

Sentences: Simple, Compound, and Complex

1. Simple Sentences

A **simple sentence** has the most basic elements that make it a sentence: a subject, a verb, and a completed thought.

Examples of **simple sentences** include the following:

1. Joe waited for the train.
"Joe" = subject, "waited" = verb
2. The train was late.
"The train" = subject, "was" = verb
3. Mary and Samantha took the bus.
"Mary and Samantha" = compound subject, "took" = verb
4. I looked for Mary and Samantha at the bus station.
"I" = subject, "looked" = verb
5. Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station early but waited until noon for the bus.
"Mary and Samantha" = compound subject, "arrived" and "waited" = compound verb

A simple sentence can also be referred to as an **independent clause**. It is referred to as "independent" because, while it might be part of a compound or complex sentence, it can also stand by itself as a complete sentence.

2. Compound Sentences

A **compound sentence** refers to a sentence made up of two independent clauses (or complete sentences) connected to one another with a **coordinating conjunction**. Coordinating conjunctions are easy to remember if you think of the words "FAN BOYS":

- **F**or
- **A**nd
- **N**or
- **B**ut
- **O**r
- **Y**et
- **S**o

Examples of **compound sentences** include the following:

1. Joe waited for the train, **but** the train was late.
2. I looked for Mary and Samantha at the bus station, **but** they arrived at the station before noon and left on the bus before I arrived.
3. Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station before noon, **and** they left on the bus before I arrived.
4. Mary and Samantha left on the bus before I arrived, **so** I did not see them at the bus station.

3. Complex Sentences

A **complex sentence** is made up of an independent clause and one or more **dependent clauses** connected to it. A dependent clause is similar to an independent clause, or complete sentence, but it lacks one of the elements that would make it a complete sentence.

Examples of **dependent clauses** include the following:

- because Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station before noon
- while he waited at the train station
- after they left on the bus

Dependent clauses such as those above **cannot** stand alone as a sentence, but they can be added to an independent clause to form a complex sentence.

Dependent clauses begin with **subordinating conjunctions**. Below are some of the most common subordinating conjunctions:

- after
- although
- as
- because
- before
- even though
- if
- since
- though
- unless
- until
- when
- whenever
- whereas
- wherever
- while

A complex sentence joins an independent clause with one or more dependent clauses.

The dependent clauses can go first in the sentence, followed by the independent clause, as in the following:

Tip: When the dependent clause comes first, a comma should be used to separate the two clauses.

1. Because Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station before noon, I did not see them at the station.
2. While he waited at the train station, Joe realized that the train was late.
3. After they left on the bus, Mary and Samantha realized that Joe was waiting at the train station.

Conversely, the independent clauses can go first in the sentence, followed by the dependent clause, as in the following:

Read the following sentences and state whether they are simple, complex or compound.

A **simple sentence** consists of just one clause.

A **complex sentence** consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent (subordinate) clauses.

A **compound sentence** consists of two or more coordinate (independent) clauses.

Exercise

1. We were playing in the garden when the guests arrived.
2. She put on her coat and went out.
3. I can't figure out what he wants.
4. You don't look happy to see me.
5. The cat saw the puppies playing in the garden.
6. She leaned out of the window.
7. You shouldn't have done this to me.
8. They tried very hard but they couldn't win the match.
9. Who let the cat in?
10. Although it was raining, we went for a walk.

Answers

1. We were playing in the garden when the guests arrived. (Complex sentence)
2. She put on her coat and went out. (Compound sentence)
3. I can't figure out what he wants. (Complex sentence)
4. You don't look happy to see me. (Simple sentence)
5. The cat saw the puppies playing in the garden. (Simple sentence)
6. She leaned out of the window. (Simple sentence)
7. You shouldn't have done this to me. (Simple sentence)
8. They tried very hard but they couldn't win the match. (Compound sentence)
9. Who let the cat in? (Simple sentence)
10. Although it was raining, we went for a walk. (Complex sentence)

