
Sentence Structure, Syntax, Sentence Combining, & Sentence Errors

I. Sentence Fragments: A construction that does not contain both a subject and a verb or dependent or subordinate clause mistaken for a complete sentence. Sentence fragments lack either important elements necessary in a complete sentence, such as a subject or a verb, or start with a word like Since, Because, If, or When—indicating that they are meant to function as a subordinate clause to main clause.

When we skated on the pond. This clause has a noun (we) and verb (skated) but starts with a word that makes it a dependent/subordinate clause (an adverb clause that would modify a main clause).

When we skated on the pond. My friend John almost fell through a crack in the ice.

The adverb clause would best modify a main clause, like sentence that follows it above. Combining the sentences results in a complete and complex sentence that tells WHEN the friend almost fell through the ice.

When we skated on the pond, my friend John almost fell through a crack in the ice.

II. Dependent/Subordinate Clauses: While clauses, both independent and dependent, must contain both subjects and verbs, dependent clauses, also called subordinate clauses, never carry the main content or action of a sentence, but rather function as modifiers in a sentence. Although both types of clauses contain both subject & verb, dependent clauses don't work as stand alone sentences because they always begins with a subordinating conjunction or other word that subordinates, or make them dependent upon another sentence. There are e types of dependent clauses:

Adjective Clause: a clause that beings with “that” “who,” “whom” or “which” and functions like any adjective in a sentence by modifying a noun. Adjective clauses usually follow a noun and never begin a sentence.

The driver *who sideswiped my car* had her license revoked. [the adjective clause modifies driver]. Although the Adjective Clause contains a subject and a verb, it cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Adverb Clause: begins with a “subordinating conjunction” (because, since, although) and modifies a verb or an adjective in a sentence, and usually answers the question “When?” “How?” “Why?” “Where?” or “To What Extent?” Adverb clauses can begin a sentence (resulting in a subordinated sentence) or occur after the verb they modify.

Because we were late for dinner, we missed out on the tasty appetizers. **OR** We missed out on the tasty appetizers *because we were late for dinner.* [The subordinate adverb clause tells “Why?” we missed out on the appetizers] Although a subordinate clause has a subject and a verb, it cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Noun Clause: a noun clause doesn't modify any other part of the sentence in which it appears, but functions exactly like any regular noun would: as the subject, direct object, object of a preposition, or predicate nominative:

- a. *Whoever broke this antique Chinese porcelain vase* will have to pay for it. [The noun clause functions as the subject of the sentence] Unlike other types of clauses, the noun clause is an essential part of the sentence & the sentence is incomplete without it. The noun clause is not a complete sentence on its own.
- b. We will sue *whoever broke this ancient Chinese porcelain vase.* [The noun clause functions as the direct object of the sentence, the object [whoever broke the vase] of the action [being sued]. The sentence is incomplete without the noun clause, and the noun clause can't stand alone as an independent sentence.
- c. Hopefully the security camera caught an image of *whoever broke this ancient Chinese porcelain vase.* [The noun clause is the object of the prepositional phrase beginning with “of.”]
- d. The murderer is *whoever broke this antique Chinese porcelain vase.* [The noun clause functions as a predicate nominative, a noun or noun clause occurring after a linking verb like is that renames or more specifically identifies the subject of the sentence.

III. Subordinating Sentences: Subordination is a strategy for combining sentences to vary sentence structure, show connections between different sentences &/or parts of a sentence & add complexity to ideas expressed in a sentence. When you subordinate a sentence, you move the subordinate (i.e. dependent) clause to the front of the sentence, separate it from the rest of the sentence (which must be an independent clause) with a comma, and begin it with a subordinating conjunction whose meaning shows the connection or complexity or strategy of the idea you want to convey. Subordination also adds sentence variety to your writing by helping you avoid writing sentences in the same way all the time: Subject – verb – object. Subject – verb – object. Subject - verb - object.

The students failed to understand the homework. The students didn't bother to follow directions.
The students didn't understand the homework *because they didn't bother to follow directions*.
Because the students didn't bother to follow directions, they failed to understand the homework.

Beginning a sentence with a subordinate clause or combining already existing sentences in your writing can add details without adding additional, unnecessary words or sentences. In fact, subordinating allows you to condense and combine ideas while preserving or demonstrating the complexity/complex connection between them.

IV. Phrases: a phrase is a group words that together have a particular function within a sentence, usually modifying other parts of the sentence. A phrase can never function as a complete sentence—only as a modifier that shows relationships such as where, when, or to whom. A phrase differs from a clause b/c it never has a subject & main verb.

Several phrases that modify nouns or verbs are often mistaken for complete sentences: prepositional phrases (which work as adjectives or adverbs in a sentence); participial phrases, gerund phrases, and infinitive phrases.

Prepositional Phrases: Prepositional phrases are always formed with the same formula: [preposition + noun OR preposition + definite/indefinite article + adjective + noun]

Prepositional Phrases function as adverbs that modify verbs in a sentence or as adjectives that modify nouns in a sentence. If the prepositional phrase answers “Which one?” or “What kind?” it is an *adjective phrase*. If the prepositional phrase answers “Where?” “How” or “To what extent?” it is an *adverb phrase*.

Prepositional phrases can never stand alone as sentences because they do not contain subjects and main verbs; they also aren't separated from the rest of a sentence by commas or other punctuation. Commonly used/misused prepositions include: *in, on, above, below, over, about, off, around, of, over, by, for, at, into, from, between, toward, until, upon, during, beside, behind, across, and after*. Many prepositions are misused: i.e. *You do not write a paper over or on a topic—you write a paper about a topic*.

I want pizza with onions and anchovies. [The prepositional phrase *with onion and anchovies* is a adjective phrase that modifies the noun *pizza*.]

It took me forever to run up the hill. [the prepositional phrase *up the hill* modifies the verb *run* because it shows how where I was taking so long to run.

Participial Phrases: participles are –ing and –ed forms of verbs that don't carry the action of a sentence or function as verbs. They function as adjectives that modify nouns. A participial phrase as a participle and a prepositional phrase. They can come before after the noun they modify, and are separated by a comma.

Frustrated by the heat, the dog jumped into the kiddie pool. [the participial phrase describes the dog]
The lights *blinking on and off at the club* gave me a headache. [the participial phrase describes lights]
Sometimes a single participle modifies a noun: *Trifling* people annoy me!

Gerund Phrases: Gerunds are –ing verbs that function as nouns. A gerund phrase has a gerund and a prepositional phrase. They do not modify anything because nouns don't modify other parts of speech). As nouns, they can function as the subject or direct object of a sentence, or as the object of a preposition.

Biking along the lakefront is one of the best things about living in Chicago. [The gerund phrase functions as the subject of the sentence, and cannot stand alone.
I only like *cooking for houseguests*. [The gerund phrase is the object of the verb *like*]

Infinitive Phrases: Infinitives are formed by placing the word “to” before a verb (i.e. to go, to squander, to write, to become, to demonstrate), but should not be confused with a prepositional phrase, which always ends with a noun [i.e. “to go” = infinitive, but “to school” = prepositional phrase. Infinitives can have many functions.

We eventually learned *to parallel park without hitting the curb*.
[the infinitive phrase functions as the object of the verb learned]

V. Sentence Types: Sentences can be labeled by how they function, and classified by the number of independent and dependent/subordinate clauses they contain. Varying the way that you compose your sentences can add great depth, variety and complexity o your writing, and help your writing to convey a particular tone or style or voice.

a. Sentences identified by function based upon type of ending punctuation

Declarative (Declaration): makes a statement:	She squashed the spider crawling on my arm.
Interrogative (Interrogatory): asks a question:	[When] Did she squash the spider crawling on my arm?
Imperative (impels): gives a command:	Squash the spider crawling on my arm!
Exclamatory (Exclamation): shows emotion:	She squashed the spider crawling on my arm!

b. Sentences classified by # and types of clauses

Simple: 1 independent clause

* *Running is my favorite form of exercise. Running is difficult and challenging. I will never stop running.*

Compound: 2 or more independent clauses, joined by a coordinating (and, but, or, yet) or correlative conjunction (neither/nor OR either/or), or a conjunctive adverb (however, although, moreover)

* *Running is difficult and challenging, **yet** it is my favorite form of exercise. I will never stop running.*

* *Running is difficult and challenging; **however**, it is my favorite form of exercise. I will never stop.*

* *Running is neither difficult nor challenging. **It is** my favorite form of exercise. I will never stop.*

Complex: 1 independent clause and 1 dependent clause, connected by a coordinating or correlative conjunction, or a subordinating conjunction

* *Running is my favorite form of exercise **because** it is difficult and challenging. I will never stop.*

Compound-Complex: 2 or more independent clauses and 1 or more subordinating conjunctions.

* ***Even though** running is difficult and challenging, it is my favorite form of exercise, **and** I will never stop.*

* *Running is my favorite form of exercise; **although** it is difficult and challenging, I will never stop.*

Essay 3 Final Revision: As you review and revise your Revision-In-Progress of Essay 3, consider your argument construction/strategy at the level of the sentences comprising your ACE Paragraphs.

- a) Identify sentences that perform RSMs or otherwise contribute to the rhetorical strategy of the paragraph.
- b) Identify whether you have written Simple, Compound, Complex, or Compound-Complex sentences.
- c) Identify sentences that you wish to add complexity to by subordination, adding RSMs, or both.
- a) Think about which sentences can be combined—and how they might be combined—in order to:
 - a. Show specific connections you are trying to make between sources, i.e. causality (Because, Since), time (When, Since, Before, After), degree (Whether or not, To the extent), juxtaposition (On the one hand...on the other hand), qualification (Even though, Although, Regardless).
 - b. Reduce wordiness, economize on language, hone the focus, use more precise/concise diction