



FOUR TRADITIONAL SENTENCE PATTERNS

Sentences have been traditionally described in English as being simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. This handout explains all four sentence types. It also describes coordination and subordination—two central techniques you can use to achieve different kinds of emphasis in your writing.

THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence has a single **subject-verb** combination.

Examples:

S V
Children play.

S V
The **game ended** early.

S V
My **car stalled** three times last week.

S V V V
The **lake has been polluted** by several neighboring streams.

A simple sentence may have more than one subject:

Examples:

S S V
Lola and Tony drove home.

S S V
The dog and cat raced down the street.

or more than one verb:

Examples:

S V V
The cat meowed and licked its paws.

S V V
The student ran out the door and answered his cellphone.

THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

A compound sentence is made up of two (or more) simple sentences. The two complete statements in a compound sentence are usually connected by a comma plus a coordinating conjunction (fanboys: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). A compound sentence is used when you want to give equal weight to two closely related ideas. The technique of showing that ideas have equal importance is called *coordination*.

Following are some compound sentences. Each sentence contains two ideas that the writer considers equal in importance.

The rain increased, **so** the officials canceled the game.

Martha wanted to go shopping, **but** Fred refused to go with her.

Tom was watching television in the family room, **and** Marie was upstairs on the phone.

Mike had to give up wood carving, **for** his arthritis had become very painful.

THE COMPLEX SENTENCE

A complex sentence is made up of a simple sentence (an independent clause) and a dependent clause that begins with a dependent word (also called a subordinator). Here is a list of dependent words:

after	if, even if	when, whenever
although, though	in order that	where, wherever
as	since	whether
because	that, so that	which, whichever
before	unless	while
even though	until	who
how	what, whatever	whose

A complex sentence is used when you want to emphasize one idea over another in a sentence.

Example:

dependent clause + independent clause = complex sentence
Because I forgot the time, I missed the final exam.

The idea that the writer wants to emphasize here ---I missed the final exam---is expressed in a complete thought. The less important idea---Because I forgot the time---is subordinated to the complete thought. The technique of giving one idea less emphasis than another is called **subordination**.

Following are other examples of complex sentences. In each case, the part starting with the dependent word is the less emphasized part of the sentence.

While Sue was eating breakfast, she began to feel sick.

Bobby went to class **although** he was fifteen minutes late.

When George lost his temper, he also lost his job.

Even though Rosa practiced for three months, she failed her driving test.

THE COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE

The compound-complex sentence is made up of two (or more) simple sentences (independent clauses) and one (or more) dependent clauses. In the following examples, the dependent clause is in bold and the simple sentences are underlined.

Example:

When the power went out, Jack was listening to the stereo, and Linda was reading in bed.

After George missed several days of school, he was behind in his classes, and he had to get a tutor.

When I go to bed at night, I try to read a book, but I always fall asleep.

Kate could not go to the concert **because she forgot she had a class,** so she gave her tickets to Thomas.