

# COMPOUND & COMPLEX SENTENCES

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Intermediate Grammar  
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Sentence formation is one of the key ingredients to good writing. There are several forms of sentences you can use in your writing-simple, compound, complex and compound-complex-and knowing how to use all of them will allow you to express your ideas with clarity and in great detail. You'll also be able to add variety to your work to keep the reader interested.

Of all sentence constructions, compound-complex sentences are typically the longest and most involved. This is because they combine two different types of sentences into one long sentence. To be specific, a compound-complex sentence unites a compound sentence with a complex sentence.

## **I. Understanding the Clause**

Before you start writing compound-complex sentences, you'll need to understand the two types of clauses in a sentence. A clause is any portion of a sentence that includes a subject and a verb.

The word "clause" itself does not necessarily describe a complete sentence. However, simple sentences are made of an independent clause, which can stand alone as a complete sentence. For example:

- Erin loves her brother.
- The dog ran off.
- I am tall.

Each of the sentences above has a subject and verb, and it stands by itself as a complete idea. This is an independent clause or a complete simple sentence.

The other kind of clause is a dependent clause. These are not complete sentences, but they do contain a noun and a verb. For example:

- *When* I come home
- *If* you sell the most cookies
- *Because* she is so smart

Notice that each of these clauses begins with a relative pronoun. This is the word that turns an independent clause into a dependent clause that must be attached to another independent clause. It cannot stand alone. You need more information to complete the thought.

## **II. 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

Compound sentences are formed by combining two independent clauses. For example:

- Erin loves her brother, and he loves her too.
- The dog ran off, but I didn't care.
- I am tall, yet she is short.

Note that when independent clauses are joined, they need a coordinating conjunction between them.

When you write a compound sentence, you need to use a comma before the coordinating conjunction to punctuate your sentence correctly.

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.

### III. 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:

Tip: When the independent clause comes first, a comma should not be used to separate the two clauses.

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

Complex sentences are often more effective than compound sentences because a complex sentence indicates clearer and more specific relationships between the main parts of the sentence. The word "before," for instance, tells readers that one thing occurs before another. A word such as "although" conveys a more complex relationship than a word such as "and" conveys.

The term periodic sentence is used to refer to a complex sentence beginning with a dependent clause and ending with an independent clause, as in "While he waited at the train station, Joe realized that the train was late."

Periodic sentences can be especially effective because the completed thought occurs at the end of it, so the first part of the sentence can build up to the meaning that comes at the end.

When a dependent clause is joined to an independent clause, it forms a complex sentence. The dependent clause can come either at the beginning or the end of the sentence. For example:

- When I come home, I will eat dinner.
- If you sell the most cookies, you will win the prize.
- The college gave her a scholarship because she is so smart.

Note that when you place the dependent clause at the beginning of the sentence, you need to put a comma after it. When the dependent clause is at the end of the sentence, no comma is required.

#### **IV. Compound-Complex Sentences**

As the name suggests, a compound-complex sentence brings both of these sentence forms together. That is, it contains at least two independent clauses (like a compound sentence) and at least one dependent clause (like a complex sentence). For example:

- Erin loves her brother, and he loves her too because she pays his bills.
- The dog ran off when I chased him, but I didn't care.



- Though my mother says it doesn't matter, I am tall, and she is short.

Note that the dependent clause can be at the beginning, middle, or end of a compound-complex sentence. No matter where it is placed, the punctuation follows the rules for both compound sentences and complex sentences.

That means that you need to put a comma before the coordinating conjunction and, if applicable, another comma after the dependent clause when it occurs at the beginning of the sentence.

See some additional examples to get a feel for how compound-complex sentences will help you add detail to your writing:

- When I went to the store, my parents wanted me to pick up some milk, but I didn't have enough money.
- Even if the child is hungry, he will never eat oatmeal, but he will always eat ice cream.
- The man was mean because he was lonely, but his attitude only made his situation worse.
- The dog needed a new leash, and he couldn't go for a walk until he had one.
- It is important to vote when the time comes, or you won't get a say in new laws.

## **V. Adding Flexibility to Your Writing**

Writing compound-complex sentences allows you a great deal of flexibility to explain how, why or when something happened. It's important to understand which parts of the sentence are independent clauses and which are dependent clauses so that you can punctuate it correctly and avoid writing a run-on sentence. Once you master this, you can freely add them to your writing to express more complicated ideas with clarity.

For more information on types of sentences and sentence structure, take a look at our sentence variety examples. They will show you how using varied sentence types and combining sentences add impact to your writing.