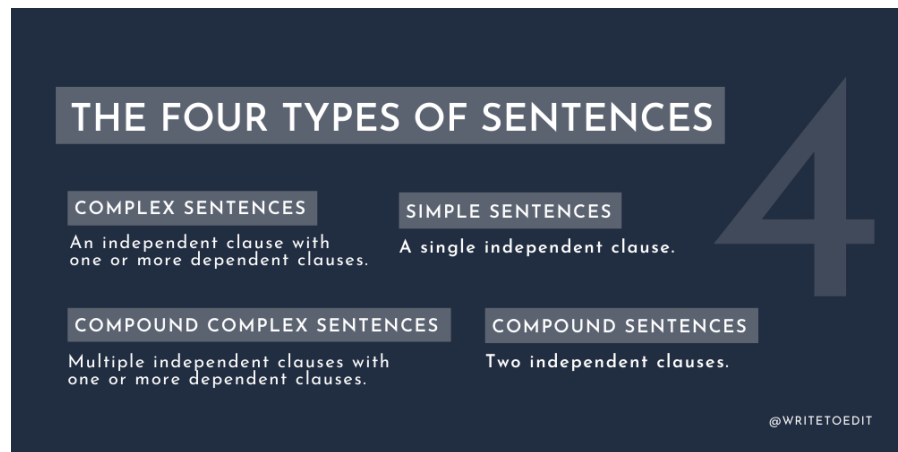
- . **Sentence:** a sentence refers to a group of words which contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought.
- . **Clause:** a group of words which consists of at least a subject and a verb (predicate). Clauses falls into two major categories: **main clauses** and **subordinate clauses**.
- . **Main Clause:** otherwise known as 'independent clause', is a group of words which has a subject and a verb (predicate) and expresses a complete thought, i.e., it can stand alone.
- . **Subordinate Clause:** otherwise known as 'dependent clause', refers to a group of words that consists of a subject and verb, which does not express a complete thought. In other words, it cannot stand alone.

Remarque

Most subordinate clauses start with subordinating conjunctions. These include, but not limited to: **although, before, unless, after, when, if, because, since** etc.

2. Types of Sentence Structures

The notion of '**clause**' is at the heart of sentence structure, largely because sentences are categorized according to the number and type of clauses they contain. In English language, there are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Gaining a greater familiarity with these different sentence patterns will immensely assist students in avoiding sentence structure errors, expressing their ideas more effectively, and thus honing their composition skills.



Types of Sentence Structure

For more details about these four types, click [here](#) and watch the video.

What comes next is a detailed description of each of type along with illustrative examples.

2.1. Simple Sentence

A simple sentence is a sentence which contains one main clause. The basic pattern of a simple sentence is SUBJECT-VERB (S V). Having the name 'simple' does not necessarily mean that the sentence be uncomplicated or short because it may contain other phrases and modifiers along with the main clause. The pattern for the simple sentence may have several variations:

Subject-verb: The plane flew over the stadium.

Verb-subject: Over the stadium flew the plane.

Subject-subject-verb: The plane and the helicopter flew over the stadium.

Subject-verb-verb: The plane flew over the stadium and turned north.

Subject-subject-verb-verb : The plane and the helicopter flew over the stadium and turned north.

2.2. Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is a sentence that contains two or more main clauses. These clauses are joined in one of the following three ways:

a. Two main clauses may be joined by a comma followed by one of the coordinating conjunctions (**FANBOYS**) : **for** (reason), **and** (addition), **nor** (choice), **but** (contrast), **or** (choice), **yet** (contrast), **so** (result).

Example: The exam was very easy, **so** I got a good mark.

b. Two main clauses can be also joined by a semi-colon (;).

Example: The exam was very easy; I got a good mark.

c. Two main clauses may be joined by a semi-colon and transitional word or phrase (conjunctive adverb). This conjunctive adverb is followed by a comma.

Example: The exam was very easy; **therefore**, I got a good mark.

These transitional words or conjunctive adverbs are different from subordinating conjunction or coordinating conjunction. Below is a list of those conjunctive adverbs: **accordingly-hence-therefore-in addition-furthermore-moreover-however-next** etc.

2.3. Complex Sentence

A complex sentence is a sentence which contains only one main clause and at least one subordinate clause.

Example: **After** he retired from the Army, Eisenhower ran for presidency.

-The subordinate clause may occur at any place in the sentence:

a-Before the main clause: **Before** he ran for presidency, Eisenhower retired from the Army.

b-After the main clause: You will be rewarded **if** you complete your project in time.

c-Interrupting the main clause: John's brother, **who** graduated from university last month, has started his own business.

d-Before and after the main clause: **As soon as** he arrived home, William went about doing the homework **that** his teacher gave him.

2.4. Compound-Complex Sentence

As its name suggests, it is a combination of the compound and the complex sentence patterns. It consists of at least two main clauses and at least one subordinate clause. The basic pattern of a compound complex sentence contains two main clauses and one subordinate clause.

Examples:

. On the day-long bicycle trip, Ophelia ate the food **that** she had packed, **but** Henry had forgotten to bring anything to eat.

. **Although** he was exhausted, David cooked dinner for his mother, **and** he cleaned after dinner.

. The travelers were excited when they arrived in Paris; they wanted to go sightseeing immediately.

3. Exercice

The sentence types that contain at least two independent clauses ?

- ☐ Compound Sentence
- ☐ Compound-complex Sentence
- ☐ Complex Sentence

4. Exercice

What is the sentence type that contains one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

5. Exercice

What is the type of sentence that does not have a dependent clause

- ☐ Compound Sentence
- ☐ Simple Sentence
- ☐ Compound-Complex Sentence

* *

*

Students are in a dire need of knowing the basic structures of English sentence, which include: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Being fully cognizant of these sentence patterns will eventually help students vary their sentence patterns and, by implication, upgrade their composition skills.

Sentence Problems and How to Fix Them

II

Below is a discussion of the most frequent sentence problems that feature prominently in students' written productions. Achieving a highly satisfactory level of written proficiency entails gaining a deeper familiarity and understanding of these sentence problems and, more importantly, learning how to work these problems out.

1. Sentence Problems

In the main, there are four types of sentence problems: **run-ons**, **fragments**, **choppy sentences**, and **stringy sentences**. Below is a detailed analysis of each type of sentence problems along with the strategies used to fix those problems.

1.1. Run-ons

Run-ons consist of two or more main clauses (independent clauses) not properly/correctly joined. There are two types of run-ons: **fused sentences** and **comma splices**.

1.1.1. Fused Sentences

Fused sentences are sentences which consist of two or more independent clauses, but the comma and the coordinating conjunction are missing.

Example: The teacher is explaining the lesson the students are taking notes.

- Fused sentences are fixed as follows:

1. Adding a full stop between the clauses

→ The teacher is explaining the lesson. The students are taking notes.

2. Adding a semi-colon (;)

→ The teacher is explaining the lesson; the students are taking notes.

3. Adding a comma or a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)

→ The teacher is explaining the lesson, **and** the students are taking notes.

4. Adding a subordinating conjunction

→ **When** the teacher is explaining the lesson, the students are taking notes.

a) Comma Splices

Comma splices are sentences which consist of two or more independent clauses that follow one another but are incorrectly joined only by a comma.

Example: My friend was seriously ill last week, we went to visit him.

- By and large, Comma splices are fixed as follows:

1. Adding a coordinating conjunction

→ My friend was seriously ill last week, **so** we went to visit him.

2. Adding a semi-colon instead of the comma

→ My friend was seriously ill last week; we went to visit him.

1.2. Fragments

As previously discussed, a sentence is a group of words which contain three things:-Subject-verb-complete thought (unfinished thought). Put simply, a fragment is a group of words which misses one or more of these three things (subject-verb-complete thought). So a fragment is the result of one of the following three problems :

1. **It is missing a subject:** was reading a book

2. **It is missing a verb:** Exercising in the morning

3. **It fails to complete a thought it starts:** Before the teacher came

- **Fragments are simply fixed by:**

1.**Adding the subject:** **My father** was reading a book.

2.**Adding the verb:** Exercising in the morning **is** beneficial to health.

3.**Joining unfinished thought fragments to a preceding or following sentence**

→ **We left the classroom** Before the teacher came.

→ Before the teacher came, **we left the classroom.**

1.3. Choppy Sentences

Choppy sentences are series of sentences which are too short and have many repeated words.

Example: Dogs are friendly and loyal. Dogs make good pets.

- **There are four strategies to fix choppy sentences:**

a. Using a coordinating conjunction

→ Dogs are friendly and loyal, **so** they make good pets.

b. Using a subordinating conjunction

→ Dogs make good pets **because** they are friendly and loyal.

c. Using modifying words or phrases (present/past participles and adjectives)

→ Dogs are friendly and loyal, **making** good pets.

d. Using appositives

→ Dogs, the good pets, are friendly and loyal.

1.4. Stringy Sentences

Stringy sentences consist of several complete thoughts (sentences) strung together with words like: **so, and, but** etc. Stringy sentences tend to be too long that the reader may forget the beginning of sentence before reaching the end of it.

Example: Mark is my best friend and he lives next door and so we do many things together.

- **Stringy sentences are basically fixed using different ways:**

a. Break the sentence into two or more sentences.

→ Mark is my best friend, and he lives next door. We do many things together.

b. Turn some of the complete thoughts into phrases or subordinate clauses.

→ Mark lives next door; we do many things together because he is my best friend.

For a brief recapitulation of the aforementioned discussion about sentence problems , click *here* and watch the video.

2. Exercice

How do we call a sentence that contains at least two independent clauses joined only by a comma?

- ☐ Comma Splice
- ☐ Choppy Sentence
- ☐ Stringy Sentence

3. Exercice

What are the two types of run-ons ?

4. Exercice

How can we fix run-ons ?

- ☐ Adding a full stop or semi-colon
- ☐ Adding the missing verb
- ☐ Adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction

* *

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Students' written productions are doubtless fraught with all manner of mistakes pertaining to sentence structure. Therefore, a much greater awareness of the different types of sentence structures and the most common sentence problems, which span run-ons, fragments, choppy sentences, and stringy sentences, on the part of these students will help the latter avoid them when composing.