

# Sentence

## Definition of Sentence

Etymologically, the term *sentence* has its origin in a Latin word “*sententia*,” which translates as “feeling,” or “opinion.” In language, a sentence is the largest grammatically independent unit, having a [subject](#) and a verb, and expressing a complete thought or an idea.

In English, a sentence starts with a capital letter, and ends with a [punctuation](#) mark, such as a period, an exclamation mark, or a question mark. It could be a very [simple sentence](#), with only a subject and a predicate; or a complex one with a group of clauses, phrases, or words, which form a syntactic unit, expressing a wish, a question, an emotion, a command, an assertion, a performance or an action.

### For example:

“Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age.” (*Inaugural Address*, by President Barack Obama, 2009).

This is an example of a complex sentence. It expresses a complete idea about economy.

## Types of Sentence

Depending upon the structure and functions, a sentence is of different types. These include:

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### Declarative Sentence

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Declarative sentence uses a simple statement instead of an exclamation, a question, or a command. In this type of sentence, the subject comes before

the verb, and a period comes at the end. It is one of the most commonly used sentences in various forms of writing. It can be a positive or negative statement in different shapes. For example, “We have meat stored in the refrigerator because it is very hot outside,” is a simple declarative sentence.

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## Interrogative Sentence

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This type of a sentence uses an interrogation or a question. Hence, it ends with an interrogation mark. This sentence uses inversion, which is a reversal of the word order, where subject comes after the verb. For instance, “Have you taken your breakfast this morning?”

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## Imperative Sentence

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An imperative sentence gives instructions or advice, or expresses a command or request. It starts with the basic form of a verb and ends with an exclamation mark or a period such as, “Give me liberty or give me death!”

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## Exclamatory Sentence

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In an exclamatory sentence, the main [clause](#) expresses strong emotions or feelings, with an exclamation mark, also referred to as an “exclamation point,” at the end. These sentences mostly appear in dialogues, being less common in academic writing. For example, “Whoa, it’s alive! It’s alive!”

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## Examples of Sentences in Literature

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### Example #1: *Richard IV* (by William Shakespeare)

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“But to say I know more harm in him than in myself,  
were to say more than I know. That he is old, the  
more the pity, his white hairs do witness it; but  
that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster,  
that I utterly deny.”

This excerpt is an example of a declarative but complex sentence, as you can see Shakespeare has used simple statements. There are two complex declarative sentences. The first one starts with “But,” and the second (in the second line) starts with “That.”

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**Example #2: *Notes From a Small Island* (by Bill Bryson)**

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“Am I alone in thinking it odd that a people ingenious enough to invent paper, gunpowder, kites, and any number of other useful objects, and who have a noble history extending back three thousand years, haven’t yet worked out that a pair of knitting needles is no way to capture food?”

The above lines are a good example of an interrogative sentence in which the author has reversed the normal word order, and used a question mark at the end of the sentence.

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**Example #3: *Self-Reliance* (by Ralph Waldo Emerson)**

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“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines ... *Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today.*”

These italic lines present an example of an imperative sentence. Emerson starts this sentence with instructions, and ends with a piece of advice.

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**Example #4: *Shrek 2* (by William Steig)**

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“*Shrek*: Now, let’s go before they light the torches!  
*Princess Fiona*: Hey, they’re my parents!  
*Shrek*: Hello, they locked you in a tower!”

This is a perfect example of exclamatory sentences, in which readers can see the characters using expressive language, marked by exclamation marks at the end of each sentence.

## **Function**

As the largest unit in writing, the sentence is comprised of several words, phrases, and clauses. It organizes a pattern of thought, conveys meanings; and contains characteristics, such as timing patterns and intonation. In both writing and speaking, the purpose of a sentence is to make statements, asks questions, make demands, and show strong feelings. It is a complete statement, having a subject and a predicate. Sentences have a very important function, which is to convey the message in the same way it is intended to be conveyed.