

Approximately 4,000 Words

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September 14, 2019

THE SENTENCES OF WRITING

1. INTRODUCTION

"Do you know what a sentence is?" I write in a comment on a young writer's work, to which he replies, "Five to ten for possession?"

Technically, they're not wrong about the homograph.

"I mean in a literary or writing sense." I laugh as my thumbs pound my smartphone's screen.

Their reply gives me a somber pause.

"I know that a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends when you put a period or question mark, but I've been writing instinctively like how I talk."

They're half-the-world away, and have approached me for help thanks to an offer I made through social media. While their English education is lacking, they absorb information like a sponge and they're willing to learn; plus their writing is better than some of my peers who graduated university.

"A sentence," I reply, "is a complete thought. It needs a subject: someone or something who the sentence is about. It also needs something about the subject; whether it be a thought, a description, an action, or a command. A paragraph is a collection of these complete thoughts based around a theme."

There's another pause. Curious why it's taking so long for my colleague to reply, I opened the google doc. In real time, I watched the conglomeration of words they have already thrown onto the screen become separated, moved around, and reorganized.

"Can I please ask you to look over my work in a few hours?" They write back to me. "I want to try and shape my thoughts."

I agree English was not my strong suit until I learned the best method for me to study by, which is—oddly enough—building study guides. Diving back into my notes from college, I dig up the following information for him, and for myself as well.

Let me share with you.

2. THE SENTENCE

a. WHAT IS A SENTENCE IN LITERATURE?

The Oxford Dictionary website states the definition of a sentence as such:

SENTENCE: *A set of words that is complete in itself, typically containing a subject and predicate, conveying a statement, question, exclamation, or command, and consisting of a main clause and sometimes one or more subordinate clauses.*

<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sentence> August 23, 2019

Wow, okay, class over? No, I'm afraid not. As said above, it is several things.

- i. A statement
- ii. A question
- iii. An exclamation
- iv. A command
- v. Can be active or passive
- vi. Consisting of a main clause and possibly one or more subordinate clauses

Are you confused? I know I was for years, and that's okay because I'm about to break it down.

b. THE SIMPLE SENTENCE.

Let's try simpler terms. A sentence is a complete thought that has a subject (someone or something) and a predicate (an action or description based around the subject), finished off with a concluding punctuation mark, aka END MARK. (There are only three types of End Marks in the English language, and they are the period, the exclamation point, and the question mark.)

So, here's a simple sentence: Suzy sat.

Suzy in this case, is a person, and in this case the SUBJECT of the sentence because she is *who the sentence is about*.

What did Suzy do? She sat. Sitting is an action, and not a person or a thing. It tells us *what Suzy did*, therefore it is the predicate.

How did the sentence end? Think about how you would say this. Were you surprised Suzy sat, were you wondering if Suzy sat, or were you simply explaining that Suzy sat?

The rule of thumb is unless you are asking if Suzy sat, your END MARK should be a period. Exclamation points are rarely if ever needed outside of dialogue, where you can use an exclamation point to show that the speaker is expressing a strong reaction.

Let's try another sentence: Paul is the owner.

Who is the sentence about? Paul, so he's the subject.

What's special about Paul? He owns something. Boom, the Predicate.

Subject + Predicate + End Mark = A Simple Sentence.

c. THE MORE COMPLICATED SENTENCES

i. WHAT IS A CLAUSE?

A clause is a simple sentence that is lacking the end mark.

SUBJECT + PREDICATE + END MARK = A Simple Sentence.
SUBJECT + PREDICATE = CLAUSE

If you're like me, you're probably thinking, *Why come up with The Clause? Is this just another way for those English professors to be all high-and-mighty?*

Not quite.

Not all sentences in the English language are simple. Some have to convey more than the briefest of stories, and that can sometimes take more than one thought to accomplish. Sentences with more than one clause fall into two categories: THE COMPLEX SENTENCE, or THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

ii. THE COMPLEX SENTENCE

What is a Clause again? It is a combination of a subject and a predicate.

SUBJECT + PREDICATE = CLAUSE

A complex sentence is a sentence consisting of two or more clauses where one clause is joined with and relying upon the other.

Simple Sentence:

Suzy (subject) sat (action) .(end mark)

Complex Sentence:

Suzy (subject) sat (action) on (place), this combines the two clauses) the brown (description, so a predicate)chair(subject).(end mark)

SUBJECT + PREDICATE joined a PREDICATE + SUBJECT finished with an END MARK.

Oh No! Math!

Take a deep breath, muchacho. This gets easier to spot as we go along.

1. INDEPENDENT VS DEPENDENT CLAUSE

The first clause is the independent clause. Alone, it tells a story. The second clause tells us where Suzy sat, but it is only included in the sentence to tell us *where* Suzy sat. This is called a dependent clause because it only exists to further round out the Independent clause.

So, let me write another sentence.

Paul is the owner of the company that we work at.

What is the main subject? Paul.

What is the status of Paul? He's the owner.

That's the INDEPENDENT CLAUSE, and it forms a simple and complete sentence.

What's Paul the owner of? The Company

What's so special about the company? We work there.

These are the DEPENDENT CLAUSES, because without knowing that Paul's the owner, the dependent clauses lack the feeling of a complete sentence.

(Paul is the owner) of (the company) that (we work at.)

Can you see a pattern yet? Yes?

Think we can talk about how these sentences combine their clauses together? Let's look back at dear Suzy.

Suzy sat on the brown chair.

Now, I'm going to bracket the independent and the dependent clause.

(Suzy sat) on (the brown chair).

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE joins DEPENDENT CLAUSE end mark.

Now, let's talk about the word that combines the Independent Clause to the Dependent Clause. That joining word is called-

2. THE SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION

What the hell, English? What do those words even mean? Let's break it on down. A conjunction is a word that *joins* something together. Subordinate means it relies on something. Therefore a Subordinating Conjunction is a fancy-ass way of saying a joining word.

Okay, let's look at examples of these Subordinating Conjunctions, or joining words.

What word combines the two clauses?

(Suzy sat) *on* (the brown chair.)

That's right; it's the word, "on." Good job! Here's two more examples:

(Paul is the owner) of (the company) that (we work at.)

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE + SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION
+ DEPENDANT CLAUSE + END MARK = COMPLEX
SENTENCE

Subordinate Conjunctions fall into one of 9 categories:

a. COMPARISON

Than, whether, whereas

Comparison Subordinate Conjunctions compare the dependent clause to the independent clause.

Paul is the owner *whereas* we are the employees.

b. RELATIVE ADJECTIVE

That, which, whatever

Relative Adjectives relate the clauses. This is not a comparison, but an agreeance.

Paul is the owner of the company *which* we work for,

c. TIME

After, Before, Once, Since, Until, When.

Time is anything related to a chronological condition.

Paul is the owner *until* he retires.

d. CONCESSION

This one is a little weird. Basically, it is the use of **though**, but it is *preceding* the general sentence.

Although Paul is the owner, it is his wife who runs the show.

e. RELATIVE PRONOUNS

The use of so, whomever, who, whom.

Paul is the man *who* owns the company.

f. PLACE

Where, on, below, above, within; basically anything relating to physical positioning.

Paul is the owner of the company *within* which we work.

g. CONDITION

If, only if, unless.

Condition can be hard to explain, but it's taking a clause and saying it can only occur if the other clause comes true.

Paul is the owner *if* he buys the company.

h. MANNER

How, as though, as if.

Don't be thrown by the name. A "Manner Clause" is used to say either how someone does something, or how something is done.

Paul acts *as if* he is the owner.

How does one clause relate to the other? (That was both an example and a question.)

i. REASON

So that, since, because

Reason is when one clause occurs due to another.

Since Paul is the owner, we are his employees.

Paul is the owner *because* he bought the company.

Wow! That's a lot to handle, but you can see how a complex sentence relates two or more clauses together. Now it's time to look at what some consider the most difficult sentence of all.

iii. THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

The compound sentence is a sentence with *at least two* INDEPENDENT CLAUSES that have *related* ideas, and are either joined by a word called the COORDINATING CONJUNCTION or by a semicolon.

Well, the good news is by now we understand what an independent clause is, and we've already seen and talked about one type of conjunction. This only leaves us to ask: what is...

1. THE COORDINATING CONJUNCTION

You use coordinating conjunctions all the time, and you probably don't realize why or how you're doing so. That sentence you just read had an example in it. Let's break it down.

You use coordinating conjunctions all the time is an example of *one* INDEPENDENT CLAUSE.

SUBJECT: You

And what do you do? What is the PREDICATE? You “use coordinating conjunctions all the time.” Boom! INDEPENDENT CLAUSE, baby!

Second sentence, “You probably don’t realize why or how you’re doing so.”

SUBJECT: You

PREDICATE: don’t realize you’re doing so

Do you notice something? Each clause could stand on its own as a sentence, or independent clause, but they work best when joined together. In fact, if you look at it, the second independent clause is *almost* reliant on the first independent clause, but with the smallest tweaking could stand on its own.

Now, what is the COORDINATING CONJUNCTION that combines the two clauses? The word that joins them is “and.”

What are some examples of Coordinating Conjunctions? Well, here’s a word *many* of us will understand: F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

When you use a coordinating conjunction, you break the sentence with a comma. I like to think of it as a sign that the comma is a signal that the coordinating conjunction is coming.

PRIMARY CLAUSE + COMMA + COORDINATING
CONJUNCTION + SECONDARY CLAUSE + END MARK =
THE COMPOUND SENTENCE.

Let’s have some fun using F.A.N.B.O.Y.S., and start by using two sentences:

I want to buy the blue car.

I want to buy the red car.

a. FOR

“For” presents a rationale, or reason why the first clause occurs. In other words, we compare the two subjects’ clauses against each other.

I want to buy the red car, *for* it is faster than the blue car.

b. AND

“And” links two non-contrasting clauses together.

I want to buy the blue car, and I want to buy the red car.
(Sure, be rich and flaunt it, a****e.)

c. NOR

Nor can be tough as it is used to link two non-contrasting, *negative* clauses, meaning, it links two agreeing disagreements.

I don’t want to buy the blue car, nor will I buy the red car.

d. BUT

“But” is used when you have either a contrasting idea, or an exception.

I want to buy the red car, but I will probably buy the blue car.

e. OR

Or is used when you want to present an alternate idea.

I will buy either the red car, or I will buy the blue car.

f. YET

Like but, yet presents a contrast or exception.

I want to buy the red car, yet I will probably buy the blue car.

g. SO

So is used to show consequence.

I didn’t like the red car, so I bought the blue car.

2. THE SEMICOLON

Rarely used nowadays, and often considered in poor taste by editors, the semicolon is a symbol that replaces coordinating conjunctions.

Example: You use coordinating conjunctions all the time; you probably don't realize why or how you're doing so.

I want to buy the blue car, but I will probably buy the red car.

becomes

I want to buy the blue car; I will probably buy the red car.

That almost sounds like resignation. Still, it's legitimate, but oftentimes one could just break the two independent clauses into two sentences. The only reason—at this point—to join those two sentences together is to show their relationship with one another.

Note from the editor: *When one clause of a sentence includes multiple commas as the result of a list of subjects, it is totally proper to use a semicolon with the conjunction. This is probably the only semicolon rule that is actually clear enough not to be considered up for interpretation!*

#ViveLaSemicolon

d. ACTIVE VS PASSIVE

In English, all sentences are in either “active” or “passive.” As a grammatical rule of thumb, every Paragraph should have at least one Active sentence, preferably the first sentence, so we know what the paragraph is about.

i. ACTIVE SENTENCE

In an active sentence, the person or thing responsible for the verb (action) of the sentence comes first. Likewise, in a passive sentence, the person or thing acted on comes first, and the person responsible for the action is added at the end.

Johannes Gutenberg created the printing press in 1439.

In the example above *someone* created *something*. That someone is the subject, Johannes Gutenberg, and he created the printing press. Wait, Subject + Predicate... I see a system here!

ii. PASSIVE SENTENCE

Generally, you want to write in the active verse *unless*:

1. The actor (whatever is performing the verb) is unknown, irrelevant, or the writer wants to be vague.

The first printing press was invented in 1439.

In this case, the subject is the printing press, the predicate was when it was invented, but there's no person, animal, human, machine, doing the inventing.

2. You are talking about a general truth or widely accepted fact.
3. You want to emphasize the subject acted upon, which is generally the method used in scientific or technical papers.

The first printing press was invented in 1439 by Johannes Gutenberg.

So, we have a subject and a predicate, but the actor—the inventor—comes after the detail.

e. EVERYTHING'S AN ACTION,

Is your brain feeling like mush yet with all this talk about clauses, and predicates, end marks, and conjunctions? Well, let me try again in another way:

Do you know that every sentence has an action in it?

Susie sat.

That sentence has a plain verb (action) clearly stated immediately after the subject, but what about another sentence like:

The chair is brown.

There is an action in that sentence, and the action is a state of being. Not all verbs or actions have to be grandiose motions like leaping, jumping, running, or

blinking. Nor must they be grandiose thoughts such as thinking, guessing, or considering. Sometimes, just *being* something is a verb.

f. CONCLUSION ON SENTENCES

Wow, is your brain full yet? I know mine's getting there, and I wrote this article. So, why study all of this? We studied this so that you, the reader, can understand the basic rules of a sentence. By knowing the basic rules, in what I hope is the clearest explanation you've ever read, you can help form your next sentences into clear short stories. In addition, knowing how to make a proper sentence will improve your communication skills. An incomplete or badly written sentence can not only ruin the flow and message of your words, but it can throw a reader so badly off they may leave your work entirely. This doesn't mean you should give up though, because now you have the tools to make your sentences great.

3. THE PARAGRAPH

a. WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH IN LITERATURE?

The Oxford Dictionary website states the definition of a sentence as such:

PARAGRAPH: *A distinct section of a piece of writing, usually dealing with a single theme and indicated by a new line, indentation, or numbering.*

<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/paragraph> August 23, 2019

That's cool and all, but what does it mean? Let's focus in on just a few words, *usually dealing with a single theme*. In fiction, this can be a grand number of things.

Let's look at an example:

Paul is the owner of the company that we work at. He's poured his heart and soul into making our workplace a comfortable, healthy, and enjoyable place to be; but it's not without cost. Most often, Paul can be found at the office working well into the night struggling over reports and fiscal papers until either exhaustion claims him, or satisfaction allows him the most miniscule of breaks. That's why we admire him.

Do you see a theme? Who or what is the paragraph about?

Paul and his running of the company. All the sentences above focus on that, and collected together they create a paragraph.

Now, a paragraph generally has a few extra parts to consider:

i. THE INTRODUCTION

Every structured paragraph has an introductory sentence. The introduction is the starting sentence of the paragraph and it should focus the reader on the subject of what the paragraph is about.

Paul is the owner of the company that we work at.

That is a clear introduction. It lists who the subject is, what's his significance, and how the reader can relate to him. From here, the rest of the sentences should follow this theme.

ii. THE SUPPORTING SENTENCES

The supporting sentences link the introduction to the conclusion, but each should also follow several considerations.

1. **UNITY:** That the supporting sentence is unified around the main idea.
2. **ORDER:** While not always important, it is vital to remember that order can be crucial. Whether chronological or descriptive, the sentences should flow.
3. **COHERENCE:** Do your sentences make sense if read aloud, or are there jarring gaps between them. Are they the same tense and same structure?
4. **COMPLETENESS:** Do the sentences clearly support the main idea? This is normally done in essays by using three or four supporting sentences.

iii. THE CONCLUSION

The concluding sentence should wrap up and relate all the supporting sentences together.

So—if we go back to the example—the introductory sentence tells who the author is talking about, the supporting sentences expand upon the subject and the final sentence states why the author wrote about the subject in such glowing detail.

Let's look at another paragraph from one of my favorite authors.

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to

pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.” – Frank Herbert, *Dune*

What, or whom, is the paragraph about? Fear, and why the narrator must not surrender to it. The supporting sentences then link together with a flowing set of ideas. Firstly: what is fear, then how will the narrator deal with it, and what will happen when the narrator deals with fear, and finally the consequences of achieving this goal.

iv. HINTS AND TIPS

Here are a few hints and tips you can use to help build a better paragraph.

1. AVOID LISTING

The Warrior walked into the room. The Warrior was tall, towering over the others in the room, but it wasn't just The Warrior's height that made The Warrior seem larger than life. The Warrior held herself confidently, challenging anyone else who dared to look at The Warrior with anything less than respect.

Okay, does this look like a laundry list to you? It sure does to me. While each of those sentences are correct and clearly relating to the theme of describing The Warrior, it's not exactly dynamic.

Since we've already established that the paragraph will be about The Warrior, so now there's a few things you can do to reduce the number of times you are forced to write, The Warrior.

a. PLAY THE PRONOUN GAME

Originating from the Latin word *pronomem*, which means ‘in the place of (or to replace) no men’ a PRONOUN is a word that replaces a noun (a name or a specific object) or noun-phrase. (Example: The Warrior)

There are charts all over the internet regarding pronouns, but long story short, they are based on how someone or something is being related to. What are some examples? Here's a chart.

PARTS OF SPEECH: PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words used to replace a noun.

Here is a pronoun chart:

| | Subject Pronouns | Object Pronouns | Possessive Adjectives | Possessive Pronouns | Reflexive Pronouns |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 st person | I | me | my | mine | myself |
| 2 nd person | you | you | your | yours | yourself |
| 3 rd person (m) | he | him | his | his | himself |
| 3 rd person (f) | she | her | her | hers | herself |
| 3 rd person (n) | it | it | its | (not used) | itself |
| 1 st person (pl.) | we | us | our | ours | ourselves |
| 2 nd person (pl.) | you | you | your | yours | yourselves |
| 3 rd person (pl) | they | them | their | theirs | themselves |
| Pronoun test -> | ___ will go. | Max saw ___. | That's ___ name. | The car is ___. | (subj) saw (reflex) in the mirror. |

<https://strawboats.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/pronoun-chart.jpg>, September 14, 2019

How do you use that chart? Well, you have to consider who or what you're talking about. In our case, The Warrior has been established to be female, and we are talking about HER in the 3rd person, so the 3rd person female line is ours to play with.

The Warrior walked into the room. SHE was tall, towering over the others in the room, but it wasn't just The Warrior's height that made HER seem larger than life. SHE held herself confidently, challenging anyone else who dared to look at HER with anything less than respect.

By balancing out the use of pronouns, and mixing them with noun phrases, the list can be reduced.

b. ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

Remember how active vs passive was mentioned back in sentences? We already know the subject thanks to the introductory sentence, so we don't have to start every

sentence afterwards declaring that we're immediately talking about The Warrior. Let's have some fun

The Warrior walked into the room. It wasn't just her height that made The Warrior appear to tower over the other occupants in the room, but it was the way she held herself. Standing confidently, she challenged anyone who dared to look at her with anything less than respect.

4. CONCLUSION

Now, with all that being said, there is something to consider: We've only studied the **basic** rules of sentences and paragraphs. There are doctorates one can earn in the English language, and although it's my native tongue, I am nowhere near a master of language.

Not all paragraphs have to follow the rules, and not all our sentences in dialogue, or our responses, follow the rules to the letter. Oftentimes—especially in fiction—shorter paragraphs can have far more impact than longer ones. Brief, sharp statements can have more impact. Mastering the literary paragraph takes time and practice, but this should help give you the foundation to really make an impact with your writing. By knowing the basic rules, you can therefore bend them to your will.

Practice the basics, and the rest will come easier. It can take time to master, but the more you practice making correct and dynamic sentences and paragraphs, the better your writing will be.

Note from the editor: *I've found that most grammatical rules, especially when writing fiction, can be considered more as guidelines. Most of the time you want to follow them, but there is a little bit of wiggle room in fiction for 'artistic liberty' or 'style' to take precedence.*

There's a certain art form to crafting engaging prose. This information should be considered ingredients in the writer's cookbook, but that they can be applied in numerous ways. Separating the "cook" from the "chef" in the world of literature is the ability to mix these ingredients in new and exciting ways.

Most of all though, remember why you started writing, what your goals are, and what you want to achieve. Have fun.

You got this.