PREPARING TO SOLVE THE 15 COMMON ERRORS

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To avoid the 15 common errors identified in *Acting on Words*, you should have a good basic understanding of what is required by a "correct" sentence. Before defining "correct," let's ask,

what is a sentence?

In response to this question, students often state that a sentence expresses a complete thought. This answer is a useful starting point, if we add an important qualification: "a sentence expresses a complete thought *in accordance with the form of grammar suited to the occasion and the intended audience.* Cooperating with the expected form of grammar for a particular context is what makes sentences "correct." Think carefully about the audience you are addressing and why you are writing. That, in turn, will help you to consider what basic words and patterns you will be expected to use to deliver a complete thought in grammar that is "correct."

Here is an illustration of how *one* word can express a complete thought according to the informal grammar of a promotional brochure:

> Flying. You remember watching geese sail past the clouds. You remember dreams when you soared above the tallest spires and towers of the town below. This ancient craving to take to the air can be more than a dream…

The first word of this passage is punctuated with a capital letter followed by a period. By English punctuation conventions, therefore, it is offered as a sentence. Can a single word really function as a sentence? In accordance with the style and context of this passage—with its informal level of grammar—the answer is yes. We understand the opening single word to be saying something like "Think about flying." Everyday conversation, if it were written down, would contain numerous examples of single words punctuated as independent sentences, each expressing a complete thought consisting of more words than the speaker acutally chose to use. The context (the preceding and/or following sentences) may convey the intended extra words beneath grammatically incomplete sentences. For various informal occasions, sentences that do not contain all the words required of sentences in formal writing may be acceptable. Here are some further examples of words that might, within context, express complete thoughts and that might be accepted in informal, expressive style as correct:

- sang another torch song
- a consumate singer
- lighting up the crowd

As the rest of this discussion will help to explain, each of the word groupings above is missing one or more grammatical elements that standard written English requires of a correct sentence. This is important to understand, because most writing occasions in post-secondary studies require formal (standard) sentences: a complete thought must be expressed according to the standard word requirements for a sentence. Groups of words that do not contain the required parts of speech to make a sentence are called "sentence fragments." For more on this problem, see *Acting on Words*, p. 555.

Minimum Grammatical Requirements

The simplest and most basic requirements for a complete sentence call for a ***subject*** and a ***verb***, e.g., "She flies." "Flying" cannot be a sentence in formal writing. "Think about flying" can. In this case, because the sentence is imperative—giving a command-- the subject "you" is understood or implied. With the occasional exception of imperative sentences using the implied subject "you," every sentence in standard written English must contain a subject and a verb, and certain thoughts, to be complete, require that the verb include other components, known collectively as the ***predicate*** (more on this shortly).

Along with learning to identify subjects and predicates, you will begin to recognize a number of basic sentence types used in standard English. The more confident you become in recognizing these basic patterns, the easier it will be for you to eliminate non-standard usages and thus increase the readability of your prose.

Think of Key Parts of Speech as Actors Cast in Different Roles

In "The Five Myths of Grammar" at this website, Handbook, the authors of *Acting on Words* suggest that you think of words as movie actors. Just as movie actors play different roles, from initiator of actions to recipient of actions, so do words play different roles in how a sentence works. Looking for functionality-- asking what key roles or functions a sentence contains—will help you to analyze sentences. To get started, you don't need many definitions, but recognizing four of the most common and fundamental parts of speech will clarify the analogy between grammar and acting. For now, take note of the following four basic definitions:

Nouns

A *noun* is any word that names a person, place or thing Your dictionary identifies nouns by the abbreviation "n." Nouns are like actors whose acting range allows them to work when cast in two quite different roles: subjects (who take action) and objects (who receive action).

Verbs

A *verb* expresses an action or a state of being. Like an actor whose resources are complex, whose abilities allow major transformations, verbs can change their appearance (when conjugated to express tense, mood, voice, and relationship to the subject). Parts of conjugated verbs

(participles) can function as adjectives and sometimes even as nouns. Your dictionary identifies verbs with the abbreviation "v."

Adjectives

An *adjective* is any word that modifies nouns or other words behaving as if they are nouns (i.e. naming things). Adjectives are like actors who get cast in lots of films, get to play beside or across from a wide range of different nouns, and get to appear in many different locations. As sidekicks of nouns, in some cases adjectives become identified with the role performed by nouns (they join into ***noun phrases***). Despite their proximity to nouns and contribution to the roles of nouns, however, adjectives are basically more limited in the range of roles they can play than are nouns. Adjectives remain describers. Your dictionary identifies adjectives with the abbreviation "adj."

Adverbs

An *adverb* modifies verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and larger units containing a subject and a verb (clauses). Like adjectives, adverbs get to work beside many other kinds of words, but their range of roles remains within the category of describing. Your dictionary identifies adverbs with the abbreviation "adv."

For more on these four main parts of speech, see the following pages in *Acting on Words*: 518-522; 532-540.

Basic Words Can Take Different Roles or Parts

We suggested that one way to begin analyzing sentences is to think of the basic parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) as actors. Knowing who an actor is will not tell you for certain what motive may drive his or her character in any given story (what part he or she may play). With certain words, adjectives and adverbs, for instance, as with certain more-type-cast actors, it is possible to predict what sort of role they will be playing (e.g. describing)—but even then, the precise details of their function and relationships can be determined only according to the specific story or sentence in which they appear. In the case of nouns and verbs, those functions may range widely. Your dictionary will not, for instance, identify a noun as a subject, because even though a noun may sometimes play the subject role, it may at other times play other roles. The casting director (writer of the sentence) will decide which noun to cast in which role. Actors step into different roles according to need, and so do certain words, within the limits of their defined part of speech.

With this idea of parts of speech (actors) and roles (functions) in mind, here is an example of the most basic and common sentence in English (especially in Canada!):

He scores!

With the dramatic rise of girls and women in hockey, the sentence might easily be

She scores!

In both cases the doer of the action, the subject**,** is immediately followed by the signifier of the action (the verb**)**. The verb "scores" in the examples above does not require anything after it to complete a thought.

Intransitive Verbs

This type of verb is called ***intransitive*.** Your dictionary indicates this with the abbreviation "intr." In the above sentences, the role or function of subject is played by the words "he" and "she" (pronouns standing in for nouns; see *Acting on Words* pages 522-23 for more on pronouns). The role or function of the verb is played by "scores." Subject and verb are the two main characters, players, performers, or roles required of every sentence

Transitive Verbs

Some types of verbs do not express a complete thought unless they are followed by a noun or pronoun that answers the question "who or what is being acted upon?" Here is an example of a statement that does not appear complete because the verb leaves the reader wanting more information:

The goalie blocked.

In order to gather a complete thought, the reader wants to know *what* the goalie blocked. Verbs requiring a word (or group of words functioning as a noun) in order to make sense are called *transitive.* Your dictionary indicates this type with the abbreviation "tr." The prefix "trans," suggesting movement from one thing to another, may help you to remember that sentences with this type of verb need to include the noun or pronoun that the action of the verb is directly acting upon.

Objects

The noun or pronoun that the action of the verb is directly acting upon is called the *object* (or *object of the verb*, or *direct object*). Nouns or pronouns (in their objective case form) perform the part of objects, a further reminder that certain words may play very different roles in the functioning of different sentences. The following sentence demonstrates correct use of an object to ensure a transitive verb makes sense:

The goalie blocks the net.

"Net," a noun, is the object. Just as your dictionary does not identify subjects, it does not identify objects. As this example reminds us, nouns may serve equally as subjects, objects, or other parts of how a sentence functions (for instance, ***indirect objects*** or ***subject complements***).

Indirect Objects

In addition to featuring a subject, verb, and direct object, some sentences using tansitive verbs and direct objects include another element for increased specificity: an *indirect object*. The role of indirect object is performed by a noun or pronoun. Indirect objects answer a question raised by their transitive verbs: "To whom or to what?", or "For whom or for what?"

The agent sold her the house.

In this example, "her" is a pronoun (a word acting in place of a noun) suited to the objective position because the party named by the pronoun is receiving the action and therefore in the objective position or case (see *Acting on Words* pp. 522-523 and p. 535 on pronoun cases). In the sentence above, the noun "house" plays the role of object: it is the direct receiver of the action. It answers the question, "what was sold?"

Linking Verbs

Another common type of sentence is the following:

The defence was erratic.

In this case a *linking verb* ("was" is a conjugated form of the linking verb "to be") expresses a state of being. It links the subject with its *complement*. "Erratic," a descriptive word, an adjective, describes the state of being of the subject. The word "erratic" in this sentence plays the part of subject complement, because it complements or tells us about the subject, the "defence." But if we talked about an "erratic manoeuvre," the adjective would no longer be taking the role of a subject complement. To play that part, an adjective must follow a linking verb. The subject complement may also be a noun, as in the following example: "According to Don Cherry, fighting in hockey is a right." The noun "right" complements or tells about the condition of the subject "fighting."

Remember, the Same Words May Play Different Parts

Consider the following sentences:

- The play was boring.
- We rated the play.
- The girl asked the boy a question.
- The boy questioned the girl.
- We play the Flames tomorrow.

Subjects (nouns or words behaving as nouns) always signify people, places or things (tangible or intangible things). A theatre "play" is a tangible thing. It can perform the role of subject, as in the first sentence above, or the role of object, as in the second sentence above. This word can be a doer of an action (making it a subject) or the recipient of an action (making it an object). The third and fourth sentences above offer further illustrations of how words may play different roles. "Boy" and "girl" may be subjects or objects. But the fourth sentence throws a sort of curve ball, so to speak. The word "question," which appears as a noun serving as an object in the third sentence, appears in the fourth sentence as a verb. The same variation in parts of speech happens in the fifth sentence above, in which the word "play"—often a noun-- serves as a verb: it signifies the action occurring in the sentence. Here it becomes a little difficult to maintain the actor-role analogy unless we imagine the case of two different actors with the same name. One is a noun (able to play noun-type roles) and the other is a verb (able to play verb-type roles).

Your Dictionary Plays an *Essential* Role in Analyzing Sentences

When the same word exists in this sense as different actors with the same name (the same word but with a different meaning connected to being a different part of speech), your dictionary will identify each of those possibilities and meanings by the respective abbreviations. "Question" has one definition as "n" and another as "v." The same is true of "play." Before you can confidently analyze sentences, you need to verify if certain words have more than one possible basic identify (e.g. noun, verb) and respective definition, and if verbs are transitive, intransitive, or ***auxiliaries*** or ***participles*** (discussed below). Referring to your dictionary for basic definitions and parts of speech is a crucial part of analyzing sentences.

The Trick Is To Identify Who or What is Taking Action

As you can see, the trick in analyzing sentences is to decide who or what is taking the action (or is existing in a state of being). The person, place, or thing taking the action or experiencing the state of being is the subject: the main character. A subject, thus, is always a noun or something acting as if it were a noun. The word signifying the action or state of being is the verb. A descriptive word signifying the state of being is the subject complement. A person, place or thing directly acted upon by a transitive verb is the direct object. A person, place or thing affected by the direct object is the indirect object. These basics are all you need to begin analyzing sentences, recognizing their fundamental players and relationships. Look for the two central players: look for the subject and verb. For further help with that central task, we need to look more at the special nature of verbs.

Base Forms of the Verb

The base form of a verb is that form given in the dictionary, for example, "go." For all verbs except "be," this is the same form as used for first person present tense, e.g., "I go." A verb may appear as one word in either its base form or a one-word variation of that form conjugated to match the subject, the person doing the action.

I go	You go	They go
We go	She/he goes	

But verbs express not only action. They express ***tense*** (*when* an action occurs), e.g., "She sings. She sang." Verbs also express mood: qualities such as possibility, necessity, and obligation. Finally, verbs may express voice (whether or not the doer of the action is presented grammatically as the doer of the action). More on these matters may be found in *Acting on Words*, pp. 519-522 and 532-540. For now, for purposes of moving forward with analysis of sentences, the important thing to recognize is that in order to serve various functions of tense, mood, and voice, verbs often alter and supplement the base verb.

Auxiliaries or Helping Verbs

As we have seen, verbs express the action or condition of the subject. In order to express various times and temporal relationships, as well as other states, verbs are often supported by *auxiliar**y*** or *helping verbs*, e.g., "She *had* played six shifts when the injury occurred. She *might have needed* a cast and *missed* three games." In these examples, the words "had" and "might have" are auxiliaries. The words "played" and "needed" are past ***participles*** (which English sometimes uses as well as adjectives, e.g., "a needed change to policy"). Some grammars define "participle" as a verbal form with the characteristics of verbs and adjectives. It can modify a noun or pronoun; it can also take present as well as past forms, and like a verb, it can take an object. Auxiliaries work with participles to specify tense and other qualities of the action or condition expressed in the sentence.

In these specific illustrations of auxiliary and participles forms, we see again how frequently English permits the same word to play different roles. While "need" may function as a transitive verb, as shown in the example "might have needed a cast," it may also function as an intransitive verb (meaning to be in need or want), and it may play the role of auxiliary as in "She need not come to practice while her cast is still on." As an auxiliary, the word expresses being under an obligation. The good news is that while your dictionary cannot predict if a noun will serve as a subject, object, complement, or even adjective, it does identify if words are or may be auxiliaries or participles. Your dictionary indicates auxiliaries with the abbreviation "aux.," present participle with the abbreviation "pr.part.," and past participle with the abbreviation "p.part." The generic word participle is abbreviated as "part."

Predicates

The base verb or participle and any helping or auxiliary verbs are sometimes called the ***simple predicate***. These verbs together with any modifiers, objects, and complements are sometimes called the ***complete predicate***. Depending on the type of thought being expressed, a complete sentence may simply require a one-word subject and a base verb (one word), but it may well require, in addition to the subject, auxiliaries and participle, an object, or a subject complement. Your dictionary uses abbreviations to provide various verb-related defining information, e.g., "aux" (auxiliary), "intr." (intransitive), "p." (past), "part." (participle, participial), "p.part." (past participle), "p.t." (past tense), "pr. part." (present participle), "pr.t." (present tense), "t." (tense), "tr." (transitive), and "v" (verb). Other abbreviations for words that could form part of a complete predicate are "adj." (adjective), "adv." (adverb), and "n" (noun).

More Practice with Subjects, Verbs, and Predicates

See if you can correctly identify subjects and simple predicates in the 15 quiz sentences that follow as "Exercise 1." Here is some further advice and practice to help you prepare.

To find the subject of the sentence, ask *who* or *what* is the sentence about.

1. Simon excelled at skiing.
    - The sentence is about Simon, who excelled at skiing. Simon is the simple subject of the sentence because there is only one subject who acts here.

2. The boy flew down the hill.
    - The sentence is about a boy, who flew down the hill.

3. One day, the hill was icy.
    - The sentence is about the hill. The hill is the subject of the sentence.

4. Simon's parents told him not to go skiing.
    - The sentence is about Simon's parents, who told Simon not to go skiing.

5. They said, "It is too icy. You will fall."
    - The sentence is about "they." The pronoun "they" refers to the noun "parents" already mentioned.

6. Simon and his friend went skiing, and fell on the hill.
    - The sentence is about Simon and his friend. It is called a compound subject because there is more than one subject in this sentence.

7. Simon excelled at skiing.
    - The sentence is about Simon, who excelled at skiing. Simon is the simple subject of the sentence because there is only one subject who acts here.

8. The boy flew down the hill.
    - The sentence is about a boy, who flew down the hill.

9. One day, the hill was icy.
    - The sentence is about the hill. The hill is the subject of the sentence.

10. Simon's parents told him not to go skiing.
    - The sentence is about Simon's parents, who told Simon not to go skiing.

11. They said, "It is too icy. You will fall."
    - The sentence is about "they." The pronoun "they" refers to the noun "parents" already mentioned.

12. Simon and his friend went skiing, and fell on the hill.
    - The sentence is about Simon and his friend. It is called a compound subject because there is more than one subject in this sentence.

To find the verb of a sentence, ask what the subject is doing. The verb tells us what action the subject is performing, and when it is being performed (action verbs). Linking verbs describe or define the subject.

1. Bobby dances.
    - "Dances" is the verb here that tells us what Bobby is doing (this is a simple predicate because it contains the verb only).

2. He is a very good ballet dancer.
    - The verb "is" defines the subject. It is a linking verb.

3. He practices every day.
    - The verb "practices" tells us what Bobby does every day. It is in the present tense. "Every day" is the part of the predicate that modifies how often Bobby practices (the complete predicate is "practices every day").

4. Bobby has dreamed of dancing for the Canadian National Ballet for as long as he can remember.
    - "Has dreamed" is in the present-perfect tense (See *Acting on Words* pp. 532-34 for the 12 active verb tenses in English). "Has" is an auxiliary verb that combines with the main verb "dreamed" to make the statement that Bobby's dream has yet to be completed.

5. One morning, the telephone rings, and Bobby answers it.
    - "Rings" and "answers" are the verbs that tell us what the telephone and Bobby are doing.

6. When Bobby hears he has an interview with the National Ballet School, he yells and screams with excitement.
    - "Hears" is the verb that tells us how Bobby knows he has an interview. "Yells" and "screams" are the verbs that tell us what Bobby does when he hears he has an interview with the Ballet school (compound predicate).

Remember that a simple predicate is the base verb and any helping verbs (e.g. was going, had called, will call).

Exercise 1 : Finding Subjects and Simple Predicates

Now find the subjects and simple predicates in the following sentences. If you have downloaded this page, bold the subjects, underline the simple predicates, and italicize objects or subject

complements. If you are printing off this page, you may wish to circle the subjects, underline the verbs once, and underline the objects or verb complements twice.

Example: **Danielle** <u>had ordered</u> a history *book.*

1. Lenore went to the pow-wow.

2. Lenore and Daniel went to the pow-wow.

3. Lenore and Daniel went to the pow-wow and danced.

4. The milk turned sour.

5. Richard Burton is Antony.

6. The committee of elders sees a solution.

7. We laughed.

8. We threw the ball.

9. Where are you going?

10. Is the bibliography current?

11. Think about it.

12. It is a rainy day.

13. There are problems brewing in this program.

14. A problem was identified by the committee of elders.

15. A problem was identified.

16. She will sing at the concert tomorrow.

17. We had been talking about the business when she arrived.

To see how you are doing, check the exercises answer key. It also provides further commentary on these particular sentences..

Basic Sentence Patterns: The Simple Sentence

What you have seen so far is that standard English (for other than informal purposes) imposes certain grammatical requirements before accepting that a complete thought has been expressed. Here is a skeleton look at eight common patterns represented in Exercise 1:

- subject + intransitive base verb
- subject + transitive base verb + object
- subject + linking verb + subject complement
- who/where/what/why/when/how + helping verb +subject + verb (+question mark)
- linking verb + subject + subject complement (+ question mark)
- verb + modifying words (subject "you" is implied; sentence gives an order)
- dummy word subject + linking verb + subject complement + subject
- subject + linking verb (and sometimes helping verbs) + past participle (and sometimes modifying words; sentence is in passive voice)

Each of these eight common patterns expresses one complete thought and no additional partial thoughts. To indicate this completeness yet simplicity, all of these patterns are classified as a ***simple sentence***. As you have seen, depending on the type of thought being expressed, a simple sentence may require merely a one-word subject and a base verb (one sentence in just two words). Other thoughts may require additional core elements of grammar in the predicate. But all of these patterns include a subject (singular or compound) and a verb (singular or compound), and in some cases, for a complete thought to emerge, there must also be a simple predicate or even a complete predicate.

None of these simple sentence patterns is normally very long, even if additional modifying words are inserted in various places. But as you know from looking at many different kinds of writing, language does not limit itself to short sentences.

More than Simple Sentences

Consider the following sentence from Charles Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*

> In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children, a boy and a girl, and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads.
>
> (Chapter 16, p. 244 Penguin 1971)

Although this long and winding stretch of 67 words is clearly not a simple sentence, it is nevertheless one *single* sentence, with a capital letter at the beginning, a period at the end, and a careful combination of main thoughts and subordinate thoughts linked according to standard devices and conventions. While you may not wish to write 67-word sentences in your post-secondary essays, to express complex thinking you should be prepared to write essays that consist of more than simple sentences from start to finish. You therefore need to master various methods of combining thoughts, ways that are clear to your reader. An essential tool to help you do this is the concept of a clause.

The Clause Defined

A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate.

Two Main Types of Clauses

An ***independent clause*** expresses a complete thought. A simple sentence is, in fact, an independent clause punctuated to stand alone. A ***dependent clause***, though containing a subject and predicate, does not express a complete thought. It is linked to an independent clause by a subordinating conjunction such as "although." See *Acting on Words*, p. 525, for a list of common subordinating conjunctions. A dependent clause may also be linked to a preceding independent clause or subject by a relative pronoun (*who, that, which, whatever*). Just as individual words may, like actors, perform different roles, so may dependent clauses. Dependent clauses may perform the normal roles of adjectives, adverbs, or nouns in their relationship to certain subjects or independent clauses. In this case, a collectivity serves in a function typical of one word.

Dependent clause as noun

> She called upon <u>whatever resolve remained beneath her aching muscles</u>

The underlined clause serves as a direct object.

Dependent clause as adjective

> She slipped through the wall of bodies <u>that was gathered along the blueline</u>.

The underlined clause describes the noun phrase “wall of bodies.”

Dependent clause as adverb

She swerved left <u>when the goalie tried a poke check</u>.

The underlined clause modifies the verb “swerved”

Note that the underlined clauses would not make sense if punctuated to stand alone as sentences. The relative pronoun or adverbial conjunction leaves the reader in need of a relational statement for complete meaning. The clauses that have not been underlined in the second and third examples above could stand on their own, because their verbs are intransitive. The non-underlined clause in the first sentence needs an object, if not a dependent clause, because the verb is transitive.

More About Independent and Dependent Clauses

Independent clauses contain a subject and a verb (or subjects and verbs), but they may also contain other information that modifies what we know about the subject and verb. The subject might be modified by additional information, as might the verb (remember, the verb and its modifying information is called the predicate). As previously stated, an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

1. Equality and social justice issues concern all Canadians.
    - “Equality and social justice issues” is the compound subject of the sentence (i.e., there is more than one subject), “concern” is the verb, and “concern all Canadians” is the predicate because it contains the verb and the object (answering the question “who or what is concerned?”)

2. Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms outlines the equality rights for all Canadians.
    - “Section 15” is the subject, which is modified by the larger context in which it appears, “The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.” “Outlines” is the verb, “outlines equality rights for all Canadians” is the predicate because it contains the verb and the object “rights” (answering the question “what is outlined?”) and the phrase “for all Canadians” modifying “rights” (i.e., it is the “equality rights for all Canadians” that are outlined in the Charter).

3. Gender, race, and disability inequalities challenge the equality rights outlined in the Charter.
    - “Gender, race, and disability inequalities” is the compound subject, “challenge” is the verb, “challenge the equality rights outlined in the Charter” is the predicate that tells us exactly what is being challenged.

A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb, but it begins with a subordinating conjunction— "although," "because," "until," "after" etc.—that explains the subordinate relationship between the independent and dependent clause. These combinations of independent and dependent clauses create the following three sentence patterns: ***compound sentences*** (two or more independent clauses joined by a semicolon or a comma and a coordinating conjunction, which you can remember by the mnemonic device FANBOYS); ***complex sentences*** (one independent clause with at least one dependent clause); and ***compound-complex*** sentences (two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause).

Part of the problem that students have when analyzing sentences is that there may be more than one independent clause, more than one dependent or subordinate clause, and more than one ***phrase*** (a phrase is a group of words that cannot stand alone because it does not include both a subject and a verb) in a sentence. Learning how to distinguish between independent and dependent clauses will help you to learn how to use commas, and organise your ideas into a logically parallel or subordinate relationship. You can begin to recognize phrases with increased confidence once you have begun to see clauses and their relationships.

Exercise 2: Recognizing Independent (Main) and Dependent (Subordinate) Clauses

The following quiz tests your ability to recognize independent (main) and dependent (subordinate) clauses. Underline the independent clauses and circle the dependent clauses in the following sentences.

Example: (Although the girl ran faster than the boy,) the boy skipped better than the girl.

1. After the girl parked her mother's car, she ran towards him.
2. She asked for his autograph, but Leonard Cohen could not find his pen.
3. When he found it, he signed her book.
4. The girl thanked Leonard Cohen, while dancing a jig around the car park.

See the exercises answer key.

Combining Sentences: Coordination and Subordination

Clauses are combined according to two major methods, coordination and subordination. Learning to recognize these will significantly increase your reading skills, and learning to use them will significantly increase your writing skills.

Combining Sentences Using Coordination

Use coordination whenever you have two related independent clauses or ideas that are of equal importance. There are three main ways to combine independent clauses. The first way is by using one of the seven coordinating conjunctions, which you can remember by the mnemonic device FANBOYS.

	for
	and
	nor
coordinating	**b**ut
conjunctions	**o**r
	yet
	so

Example: He read *Our Mutual Friend*, and he began to recognize compound, complex, and compound-complex combinations.

The second way is to use a pair of correlative conjunctions.

	either… or
correlative	neither … nor
conjunctions	not only… but also

Example: Either you will learn to recognize and employ various sentence patterns, or you will remain limited in your ability to add effective emphasis and variety to your prose.

The third way to create compound sentences is to use a semicolon or a semicolon followed by a *conjunctive adverb*, such as "therefore," "however," "nevertheless," etc. When combined, the two independent clauses make a compound sentence**.**

Examples : She has mastered a wide range of sentences; she now uses inversions and other variations with notable effect.

Her use of compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences has significantly improved; moreover, she now reads with increased speed and understanding.

More Examples of How to Use Coordination

Here are further examples of combining independent clauses into compound sentences using a coordinating (FANBOYS) conjunction

1. Independent clause: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is fatal.
   Independent clause: For most people the progressive paralysis is gradual.

   Compound sentence: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is fatal, but for most people the progressive paralysis is gradual.

- "Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is fatal" is the first independent clause. "For most people the progressive paralysis is gradual," the second independent clause, is introduced by a comma and the coordinating conjunction "but." This is a compound sentence because it has two independent clauses joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

2. Independent clause: People with ALS suffer from muscle weakness.
   Independent clause: Most of them have difficulty walking, speaking, and swallowing.

   Compound sentence: People with ALS suffer from muscle weakness, and most of them have difficulty walking, speaking, and swallowing.

   - "People with ALS suffer from muscle weakness" is the first main clause. "Most of them have difficulty walking, speaking, and swallowing" is the second main clause. It is introduced by a comma and the coordinating conjunction "and."

Exercise 3: Combing Clauses Using Coordination and FANBOYS

Below are two pairs of independent clauses. Combine them by using a comma and one of the following coordinating conjunctions: "for," "and," "nor," "but," "or," "yet," or "so."

Make sure that you put the sentences in an order that makes sense.

1. Independent clause: More research is needed to understand women's health needs.
   Independent clause: It is important the women participate as volunteers in this research.

_____

_____

2. Independent clause: Assisted suicide is illegal in Canada.
   Independent clause: There is a growing movement to change the law.

_____

_____

See the exercises answer key.

Using the Semicolon to Coordinate Sentences

The semicolon is used to coordinate two independent clauses that are closely related in meaning and grammatical structure.

1. Independent clause: Rodriguez thought that the quality of life is important.
   Independent clause: She wanted to die because her life was without quality.

Compound sentence: Rodriguez thought that the quality of life is important; she wanted to die because her life was without quality.

Exercise 4 Combining Clauses using Coordination and a Semicolon

Combine the following pair of independent clauses into one compound sentence. Use a semicolon, and arrange the sentences so that they make sense.

1. Independent clause: Some individuals make the choice to die.
   Independent clause: Other individuals make the choice to live.

_____

_____

See the exercises answer key.

Using Adverbial Conjunctions after a Semicolon to Combine Sentences.

Use a semicolon, an adverbial conjunction, and a comma to join two independent clauses and add emphasis to the relative meaning and grammatical structure.

Following is a list of common adverbial conjunctions:

however	furthermore	consequently
nevertheless	moreover	therefore
indeed	hence	thus

1. Independent clause: Steven Hawkins suffers from ALS.
   Independent clause: He believes his life has quality.

   Compound sentence: Steven Hawkins suffers from ALS; however, he believes his life has quality.

2. Independent clause: Researchers believe there is the possibility of a cure.
   Independent clause: Many people who suffer from ALS feel there is hope.

Compound sentence: Researchers believe there is the possibility of a cure; therefore, many people who suffer from ALS feel there is hope.

Exercise 5: Combining Clauses Using Coordination, a Semicolon and a Conjunctive Adverb

combine the following independent clauses.

1. Independent clause: Stress is a natural part of life.
   Independent clause: Too much stress can decrease our physical health.

   _____

   _____

2. Independent clause: Shamanic healing acknowledges that all healing includes a spiritual dimension.
   Independent clause: Shamans attempt to create a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual balance.

   _____

   _____

   _____

See the exercises answer key.

More on Using Subordination to Combine Sentences

Use subordination when you want to show that one idea is more important than another. The most important idea will appear in the main clause, and the subordinate idea will appear in the dependent or subordinate clause. You can identify this clause because it will start with a subordinating conjunction.

Following is a list of common subordinating conjunctions:

after	although	as	even though	so that
before	whenever	as if	in order that	if
because	where	unless	rather than	once
since	when	until	provided that	while

You may consider both ideas, initially, as independent clauses but then decide to subordinate one to the other, as follows:

1. Independent clause: Europeans arrived in what is now Canada in the fifteenth century.
   Independent clause: They did not make first contact with certain plains First Nations until the late nineteenth century.

   Complex sentence: Although Europeans arrived in what is now Canada in the fifteenth century, they did not make first contact with certain plains First Nations until the late nineteenth century.

   - "Although" is the subordinating conjunction that indicates that the first independent clause is the subordinate clause. The main clause here—"they did not make first contact with certain plains First nations until the late nineteenth century"—appears at the end of the sentence. It is a complex sentence because it has one independent clause and (at least) one dependent clause.

3. Independent clause: The Inuit have maintained strong cultural traditions.
   Independent clause: Their ancient way of life has changed dramatically.

   Complex sentence: The Inuit have maintained strong cultural traditions, even though their ancient way of life has changed dramatically.

   - "Even though" is the subordinating conjunction that indicates that the second independent clause is the subordinate clause. The main clause here—"The Inuit have maintaineded strong cultural traditions"—appears at the beginning of the sentence.

4. Independent clause: European explorers, missionaries, and teachers enforced their beliefs and values.
   Independent clause: They believed their worldview was superior.

   Complex sentence: European explorers, missionaries, and teachers enforced their beliefs and values because they believed their worldview was superior.

   - "Because" is the subordinating conjunction. The comma is omitted because the dependent clause is essential to the main idea of the sentence.

Exercise 6: Combining Clauses Using a Subordinating Conjunction

Combine the pairs of sentences below by using a subordinating conjunction. Make sure that your order of arrangement makes sense.

1. European awareness of the new world increased.
   Opportunities for trade with aboriginal peoples were explored.

_____

_____

2. Indian artists work with a wide variety of art forms.
   Basketry, beadwork, textiles, and carvings are some of the most traditional mediums.

_____

_____

3. It is important to preserve the aboriginal oral tradition.
   Oral narratives transmit and preserve traditional Indigenous knowledge.

_____

_____

See the exercises answer key.

Exercise 7: More Practice with Coordination and Subordination

Following are five different pairs of sentences. Using either FANBOYS coordinating conjunctions—*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*—or subordinating conjunctions—*after, although, because, before, as, so, when or while*—combine the sentences to make one sentence. Please note that there are a variety of options that make sense.

Example: The student ran to class. She was late.

Option 1: Although the student ran to class, she was late.

Option 2: Because she was late, the student ran to class.

Option 3: The student ran to class, but she was late.

1. Leonard Cohen shook his head. He climbed into the back of his limousine.

   _____

2. The girl ran towards the limousine. The car was already leaving the car park.

   _____

3. The limousine sped away. He waved to her.

   _____

4. She was disappointed. She stared dejectedly after him.

   _____

5. She was thirsty. She decided to buy an iced tea from the coffee shop.

See the exercises answer key.

Exercise 8: More Practice Using Adverbial Conjunctions after a Semicolon to Make Compound Sentences

Use an appropriate adverbial conjunction to connect the following pairs of sentences. Some frequently used adverbial conjunctions include the following words: “furthermore,” “however,” “moreover,” “nevertheless,” “consequently,” “therefore,” and “likewise.”

Example: We would like to go to Greece on holiday. We must wait until we have saved enough money.

We would like to go to Greece on holiday; however, we must wait until we have saved enough money.

1. Leonard Cohen is one of the most distinguished Canadian songwriters. He is held in high regard in Canada.

   _____

   _____

2. Cohen's songs reflect his skill as a poet. His skill as a poet does not negate his skill as a songwriter.

_____

_____

3. Leonard Cohen has been inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame. He has been awarded the Order of Canada.

_____

_____

See the exercises answer key.

Using Relative Pronouns to Combine Sentences

Another way you can subordinate one idea as a dependent clause is to use a relative pronoun clause. Relative pronouns modify a noun or a pronoun. In relative pronoun clauses, the relative pronoun becomes the subject or object of the clause it begins. The clause generally falls immediately after the word it modifies. Relative pronoun clauses are either restrictive (essential to the meaning of the sentence) or non-restrictive (non-essential to the meaning of the sentence).

Following is a list of common relative pronouns: "who," "whom," "whose," "which," "that."

Using Restrictive Relative Pronoun Clauses

1. Independent clause: Patricia M. Ningewance is a Canadian aboriginal artist.
   Independent clause: She believes that art is about "[finding] our way home."

   Combined: Patricia M. Ningewance is a Canadian aboriginal artist who believes that art is about "[finding] our way home."

- "Who" is the relative pronoun here that replaces "she," and stands for Patricia M. Ningewance, the aboriginal artist. There is no comma before the "who" because the information that follows is essential to the sentence.

Exercise 9: Using a Relative Pronoun to Combine Restrictive Clauses

Use a relative pronoun to combine the following sentences.

1. Many aboriginal artists are concerned with traditional ways of life.
   They pass on aboriginal beliefs about nature and spirituality to future generations.

   _____

   _____

2. Certain traditional painters or carvers resist commercial pressures.
   These are the artists most deeply concerned with natural themes.

   _____

   _____

See the exercises answer key.

Non-restrictive Relative Pronoun Clauses

A non-restrictive relative pronoun clause may contribute additional information to a sentence by *expanding* on the meaning or context, but this information is not essential to expressing the core meaning. Commas are used to signal that the relative pronoun clause is not essential to a proper understanding of the basic idea being stated..

1. Early Aboriginal people, who used pigments from a variety of plants and minerals, decorated their clothing, utensils, and tee-pees.

   - "Who used pigments from a variety of plants and minerals" is the non-restrictive or non-essential clause that adds additional information to the main clause: "Early Aboriginal people decorated their clothing, utensils, and tee-pees." There are commas on both sides of the non-restrictive clause to indicate that the meaning would still be clear even if the words in the non-restrictive clause were deleted. The main clause pauses in mid thought and then completes itself after the intervening non-essential subordinate clause.

2. Aboriginal art, which includes bone, ivory, and soapstone carvings, was often used for ritualistic purposes.

   - "Which includes bone, ivory, and soapstone carvings" is the non-restrictive or non-essential clause that adds additional information to the main clause: Aboriginal art was often used for ritualistic purposes. There are commas on both sides of the non-restrictive clause to indicate that the meaning would still be clear even if the words in the non-restrictive clause were deleted.

Exercise 10: Identifying Non-restrictive Subordinate Clauses

Underline the non-restrictive clauses or modifiers in the following sentences.

1. Sharon Hall, who belongs to the Brown Bear Clan, uses her dreams to inspire her art.
2. Aboriginal artists, who often work with bone, beads, and animal hair, express their unique tribal heritage in their art.
3. The creative process of Aboriginal pottery making, which often involves collecting the clay from secret places, celebrates the relationship between life and mother earth.

See the exercises answer key.

Exercise 11: Combining Clauses Using Non-restrictive Subordination

Combine the following pairs of sentences, so that they make one sentence that contains, within it, a non-restrictive modifier.

1. Oral Narratives are transmitted by word-of-mouth.
   They articulate and record cultural histories, beliefs, and values.

   _____

   _____

2. Historian and anthropologists use oral histories and traditions to understand past events.
   They distinguish between traditions, eyewitness accounts, and cultural storytelling.

   _____

   _____

See the exercises answer key.

Exercise 12: More Practice in Identifying Restrictive and Non-restrictive Modifying Information

Underline the restrictive and circle the non-restrictive modifying information in the following sentences. Some of the modifying information is in the form of subordinate clauses. Some is in the form of phrases (groups of that function as a unit but lack a subject, verb or both).

Example: My sister, (who would rather go on holiday to Spain), has saved over a hundred dollars.

Anyone <u>who has been to Greece</u> knows that Greece is the best holiday location.

1. Randy Bachman, another Canadian singer-songwriter, is legendary in the rock-and-roll industry.

2. Lucie Blue Tremblay writes and performs lesbian music that has both English and French interpretations.

3. Joni Mitchell sings and performs folk-rock and jazz music, which is well-known throughout the world.

4. Molly Johnson, who is a Canadian rock and jazz singer, released a solo jazz album in 2000.

See the exercises answer key.

Phrases

Phrases are groups of words that function as a unit but lack a subject, verb or both. Phrases, therefore, are not clauses, which always contain a subject and verb or predicate. As you learn to recognize common types of phrases, remember that the most important thing is to determine how they function, what roles they play.

Gerund phrases are based on verbal forms ending in "–ing" that function as nouns:

Skating long hours makes her legs burn	(as a subject)
The coach demanded better skating.	(as an object)
His great love is skating.	(as a subject complement)

Verb phrases comprise a main verb and one of more auxiliaries behaving as a single verb in the predicate:

She should have invited you to the symphony.

Noun phrases include a noun and its modifiers:

A dark angry cloud appeared in the sky.	(as a subject)
We saw a dark angry cloud.	(as an object)
The night was a dark angry cloud.	(as a subject complement)

Infinitive phrases comprise the verb in its infinitive form (to look, to sing, etc) and any modifiers:

I tried to express my satisfaction.	(as an adverb)

Montreal is the city to visit. (as an adjective)

To finish my essay will be a triumph. (as a noun)

Participial phrases include the past or present participle of a verb and any objects, complements, or modifiers. They function as an adjective.

Sauntering down the street, the schoolboy heard the school bell ring.

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition. A noun or pronoun, known as the object of the preposition, ends the phrase.

The queen of the blues took the stage. (as an adjective)

The audience pushed to the front rows for a better view. (as an adverb)

Then a knock came from outside the door. (as a noun)

More on Sentence Patterns Beyond the Simple

At the start of this document, we looked at several patterns of sentences within the simple category: those with intransitive or transitive verbs, those with linking verbs and subject complements, those expressing a question by placing the subject between elements of the predicate, those beginning with dummy subjects, those in the passive voice, and so on. Now that you have considered types of clauses as well as phrases, you are ready to identify not only various types of simple sentences but the more elaborate forms known as *compound*, *complex*, and *compound-complex* sentences. Putting this knowledge into practice in your own writing will provide variety and emphasis in your expression.

Just as a refresher, recall that a *simple* sentence consists of one independent clause; it has no dependent clauses. The subject and/or the verb of the independent clause may be compound. Because it connects one subject or group of subjects to one verb or group of verbs, it can be said to express one complete thought.

Examples

Susan ran.
Susan and Mike climbed the mountain.

A *compound* sentence consists of two or more independent clauses; these independent clauses are often joined by a FANBOYS coordinating conjunction—“for,” “and,” “nor,” “ but,”” or,” “yet,” and “ so”--with its parts being more or less equal. A comma is placed immediately before the conjunction.

Examples

John, Nathan and Steve want to climb Mount Everest, and they are determined to do it one day.
Susan's horse reared and bucked, but Susan did not fall off.
Mountain climbing demands expertise; moreover, it demands that the climbers be physically fit.
Susan fell off; the horse ran away.

A pair of correlative conjunctions is another way of creating a compound sentence.

Examples

Either you will pass the examination, or you will have a chance to write a supplemental.
Neither is their music interesting, nor is it gentle on the eardrums.
Not only is she a fast skater, but she also has a hard, accurate shot.

A semicolon may be used, with or without an ensuing adverbial conjunction.

Morris Berman's book *Dark Age America* is a disheartening read; it presents a picture of rampant greed and indifference with little hope of escape.

Morris Berman's book *Dark Age America* is a disheartening read; nevertheless, it is important.

A *complex* sentence consists of one independent clause that is modified by one or more dependent or subordinate clauses. When the dependent clause appears first in the sentence, it is followed by a comma. Sometimes the dependent clause is introduced by an adverbial conjunction: "however," "further," "therefore," "although," "when," "whenever," "still," "after," "indeed," etc.

Examples:

After they climbed the mountain, they rested for a while.
Although she rode well, she was unable to control her new horse.
She was unable to control her new horse although she rode well.

[When you begin a sentence with an independent clause, a comma may not be required after it, for instance, if the following dependent clause is essential to the main idea of the main clause.]

A *compound-complex* sentence consists of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

Examples:

> Mary stayed at home to look after the children, but, after they had gone to school, she left the house.
>
> Although Jonathan had never seen her before, he thought she was beautiful, so, plucking up his courage, he asked her out.

Exercise 13 : More Practice in Identifying Compound and Complex Sentences

Identify the independent and dependent clauses in the following sentences, by underlining the independent clauses and circling the dependent clauses. Identify the type of sentence pattern by writing either an S (simple), C (compound), Cx (complex), or CC (compound complex) at the side of the sentence.

1. Horses jump.
2. Show jumping classes are seen at horse shows all over the world, and, since 1912, show jumping has been an Olympic sport.
3. The history of show jumping is interesting.
4. The Enclosure acts, which were instigated in England in the eighteenth century, required the construction of fences to separate the land of the wealthy farm owners from the land of the common people, and there was an increasing demand for horses who could jump these fences.
5. In the late nineteenth-century, horse jumping became a spectator sport.
6. Originally, the spectators would watch the competitors ride across country, racing from church steeple to church steeple (point to point), but the spectators soon became frustrated because they could not see all the fences, and the sport became contained to a field or arena.
7. In France, “lepping” competitions, which were confined to an arena, became popular, and these competitions spread to England in the late nineteenth century.
8. These “lepping” competitions are the precursor to modern show jumping classes.
9. Canada’s Spruce Meadows, which is in Calgary, Alberta, has one of the best show jumping facilities in the world.

See the exercises answer key.

For More on Sentence Patterns

For more on sentence patterns, see pages 23-25 of *Acting on Words* and “Sentence Patterns” at the Text Enrichment Site, Chapter 1. You might then enjoy the challenge of analyzing the following passage from Dickens, quoted earlier in this document:

Exercise 14: Analyzing Dickens

Try to identify every unit of the Dickens sentence quoted immediately below—its clauses and phrases. For each unit, state its function, e.g., main clause, subordinate clause, adjectival phrase, etc. When you have gone as far as you think you can, see the exercises answer key. Have fun!

> In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children, a boy and a girl, and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads.
>
> (Chapter 16, p. 244 Penguin 1971)

Exercise 15: Recognizing Incomplete Sentences

By now you realize that a complete sentence in standard written English requires a subject and a verb; in some cases, a simple or complete predicate is required as well. You also realize that adverbial conjunctions at the start of an independent clause change a complete thought to an impartial (subordinate thought). For each of the following groups of words, explain what parts of speech are present and what must be added or removed in order to create a sentence (complete and correct thought). You may recall that the first three of the following appeared earlier, during a preliminary discussion of grammatical completion.

1. sang another torch song

2. a consummate singer

3. lighting up the crowd

4. after she left the stage

See the exercises answer key.

For Further Practice: More Exercises

The following exercises offer more practice in the types of exercises in the previous parts of this document. After completing each of the following, see the exercises answer key.

Exercise 16: Finding Subjects

Underline the subjects in the following sentences.

1. Simon and Peter were covered in snow.
2. They struggled to their feet.
3. Their skis were either broken or lost.

4. A few people, who were skiing by, stopped to help them.
5. Someone on a skidoo came and gave them a ride down the hill.

Exercise 17: Finding Verbs

Underline the verbs in the following sentences.

1. His mother drives him to the interview.
2. Bobby dances skilfully for the panel of interviewers.
3. The interviewers congratulate and applaud Bobby's performance.
4. Bobby became one of the youngest dancers at the school.
5. Bobby and his mother are members.

Exercise 18: Finding Subjects and Simple Predicates

Find the subjects and verbs or simple predicates in the following sentences. In the example, the subject is underlined and the verbs enclosed in paretheses. Answers are provided.

Example: The girl and boy (ran) and (skipped) up to the front door.

1. The girl borrowed her mother's car, and drove to the folk festival.
2. On the way, she stopped at the coffee shop.
3. She gasped.
4. Leonard Cohen was standing in the car park.

Exercise 19: **Finding Complete Subjects and Complete Predicates**

Underline the subjects and all modifying information, and circle the verbs and all modifying information in the following sentences. .

1. Sue Rodriguez, a woman who had Lou Gehrig's disease, fought for the right to die.
2. As a disabled woman, she argued that the law discriminated against her.
3. She lost her case in the courts.
4. Physician-assisted suicide is illegal in Canada.