

Sentences: What's Your Type?

Sentences are more complicated than most people think. It's not just about stringing words together—proper creation can make your prose powerful.

There are a few different ways to classify a sentence: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

1. A simple sentence has one main clause with one subject, one predicate (tells what the subject does, what is done to the subject, or the state of being of the subject), and one thought:

Snow falls in winter. The subject is *snow* and the predicate is *falls in winter*.
She bought milk. The subject is *she* and the predicate is *bought milk*.

A simple sentence can also have a compound subject or a compound verb, or both:

John and I jogged down the street then sprinted to the park. The compound subject is *John and I* and the compound verbs are *jogged* and *sprinted*.

2. A compound sentence has two or more main clauses that are both important and are closely related:

Painting is fun, but cleaning up is not.
I like to run; Jane likes to bike.

3. A complex sentence has one main clause and one or more subordinate or dependent clauses:

Even though I worked hard, I still missed the deadline. The main clause is *I still missed the deadline*, and the subordinate clause is *Even though I worked hard*.
After I went home, I watched the new television show that you recommended. The main clause is *I watched the new television show*, and the subordinate clauses are *After I went home* and *that you recommended*.

4. A compound complex sentence has two main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses:

I tried to reconcile the financial accounts, but when I started to crunch the numbers, I knew I needed someone else's help because it was so complicated. The main clauses are *I tried to reconcile the financial accounts*, and *I knew I needed someone else's help*. The subordinate clauses are *when I started to crunch the numbers*, and *it was so complicated*.

A sentence also generally has one of four purposes:

1. To state a fact or make an assertion (declarative)

A declarative sentence ends with a period:

I am leaving.
You can't go.

2. To ask a question (interrogative)
An interrogative sentence ends with a question mark:
When can I leave?
Why can't you go?
3. To give a command or make a plea (imperative)
An imperative sentence ends with a period or exclamation point, is a command or request, and usually doesn't state the subject (which is generally "you"):
Leave!
Please let me go.
4. To express a strong feeling (exclamatory)
An exclamatory sentence ends with an exclamation point and may or may not state the subject or predicate:
How thrilled we are!
What a show!

Although we may not think of our sentences in these ways, taking time to dissect a sentence every once in a while may point out where a simple sentence is best, or where there are too many compound complex sentences. Words are the vehicle writers use to get a point across, and changing up your sentences can have a profound impact on your storytelling.