
Writing Correct and Complete Sentences

You should read this chapter if you need to review or learn about



- Identifying sentences
- The four sentence functions
- The four sentence forms
- Identifying and correcting run-on sentences
- Identifying and correcting sentence fragments and comma splices

Get Started



Here we will focus on sentences and sentence parts masquerading as sentences. First, you will discover how to identify sentences by their function and form. Then you will practice correcting incomplete and incorrect sentences.

What is a Sentence?

Sentence: Halt!

Sentence: You halt!

Sentence: Please halt right now, before you go any further.

Each of these three word groups is a sentence because they each meet the three requirements for a sentence. To be a sentence, a group of words must

- Have a *subject* (noun or pronoun)
- Have a *predicate* (verb or verb phrase)
- Express a *complete thought*

A *sentence* has two parts: a *subject* and a *predicate*. The *subject* includes the noun or pronoun that tells what the subject is about. The *predicate* includes the verb that describes what the subject is doing.

Subject	Predicate
(<i>You</i> is understood but unstated)	Halt!
Age	is the outrageous price paid for maturity.
A crocodile	cannot stick its tongue out.
Several tourists	are lost in the winding roads of Corfu.
Some toothpastes	contain antifreeze.

Therefore, a sentence is a group of words with two main parts: a subject area and a predicate area. Together, the subject and predicate express a complete thought.

Being able to recognize the subject and the verb in a sentence will help you make sure that your own sentences are complete and clear. To check that you've included the subject and verb in your sentences, follow these steps:

- To find the subject, ask yourself, "What word is the sentence describing?"
- To find an action verb, ask yourself, "What did the subject do?"
- If you can't find an action verb, look for a linking verb.

Quick Tip



In a question, the verb often comes before the subject. For example: "Is the ice cream in the freezer?" The verb is *is*; the subject is *ice cream*.

The Four Different Sentence Functions

In addition to classifying sentences by the number of clauses they contain, we can pigeonhole sentences according to their function. There are four sentence functions in English: *declarative*, *exclamatory*, *interrogative*, and *imperative*.

1. *Declarative sentences* state an idea. They end with a period.
Grasshoppers contain more than 60 percent protein.
Insects are rich in necessary vitamins and minerals.
Crickets are packed with calcium, a mineral crucial for bone growth.
Termites and caterpillars are a rich source of iron.
2. *Exclamatory sentences* show strong emotions. They end with an exclamation mark.
I can't believe you left the car at the station overnight!
What a mess you made in the kitchen!
Our evening is ruined!
The china is smashed!
3. *Interrogative sentences* ask a question. They end with a question mark.
Who would eat bugs?
Where did you put the eraser?
Would you please help me with this package?
What do you call this dish?
4. *Imperative sentences* give orders or directions, and so end with a period or an exclamation mark. Imperative sentences often omit the subject, as in a command.
Take this route to save 5 miles.
Clean up your room!
Sit down and listen!
Fasten your seatbelts when the sign is illuminated.

The Four Different Sentence Types

In Chapter 7, you reviewed independent and dependent clauses. These word groups can be used in a number of ways to form the four basic types of sentences: *simple*, *compound*, *complex*, *compound-complex*. Let's look at these sentence types now.

You may also add a conjunctive adverb to this construction. The following words are conjunctive adverbs:

accordingly	afterall	again	also
besides	consequently	finally	for example
for instance	furthermore	however	indeed
moreover	nevertheless	nonetheless	notwithstanding
on the other hand	otherwise	regardless	still
then	therefore	though	thus

The sentence construction looks like this:

independent clause; conjunctive adverb, independent clause

Grasshoppers eat clean plants; indep. clause	however, conj. adv.	lobsters eat foul materials. indep. clause
Nico worked hard; indep. clause	therefore conj. adv.	she got a merit raise. indep. clause

Quick Tip



Don't join the two parts of a compound sentence with a comma because you will end up with a type of run-on sentence called a *comma splice*. More on this later in this chapter.

3. Complex sentences

A *complex sentence* contains one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. The independent clause is called the *main clause*. These sentences use *subordinating conjunctions* to link ideas. The subordinating conjunctions include such words as: *because, as, as if, unless, provided that, if, even if*. A complete list of subordinating conjunctions appears in Chapter 7.

Since insects don't have much muscle, dep. clause	their texture is similar to that of a clam. indep. clause
No one answered indep. clause	when he called the house. dep. clause
It was no secret indep. clause	that he was very lazy. dep. clause

4. Compound-complex sentences

A *compound-complex sentence* has at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. The dependent clause can be part of the independent clause.

When the drought comes, dep. clause	the reservoirs dry up, indep. clause	and residents know that water restrictions will be in effect. indep. clause
Chris wanted to drive to work, indep. clause	but she couldn't indep. clause	until her car was repaired. dep. clause

Choosing Sentence Types

You now have four different types of sentences to use as you craft your ideas into language: simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. Which ones should you use?

Should you write mainly simple sentences, as Ernest Hemingway did? Perhaps you should use complex sentences, favored by Charles Dickens and William Faulkner. Consider the Big Three—*purpose*, *audience*, and *subject*—as you craft your sentences:

- *Purpose.* Always consider your purpose for writing before you select a sentence type. Are you trying to entertain, persuade, tell a story, or describe? Sentences that describe are often long, while those that persuade may be much shorter. However, this guideline isn't firm: The length and complexity of your sentences also depends on your audience, topic, and personal style.
- *Audience.* Your choice of sentences also depends on your audience. For example, the more sophisticated your audience, the longer and more complex your sentences can be. Conversely, the less sophisticated your audience, the shorter and simpler your sentences should be.
- *Subject.* Your choice of sentence types also depends on your subject matter. The more complex your ideas, the simpler your sentences should be. This helps your audience grasp your ideas.

Overall, most effective sentences are concise, conveying their meaning in as few words as possible. Effective sentences stress the main point or the most important detail. This ensures that your readers understand your point. Most writers—professional as well as amateur—use a combination of all four sentence types to convey their meaning.

Quick Tip



No matter which sentence form you select, remember that every sentence must provide clear and complete information.

Sentence Errors: Run-on Sentences and Comma Splices

There are two basic types of sentence errors: *fragments* and *run-on sentences*. These problems with sentence construction confuse your readers and obscure your meaning. Their use will also result in clumsy, unpolished writing and speech. Let's look at each of these sentence errors in detail so that you'll be able to fix them with ease.

As you've learned, there are two types of clauses: *independent* and *dependent*.

- *Independent clauses* are complete sentences because they have a subject, a verb, and express a complete thought.

I go to the movies every Saturday night.

Richard Nixon's favorite drink was a dry martini.

- *Dependent clauses* cannot stand alone because they do not express a complete thought, even though they have a subject and a verb.

Since *I* *enjoy* the movies.
subject. verb

Because Richard Nixon's favorite *drink* *was* a dry martini.
subject. verb

A *run-on sentence* is two incorrectly joined independent clauses. A *comma splice* is a run-on sentence with a comma where the two independent clauses run together. When your sentences run together, your ideas are garbled.

Run-on: Our eyes are always the same size from birth our nose and ears never stop growing.

Corrected: Our eyes are always the same size from birth, *but* our nose and ears never stop growing.

Run-on: A duck's quack doesn't echo, no one knows why.

Corrected: A duck's quack doesn't echo; no one knows why.

or

A duck's quack doesn't echo, *and* no one knows why.

Run-on: The traditional sonnet has 14 lines, 10 syllables make up each line.

Corrected: The traditional sonnet has 14 lines; 10 syllables make up each line.

or

The traditional sonnet has 14 lines, *and* 10 syllables make up each line.

Quick Tip



Run-on sentences are not necessarily long. Some can be quite short, in fact.

Mary fell asleep John left. Nick cooked Rita cleaned up.

You can correct a run-on sentence in four ways. Let's use the following example.

Water and wind are the two main causes of erosion, they constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

1. Divide the run-on sentence into two sentences with the appropriate end punctuation, such as a period, exclamation mark, or a question mark.

Water and wind are the two main causes of erosion. They constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

2. Add a coordinating conjunction (*and, nor, but, or, for, yet, so*) to create a compound sentence.

Water and wind are the two main causes of erosion, *for* they constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

3. Add a subordinating conjunction to create a complex sentence.

Since water and wind are the two main causes of erosion, they constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

4. Use a semicolon to create a compound sentence.

Water and wind are the two main causes of erosion; they constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

Here's what the sentence looks like with a conjunctive adverb added:

Water and wind are the two main causes of erosion; *as a result*, they constantly change the appearance of the Earth.

Which corrected version do you choose? Select the one that best suits your audience, purpose, and writing style. Ask yourself these questions as you decide:

- Which version will my readers like best?
- Which version will most clearly and concisely communicate my message?
- Which version fits best with the rest of the passage?

Sentence Errors: Fragments

As its name suggests, a *sentence fragment* is a group of words that do not express a complete thought. Most times, a fragment is missing a subject, a verb, or both. Other times, a fragment

may have a subject and a verb but still not express a complete thought. Fragments can be phrases as well as clauses.

Quick Tip



Sentence fragments are common and acceptable in speech, but not in writing—unless you are recreating dialogue in a short story or novel.

There are three main ways that fragments occur.

1. Fragments occur when a dependent clause masquerades as a sentence.
Because more and more teenagers are staying up far too late.
Since they do not compensate for the sleep they miss.
2. Fragments also happen when a phrase is cut off from the sentence it describes.
Used to remove a wide variety of stains on carpets and upholstery.
Trying to prevent the new cotton shirt from shrinking in the dryer.
3. You can also create a fragment if you use the wrong form of a verb.
The frog *gone* to the pond by the reservoir.
Saffron *being* a very costly and pungent spice.

Quick Tip



Don't be misled by a capital letter at the beginning of a word group. Starting a group of words with a capital letter doesn't make the word group a sentence. It just makes it a fragment that starts with a capital letter.

You can correct a fragment three ways:

1. Add the missing part to the sentence.
Fragment: Because more and more teenagers are staying up far too late.
Complete: Because more and more teenagers are staying up far too late, they are sleep deprived.
Fragment: Since they do not compensate for the sleep they miss.
Complete: Since they do not compensate for the sleep they miss, teenagers often get cranky in the afternoon.

Fragment: Used to remove a wide variety of stains on carpets and upholstery.

Complete: This product is used to remove a wide variety of stains on carpets and upholstery.

Fragment: Trying to prevent the new cotton shirt from shrinking in the dryer.

Complete: Jean was trying to prevent the new cotton shirt from shrinking in the dryer.

2. Correct the misused verb.

Fragment: The frog *gone* to the pond by the reservoir.

Complete: The frog *went* to the pond by the reservoir.

Fragment: Saffron *being* a very costly and pungent spice.

Complete: Saffron *is* a very costly and pungent spice.

3. Omit the subordinating conjunction or connect it to another sentence.

Fragment: *Because* more and more teenagers are staying up far too late.

Complete: More and more teenagers are staying up far too late.

Fragment: *Since* they do not compensate for the sleep they miss.

Complete: They do not compensate for the sleep they miss.



- ✓ A *sentence* has a subject, a verb, and expresses a complete thought.
- ✓ The four sentence functions are *declarative*, *exclamatory*, *interrogative*, *imperative*.
- ✓ The four types of sentences are *simple*, *compound*, *complex*, *compound-complex*.
- ✓ *Run-on sentences* are incorrectly joined independent clauses; *fragments* are parts of sentences. Both are considered incorrect in formal written speech (although fragments are often used in written dialogue).



QUESTIONS

True-False Questions

1. A *sentence* has two parts: a *subject* and a *predicate*.
2. The *predicate* includes the noun or pronoun that tells what the subject is about. The *subject* includes the verb that describes what the subject is doing.
3. Together, the subject and predicate express a complete thought.
4. In a question, the verb often comes after the subject.

5. *Declarative sentences* state an idea. They end with a period.
6. The following is a declarative sentence:
Antonia ('Tonie') Nathan, the 1972 vice-presidential candidate of the Libertarian party, was the first woman in American history to receive an electoral vote.
7. *Exclamatory sentences* ask a question. They end with a question mark.
8. The following is an exclamatory sentence:
What career did Ronald Reagan have before he became president?
9. *Interrogative sentences* give orders or directions, and so end with a period or an exclamation mark.
10. The following is an interrogative sentence:
Where did you put my mink coat?
11. *Imperative sentences* give orders or directions, and so end with a period or an exclamation mark.
12. The following is an imperative sentence:
Extinguish all smoking material while the sign is lit.
13. A *simple sentence* has two or more independent clauses.
14. The following is a simple sentence:
When the Hoovers did not want to be overheard by White House guests, they spoke to each other in Chinese.
15. A *compound sentence* has two or more independent clauses.
16. The following is a compound sentence:
Andrew Johnson, the seventeenth president, was the only self-educated tailor ever to serve as president.
17. Don't join the two parts of a compound sentence with a comma because you will end up with a type of run-on sentence called a "comma splice."
18. The following is a run-on sentence:
Julie Nixon, daughter of Richard Nixon, married David Eisenhower, son of Dwight D. Eisenhower.
19. The following is a run-on sentence:
William Henry Harrison was the first president to die in office, he was the oldest president ever elected.
20. The following sentence is a fragment:
Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy Davis opposite each other in the movie *Hellcats of the Navy*.

Completion Questions

Select the word that best completes each sentence.

1. Effective sentences stress the (minor, main) point or the most important detail.
2. A run-on sentence is the same as a (fragment, comma splice).

3. There are two basic types of sentence errors: *fragments* and (*run-on sentences, independent clauses*).
4. (*Dependent, Independent*) *clauses* are complete sentences because they have a subject and a verb and express a complete thought.
5. (*Dependent, Independent*) *clauses* cannot stand alone because they do not express a complete thought, even though they have a subject and a verb.
6. You can join the clauses in a compound sentence with a coordinating conjunction or a (semicolon, preposition).
7. The word (nonetheless, and) is a conjunctive adverb.
8. A *complex sentence* contains one independent clause and at least one (dependent clause, adjective).
9. The independent clause in a complex sentence is called the (“subordinate clause,” “main clause”).
10. A *compound-complex sentence* has at least two (independent, short) clauses and at least one dependent clause.
11. In a *compound-complex sentence*, the dependent clause (cannot, can) be part of the independent clause.
12. The length and complexity of your sentences depends on your audience, topic, and (personal style, readers).
13. The more complex your ideas, the (more difficult, simpler) your sentences should be.
14. Overall, most effective sentences are (concise, verbose), conveying their meaning in as few words as possible.
15. Fragments also happen when a phrase is (added to, cut off from) the sentence it describes.

Multiple-Choice Questions

Choose the best answer to each question.

1. To be a sentence, a group of words must have all the following *but*
 - (a) A subject
 - (b) An adjective
 - (c) A verb
 - (d) A complete thought
2. The four sentence functions in English include all the following *except*
 - (a) Declarative
 - (b) Exclamatory
 - (c) Declining
 - (d) Interrogative

3. Which of the following sentences is best classified as exclamatory?
 - (a) People in Bali remove the wings from dragonflies and boil the bodies in coconut milk and garlic.
 - (b) The birds in my yard help keep the insect population under control.
 - (c) Look at that gorgeous insect on the fence!
 - (d) Would you eat insects?
4. Which of the following sentences is interrogative?
 - (a) A new language can come into being as a pidgin.
 - (b) A pidgin is a makeshift jargon containing words of various languages and little in the way of grammar.
 - (c) The leap into a “true” language is made when the pidgin speakers have children!
 - (d) Is language innate in humans?
5. Which of the following is *not* a declarative sentence?
 - (a) Venezuelans like to feast on fresh fire-roasted tarantulas.
 - (b) Eating insects is disgusting!
 - (c) In Japan, gourmets relish aquatic fly larvae sautéed in sugar and soy sauce.
 - (d) Many South Africans adore fried termites with cornmeal porridge.
6. When you are deciding which sentence types to use, consider all the following factors *except*
 - (a) Purpose
 - (b) Your handwriting
 - (c) Audience
 - (d) Subject
7. Which of the following is a simple sentence?
 - (a) The “ZIP” in zip code stands for “zone improvement plan.”
 - (b) Lyndon Johnson loved the soda Fresca so much he had a fountain installed in the Oval Office that dispensed the beverage, which the president could operate by pushing a button on his desk chair.
 - (c) There was some question as to whether Barry Goldwater could legally serve as president because the Constitution requires presidents to be born in the United States and Goldwater was born in Arizona before it was a state.
 - (d) Despite being only five stories high, the Pentagon is one of the biggest office buildings in the world.
8. Which of the following is a compound sentence?
 - (a) Sirimauo Bandranaike of Sri Lanka became the world’s first popularly elected female head of state in 1960.
 - (b) Andrew Jackson was the only U.S. president who believed that the world was flat.
 - (c) Six-time Socialist party candidate for President of the United States Norman

Thomas never polled more than 884,000 popular votes in one election, but his influence on American political and social thought was very effective.

- (d) The first U.S. president to ride in an automobile was William McKinley.
9. Which of the following is a complex sentence?
- (a) George Washington's false teeth were made of whale bone.
 - (b) George Washington was deathly afraid of being buried alive.
 - (c) Washington's second inaugural address was 138 words long.
 - (d) If children are capable of creating grammar without any instruction, then such grammar must preexist in their brains.
10. Which of the following is a compound-complex sentence?
- (a) When President Franklin Pierce ran down an elderly woman, the charges against him could not be proven, and the case was dismissed.
 - (b) When George Washington was elected president, there was a king in France, a czarina in Russia, an emperor in China, and a shogun in Japan.
 - (c) George Washington had to borrow money to go to his own inauguration.
 - (d) James K. Polk was the only president to have been Speaker of the House.
11. Which word group is a fragment?
- (a) The Pentagon has more than 3 million square feet of office space it can house about 30,000 employees.
 - (b) Theodore Roosevelt's wife and mother dying on the same day.
 - (c) Currently, there are more handwritten letters from George Washington than from John F. Kennedy.
 - (d) The Baby Ruth candy bar was actually named after Grover Cleveland's baby daughter, Ruth.
12. Which of the following sentences is correct?
- (a) For example, thousands of edible termites can be raised in a 6-foot mound the same number of cattle requires hundreds of acres of grassland.
 - (b) For example, thousands of edible termites can be raised in a 6-foot mound, the same number of cattle requires hundreds of acres of grassland.
 - (c) For example, thousands of edible termites can be raised in a 6-foot mound; the same number of cattle requires hundreds of acres of grassland.
 - (d) For example, thousands of edible termites can be raised in a 6-foot mound however the same number of cattle requires hundreds of acres of grassland.
13. Which of the following sentences is correct?
- (a) We may think of insects as dirty, they are actually cleaner than other creatures.
 - (b) We may think of insects as dirty they are actually cleaner than other creatures.
 - (c) We may think of insects as dirty, but they are actually cleaner than other creatures.
 - (d) We may think of insects as dirty since they are actually cleaner than other creatures.

14. Which of the following sentences is correct?
- (a) More than one million species of insects and worms exist, and humans can eat about 1,400 of these species.
 - (b) More than one million species of insects and worms exist, humans can eat about 1,400 of these species.
 - (c) More than one million species of insects and worms exist humans can eat about 1,400 of these species.
 - (d) More than one million species of insects and worms exist so humans can eat about 1,400 of these species.
15. Which of the following sentences is correct?
- (a) Those polled were most repulsed about American fast food, they had difficulty with the concept of washing down ground beef with melted ice cream.
 - (b) Those polled were most repulsed about American fast food they had difficulty with the concept of washing down ground beef with melted ice cream.
 - (c) Those polled were most repulsed about American fast food, they had difficulty with the concept of washing down ground beef with melted ice cream.
 - (d) Those polled were most repulsed about American fast food because they had difficulty with the concept of washing down ground beef with melted ice cream.
16. Which of the following sentences is correct?
- (a) You know that insects are healthful, but what do they taste like.
 - (b) You know that insects are healthful what do they taste like!
 - (c) You know that insects are healthful, what do they taste like?
 - (d) You know that insects are healthful, but what do they taste like?

Further Exercises

Correct all the sentence errors in the following paragraph.

Not surprisingly each type of insects has its own taste. One type of caterpillar has been compared to a mushroom omelet a Mexican stinkbug has a pleasant cinnamon flavor despite its unappealing name. Catherine Fowler a professor of anthropology at the University of Nevada, Reno described the taste of Pandora moth caterpillars as “very good like scrambled egg omelet with mushrooms.” Tom Turpin a professor of Entomology at Purdue University enjoys “chocolate chirpy cookies” chocolate chip cookies with roasted crickets. Gene DeFoliart likes greater wax moth larvae, tastes like bacon when deep fried.