Sentence Variation using Sentence Types

Sentence variation involves alternating sentence structure and length to create a rhythm in writing. Using sentence variety can make it easier for readers to read, understand, and engage with your paper. Switching up the types of sentences you use is one way of achieving sentence variation.

Helpful Terms
Clause - a phrase with a subject and a verb
Independent clause - a clause that can stand alone as a sentence and expresses a complete thought
Dependent clause - a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence because it contains a subordinating conjunction
Subordinating conjunction - a word or phrase (such as after, although, as long as, because, now that, since, until, when, where, and while) that renders a clause dependent (and a thought incomplete)
Coordinating conjunction - a word (such as and, but, nor, yet, so, for, and or) that joins two sentences together with a comma

Simple Sentence
A simple sentence, also known as an independent clause, has a single subject/verb pairing (though keep in mind that one subject can perform multiple actions and one action can be performed by multiple subjects). Circle the subject(s) and underline the verb(s) in these sentences.

1. My car is in the shop.
2. James and I made puns at each other.
3. The original vampire legends stem from stories about Vlad the Impaler.

Compound Sentence
A compound sentence is two simple sentences, or independent clauses, put together. The sentences are usually joined by a coordinating conjunction and a comma. Put a box around each simple sentence, then circle the subject and underline the verb for each sentence.

1. My uncle and his son love to watch American Idol, but I have never seen the point of the show.
2. I try to get my dog to speak, fetch, or roll over, but he just wants to lie down and stay.
Complex Sentence
A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Remember that a dependent clause is marked by a subordinating conjunction. Identify the subordinating conjunction in the following sentences:

1. Because the druid performed the ritual incorrectly
2. Although the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain

When the independent clause comes first, there is not a comma between the clauses (except in certain instances of extreme contrast between the clauses). Underline the independent clause and make a box around the subordinating conjunction for these sentences.

1. The king was unhappy because the druid performed the ritual incorrectly.
2. I really enjoyed the book until my brother spoiled it for me.

When the dependent clause comes first, there is a comma in between the two sentences. Underline the dependent clause and circle the comma for these sentences.

1. While Dr. Watson waited by the door, Sherlock searched the apartment for clues.
2. Although the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain, the plains rarely flood.

Compound-Complex Sentence
A compound-complex sentence contains more than one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. In the following sentences, underline each separate clause, then identify each as either independent or dependent. Also, identify any subordinating or coordinating conjunctions used.

1. Because Brandon forgot to pay his electric bill, his electricity was cut off, and all the ice cream in his freezer melted.
2. I tried to put the shed together by myself, but when I couldn't lift the sides up on my own, I called my friends.

Contact
Want to learn more about sentence structure? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736  WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu
www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing