

Sentence Patterns



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This material is designed to be used with middle school or high school students. Visit <http://www.squidoo.com/sentence-patterns> for links to practice and printables.

Sentences -- the Baby Steps of Writing



Sentences are the first goal in writing, and although they may be compared to baby steps, they are not just for the young grades. Even adult authors need to know the different ways to craft sentences and to combine sentences.

There are rules that govern sentence building, and amazingly there are actually only a few basic sentence patterns. Master these five sentence types, and you can write anything -- correctly! Use a *variety* of all five types in your paragraphs and essays to make your writing truly shine.

Independent Clauses and Dependent Clauses

Before Sentences Come the Clauses

Sentence writing is built on a foundation of understanding what independent clauses and dependent clauses are. Most people, even if they can't give a grammatical definition, have a sense of what these two types of clauses are.

Simply put, **an independent clause can stand alone**. It conveys a complete thought and has both a subject and a verb. **A dependent clause, on the other hand, cannot stand alone**. It does have a subject and a verb, but it leaves you thinking, "huh?"

EXAMPLES--

Batik is a popular handicraft purchased by tourists.
Although I washed my new batik in cold water.

You intuitively know that the first is an independent clause and can stand alone whereas the second one is not complete; the second clause is a dependent one.

So this is step one in teaching sentence writing. Make sure your child can identify independent clauses and dependent clauses. You don't necessarily have to use those exact terms. You can call them complete sentences and fragments. But the instruction in this eBook will use the terms independent and dependent clauses.

Learning the Patterns

Once you understand **independent and dependent clauses**, you can learn the rules for putting them together to make sentences. There are five main sentence patterns.

SENTENCE PATTERNS	
① Independent clause.	SIMPLE
② Independent clause; independent clause.	COMPOUND
③ Independent clause, but [and, so, nor, yet, for, or] independent clause.	
④ Independent clause dependent clause.	COMPLEX
⑤ Dependent clause, independent clause.	

Use my diagram as a model, and have your child create his own reference poster of the sentence patterns as you study each one. Don't overload your child with all five patterns; take them one a time.

Each sentence pattern will likely take several lessons to master. Be sure that one pattern is firmly understood before introducing another one. As you're studying

a particular sentence pattern, use every opportunity to reinforce it. When you see that sentence pattern used in your reading, point it out and analyze it. When your child has writing to do for other academic areas, require him to *use* the new sentence pattern a set number of times in the assignment.

Simple Sentences

Sentence Pattern Number One

So you know that if you have an independent clause, it can be a sentence. You capitalize the first word and use punctuation at the end. A simple sentence like that is called, amazingly, a **simple sentence**. Brilliant name, isn't it?

Simple sentences are important in writing because they are the building blocks. But you don't want *each* and *every* sentence in your paragraph or essay to be a simple one. Simple also means foolish, and a paragraph full of simple sentences sounds childish.

Exercise idea -- Write ten simple sentences. Make sure each one is a single independent clause (sentence pattern #1), punctuated and capitalized correctly. And make them interesting because you'll be using these again later.

EXAMPLES --

I am learning Chinese painting.

Last Friday I learned to paint a sparrow.

The supplies are inexpensive.

Hint for mom -- Give your child some spelling or vocabulary words to make sentences with. Or give a theme to write about.

Compound Sentences

Sentence Pattern Numbers Two and Three

What if you want to join two independent clauses together? Can that be done? Yes! It can. And there are two main ways.

1. Use a semicolon between the two independent clauses.

To use a semicolon, the sentences should be very closely related in meaning. But I hope that you wouldn't try to connect two sentences that weren't related anyway! Notice that the word after the semicolon is **not** capitalized.

2. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two independent clauses.



This rule is so simple, yet people will ruin it by forgetting the comma or by forgetting the coordinating conjunction. You have to have *both*!

I call this rule "comma but." You can think of it as "comma butt" -- a terrible disease that infects the bottom. Actually you can use FOR, AND, NOR, OR, YET, or SO as well as BUT.

An easy way to remember these coordinating conjunctions is FANBOYS. Have your child create his own FANBOYS poster to help him remember.

A sentence that has two independent clauses joined together correctly is called a **compound sentence**. Try to use some of these in your writing. But don't overdo it! You don't want to have too much of a good thing.

Exercise idea -- Look at the ten simple sentences you wrote earlier. Rewrite them, but this time add a semicolon and another closely related independent clause at the end to form a compound sentence (sentence pattern #2).

EXAMPLES--

I am learning Chinese painting; last Friday I learned to paint a sparrow.

The supplies are inexpensive; I paid less than ten dollars for paint, paper, and brushes.

Now take your newly written compound sentences and rewrite them using sentence pattern #3. That means you'll take out the semicolon and add in a comma and one of the FANBOYS. Make sure to use **both** the comma and the conjunction. And of course, choose a *logical* conjunction.

EXAMPLES--

I am learning Chinese painting, and last Friday I learned to paint a sparrow.

The supplies are inexpensive, so I think this is a good hobby for me.

Hint for mom: Carefully check for semicolons and a lowercase letter after the semicolon. Carefully check for both a comma and a conjunction. If one is missing, it's wrong!

Sentence Bad Guy #1 Mr. Run-on



Also Known as a Comma Splice

*Not even brick walls stop Mr. Runon.
He keeps running on and on.
Drawing by Sprite, my daughter.*

What happens when you put two independent clauses together and do not use a semicolon or the "comma but" rule?

You've created a run-on sentence.

And that's a huge writing no-no.

Avoid run-on sentences! Learn how to join independent clauses with sentence patterns two and three.

Sentence Bad Guy #2 Ms. Fragment

Ms. Fragment loves destroying perfectly good sentences. Drawing by Sprite, my daughter.



If you've got a dependent clause standing alone, it's got a fancy name -- a fragment. And that's a pretty major writing error.

What's the best way to find fragments? Read your draft backwards sentence by sentence. Not word by word, but read the last sentence. Then the next to the last sentence and so on. Usually you will find the fragments this way.

Complex Sentences

Sentence Pattern Numbers Four and Five

Now we can start using dependent clauses in our sentences. We know that a dependent clause needs to be attached to something -- specifically to an independent clause. And there are two ways to do that. You can put it **before** an independent clause or behind one. And the punctuation is different in either case.

The rule is

Independent clause dependent clause.

Dependent clause COMMA independent clause.

Yes, that's right. When the dependent clause is at the **end** of the sentence you **don't** need a comma.

The words that introduce dependent clauses are called subordinating conjunctions.

after	once
although	provided (that)
as	rather than
as if	since
as long as	so that
as much as	than
as soon as	that
as though	though
because	till
before	unless
even if	until
even though	when
if	whenever
if only	where
inasmuch	whereas
in order that	wherever
lest	while
now that	

This kind of sentence with a dependent clause and an independent clause is called a **complex sentence**. Now that name doesn't really matter a whole lot except that complex sentences imply a good understanding of both your topic and of writing. So you need to use these types of sentences when you write.

Exercise idea -- Convert your original ten simple sentences into complex sentences by adding a dependent clause. (Having a list of the subordinating conjunctions handy is most helpful.)

First add the dependent clause to the beginning of the sentence (sentence pattern #4). Start with one of the subordinating conjunctions in the list above, create the rest of the dependent clause, don't forget your comma, and then finish it with your independent clause (one of the original simple sentences).

EXAMPLES --

Because I want a creative hobby, I am learning Chinese painting.

Even though I'm just starting, last Friday I learned to paint a sparrow.

If you shop in a local store, the supplies are inexpensive.

Then using the complex sentences you just made, rewrite them by rearranging them. Now put the dependent clause at the end. Don't forget to leave off the comma this time. These are sentence pattern #5

EXAMPLES --

I am learning Chinese painting because I want a creative hobby.

Last Friday I learned to paint a sparrow even though I'm just starting.

The supplies are inexpensive if you shop in a local store.

Hint for mom -- Be ruthless about checking for commas when the sentence begins with a dependent clause. If there's no comma, it's wrong!

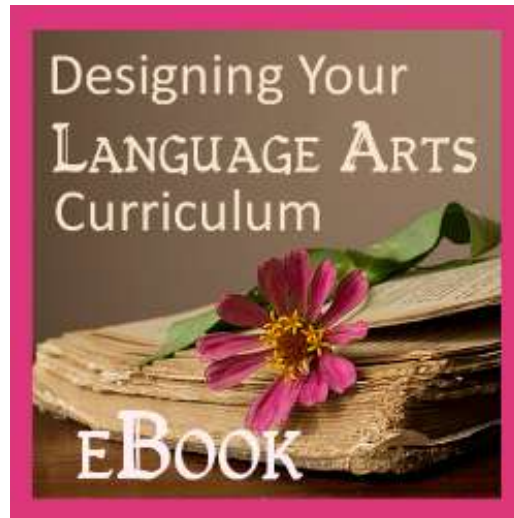
Compound-Complex Sentence

Get Creative! Mix Up Patterns One Through Five.

There is actually another sentence pattern and that's a combination of at least two independent clauses with at least one dependent clause. Once you've mastered the first five sentence patterns, this one is fun to get creative with. You follow the same rules and join the clauses together.

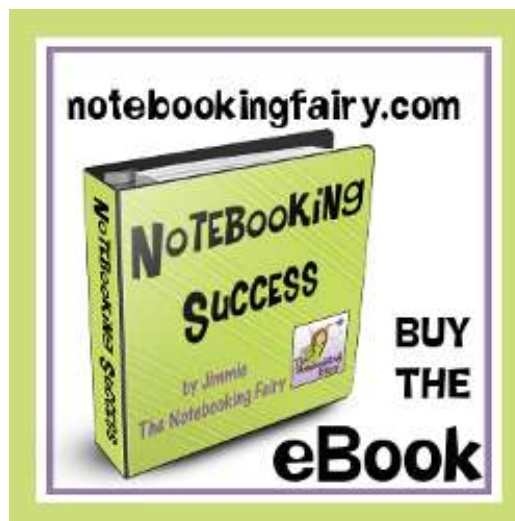
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