

Simple, Compound, Complex, and Compound-Complex Sentences

Sentences are categorized according to the number and types of clauses they contain. The names of the four types of sentences are **simple**, **compound**, **complex**, and **compound-complex**. You need to be familiar with these sentence patterns for a number of reasons:

1. **Variety.** Varying your sentence patterns creates interest and avoids monotony. Repeating a sentence pattern endlessly will bore even your most interested reader.
2. **Emphasis.** You can use these sentence patterns to emphasize the ideas that you think are more important than others.
3. **Grammar.** A knowledge of the basic sentence patterns of English will help you avoid the major sentence structure errors discussed in Section Three.

Being able to recognize and use these sentence patterns will help you control your writing and thus express your ideas more effectively.

The Simple Sentence

The introduction to this chapter points out that a sentence must contain at least one main clause. A sentence that contains only one main clause and no other clauses is called a **simple sentence**. However, a simple sentence is not necessarily an uncomplicated or short sentence because, in addition to its one main clause, it may contain a variety of phrases and modifiers.

The basic pattern for the simple sentence is subject–verb (SV). This pattern may vary in several ways:

EXAMPLES

S V

subject–verb (SV): The plane flew over the stadium.

V S

verb–subject (VS): Over the stadium flew the plane.

S S V

subject–subject–verb (SSV): The plane and the helicopter flew over the stadium.

S V V

subject–verb–verb (SVV): The plane flew over the stadium and turned north.

Below is a list of the most commonly used transitional words and phrases. Do not confuse these words or phrases with coordinating conjunctions or subordinating conjunctions.

accordingly	hence	next	thus
also	however	nonetheless	undoubtedly
besides	instead	otherwise	for instance
consequently	meanwhile	similarly	for example
finally	moreover	still	on the other hand
further	namely	then	that is
furthermore	nevertheless	therefore	

PRACTICE

Write compound sentences of your own according to the instructions.

1. A compound sentence that uses a comma and *but* to join two main clauses:

*I was very hungry after the game, but I decided not
to eat anything.*

2. A compound sentence that joins two main clauses with a semicolon:

3. A compound sentence that joins two main clauses with a semicolon and an appropriate transitional word or phrase followed by a comma:

4. A compound sentence that joins two main clauses with a comma and *yet*.

5. A compound sentence that joins two main clauses with a semicolon followed by the transitional word *however* or *therefore*:

The Complex Sentence

The **complex sentence** has the same subject–verb pattern (SV/SV) as the compound sentence. However, the complex sentence features only one main clause and always contains at least one subordinate clause and sometimes more than one. The subordinate clauses in a complex sentence may occur at any place in the sentence.

EXAMPLES

Before a main clause: ^S ^V After he retired from the Army, ^S ^V Eisenhower ran for president.

After a main clause: ^S ^V Rugby is a sport ^S ^V that I have played only once.

Interrupting a main clause: ^S ^S ^V Emilio's grandfather, who fought in World War II, ^V told him about his experiences during the war.

Before and after a main clause: ^S ^V When the pianist sat down at the piano, ^S ^V she played a melody that she had written recently.

PRACTICE

Write complex sentences of your own according to the instructions.

1. A complex sentence that includes an adjective clause using the relative pronoun *who*:

Zelda searched for three days to find the

person who had lost the German shepherd.

2. A complex sentence that ends with an adverb clause:

3. A complex sentence that contains an adjective clause using the relative pronoun *which*:

4. A complex sentence that begins with an adverb clause:

5. A complex sentence that contains an adjective clause that uses the word *where*:

The Compound-Complex Sentence

The **compound-complex sentence** is a combination of the compound and the complex sentence patterns. It is made up of two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. Therefore, it must contain a minimum of three sets of subjects and verbs (at least two main clauses and at least one subordinate clause).

EXAMPLES

main clause sub. clause

[On the day-long bicycle trip, Ophelia ate the food] [that she had packed,]

main clause

[but Henry had forgotten to bring anything to eat.]

sub. clause main clause

[Although he was exhausted,] [Ernesto cooked dinner for his mother,]

main clause

[and after dinner he cleaned the kitchen.]

main clause sub. clause

[The travelers were excited] [when they arrived in Paris;]

main clause

[they wanted to go sightseeing immediately.]

PRACTICE

Write compound-complex sentences of your own according to the instructions.

1. A compound-complex sentence that contains two main clauses joined by *and* and one adjective clause beginning with *who*:

Murphy, who works at the Mazda dealership, sold ten Miatas

last month, and this month he plans to sell even more.

2. A compound-complex sentence that contains two main clauses and an adverb clause. Use *or* to join the two main clauses.

3. A compound-complex sentence that contains two main clauses and an adjective clause. Use a semicolon and a transitional word or phrase to join the two main clauses.

4. A compound-complex sentence that contains two main clauses and two adverb clauses:

5. A compound-complex sentence with a pattern of your own choice:

PRACTICE

In the following sentences, write S above each subject and V above each verb. Then, in the spaces provided, identify the sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.

- S V
1. *Cinderella* is a European fairy tale with over five hundred versions. simple
 2. The oldest versions are from the ninth century; those early stories do not give Cinderella glass slippers. _____
 3. The glass slippers appeared when a French version of the story was translated incorrectly. _____
 4. In older versions, Cinderella's shoes were made of a rare metal or some other valuable covering. _____
 5. The French story used white squirrel fur for the slippers, but the French word that meant *fur* was similar to the word that meant *glass*. _____
 6. Charles Perrault, who translated the story in 1697, was the first person to describe the slippers as glass. _____
 7. Almost all later versions of the story depict Cinderella as wearing glass slippers. _____
 8. In most of the stories, Cinderella is helped by her fairy godmother; however, some versions use other characters. _____
 9. Although Cinderella's mother is dead, she magically appears in one story, and she takes the place of the fairy godmother. _____
 10. Sometimes cows or goats assist Cinderella, but in the Disney version mice come to her aid. _____

Section Two Review

1. A **simple sentence** contains only one main clause and no other clauses.
2. A **compound sentence** contains two or more main clauses that are joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon or a semicolon and a transitional word or phrase.
3. A **complex sentence** contains only one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.
4. A **compound-complex sentence** contains two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

Exercise 2A

In the spaces provided, identify the following sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.

1. Alex was the name of a famous African gray parrot. simple
2. Irene Pepperberg, who is a comparative psychologist, bought Alex from a pet shop in 1977. _____
3. For twenty-two years, Dr. Pepperberg taught Alex to do tasks that only a few nonhuman species can do. _____
4. Alex seemed to use words creatively. _____
5. Alex's speech was not just imitation; instead, it suggested reasoning and choice. _____
6. Dr. Pepperberg used a novel approach to teach Alex. _____
7. Another trainer competed with Alex for a reward, and Alex would learn by watching the other trainer. _____
8. When Alex was shown a blue paper triangle, he could identify the color, the shape, and the material. _____
9. He had not simply memorized the colors that go with objects; he also identified the correct colors of new objects. _____
10. Alex could identify fifty different objects, recognize quantities up to six, distinguish seven colors and five shapes, understand "bigger," "smaller," "same," and "different," and was learning the concepts of "over" and "under." _____
11. If Dr. Pepperberg asked Alex to identify the object that was orange and three-cornered, he would choose the right one. _____

Exercise 2A

continued

12. Sometimes Alex would grow tired of the questions, so he would ask to go back to his cage. _____
13. Although many researchers dispute Dr. Pepperberg's claims, others believe Alex demonstrated the intelligence of a five-year-old human. _____
14. According to some scientists, Alex expressed conscious thoughts and feelings. _____
15. African gray parrots often live for fifty years, but Alex died unexpectedly during the night in 2009 when he was less than thirty years old. _____

Exercise 2B

A. Combine each set of sentences to create the sentence type asked for. You may need to delete or change some words.

1. A simple sentence with the pattern verb–subject:
 - a. The ship was in the harbor.
 - b. The ship was a nineteenth-century three-masted schooner.

In the harbor was a nineteenth-century three-masted schooner.

2. A compound sentence:
 - a. Lance Armstrong had retired from racing.
 - b. He decided to return for one more Tour de France.
-
-

3. A complex sentence:
 - a. Hogart would not go to the dance.
 - b. Sheba changed her dress.
-
-

4. A simple sentence:
 - a. I plan to mow my lawn this morning.
 - b. I also plan to take a nap this afternoon.
-
-

5. A complex sentence:
 - a. Josh had not done his homework.
 - b. He could not go to the movie with his friends.
-
-

Exercise 2B

continued

6. A simple sentence:
- The spider saw the little girl.
 - The spider sat down beside her.

7. A compound sentence:
- The drought had lasted for three years.
 - No one was allowed to water lawns or wash cars.

8. A compound-complex sentence:
- The Subreality Cafe is a dark and gloomy place.
 - It appeals to people who wear black clothing and dark makeup.
 - It is one of the most popular cafes in the city.

9. A compound-complex sentence:
- “Richard Cory” is a song composed by Paul Simon.
 - It is included in Simon and Garfunkel’s album *Sounds of Silence*.
 - It is originally a poem composed by Edwin Arlington Robinson.

B. Following the instructions, construct sentences of your own.

10. A compound-complex sentence that uses a semicolon:

Exercise 2B

continued

- 11.** A complex sentence that includes an adjective clause:

- 12.** A compound sentence that uses a semicolon and a transitional word:

- 13.** A simple sentence:

- 14.** A complex sentence that includes an adverb clause at the beginning of the sentence:

- 15.** A compound-complex sentence that does not use a semicolon:

Exercise 2C

Identify the sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.

1. After dark, the shore near my cabin is a mysterious place where the absence of light creates a new reality. complex 2. As I was walking along the beach one night recently, I surprised a snow crab in the beam of my flashlight. _____ 3. He lay in a pit just above the surface as if he were watching the sea and waiting. _____ 4. When I turned off the flashlight, I could feel the darkness around me, and I felt alone with the snow crab. _____ 5. I could hear nothing but the elemental sounds of wind blowing over sand and water and waves crashing on the beach. _____ 6. When I am on that beach at night, time seems suspended, and I feel alone with the creatures of the shore. _____ 7. Those creatures, like the sea anemones and the shore birds, have been there since the dawn of time. _____ 8. As my eyes accustom themselves to the dark, the gulls and sanderlings become shadows. _____ 9. When I am surrounded by those sights, sounds, and smells, I feel transported into another, older world before humankind. _____ 10. The rhythm of the sea becomes the rhythm of the whole world, and the smell becomes a fundamental smell. _____ 11. On that recent night, I sat near that snow crab and watched the sea with him. _____ 12. Hidden beneath the water before me were patches of bright coral that were the home for blood-red starfish and green sea cucumbers. _____ 13. All seemed peaceful then, but on the shore the battle for survival rages incessantly. _____ 14. The largest shark and the smallest plankton must search constantly for the food that sustains them. _____ 15. In the dim light I saw several hermit crabs scurrying across the sand, and I turned from the dark shore toward the lights of my home. _____