

Cumulative Sentence

Definition of Cumulative Sentence

A cumulative sentence is known as a “loose sentence,” that starts with an independent clause or main clause, which is simple and straight, provides main idea, and then adds subordinate elements or modifiers. It adds subordinate or modifying elements after the subject and the predicate. Writers use these types of sentences when they want to put forth the main idea first, and provide details to elucidate the idea further thereafter. They use these details in the form of dependent or subordinate phrases or clauses.

These types of sentences work better in various forms of writing, specifically in explaining theories, by giving the main idea at the beginning, and then adding more information to build up the idea further. For instance, in the sentence, “Llanblethian hangs pleasantly, with its white cottages, and orchard and other trees...” (*The Life of John Sterling*, by Thomas Carlyle), the main clause is short, independent, and straightforward, while the subordinate elements clarify the idea further.

Examples of Cumulative Sentence in Literature

Example #1: *More Die of Heartbreak* (by Saul Bellow)

“The radiators put out lots of heat, too much, in fact, and old-fashioned sounds and smells came with it, exhalations of the matter that composes our own mortality, and reminiscent of the intimate gases we all diffuse.”

In these lines, the main idea is simply the heat of radiators. After that, comes additional information, telling how dangerous the smell of these radiators could be for the humans.

Example #2: *Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream* (by Joan Didion)

“The San Bernardino Valley lies only an hour east of Los Angeles by the San Bernardino Freeway but is in certain ways an alien place: not the coastal California of the subtropical twilights and the soft westerlies off the Pacific but a harsher California, haunted by the Mojave just beyond the mountains, devastated by the hot dry Santa Ana wind that comes down through the passes at 100 miles an hour and whines through the eucalyptus windbreaks and works on the nerves.”

In this example, the main clause is independent, [setting](#) a scene for this [essay](#), and describing the location of San Bernardino Valley. The modifying elements further enhance this description.

Example #3: *Life and Times of Chaucer* (by John Gardner)

“The unwieldy provision carts, draught horses, and heavily armed knights kept the advance down to nine miles a day, the huge horde moving in three parallel columns, cutting broad highways of litter and devastation through an already abandoned countryside, many of the adventurers now traveling on foot, having sold their horses for bread or having slaughtered them for meat.”

This is a perfect description of a cumulative sentence. The main clause is about carts, and then there are further details that explain how carts move down the road.

Example #4: *Gentlemen of the Road: A Tale of Adventure* (by Michael Chabon)

“He wept silently, after the custom of shamed and angry men, so that when the pursuit party came tumbling. pounding. scrabbling

concealed, he could hear the creak and rattle of their leather armor with its scales of horn; and when the Arsiyah returned, just before daybreak, at the very hour when all of creation seemed to fall silent as if fighting off tears, Zelikman could hear the rumbling of the men's bellies and the grit in their eyelids and the hollowness of failure sounding in their chests."

This is another very good example of cumulative sentence. The main clause is very short and straight, telling someone has wept; thereafter, the author has given a detailed description of why someone, mentioned in the main clause, wept silently.

Function of Cumulative Sentence

Cumulative sentences are easier to understand, straightforward, and simple. The additional details in these sentences become relatively important, as they elucidate the main idea, given in a few words at the beginning. They are useful when the goal of a writer is clarity rather than [suspense](#). Cumulative sentences give an informal, conversational, and relaxed feeling to a work of art.

Besides, one must be judicious while explaining a main clause through subordinate and modifying phrases or clauses. At times, readers might not read full details in the entire sentence, as they have already read the main idea. Moreover, if a sentence becomes too long, they might lose interest, or forget the main idea at the end of a sentence.