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Sentence Structure

Thank goodness for sentences and sentence structure! [Sentences](#) are nice little packages of words that come together to express complete thoughts. They make it easy to understand ideas and learn information.

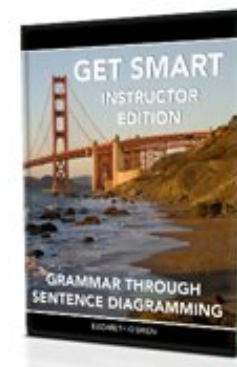
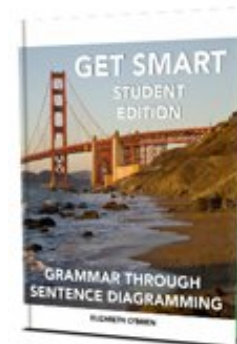
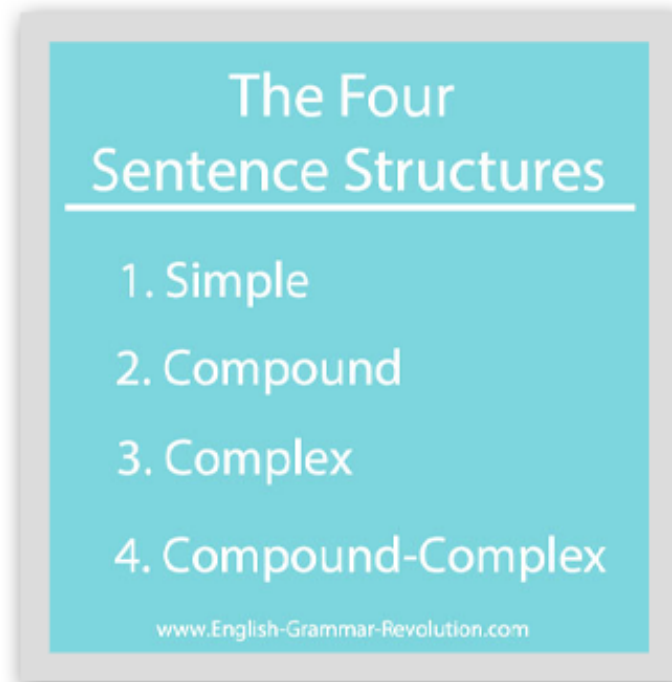
Without sentences, we'd probably all be walking around like a bunch of babbling idiots. See. They're pretty important. Let's show them some respect and learn more about them!

"I'm enjoying your
Stay Smart books.

I'm going through
the exercises a
second time, and
I'm still learning
from my mistakes."

- Rupan, Student





In order to be a complete sentence, a group of words needs to contain a subject and a verb, and it needs to express a complete thought.

If a group of words is missing any of that information, it is probably a [sentence fragment](#). If you have a group of words containing two or more independent clauses that are not properly punctuated, it is probably a [run-on sentence](#).

Okay, now it's time for us to explore the four sentence structures!

The Four Sentence Structures

1. [Simple Sentences](#)

A simple sentence contains only one independent clause.

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An [independent clause](#) is a group of words (with a subject and a verb) that expresses a complete thought.



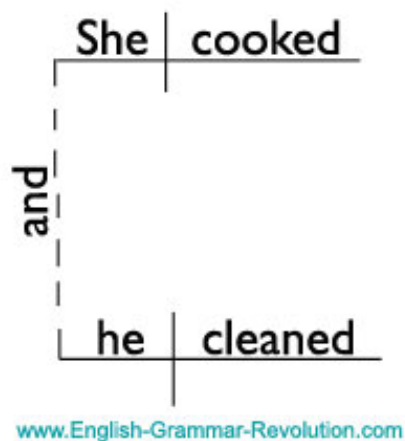
I drink coffee.

I drink coffee is an independent clause. It contains a subject (*I*) and a verb (*drink*), and it expresses a complete thought. Learn more about the [simple sentence here](#).

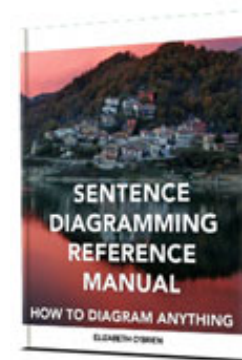
2. [Compound Sentences](#)

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses. These clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon.

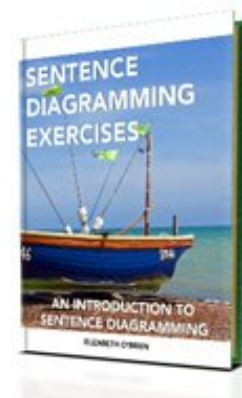
A [coordinating conjunction](#) is a word that glues words, phrases, or clauses together.



She cooked and he cleaned.



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Learn the basics of diagramming sentences with [these exercises](#).

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She cooked is an independent clause. *He cleaned* is also an independent clause. *And* is a coordinating conjunction joining the two independent clauses. *She cooked and he cleaned* is a compound sentence. Learn more about the [compound sentence here](#).

Psst! When you join two independent clauses with only a comma, it's called a *comma splice*. [Avoid comma splices](#).

3. Complex Sentences

A complex sentence contains a subordinate clause and an independent clause.

A [subordinate clause](#) is a group of words that has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought.



I washed the dishes after I ate breakfast.

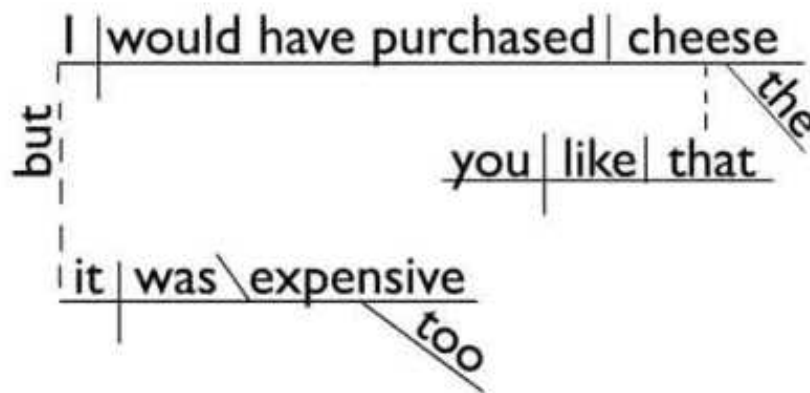
I washed the dishes is an independent clause. *After I ate breakfast* is a [dependent adverb clause](#) modifying the verb *washed*. *I washed the dishes after I ate breakfast* is a complex sentence.

Sometimes, it can be hard for people to tell the difference between compound sentences and complex sentences. [You can learn more telling the difference here](#).

Learn more about the [complex sentence here](#).

4. Compound-Complex Sentences

A compound-complex sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause.



*I would have purchased the cheese that you like,
but it was too expensive.*

I would have purchased the cheese and *it was too expensive* are both independent clauses. They are being joined by the conjunction *but*.

That you like is a [dependent adjective clause](#) modifying the noun *cheese*. The whole sentence is a compound-complex sentence. Learn more about the [compound-complex sentence here](#).

Sentence Diagramming Rules!

The great thing about [diagramming sentences](#) is that it shows how the parts of a sentence are related. Being able to see a sentence drawn out will help you understand sentence structure. Give it a shot!

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Keep learning and have fun!



Elizabeth O'Brien is the creator of the Grammar Revolution step-by-step grammar and sentence diagramming programs. Her programs are guaranteed not only to teach you grammar, but also to give you more confidence in your communication skills.

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"A schoolchild should be taught grammar for the same reason that a medical student should study anatomy." - E. B. White
