

Sentence Structure

Independent Clause

An independent clause contains a subject, verb, and complete thought. It is a complete sentence on its own.

- EXAMPLE: The dog likes sleeping.

Dependent Clause

A dependent clause contains a subject and verb but not a complete thought. It is often marked by a subordinating conjunction (AKA dependent marker words). It cannot stand on its own—it needs another clause to form a complete sentence.

- EXAMPLE: Because the dog likes sleeping

Subordinating Conjunctions

These words or phrases make a clause dependent, and they show a relationship between the dependent clause and independent clause.

- EXAMPLES: Because, for, unless, before, when, although, if, until, while, rather than, etc...

Prepositions

These words or phrases are used before a noun/pronoun to show the relationship between objects. Many subordinating conjunctions are also prepositions.

- EXAMPLES: To, in, during, at, on, under, outside, between, following, except for, etc...

Simple Sentence

A simple sentence contains just one independent clause.

- EXAMPLE: He likes walking.

Compound Sentence

A compound sentence contains multiple independent clauses (no dependent clauses).

- EXAMPLE: He likes walking, but he prefers running.

Complex Sentence

A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. It can start with either clause type, but note the necessary comma when starting with a dependent clause.

- DEPENDENT CLAUSE FIRST: Before going to bed, she brushed her teeth.
- INDEPENDENT CLAUSE FIRST: She brushed her teeth before going to bed.

Complex-Compound

A complex-compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. The clauses can be in any order.

- We are going to grill tonight because the weather is so nice, and we'll sit out on the patio.
- We are going to grill tonight, and we'll sit out on the patio because the weather is so nice.
- Because the weather is so nice, we are going to grill tonight, and we'll sit out on the patio.
- We'll sit out on the patio because the weather is so nice, and we are going to grill tonight.
- We'll sit out on the patio, and we are going to grill tonight because the weather is so nice.
- Because the weather is so nice, we'll sit out on the patio, and we are going to grill tonight.

COMMON ERRORS

Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence contains two or more independent clauses joined incorrectly. There are two types: comma splices and fused sentences. A comma splice is two or more independent clauses joined with only a comma. A fused sentence is two or more independent clauses with nothing to separate them.

- **COMMA SPLICE:** My watch stopped working, I had to replace the batteries.
- **FUSED SENTENCE:** My watch stopped working I had to replace the batteries.

Correct both types of run-on sentences by using one of the correct ways to join independent clauses:

- **PERIOD:** My watch stopped working. I had to replace the batteries.
- **SEMICOLON:** My watch stopped working; I had to replace the batteries.
- **SEMICOLON + TRANSITION:** My watch stopped working; therefore, I had to replace the batteries.
- **COMMA + COORDINATING CONJUNCTION:** My watch stopped working, so I had to replace the batteries.
- **ADD SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION TO EITHER CLAUSE:** After my watch stopped working, I had to replace the batteries.

Fragment

A fragment is a phrase that is missing a subject, verb, or complete thought. Correct it by adding the missing element.

- **MISSING SUBJECT:** Curled up on my lap → My cat curled up on my lap.
- **MISSING VERB:** The soft ball of fur → The soft ball of fur slept in the sun.
- **MISSING COMPLETE THOUGHT:** When I pet her on the head → I pet her on the head. *OR* When I pet her on the head, she purrs at me.