



Sentence Structure

This resource page contains basic information about the structure of sentences, the types of sentences, and the errors that are most common amongst student writers.

Subjects & Predicates

A sentence must contain both a subject and a predicate in order to be considered a complete sentence.

The *subject* addresses the someone or something that the writer is referring to in his or her sentence; it is the individual participating in the action. Keep in mind that the subject is usually, but not always, mentioned first in the sentence. In the sentence below, the subjects are highlighted in red.

- **Lauren** is a tutor in the Writing Center.
- Before she leaves for the day, **Jessie** makes sure all her paperwork is completed.
- **Jensen and I** are going to Disney World for the weekend.

A *predicate* provides the reader with information about the subject. The sentences mentioned above are repeated in this section, but instead highlight the predicates in blue.

- Lauren **is a tutor for the Writing Center.**
- Before she leaves for the day, Jessie **makes sure all her paperwork is completed.**
- Jensen and I **are going to Disney World for the weekend.**

Sentence Types

Sentences can be determined by the number of clauses they contain. A clause is a part of a sentence that contains both a subject and a predicate. The four types of sentences are as follows:

Simple Sentence: a sentence that consists of an independent clause.

- I like coffee.
- I have homework.

Compound Sentence: a sentence that consists of two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction (the most common coordinating conjunctions are: but, or, and, so).

- I like coffee **but** David prefers tea.
- I have homework **and** a psychology exam to study for.

Complex Sentence: a sentence that consists of an independent clause, as well as one or more, dependent clauses (a dependent clause starts with a subordinating junction such as that, because, although, while, where, if).

- I drove the car **while** Lana scanned her map for the quickest route.
- I have homework **because** I failed to finish my assignment during class.



Compound Complex Sentence: a sentence that contains two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

- **Although I like to go to Dunkin Donuts, I have not had the time to go recently, and I have not found anyone to go with.**

In the example provided above, the independent clauses have been highlighted in red and the dependent clauses have been highlighted in blue.

Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is a sentence not consisting of two sentences that have not been separated with an end punctuation mark. These can include both fused sentences, and comma splices. The original sentence, as well as the corrected sentence, can be seen in the examples listed below. The error is highlighted in red while the correct version is highlighted in blue.

- I like all the tutors in the Writing Center **they are extremely knowledgeable.** (Fused sentence)
I like all the tutors in the Writing Center. **They are extremely knowledgeable.**
- Dean forgot to bring his science project to class **he left his assignment on the kitchen table.** (Fused Sentence)
Dean forgot to bring his science project to class. **He left his assignment on the kitchen table.**
- Today I am tired, **I will take a nap.** (Comma splice)
- Today I am tired. **I will take a nap.**
- The children wanted to stay up all night, **the parents wanted to go to bed.** (Comma splice)
- The children wanted to stay up all night. **The parents wanted to go to bed.**

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a sentence that does not contain a completed idea; the sentence is unfinished. Leaving a dependent clause to stand on its own without an independent clause is a common mistake amongst students. In the examples listed below, the error is highlighted in red with the corrections highlighted in blue.

- I don't think I am going to receive a good grade on my paper. **Because I started it last minute.**
- I don't think I am going to receive a good grade on my paper **because I started it last minute.**
- I became extremely frustrated with my partner. **After she refused to help me work on the final project.**
- I became extremely frustrated with my partner. **She refused to help me work on the final project.**