

SENTENCE VARIETY & STRUCTURE

Simple, Compound (coordinating), and Complex (subordinating) Sentences

Simple sentences offer one simple thought. They generally begin with a subject followed by a verb and may end with an object:

The sun rose this morning.
The dew glistened on the grass.
The birds began to sing to each other.
Small animals awoke and searched for breakfast.

When several of these sentences follow one another, the writing style becomes very monotonous and does not reflect the variety of complex thinking patterns so common to the human mind.

- As the sun rose over the horizon, birds began to sing to each other and small animals awoke and searched for breakfast in the glistening, dew-covered grass.
- The dew glistened on the grass as the sun rose over the horizon. While the birds began to sing to each other, animals awoke and searched for breakfast.

Varying sentence length and pattern results in a natural, fluid form of writing. Writing should be pleasing to readers. If all of your sentences follow the same pattern, however, the writing and rhythm become boring and dull. Creating a variety of sentence patterns not only holds a reader's interest (which, after all, is the purpose of writing), but it also reflects your mind's ability to think creatively and complexly.

Writers have a number of options for transforming simple sentences into more sophisticated sentences.

- 1. COORDINATION – When we say that someone is coordinated, we mean she/he is well balanced. Athletes and dancers, for example, are considered to be very coordinated because they aren't clumsy or out of balance. A coordinated sentence is also well balanced because it balances two complete thoughts (or clauses: subject + verb combinations) in which the information is of equal value.**
Grandma lost her eye sight. Her hearing sharpened over time.
Grandma lost her eye sight, but her hearing sharpened over time.

You can say you're sorry. You can go to your room.
You can say you're sorry, or you can go to your room.

The tornado hit. The town was leveled.
The tornado hit, and the town was leveled.

The key words (coordinating conjunctions) we use to create coordinated sentences are the following:

and, but, or, nor, for, yet, so.

Punctuation note: In a coordinated sentence, a comma always precedes the coordinating conjunction. It is not an option; it is a requirement of the sentence structure.

Coordination can also be created by joining two complete sentences that are closely related in meaning with a semi-colon (;).

Many web sites are interesting. Some are inaccurate.

Many web sites are interesting, but some are inaccurate.
Many web sites are interesting; some are inaccurate.
Many web sites are interesting; however, some are inaccurate.

Semi-colons do not connect phrases or subordinate clauses to a sentence. They can only connect complete thoughts that can stand on their own.

Punctuation note: Notice that if you add a transition word after the semi-colon (words like however, therefore, consequently, etc.), you must add a comma after the transition word

2. **SUBORDINATION - When we call someone a subordinate, we mean that she/he is lower in rank than we are and we, therefore, have more power than she/he has. In the military, for example, subordinates depend on their commanding officers to lead the way. Alone, they have no power. A subordinated sentence also contains a power structure and reflects a complex level of thinking.**

I can't float. I just sink. I even hold my breath.

Even though I hold my breath, I seem to sink rather than float.
(dependent/subordinate clause) (independent clause)

I seem to sink rather than float even though I hold my breath.
(independent clause) (dependent/subordinate clause)

The independent clause (subject + verb combination) is a complete thought/idea with meaning that can stand on its own. The subordinate clause is not; it depends on the independent portion of the sentence to give it meaning. Alone, it is just a fragment.

The key words (subordinating conjunctions) we use to create subordinated sentences are the following:

After	In case	Supposing that
Although	In that	Than
As (far/soon)	In as much as	Though
as	In so far as	Till
As if as though	Lest	Unless
Because	No matter how	Until
Before	Now that	When, whenever
Even if	Once	Where, wherever
Even though	Provided (that)	Whether
How	Since	While
If	So that	Why

Punctuation note: When a subordinate (or complex) sentence begins with the subordinate clause, a comma always follows the subordinate clause. It is not an option; it is a requirement of the sentence structure.

Because I wanted to pick the best seat, I needed to get to class early.

However, notice that when the sentence begins with the independent clause a comma is not inserted into the middle of the sentence.

I needed to get to class early because I wanted to pick the best seat.

3. **PREPOSITIONAL or PARTICIPIAL PHRASES** at the beginning of sentences create sentence variety.

a. **Prepositional Phrases** provide information of place, time, direction, or relationship:

At yesterday's game, the half-time show was a disaster.
By tomorrow morning, there will be six inches of snow on the ground.
Beneath our property, you'll find old and abandoned mine shafts.
For each one of us, the memory has a different meaning.

Punctuation note: When a sentence begins with a prepositional phrase, a comma follows it.

b. **Participial phrases** generally begin with -ing verbs and are used to describe nouns. In each of the following sentences, the opening participial phrase describes something that the subject of the sentence did.

Erin woke early. She dressed quickly and went to feed horses.
Waking up early, Erin dressed quickly and went to feed horses.

The traffic was getting worse. Adam chose to leave after rush hour.
Seeing the traffic was getting worse, Adam chose to leave after rush hour.

Punctuation note: When a sentence begins with a participial phrase, a comma always follows it.