QC Writing Center Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentence Guide

SIMPLE SENTENCES

A simple sentence consists of a subject and a verb used in a complete thought, also known as an independent clause.

Examples:

* Kristina drank her morning coffee.
  + Kristina = Subject
  + Drank = Verb
* John walked to the store
  + John = Subject
  + Walked = Verb

These sentences are independent clauses because they form a complete thought without having to add more words. A dependent clause, on the other hand, is a simple sentence that does not form a complete thought.

* Giana read a picture book = independent clause
* Than his sister can = dependent clause

Simple sentences are usually short. You may use compound subjects and verbs to add length, but for the most part, using too many simple sentences will make your writing choppy.

* Example: Kristina woke up. She drank her morning coffee. She read the newspaper. She left the house. She rode the bus. She went to work.

Notice how the amount of simple sentences used here back to back make the writing seem choppy and abrupt. Using several simple sentences back go back disrupts the flow of writing; using a mixture of simple, compound, and complex sentences makes writing flow well.

COMPOUND SENTENCES

Compound sentences join two independent clauses together with a conjunction.

* Example: Kristina drank her morning coffee, and then she showered and got dressed.

Notice how the first part of the sentence and the last part can stand alone as independent sentences. The key isn’t to use too many compound sentences, or your writing will sound awkward.

* Example: Ryan picked up a rock, and then he put it in his pocket. Ryan walked down the road, and he kept looking for rocks. Ryan liked collecting rocks, and he also liked collecting shells. He saw another rock, and then he picked it up.

Notice how the writing here seems a bit long winded and fake-sounding.

COMPLEX SENTENCES

A complex sentence uses an independent clause combined with one or more dependent clauses. Complex sentences use conjunctions to tie them together, too.

Examples:

* Because she woke up late when her alarm malfunctioned, Kristina missed her morning train.
  + Because she woke up late when her alarm malfunctioned = Dependent Clause
  + Kristina missed her morning train = Independent Clause
* As Kristina watched the train pull out of the station, she realized she would be late for work yet again.

The dependent clauses can also fall at the end of an independent cause as in these examples:

* Kristina missed her morning train because she woke up late when her alarm malfunctioned.
* Kristina realized she would be late for work yet again as she watched the train pull out of the station.

Here is a complex sentence with two compound independent clauses and one dependent clause:

* Kristina missed her morning train, and as she watched it pull out of the station, she realized that she would be late for work yet again.