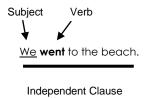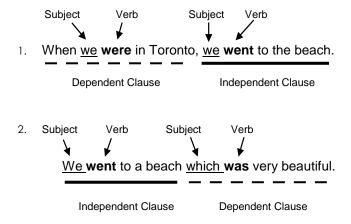# SENTENCE STRUCTURE BASICS

All **sentences** consist of one or more clauses. A **clause** is a group of words that contains a **subject** and a **verb**. Some clauses are independent, and others are dependent**.** For a sentence to be complete, it must contain at least one independent clause.

INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES

An **independent clause** expresses a complete thought and can stand alone as a sentence.

Subject   Verb

We **went** to the beach.

Independent Clause

A **dependent clause** is not a complete sentence. It must be connected to an independent clause.

Subject   Verb   Subject   Verb

1. When <u>we</u> **were** in Toronto, <u>we</u> **went** to the beach.

    Dependent Clause   Independent Clause

2. Subject   Verb   Subject   Verb

    <u>We</u> **went** to a beach <u>which</u> **was** very beautiful.

    Independent Clause   Dependent Clause

There are different types of dependent clauses. For more information, please refer to the Learning Centre's *Dependent Clauses* handout.
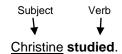

SENTENCE TYPES

There are **four sentence patterns**: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. The different patterns are categorized according to various combinations of independent and dependent clauses.
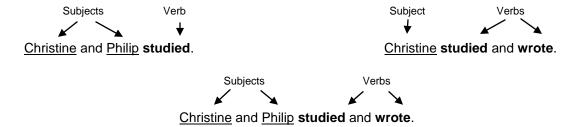
SIMPLE SENTENCES

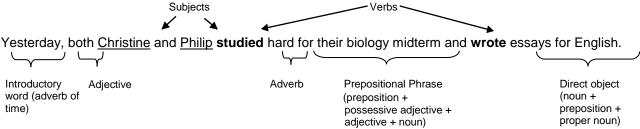The **simple sentence** is composed of one independent clause.

A simple sentence may have one subject and one verb.

Subject   Verb
↓   ↓
Christine **studied**.

A simple sentence may contain two or more subjects and/or two or more verbs.

Subjects   Verb   Subject   Verbs
Christine and Philip **studied**.   Christine **studied** and **wrote**.

Subjects   Verbs
Christine and Philip **studied** and **wrote**.

A simple sentence may also contain phrases and other modifiers such as articles, adjectives, and adverbs.

Subjects   Verbs
Yesterday, both Christine and Philip **studied** hard for their biology midterm and **wrote** essays for English.

Introductory word (adverb of time) | Adjective | Adverb | Prepositional Phrase (preposition + possessive adjective + adjective + noun) | Direct object (noun + preposition + proper noun)

COMPOUND SENTENCES

The **compound sentence** is composed of two or more independent clauses but no dependent clauses.
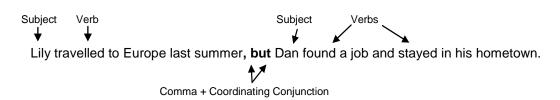
There are three ways to join the independent clauses in a compound sentence:

1. Two independent clauses may be joined by a *semicolon* when they have an implied logical relationship.

Subject Verb   Subject   Verbs
↓   ↓   ↓
Lily travelled to Europe last summer**;** Dan found a job and stayed in his hometown.
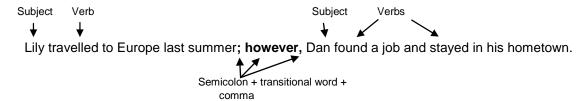
Semicolon

2. Two independent clauses may be joined by a *comma* <u>and</u> a *coordinating conjunction.* The seven **coordinating conjunctions** are easily remembered with the mnemonic device *FANBOYS.*

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

Subject   Verb   Subject   Verbs

Lily travelled to Europe last summer**, but** Dan found a job and stayed in his hometown.

Comma + Coordinating Conjunction

3. Two independent clauses may be joined by a *semicolon*, a *transitional word or phrase*, and a *comma*.

Subject   Verb   Subject   Verbs

Lily travelled to Europe last summer**; however,** Dan found a job and stayed in his hometown.

Semicolon + transitional word + comma

Here are some examples of commonly used **transitional words and phrases***:*

However	Nonetheless	Accordingly
Therefore	Similarly	Consequently
Furthermore	Undoubtedly	Finally
Moreover	For instance	Hence
On the other hand	For example	Thus

COMPLEX SENTENCES

The **complex sentence** is composed of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

The dependent clauses may be located in any of the following positions within a complex sentence: before the independent clause, after the independent clause, before and after the independent clause, or interrupting the independent clause.

Comma

When he finishes university, Tim hopes to move to British Columbia.   ⟸   Dependent clause located *before* independent clause.

Dependent Clause   Independent Clause

No Comma

Tim hopes to move to British Columbia when he finishes university.   ⟸   Dependent clause located *after* independent clause.

Independent Clause   Dependent Clause

I read the story that you wrote.

Independent   Dependent Clause
Clause

⇐ Dependent clause located *after* independent clause.

Comma

While I was on the train, I read the story that you wrote.

Dependent Clause   Independent   Dependent Clause
Clause

⇐ Dependent clause located *before* independent clause, dependent clause located *after* independent clause.

The man who interviewed me asked a lot of challenging questions.

Dependent Clause

Independent
Clause

⇐ Dependent clause *interrupting* the independent clause.

COMPOUND—COMPLEX SENTENCES

The **compound-complex** sentence is composed of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

Until I finish my exams, I have to study every night; otherwise, I would definitely join you for the concert.

Dependent Clause   Independent Clause   Independent Clause

David was confused about the assignment that was due on Tuesday, so he asked his teacher for help.

Independent Clause   Dependent Clause   Independent Clause

We were all delighted when Catherine came home; she had been away so long!

Independent Clause   Dependent Clause   Independent Clause

EXERCISES

A. Identify the subjects and verbs in the following sentences by writing an "S" above the subject and a "V" above the verb. Identify the types of clauses by underlining independent clauses once and dependent clauses twice. Then indicate which type of sentence each one is.

Examples:

       S   V   S   V

a. <u>Janine decided to volunteer at the Greyhound Rescue Shelter</u> <u><u>because she loves dogs.</u></u>   **Complex**

       S   V   S   V

b. <u>Janine loves dogs,</u> so <u>she decided to volunteer at the Greyhound Rescue Shelter.</u>   **Compound**

       S   V   S   V

c. <u>Janine decided to volunteer at a shelter</u> <u><u>that provides a home to rescued Greyhound dogs.</u></u>   **Complex**

       S   V   S   V

d. <u>Janine wanted to give back to her community,</u> so <u>she decided to volunteer at a shelter</u>   **Compound Complex**

       S   V

<u><u>that provides a home to rescued Greyhound dogs.</u></u>

---

1. I used to have a beautiful plant by my window, but it died when I forgot to water it.

2. With lightning speed, the defenseman's perfectly-placed slapshot blasted the puck over the goalie's shoulder and into the top left corner of the net.

3. The student finished his essay well before the end of the exam; nonetheless, he was exhausted from the effort of writing and didn't feel like editing his work.

4. My favourite movie, which I've seen at least five times, depicts an epic battle between good and evil.

5. To Sam, nothing in the world could compare to the delicious gingerbread that his grandmother prepared for Christmas each year.

6. I'll be waiting for you in the lobby, so just come down when you're ready.

B. Apply your understanding of the four sentence patterns by writing sentences according to the instructions below. Practice restating the same ideas in different ways using the sentence patterns. (See the "Example" box on page 5.)

1. *Write a simple sentence.*

   _____

   _____

2. *Write a compound sentence that joins the clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.*

   _____

   _____

3. *Write a compound sentence that joins the clauses with a semicolon.*

   _____

   _____

4. *Write a compound sentence that joins the clauses with a semicolon, a transitional word or phrase, and a comma.*

   _____

   _____

5. *Write a complex sentence that includes an independent clause followed by a dependent clause beginning with* **because** *or* **although***.*

   _____

   _____

6.
   Write a complex sentence that includes an independent clause interrupted by a dependent clause beginning with **who**, **that***, or* **which***.*

   _____

   _____

7. *Write a complex sentence that includes a dependent clause beginning with* **after, when,** *or* **while** *followed by an independent clause.*

   _____

   _____

8. *Write a compound-complex sentence.*

   _____

   _____

   _____