

Basic Sentences

manipulate sentence structure, word choice, sentence length, and emphasis. While paragraphs are the building blocks for every multi-paragraph paper, sentences make up the foundation. We all know that if a foundation crumbles, the building blocks come crashing down. So, here is your guide to writing good sentences.

CHARACTERISTICS

Good sentences follow these characteristics:

- Accurately exhibit one of four structures: simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex
- Use strong words, including specific nouns and verbs
- Include variety in their beginnings, structure, and length
- Use parallel structures for parallel ideas
- Put the main idea in the main clause and subordinate ideas in subordinate clauses
- Place the most important idea at the end, the second most important idea at the beginning, and tuck other information in the middle
- Follow the rules of grammar, mechanics, and usage

STEP 1

Building Basic Sentences

Sentences are built using one of four structures:

1. Simple. A simple sentence has a subject and verb. Either may be compound, and both may have words and phrases that modify them.

For example:

ART S V
The pad fell.

Simple sentence; subject pad, verb fell

Art Adj Adj Adj S V Adv Phrase Adv Phrase
The red personalized mouse pad fell off the desk and onto the floor.

Subject: pad

Verb: fell

Words modifying the subject: the, red, personalized, mouse

Phrases modifying the verb: off the desk, onto the floor

Art Adj S conj S V
The mouse pad and mouse fell off the desk.

Compound subjects: pad and mouse

Verb: fell

Words modifying the subject: the, mouse

Phrases modifying the verb: off the desk

* Simple sentence
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* Compound sent.
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* Complex sent.
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* Compound-Complex sent.
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more than one

Definitions:

*subordinate clause
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2. **Compound.** A compound sentence is made of two simple sentences joined together. A comma marks where the two simple sentences are joined. For example:

CONJ.

The mouse pad fell on the floor, and the mouse landed on top.

First simple sentence: *The mouse pad fell on the floor.*

Second simple sentence: *The mouse landed on top.*

3. **Complex.** A complex sentence is a simple sentence with a subordinate clause added. [See Part IV, Section C: Phrases and Clauses for explanations about subordinate clauses.] For example:

The mouse pad fell on the floor [when the cat jumped on the desk.]

Simple sentence: *The mouse pad fell on the floor.*

Subordinate clause: *when the cat jumped on the desk*

4. **Compound-Complex.** A compound-complex sentence has two simple sentences and at least one subordinate clause. For example:

CONJ.

[When the cat jumped on the desk] the mouse pad fell on the floor, and the mouse landed on top.

First simple sentence: *The mouse pad fell on the floor.*

Second simple sentence: *The mouse landed on top.*

Subordinate clause: *when the cat jumped on the desk*

STEP 2 Choosing Strong Words

Any sentence structure is strengthened by strong words. Consider these suggestions:

Use strong nouns and verbs in order to eliminate wordy adjectives and adverbs.

Don't write:

The young boy walked slowly across the yard.

Instead write:

The toddler inched his way across the yard.

Use more action verbs than linking verbs. [See definitions and examples for both in the Glossary.]

Don't write:

He was tall and handsome.

Instead write:

The tall, handsome man caught her eye.