

Four Types of Sentences

There are four basic types of sentences: 1) simple; 2) compound; 3) complex; and
4) compound-complex

-1-

A simple sentence consists of a core--subject, verb, object (sometimes) or complement (sometimes)--and modifying phrases (for example, prepositional phrases used as adjectives or adverbs; participial phrases used as adjectives, etc.)

EXAMPLES: At noon on Tuesday during the summer Joe shoots at kittens and puppies with his bow and arrow.

NOTE: Phrases can often be placed either at the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on how direct the writer wants to be.

EXAMPLE: With or without make-up, jewelry, or expensive clothes, Joan always looks like a zombie.

OR: Joan always looks like a zombie with or without make-up, jewelry, or expensive clothes.
(The second example is more direct; the first example creates suspense.)

-2-

A compound sentence consists of two or more simple sentences.

These sentences are often combined with conjunctions, such as and, or, nor, but, yet, so, for, however, therefore, nevertheless, otherwise, consequently, etc.

EXAMPLE: Joe works in a manure factory downtown, and his wife Joan works in a perfume factory nearby.

EXAMPLE: Sarah saves five dollars out of each paycheck she receives; otherwise, she would have no money to buy presents for herself at Christmas time.

NOTE: In formal writing, compound sentences require either a comma before and, or, nor, but, yet, so, for, or a semi-colon before however, therefore, nevertheless, otherwise, consequently, etc

If there is no conjunction used between two simple sentences, a semi-colon or a period should be used instead.

EXAMPLE: Joe works downtown in a manure factory; his wife Joan works in a perfume factory nearby.

A complex sentence can be one of two kinds: 1) one including an adjective clause; or
2) one including an adverb clause.

A complex sentence with an adjective clause consists of a simple sentence and an adjective clause.

Adjective clauses usually begin with: that, who, whose, whom, where, when, which. (These are adjective signal words.)

These clauses usually follow the word they modify, or at least appear very close to it; they are not moveable.

EXAMPLE: Mary is the person who dozes off continuously during church.
Susie is the girl whose brother takes his pet boa constrictor with him everywhere.

NOTE: Sometimes "that", "who", "whom", or "which", etc. is omitted from the adjective clause in a sentence--it is only implied. (This type of sentence is still complex.)

EXAMPLE: Jack is the guy Mary hit on the head with a bedpan. [Jack is the guy (who, that) Mary hit on the head with a bedpan.]

A complex sentence with an adverb clause consists of a simple sentence and an adverb clause.

Adverb clauses usually begin with such words as although, while, whereas, since, if, because as, as soon as, after, when. (These are adverb signal words.)

These clauses are often moveable; for example, adverb clauses can often appear either at the beginning or the end of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: Although she gets sick from them, little Julie eats every mud pie she makes.

OR: Little Julie eats every mud pie she makes although she gets sick from them.

EXAMPLE: Jeff can pull the wings cleanly off ten flies in only thirty seconds when he concentrates on what he is doing.

OR: When he concentrates on what he is doing, Jeff can pull the wings cleanly off ten flies in only thirty seconds.

NOTE: Adverb and adjective clauses cannot stand alone; they must be connected to a simple sentence. (Clauses which cannot stand alone are called subordinate or dependent clauses.)

If a period is used after an adverb clause, this clause becomes a fragment.

A compound-complex sentence consists of two sentences, and one or more adjective or adverb clauses.

EXAMPLE: John climbed to the top of the tree, but Sue, who was a bit clumsy, fell off half way up.

EXAMPLE: Since he was five, Frank has broken three fingers, two toes, and a knee cap; however, he still walks across ice-covered telephone lines in the winter time.

The whole point of this discussion is sentence variety. Don't be satisfied with writing only simple sentences--or only simple and compound sentences, for that matter. Varying your types of sentences will add versatility and rhythm to your writing style. Your reader will escape the monotony of simple sentence after simple sentence.

Besides lending variety to your writing, complex sentences can help you rank your ideas. You can show the reader that one idea is more important than another by putting the important idea in a sentence core and the unimportant idea in an adjective or adverb clause.

EXAMPLE: Main Idea: Larry attracts much attention.

Minor Idea: Larry wears elephant ears and duck feet rented from a costume shop.

THUS: Larry, who wears elephant ears and duck feet rented from a costume shop, attracts much attention.

OR: When he wears elephant ears and duck feet rented from a costume shop, Larry attracts much attention.

OR: Larry attracts much attention because he wears elephant ears and duck feet rented from a costume shop.