

Sentence Structures

Simple sentences

A simple sentence has one independent clause (also known as a main clause). An independent clause makes sense by itself. It expresses a complete thought and has a subject and verb.

E.g. The girl was dancing.

A simple sentence may have a **compound verb construction** (two or more verbs):

E.g. The girl was dancing and smiling.

A simple sentence may have **compound subject construction** (two or more subjects):

E.g. The boy and girl were dancing.

Compound sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two independent clauses (simple sentences) which are joined together by a coordinating conjunction (often referred to as 'FANBOYS' – For And Nor But Or Yet So). No comma is needed before or after a coordinating conjunction.

E.g. I am hungry for I forgot to eat breakfast.

Lily took the item to the till but she had forgotten her purse.

*Note: 'the co-ordinating conjunction 'nor' is unique because the first clause has to be a negative clause: e.g. John **doesn't** like to do his homework nor does he check his answers when he does it. Another thing that makes this co-ordinating conjunction unique is that you have to reverse the verb order. We don't say "nor he does check his answers when he does it". On its own, the second main cause would sound like a question: "Does he check his answers when he does it?"*

To check if it's a compound sentence, replace the coordinating conjunction with a full stop and the two sentences should be able to stand alone.

E.g. The girl was dancing and she was smiling. The 'and' could be replaced with a full stop.

Complex sentences

A complex sentence contains an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. A dependent clause could come in the form of a subordinate, relative or non-finite clause.

Subordinate clauses:

A subordinate clause starts with a subordinating conjunction (e.g. because, although, once, since, until, before, even though, since, after etc.). The subordinate clause can be 'fronted', 'embedded' or 'following':

- **Fronted subordinate clauses** come before the independent clause. A comma is needed after a fronted subordinate clause.
E.g. Although he was exhausted, Tom continued to read.
- **Embedded subordinate clauses** are 'dropped in' the middle of the main clause. Commas are needed around the embedded clause.
E.g. Tom, although he was exhausted, continued to read.
- **Following subordinate clauses** come after the main clause. No comma is needed when the subordinate clause is after the main clause.
E.g. Tom continued to read although he was exhausted.

Relative clauses:

A relative clause begins with a relative pronoun (e.g. that, who, whose when, where, which etc...). The relative clause can be 'embedded' or 'following'.

- **Embedded relative clauses** are 'dropped in' the middle of the main clause. Commas are needed around the embedded clause.
E.g. The cat, who was fat, sat on the mat.
- **Following relative** clauses come after the main clause
E.g. I go to school in Backwell, which is in Bristol).

N.B. If the information is not essential, and the first part of the sentence would make sense on its own, a comma is needed (see example above). However, if the extra information is essential for the sentence to make sense, no comma is used before a relative clause (e.g. It is best not to stroke a dog that you do not know).

Non-finite clauses:

A non-finite clause does not start with a conjunction or pronoun. To make it simple, we often describe non-finite clauses as starting with an '-ing', '-ed' or '-en' word (e.g. running, scared, shaken...) – although, non-finite clauses don't always start with these! Non-finite clauses can be 'fronted', 'embedded' or 'following':

- **Fronted non-finite clauses** come before the independent clause. A comma is needed after a fronted non-finite clause.

E.g. Running after the bus, Tom realised he'd forgotten his lunch.

- **Embedded non-finite clauses** are 'dropped in' the middle of the main clause. Commas are usually used around the embedded clause.

E.g. The monkey, suffering from the loud noise, hid in the corner of the cage.

- **Following non-finite clauses** come after the main clause. A comma is sometimes used after a following non-finite clause – it depends on the sentence and the emphasis that is desired.

E.g. Tom raised his hand, wondering what the time was.

Compound-complex sentences

A compound-complex sentence is comprised of at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. It contains compound and complex elements.

E.g. Jenny, who lost her favourite toy last night, woke up in a bad mood so she decided to go to the shops to buy herself a new one.

E.g. Sophie's mum gave me a lift home but I forgot my key even though Mum reminded me to put it in my bag this morning.