

Sentence Structure: Complex sentences

(Adapted from Hogue, A. 1996. *First steps in academic writing*. Addison-Wesley Longman. New York.)

A third kind of English sentence is a complex sentence. Before we study this, let's learn about clauses and subordinating conjunctions used in complex sentences.

Independent and Dependent Clauses

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. There are two kinds of clauses in English: independent clauses and dependent clauses.

An **independent clause** (ID) has one SV combination and expresses a complete thought. It can be a sentence by itself. A simple sentence is an independent clause e.g.

Paris has excellent art museums.

It was cold and windy yesterday.

We finished our homework and cleaned up the kitchen.

A **dependent clause** (DC) is an independent clause with a subordinating conjunction added to the beginning of it e.g.

...because it has excellent art museums....

...although it was cold and wind yesterday....

...after we finished our homework and cleaned up the kitchen....

A dependent clause does not express a complete thought, so it is not a sentence by itself. It needs to be joined to an independent clause to make sense as you can see from the examples below:

Art students should visit Paris because it has excellent art museums.

↑
IC (Independent Clause)

↑
DC (Dependent Clause)

We went on a hike although it was cold and windy yesterday.

↑
IC (Independent Clause)

↑
DC (Dependent Clause)

We watched TV after we finished our homework and cleaned up the kitchen.

↑
IC (Independent Clause)

↑
DC (Dependent Clause)

Subordinating Conjunctions

There are many subordinating conjunctions. Some introduce reasons, some introduce times, and others introduce contrasts and conditions as you can see from the list below:

Subordinating Conjunctions

<p>Adverbs Clauses:</p> <p>Time</p> <p>After</p> <p>as soon as</p> <p>Before</p> <p>Since</p> <p>Until</p> <p>While</p> <p>When</p> <p>Whenever</p> <p>Reason</p> <p>As</p> <p>Because</p> <p>Since</p> <p>Condition</p> <p>as if</p> <p>even if</p> <p>If</p> <p>Unless</p>	<p>Adjective Clauses :</p> <p>People</p> <p>Who</p> <p>that</p> <p>Things</p> <p>which</p> <p>that</p> <p>Contrast</p> <p>although</p> <p>even though</p> <p>though</p> <p>Purpose</p> <p>in order that</p> <p>so that</p>
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Exercise 1: Please put the conjunction provided into the appropriate blank of each sentence below.

Reason	Time	Contrast	Condition
Because	before	although	if
	after		
	when		
	while		

1. We cancelled our picnic it rained.
2. Wait for a green light you cross the street.
3. I will go straight to bed I finish this exercise.
4. Where were you I called?
5. My neighbors were having a party I was trying to sleep.
6. My father doesn't speak English he lived in England for many years.
7. I will be happy I win the lottery.

Here are some things to remember about subordinating conjunctions:

1. A few subordinating conjunctions are also prepositions e.g.

- after my accident (preposition)
- after I had an accident (subordinating conjunction)

- before class (preposition)
- before class begins (subordinating conjunction)

2. Because is a subordinating conjunction. Because of is a two-word preposition.

- because of my accident (preposition)
- because I had an accident (subordinating conjunction)

3. Although introduces a contrast or opposite. It has about the same meaning as but.

- Although they didn't study, they passed the test. (They didn't study, but they passed the test anyway.)
- Although I was tired, I couldn't go to sleep. (I was tired, but I couldn't go to sleep.)
- Although the weather was bad, they went on a picnic. (The weather was bad, but they went on a picnic anyway.)

4. If introduces a condition.

- **If** you don't study, you will fail the test.
- **If** it rains, we will cancel our picnic.
- **If** you visit my country, you should spend several days in the capital.

Exercise 2: Identify which sentence is independent or dependent clause.

1. Write **IC** (independent clause) or **DC** (dependent clause) in the space to the left of each group of words.
2. If it is a **DC**, circle the subordinating conjunction.

Example:

DC **While** the class was taking a test.

- ___ 1. I take a walk around the block.
- ___ 2. Before I go to work.
- ___ 3. This exercise wakes up my body and clears my mind.
- ___ 4. It's hard to do this in the winter.
- ___ 5. Because it is still dark when I go to work
- ___ 6. Although I try to get up early even on weekends.
- ___ 7. I sometimes sleep late on Saturdays.
- ___ 8. When it is raining, of course.
- ___ 9. I never go out.
- ___ 10. I become moody and depressed.
- ___ 11. If I don't exercise for several days.

A complex sentence has one independent and one or more dependent clauses. The clauses in a complex sentence can be in any order. If the dependent clause is first, put a comma after it as you can see from the examples below: (The dependent clause was underlined with a broken line.)

- Example:**
- 1.a Marta always gets A's because she studies hard.
 - 1.b Because Marta studies hard, she always gets A's.
 - 2.a I will quit my job immediately if I win the lottery.
 - 2.b If I win the lottery, I will quit my job immediately.
 - 3.a We went home after the dance ended.
 - 3.b After the dance ended, we went home.
 - 4.a We went to the beach because it was a sunny day.
 - 4.b Because it was a sunny day, we went to the beach.

*Complex Sentence = IC DC (no comma)
or DC, IC (with comma)*

Exercise 3:

- Instructions: 1.) Underline the independent clauses with a solid line and the dependent clauses with a broken line.
- 2.) Draw a circle around the subordinating conjunction.
 - 3.) Add a comma if one is needed.

Example: After I won the lottery last year, my wife and I traveled around the world.

1. We were very excited when we won the lottery.
2. After we got our first payment we started planning our trip.
3. We decided to visit Italy first because our parents came from there.
4. Before we left on our trip we wrote to our cousins in Rome.
5. Although we didn't know our Italian cousins they invited us to stay with them.
6. We studied Italian for several months before we left on our trip.
7. Although we could understand a little Italian we couldn't speak it.
8. Of course, our Italian cousins couldn't speak English although they could understand it.
9. When we arrived in Rome they met us at the airport.
10. They waited outside while the Italian officials checked our passports and luggage.
11. Finally, after we got our suitcases we went outside and met our relatives.
12. It was very confusing because no one could understand anymore.
13. However, before we left Italy we could speak a little more Italian.
14. If we go to Italy again we won't be so nervous.

Exercise 4:

A) Combine an independent clause from column A with a dependent clause from column B to make complex sentences.

A	B
1. Before my two brothers and I got to the lake	a. I always get seasick
2. Because we forget our fishing licenses	b. It was almost noon.
3. Although my brothers love fishing	c. I wasn't catching anything except a cold.
4. When I am on a boat	d. It started to rain hard.
5. After we had been fishing for a while	e. We had to drive back ten miles and buy new ones.
6. Before we could get back to shore	f. I hate it.
7. While my brothers were catching fish after fish	g. I will say "No, thanks!"
8. If my brothers invite me to go fishing again	h. We were wet from head to foot.

B) Write your sentences on the lines provided. You can write the clauses in either order, but be sure to punctuate them correctly. *One example has already been done below.*

1. Before my two brothers and I got to the lake, it was almost noon.

Or It was almost noon before my two brothers and I got to the lake.

2. _____

Or _____

3. _____

Or _____

4. _____

Or _____

5. _____

Or _____

6. _____

Or _____

7. _____

Or _____

8. _____

Or _____

Revision Exercises: Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences

A. Instructions:

- 1) Underline all independent clauses with a solid line and all dependent clauses with a broken line.

- 2) In the space at the left, write the words simple, compound, or complex to identify each sentence type.

Unusual Vacations

- _____ 1. Some people like to relax and do nothing when they take a vacation.
- _____ 2. Other people like to travel, and still others like to have an adventure.
- _____ 3. Unusual vacations are becoming popular.
- _____ 4. For example, people go hiking in Nepal or river rafting in Ecuador.
- _____ 5. Some people spend their vacations learning, and some spend their vacations helping other.
- _____ 6. A friend of mine studies Japanese during his vacation because his company is going to send him to Japan to work.
- _____ 7. A friend of mine likes to help people, so he spent his summer helping to build a school in Bangladesh.
- _____ 8. After he returned home, he wanted to go back to build a medical clinic.
- _____ 9. The travel business is changing because people are taking different vacations.
- _____ 10. After people have been in the jungles of Guatemala, they may find the beaches of Florida a little boring.

B. 1) Instructions: Work with a partner or by yourself.

- 1) Combine the sentences in each group to make one sentence. Some of your sentences will be simple, some will be compound, and some will be complex. Punctuate each sentence carefully.
- 2) Write the sentences together as a paragraph.

Camping

1. a. I love to go camping.
b. I love this in the summer.
c. I hate to sleep on the ground.
d. The ground is hard.

*(Use **although** in front of 1a.)*

2. a. I get up in the morning.
b. I can hardly move.

*(Use **when** in front of 2a.)*

3. a. My back hurts.
b. My muscles ache.

*(Use **and** in front of 3b)*

4. a. We go camping.
b. We always forget something.

*(Use **when** in front of 4a.)*

5. a. We forgot to bring our tent.
b. This happened last year.
c. We had to sleep in the open.

(Use so in front of 5c.)

6. a. I didn't sleep at all.
b. I am afraid of snakes.
c. I am afraid of bears.

(Use because in front of 6b)

7. a. I see a snake.
b. I scream.
c. I run.

(Use if in front of 7a.)

8. a. I see a bear.
b. I am frozen with fear.

(Use if in front of 8a.)
