



Sentence Patterns

When you use a variety of different sentence patterns, your writing flows more smoothly for the reader. There are four sentence patterns that you can use:

- ▶ Simple sentences contain one independent clause. An independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence because it contains both a subject (noun) and a predicate (verb).

The rat ate the cheese.

- ▶ Compound sentences contain two or more independent clauses. These clauses are joined either by a semi-colon, or a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

The rat ate the cheese, but he did not drink the wine.
The rat ate the cheese; he did not drink the wine.

Independent clause: the rat ate the cheese
Independent clause: he did not drink the wine

- ▶ Complex sentences contain one independent clause, and at least one subordinate clause.

The rat ate the cheese because he was hungry.

Independent clause: the rat ate the cheese
Subordinate clause: because he was hungry

- ▶ Compound-complex sentences contain two or more independent clauses, and one or more subordinate clauses.

Rather than go hungry, the rat ate the cheese; however, he did not drink the wine.

Subordinate clause: rather than go hungry
Independent clause: the rat ate the cheese
Independent clause: he did not drink the wine

Practice Exercise¹

Identify the following sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.

1. You should leave now, or you will have to wait until tomorrow for the next train.
2. Martha presented a new and controversial marketing campaign, but when her co-workers objected, she was forced to modify it.
3. No one will be allowed in that class unless he or she has registered in advance for it.
4. Don't forget to put out fresh food and water for the dog.
5. On Tuesday, the Smiths painted the porch, watered their lawn, and bought new summer furniture.
6. Greg is articulate, but he is very immature.
7. I don't care what you say; this sentence is boring.
8. If you cannot send the program to the mainframe, all your hard work will be wasted.
9. Evangeline was hard at work in her garden while her husband was taking a nap on the couch.
10. While we are waiting, let's play cards until he returns; it will help pass the time.

Answers

1. Compound

Independent clause: You should leave now.

Independent clause: you will have to wait until tomorrow for the next train.

2. Compound-complex

Independent clause: Marlene presented a new and controversial marketing campaign.

Subordinate clause: when her co-workers objected

Independent clause: She was forced to modify it.

¹ Adapted from Put it in Writing, Prentice-Hall p. 143.

3. Complex

Independent clause: No one will be allowed in that class.

Subordinate clause: unless he or she has registered in advance for it.

4. Simple

5. Simple

6. Compound

Independent clause: Greg is articulate.

Independent clause: He is very immature.

7. Compound

Independent clause: I don't care what you say.

Independent clause: This sentence is boring.

8. Complex

Subordinate clause: If you cannot send the program to the mainframe

Independent clause: All your hard work will be wasted.

9. Complex

Independent clause: Evangeline was hard at work in her garden.

Subordinate clause: While her husband was taking a nap on the couch.

10. Compound-complex

Subordinate clause: While we are waiting.

Independent clause: Let's play cards until he returns

Independent clause: It will help pass the time.