

Sentence Types

As you know, in order to form a sentence in English, you must have two components, a subject and a verb. Needless to say, however, almost all English sentences consist of more than a subject and a verb, and often you will find multiple subjects and verbs in a single sentence. This lesson will help you learn the four basic sentence types in English. We'll start with the simplest and move through the most complicated.

Sentence type 1: SIMPLE SENTENCE

In English, the most basic sentence will have both a subject and a verb and will express a complete thought. Of course, we often add elements to a sentence in order to provide more detail. For instance, we might add adjectives or adverbs or different types of phrases. Below you will see a very simple sentence, just a subject and verb. Then I'll show you how it looks with some added elements.

The boy runs. (boy = subject and runs = verb)

The boy runs for the high school track team. (same sentence, but I've added a prepositional phrase, "for the high school track team")

The boy runs very slowly. (same sentence, but now I've added two adverbs, "very" and "slowly")

The tall boy runs. (same sentence, but now I've added the adjective, "tall")

Wanting to join a sport's team, the boy runs for the high school track team.
(same sentence, but now I've added the participial phrase, "wanting to join a sport's team" and the prepositional phrase, "for the high school track team")

Despite adding the different phrases or modifiers, you still have the basic sentence, "The boy runs." This is called a **simple sentence**. It is a sentence with a subject and verb that can stand on its own as a complete thought.

When you have a subject and verb that can stand alone as a complete thought, this is called an **independent clause**. A **clause** means that a group of words has a subject and a verb. **Independent** means that the clause has the ability to stand alone, meaning it is a complete sentence. **Each simple sentence has one independent clause.**

PRACTICE

Below are ten sentences. Circle the subject and underline the verb in each "sentence." On the line in front of each, write **SS** if the sentence is a simple sentence (subject and verb and a complete thought) or **NSS** for not a simple sentence. You will know that you do not have a simple sentence if you cannot find both a subject and a verb to go with it. Remember, when you say the subject and the verb together, they must make sense (ex.: boy runs).

_____ 1. The beach house blew away during the hurricane.

- _____ 2. My brother cut the grass on Saturday.
- _____ 3. Finding the book extremely boring, I took it back to the library.
- _____ 4. The flag waving in the breeze.
- _____ 5. In the distance I could hear thunder.
- _____ 6. To open a can of tuna for lunch.
- _____ 7. Shorts hanging on the line.
- _____ 8. I raised my hand for the question.
- _____ 9. Since last year I have not gotten an F on my report card.
- _____ 10. Steven, finding the quarter on the sidewalk.

Perhaps you've been wondering if simple sentences can have more than one subject and one verb. The answer to that question is a qualified yes. If this occurs, the subjects and verbs must be joined by a conjunction and still express only one thought. Here are some examples.

Margaret and Michele had a huge fight last week.

There are two subjects in this sentence, "Margaret" and "Michele." They are joined by the conjunction "and." Despite using the word "and," you cannot split the sentence into two parts. You need both "Margaret" and "Michele" to have a complete thought.

Margaret laughed and hung up the phone.

There are two verbs in this sentence, "laughed" and "hung." The subject, "Margaret," is performing two actions ("laughed" and "hung"). Again, you cannot split the sentence where the "and" is. You need both parts to make a complete thought.

Sentence Type 2: COMPOUND SENTENCE

The second type of English sentence is called a **compound sentence**. In this type of sentence, you will find two complete thoughts joined by a conjunction such as *and, but, or, nor*. An easy way to tell if you have a compound sentence is to cross out the conjunction and see if you have a complete thought on both sides of the conjunction. Here is an example:

Michael washed the dishes, and Susan vacuumed the house.

If you were to cross out “and,” would you have two complete thoughts? Yes, you have, in effect, two sentences: **Michael washed the dishes. Susan vacuumed the house.** The sentence above, then, is a compound sentence.

You are correct if you noticed that a **compound sentence consists of two (or possibly more) independent clauses**. Remember, an independent clause means you have a group of words with a subject and a verb, and that group of words can stand alone as a complete thought. In the sentence above, you have **two independent clauses: Michael washed the dishes/Susan vacuumed the house.**

Is it possible to have more than **two independent clauses**? Yes. Here is an example:

Michael washed the dishes, Susan vacuumed the house, and Thomas did the laundry.

It is easy to see that there are **three independent clauses in this sentence: Michael washed the dishes/Susan vacuumed the house/Thomas did the laundry.** Each of these clauses could stand alone as a complete thought.

Let’s look at punctuation with **compound sentences**. If you use a conjunction (*and, but, or, nor*), the comma is placed **in front of the conjunction**. It is also possible to join two closely related **independent clauses** with a semicolon. Here is an example:

Michael washed the dishes; Susan dried them.

PRACTICE

Below are ten compound sentences. In each, underline the conjunction joining the two independent clauses and then place each independent clause in parentheses. Finally, mark the subject in each independent clause with an S and the verb in each independent clause with a V. An example is done for you.

S V S V
(Michael washed the dishes), and (Susan dried them).

1. I wanted to watch a movie, but Bill wanted to skateboard.
2. After lunch we walked to Spanish, but Jim skipped the class.

3. I like Gmail, but my best friend uses Yahoo.
4. Lying in the sun for three hours, I got a terrible sunburn, but Marie did not burn at all.
5. I might do my homework tonight, or I may decide to do it in the morning.
6. Use an encyclopedia, or find the information online. (hint: don't forget that "you" is sometimes the understood subject of a clause)
7. At batting practice I hit an amazing number of pitches, but Mark struck out every time.
8. You can lie on the couch all day, or you can do something productive.
9. I have not read any of the *Harry Potter* books, nor have I read any of the *Twilight* series.
10. Tom cleaned the scallops; I wrapped them in bacon.

PRACTICE

Beside each sentence below, write S if the sentence is a simple sentence (one independent clause) or C if the sentence is a compound sentence (two or more independent clauses). You may find it helpful to mark the subjects and verbs before you decide on the sentence type.

- _____ 1. Did you find your wallet?
- _____ 2. I like pretzels, but George prefers popcorn.
- _____ 3. My dad drives a cool Fiat Abarth, but my mom drives a boring Subaru Forester.
- _____ 4. My sister is leaving for college in a week.
- _____ 5. Someone broke into our house last night.
- _____ 6. I did the experiments; Tim recorded the results.
- _____ 7. My grandmother makes a great apple pie, but my aunt makes the best chocolate cake.
- _____ 8. After the last class of the day, I went home and slept for three hours.
- _____ 9. No one in my class has read *War and Peace*.
- _____ 10. My brother snowboards, and my sister skis.

Sentence type 3: COMPLEX SENTENCE

The third type of English sentence is the **complex sentence**. Recall that an **independent clause** is a group of words with a subject and verb that can stand alone and express a complete thought (a sentence). We also have a clause in English called a **dependent clause**. This type of clause is a group of words with a subject and verb, but **this group cannot stand on its own** and does not express a complete thought. This type of clause is called a **dependent or subordinate clause**. You can recognize such a clause by the introductory word that begins this type of clause. These introductory words are words such as *when, why, because, whenever, though, although, if, until, how, while, unless, after, before, as, as if, unless, so that, since, where, who, whose, whom, which, that, etc.* All of these introductory words make it impossible for the clause that follows it to stand on its own. Here are some examples of **dependent clauses**:

- **when you find the answer**
- **why he ran away**
- **if you need more time**
- **because you lost the money**
- **whenever you are ready**
- **though you know the answer**
- **although he agrees with me**
- **until time is called**
- **how he found out**
- **while you work on the cake**
- **unless you can tell me**
- **after I find the solution**
- **before time is called**
- **as the clock struck midnight**
- **unless you can raise the money**
- **so that we can open the bidding**
- **since you already have the answer**
- **where the wild things are free**
- **who can run the fastest**
- **whose name has the most syllables**
- **whom we know to be reliable**
- **which made him ill**
- **that belongs to our neighbors**

As you can easily see, each group of words above has a subject and verb. Sometimes the subject is the introductory word (“who” in “who can run the fastest” or “which” in “which makes no difference”). None of these **dependent clauses** can stand alone, however. Each dependent clause “depends” on an **independent clause** to make it a complete thought. Once we add an **independent clause** to each of the **dependent clauses** above, we can form a complete sentence. The **dependent clause** can be either at the beginning of the sentence or at the end. You can also have several dependent clauses in a sentence as long as you have an **independent clause** in the sentence.

A complex sentence is one independent clause plus one or more dependent clauses. Here are the **dependent clauses** added to an **independent clause**. **The result is a sentence:**

- **When you find the answer**, let me know.
- I know **why he ran away**.
- **If you need more time**, I can give you more time.
- I can't reimburse you **because you lost the money**.

- We can go **whenever you are ready**.
- **Though you know the answer**, you shouldn't raise your hand.
- **Although he agrees with me**, he won't tell anyone.
- You can't stop **until time is called**.
- I really don't know **how he found out**.
- **While you work on the cake**, I will make the icing.
- **Unless you can tell me**, I won't know when to stop.
- I will call you **after I find the solution**.
- You cannot stop **before time is called**.
- **As the clock struck midnight**, the coach turned into a pumpkin.
- **Unless you can raise the money**, you will lose your house.
- Raise your hand **so that we can open the bidding**.
- **Since you already have the answer**, please write it on the board.
- I want to go **where the wild things are free**.
- We will never know **who can run the fastest**.
- Take the people **whose name has the most syllables**.
- I hired Bill Smith, **whom we know to be reliable**.
- He ate the spoiled mushrooms, **which made him ill**.
- We found the dog **that belongs to our neighbors**.

As you can see from the sentences above, once you add an **independent clause** to a **dependent clause**, you can form a complete sentence. This type of sentence is called a **complex sentence**. A **complex sentence** has **one independent and one or more dependent clauses**.

PRACTICE

Below are some dependent clauses. They cannot stand alone as sentences. Add an independent clause to each of the following dependent clauses to create a complex sentence. You may add the independent clause either before or after the dependent clause. An example is done for you.

Example: after the rain stopped

Answer: We went swimming after the rain stopped.

1. if you find my CD

2. that makes no sense

3. so that the project is completed on time

4. since everyone agrees

5. because you don't understand me

6. while he tried to sleep

7. although he gave it his best shot

8. whenever the bell rings

9. after the party was over

10. before class begins

Practice

Below are ten complex sentences. In each sentence underline the independent clause once and the dependent clause twice. Two sentences have two dependent clauses, so watch for those!

1. He is sitting in the chair that is falling apart.

2. Although he hasn't read the book, he has decided to write a book report on it.

3. While you cook dinner, I will set the table.

4. After he left the dance, Bill drove home in the car that his parents gave him for his birthday.

5. I don't understand the problem even though I got the right answer.

6. When you find him, you should give him the money that you owe him.

7. I saved my money so that I could buy an iPad.

8. I have made the honor roll since I was in seventh grade.

9. Unless you know the answer, do not raise your hand.

9. I will buy you a ticket if you give me the money for it.

10. Whenever he plays quarterback, the football team always wins.

Sentence Type 4: OOMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE

Though this sentence type seems to be the most difficult of the four sentence types, you already understand the components of the complex-compound sentence because it is a combination of the **compound sentence** and the **complex sentence**. The **compound-complex sentence** must have **two or more independent clauses (making it compound)** and **one or more dependent clauses (making it complex)**. So, in order to have a **compound-complex sentence**, you must have at least **three clauses**, two of which are **independent**. Here is an example:

S V	S V	S V
(I ate tuna for lunch),	but (Steve ate a BLT)	(that his mom made for him).
independent clause	independ. clause	dependent clause

As you can see, the sentence above has two independent clauses that can stand alone, making it a compound sentence. Additionally, it has a dependent clause, which makes the sentence complex. Together, these three clauses form a compound-complex sentence.

PRACTICE

Below are ten compound-complex sentences. First, label the subject and verb in each clause. Then, in each sentence, put parentheses around each clause and then label each clause with an I for “independent” or a D for “dependent.”

S V	S V	S V
SAMPLE: (Tom knew my name),	but (he forgot it)	(when the teacher asked him for it).
I	I	D

1. I love eating turkey at Thanksgiving, but my friend’s family eats lasagna because his cousin is allergic to poultry.

2. After I swept the garage, I asked my dad for my allowance, but he only laughed at my request.

3. I hate writing essays, and I hate writing poetry, though I love giving speeches.
4. After Bob got his license, he drove to school every day, and he picked me up.
5. Because my mother grew up without much money, she is really kind, and she give my sister and me \$20 each week for an allowance.
6. If you find a job, you should work during the summer, but you should cut back on your hours during the school year.
7. I can never remember the batting order, but I can always remember the position that each person plays.
8. Ron is running for student council president, but he will not win if he does not get the seniors' vote.
9. While my parents were at dinner, I cleaned the house, and my sister did the ironing.
10. The local newspaper will not fund our team unless we can find a co-sponsor, but I have no ideas for possible co-sponsors.

CUMULATIVE PRACTICE

Label each sentence below as simple (S), compound (CP), complex (CX), or compound-complex (CPX). You may find it necessary to place parentheses around the clauses and to label each as independent or dependent before deciding on the type of sentence.

- _____ 1. You can enter the data, or you can interview the candidates.
- _____ 2. No one knew the man, and no one asked his name.
- _____ 3. After the officer pulled Tim over, Tim began to cry, and the officer took pity on him.
- _____ 4. Mrs. Smith assigned twenty pages of the novel for homework.
- _____ 5. Running after the car, the dog barked until the car was out of sight.
- _____ 6. You should read the assigned novel; do not read *Spark Notes*!
- _____ 7. I love skiing, my brother loves snowboarding, and my sister likes snow tubing.
- _____ 8. If you do not want to join marching band, you should find another extracurricular activity.
- _____ 9. Do your homework!
- _____ 10. Whenever I hear classical music, I immediately get sleepy.
- _____ 11. In the middle of the night, my little sister screamed at the top of her lungs because she had a nightmare, and I ran to comfort her.
- _____ 12. I washed and vacuumed the car.
- _____ 13. We ordered pork tenderloin for our entrée and scalloped potatoes for our side dish.
- _____ 14. We have nothing to fear but fear itself.
- _____ 15. I now understand simple, compound, and compound-complex sentences.