

Sentence Structure

Using different types of sentences allows you to highlight different relationships between ideas and to add variety to your writing. This resource is designed to help you to construct sentences accurately, so that your meaning is clear.

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Clauses and phrases

Sentences are made up of clauses and phrases. All sentences must have at least one independent clause.

Clauses

A **clause** is a group of words which has:

- a **subject**, ie. the focus of the clause, or someone or thing which does something in the clause
- *and*
- a **complete finite verb**, ie. a verb which has a subject and a sense of time

For example,

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Verb</u>	
<i>The lecture</i>	<i>finished</i>	<i>at 3 pm</i>
<i>Pollution</i>	<i>causes</i>	<i>cancer</i>
<i>New Zealand</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>in the south Pacific</i>

There are **two** kinds of clauses: **independent** (or **main**) clauses and **dependent** (or **subordinate**) clauses

Independent

An independent clause **expresses a complete thought** *and can stand on its own* as a sentence

e.g. Learning a new language is often frustrating.

Dependent

A dependent clause does not express a complete thought and needs to be joined to an independent clause to become a sentence. It usually begins with a word such as *although, while, because, who, which, if*, etc.

e.g. Although learning a new language is often frustrating

Practice

Find the subject and the verb in the following clauses. Then decide if each clause is dependent or independent.

1. Dairying is concentrated in districts with reliable summer grass ¹
2. Although it started out with a similar fauna and flora to New Caledonia and Australia ²
3. Scarcity creates the need for a system to allocate the available resource among some of its potential users ³
4. Banks, insurance companies, and investment companies can now enter one another's markets ³
5. When layoffs become inevitable ⁴
6. These obvious contamination problems have long been known ⁵

Phrases

A **phrase** is a group of words which either does not have a subject,

e.g. walks to work every day

or does not have a finite verb,

e.g. The reason being their good design

Practice

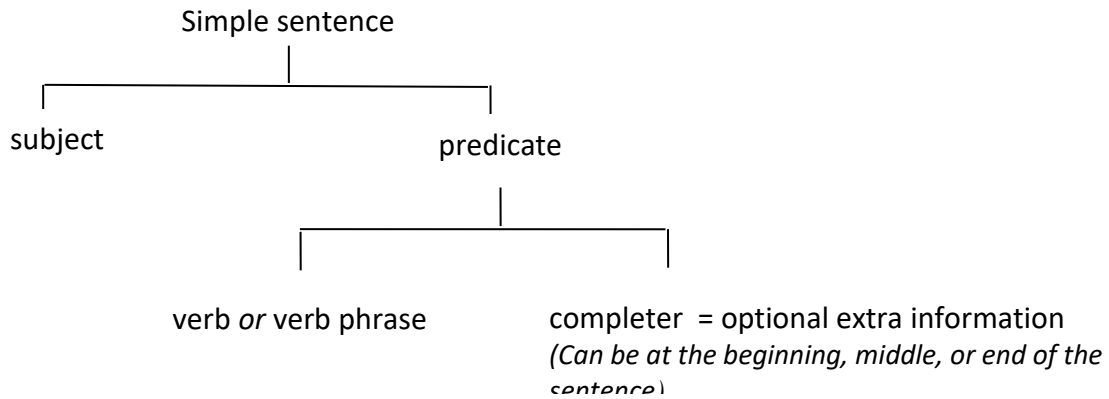
Identify the following as phrases or clauses.

1. Trying to build up breeding herd numbers ¹
2. The relationship between predator and prey ⁵
3. The development of technology allowed people to speed up evolutionary change ⁵
4. Because humans are long-lived and reproduce slowly ⁵

Simple sentences

A **simple** sentence has only **one clause**, which must be an **independent** clause. The word “*simple*” does not necessarily mean “*easy*”; simple sentences can also contain phrases, so they are often long and complicated. However, they still have only **one subject** and **one finite verb**.

The diagram below illustrates the basic elements of a simple sentence.



For example, the following are all simple sentences:

Completer	Subject	Completer	Verb	Completer
	<i>The level of unemployment</i>		<i>increased.</i>	
	<i>The RMA</i>		<i>was passed</i>	<i>in 1991.</i>
	<i>The course</i>		<i>includes</i>	<i>practical report writing.</i>
	<i>The report,</i>	<i>commissioned by the Ministry of Education,</i>	<i>identified</i>	<i>four areas for improvement.</i>
<i>In the late 1980s,</i>	<i>the value of the NZ housing market</i>		<i>declined</i>	<i>by 10%.</i>

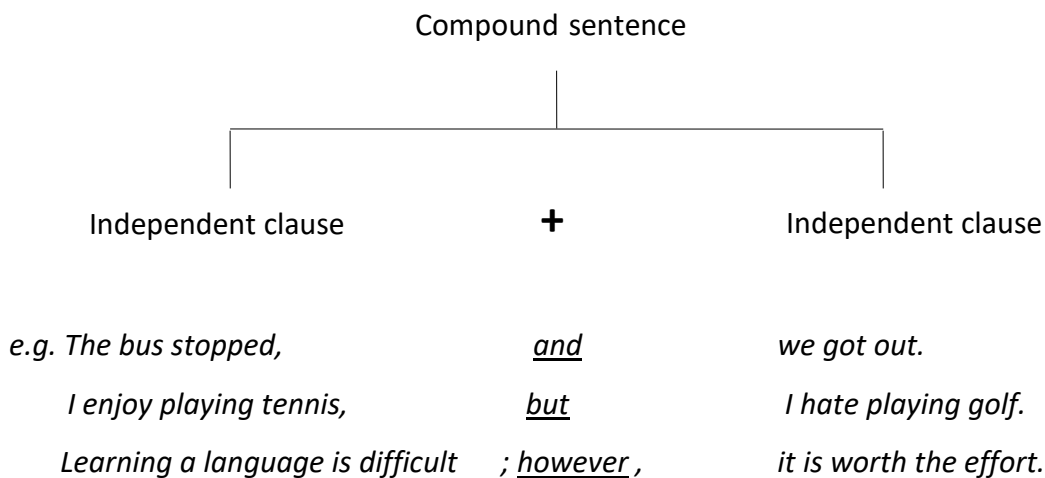
Practice

Check whether the following are complete sentences.

1. The greatest danger that a species faces in a rapidly coevolving ecosystem ⁵
2. Diversity has become a strategic imperative for corporations ⁴
3. Her Maori name, Maata Mahupuku, inscribed on her headstone ²
4. As profits fell and the government reduced internal prices to realign with export prices ²
5. Taste, or personal food preference, is another strong determinant of demand ¹
6. Implications for food and fibre marketing are many ¹

Compound sentences

A **compound** sentence has **two or more independent clauses**.



In this type of sentence, each clause has **equal** (or nearly equal) **importance**.

The clauses can be joined in **three** ways:

1. With a **coordinating conjunction**

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

e.g. Diversity has become a strategic imperative for corporations, and the term has already entered the corporate vocabulary.³

or with a **correlative conjunction**

e.g. not only ... but also

e.g. Not only have conservationists been successful in bringing issues to the attention of governments, but they have also achieved considerable success in having policies and institutions introduced or changed to meet their demand.⁶

2. With a **semi-colon (;)**

e.g. Astute depositors could see what was happening to the value of the land that was supporting the assets of the banks; they moved quickly to remove their deposits for cash.³

3. With a **semi-colon** and another kind of **link word** called a **conjunctive adverb**

e.g. furthermore, however, therefore, in contrast, similarly

*e.g. These obvious contamination problems have long been known; **however**, what is not often realised is the organic matter carried in ground water can contaminate samples.⁵*

Many of these link words can also be placed in other parts of the sentence.

***However**, some other aspects of the reforms appear counterproductive.
Some other aspects of the reforms, **however**, appear counterproductive.
Some other aspects of the reforms appear counterproductive, **however**.⁶*

Practice

A. *Underline the two independent clauses in the following sentences*

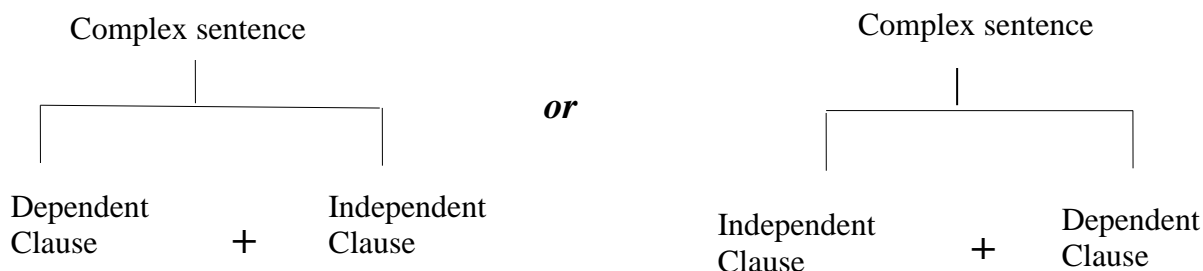
1. Modern management techniques have been used with success in firms in the industrial sector, and there is scope for a greater transfer of these concepts, techniques and principles to the farm sector. ¹
2. We do not know where the first beachhead for the invasion was, but it is a fair guess that the narrow strait between Bali and Lombok was the first and most fundamental barrier to be breached. ⁵
3. Coal mining forms part of the relatively invisible history of Bannockburn, yet it was in some ways the backbone of the local economy. ⁷
4. Environmental politics may have a substantial policy focus to it, or it may be quite abstract and of little direct significance to policy. ⁶

B. *Join the following pairs of sentences together to make compound sentences.*

1. People have been conducting policy research for millennia. Policy studies emerged as a field of intellectual enquiry less than fifty years ago. ⁶
2. Problems do not just exist. They must be defined. ⁶
3. In the early 1870s there were large numbers of Chinese and European miners on the Bannockburn field. Their activities have proved difficult to trace in the physical remains in the landscape. ⁷

Complex sentences

A **complex** sentence has **one independent clause** and **one or more dependent clauses**.



e.g., Because she did not know the route well, she drove slowly.

e.g. She drove slowly because she did not know the route well

In this type of sentence, the clauses do not have equal importance. The **independent (or main) clause** contains the most important idea, and the **dependent** clause adds extra information.

The two clauses are linked by a **subordinate conjunction** placed at the beginning of the dependent clause.

e.g. although, because, just as, whereas, unless, even though

e.g. Today, New Zealand lacks crocodiles, goannas, freshwater turtles and land turtles, even though all were probably part of its Gondwanan heritage⁵

Even though crocodiles, goannas, freshwater turtles and land turtles were probably part of its Gondwanan heritage, New Zealand lacks these species today.⁵

Practice

Underline the independent clauses and double underline the dependent clauses in the following sentences.

1. Because it is so frequently misunderstood, the last point merits restatement.³
2. One is restricted to a tiny patch of boulders and a rainforest relic on two islands, while the others are restricted to remnant areas on the North Island.³
3. Although the [Lotto] win brought many nice things, it occasioned a period of transition that meant loss, change and much painful growth.⁴
4. Some investors, who are known as **value investors**, invest in companies that have share prices close to or below the book value of the company.³

Compound-complex sentences

A compound-complex sentence has two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

e.g. When the new structure was proposed in 2003, the Council at first refused to discuss the plans with community groups, but the Environment Court over-ruled the decision and insisted on a full consultation process.

Useful resources on sentence structure

If you would like to know more about **phrases, clauses, and sentences, or how to improve your sentence structure in reports and essays**, visit our website at <http://tl.lincoln.ac.nz> for more resources or ask at the Service Point about the workshops, drop-in sessions, and individual appointments we offer.

There are also many useful sources in the LU library and on the WWW. You could start with:

RMIT's Writing Skills site:

https://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lisu/content/4_WritingSkills/06sentences.htm

Purdue University's Online Writing Lab: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Rozakis, L. (2003). *English grammar for the utterly confused*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Sources for examples

Examples in this worksheet have been adapted from the following texts:

¹ Wallace, L. T. & Lattimore, R. (Eds.). (1987). *Rural New Zealand – What Next?* Lincoln, New Zealand: Agribusiness & Economic Research Unit.

² McIntyre, R. (2002). *The canoes of Kupe*. Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press.

³ Drummond, E. H. & Goodwin, J. W. (2004). *Agricultural Economics* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

⁴ Wilson, I. (2000). *The new rules of corporate conduct*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

⁵ Flannery, T. (1994). *The future eaters*. Port Melbourne, Australia: Reed Books.

⁶ Buhrs, T. & Bartlett, R.V. (1993). *Environmental Policy in New Zealand*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Stephenson, J., Bauchop, H., & Petchey, P. (2004). *Bannockburn Heritage Landscape Study*. (Science for Conservation 244). Retrieved April 27, 2006, from Department of Conservation Web site: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/Publications/004~Science-and-Research/Science-for-Conservation/PDF/sfc244.pdf>]

Answers for practice exercises

Clauses & phrases

Find the subject and the verb in the following clauses. Then decide if each clause is dependent or independent.

1. **Dairying (subject) is (verb)** concentrated in districts with reliable summer grass **Independent clause**
2. Although **it (subject) started out (verb)** with a similar fauna and flora to New Caledonia and Australia. **Dependent clause**
3. **Scarcity (subject) creates (verb)** the need for a system to allocate the available resource among some of its potential users **Independent clause**
4. **Banks, insurance companies, and investment companies (subject)** can now enter **(verb)** one another's markets **Independent clause**
5. When **layoffs (subject) become (verb)** inevitable **Dependent clause**
6. **These obvious contamination problems (subject) have long been known (verb)** **Independent clause**

Identify the following as phrases or clauses.

1. Trying to build up breeding herd numbers **phrase**
2. The relationship between predator and prey **phrase**
3. The development of technology allowed people to speed up evolutionary change **clause**
4. Because humans are long-lived and reproduce slowly **clause**

Simple sentences

Check whether the following are complete sentences.

1. The greatest danger that a species faces in a rapidly coevolving ecosystem **incomplete**
2. Diversity has become a strategic imperative for corporations **complete**
3. Her Maori name, Maata Mahupuku, inscribed on her headstone **incomplete**
4. As profits fell and the government reduced internal prices to realign with export prices **incomplete**
5. Taste, or personal food preference, is another strong determinant of demand **complete**

6. Implications for food and fibre marketing are many **complete**

Compound sentences

Underline the two independent clauses in the following sentences

1. Modern management techniques have been used with success in firms in the industrial sector, and there is scope for a greater transfer of these concepts, techniques and principles to the farm sector.
2. We do not know where the first beachhead for the invasion was, but it is a fair guess that the narrow strait between Bali and Lombok was the first and most fundamental barrier to be breached.
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4. Environmental politics may have a substantial policy focus to it, or it may be quite abstract and of little direct significance to policy.

Join the following pairs of sentences together to make compound sentences.

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2. Problems do not just exist; they must be defined.
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Complex sentences

Underline the independent clauses and double underline the dependent clauses in the following sentences.

1. Because it is so frequently misunderstood, the last point merits restatement.
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3. Although the [Lotto] win brought many nice things, it occasioned a period of transition that meant loss, change and much painful growth.
4. Some investors, who are known as value investors, invest in companies that have share prices close to or below the book value of the company.