



Building Blocks for Writing – Key Sentence Structures

In essays or other types of assignments, sentence variety is essential to good writing. Knowing the different types of sentence structure and their functions can help you improve the flow and coherence of your papers.

Below are some common sentence types:

1. A **simple sentence** has only one main clause.
2. A **compound sentence** has two main clauses which are joined together with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, nor, yet, so, or*).
3. A **complex sentence** has a main clause and a subordinate clause that begins with a subordinating conjunction (*when, though, because, if, while, whereas, even though*).
4. An **adjective clause** is a modifier – it describes a noun and begins with one of the following relative pronouns: *which, who, that, where, when, why*.
5. An **adjective phrase** is a modifier – it describes a noun in the following or preceding sentence (e.g., She sat in the garden, ***bored by her own thoughts***. OR ***Bored by her own thoughts***, she sat in the garden.)
6. **Prepositional phrases** function as adverbs -- These are phrases at the beginning of a sentence or after the main verb that begin with words like *for, until, between, in, with, of, apart from*.
7. **Modifying verb phrases** (participles -- *-ing Verb*) are logically related to the main clause – they add information about “how” or “result” or “reason.” They are not sentences because they lack a subject. (e.g. ***Pretending*** to be ill, my sister always got out of doing housework OR By ***pretending*** to be ill, my sister always got out of doing housework.)
 - i. Ex. *Thinking that he is a girl, he walked into the girls’ restroom.*

Exercises

Task: Compare the two paragraphs from Rose's essay. What do you notice about the differences between the sentence structures used in each paragraph? Why the difference? Use the "sentence structure basics" above to analyze the types of sentences used.

Excerpt 1 -- Our culture--in Cartesian fashion--separates the body from the mind, [2] so that, for example, we assume [3] that the use of a tool does not involve abstraction. (*complex; prepositional phrase; noun clause*)

We reinforce this notion by defining intelligence solely on grades in school and numbers on IQ tests. (modifying verb phrase/ simple)

And we employ social biases (WHICH PERTAIN) pertaining to a person's place on the occupational ladder. (simple; adjective clause)

The distinctions among blue, pink, and white collars carry with them attributions of character, motivation, and intelligence. (simple)

Although we rightly acknowledge and amply compensate the play of mind in white-collar and professional work, we diminish or erase it in considerations about other endeavors--physical and service work particularly. (complex)

We also often ignore the experience of everyday work in administrative deliberations and policymaking. (simple)

Excerpt 2 -- As a foreman, Joe constantly faced new problems and became a multi-tasker, evaluating a flurry of demands quickly, parceling out physical and mental resources, keeping a number of ongoing events in his mind, returning to whatever task had been interrupted, and maintaining a cool head under the pressure of grueling production schedules. (prep. Phrase; modifying phrases, simple sentence)

In the midst of all this, Joe learned more about the auto industry, the technological and social dynamics of the shop floor, the machinery and production processes, and the basics of paint chemistry and of plating and baking. (simple; prepositional phrase)

With further promotions, he not only solved problems but also began to find problems to solve: Joe initiated the redesign of the nozzle on a paint sprayer, thereby eliminating costly and unhealthy overspray. (prep. Phrase, simple; modifying phrase)