

ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION INFO SHEET

Grammar: Simple Sentence (G: SS)

Sentences are the building blocks of all writing, and effective writers use a variety of structures to engage the reader. This is the first of three information sheets, which will guide you through the most basic of sentence structures. Remember that we have not included a definitive explanation of sentences, and there are a number of exceptions to these rules. However, this information may help you to solve some basic errors when writing.

Learn about:

- what is a simple sentence
- how to solve common punctuation errors in simple sentences.

See other **Info sheets**, **Activity sheets** and **videos** on compound and complex sentences.

There are three major types of sentences. Each type of sentence requires specific punctuation.

1. **Simple sentence:** Tom walks to work most days
2. **Compound sentence:** Tom walks to work, and Sam joins him every Friday.
3. **Complex sentence:** Although Tom likes walking to work, he has started to drive on Fridays.

What is a sentence?

A sentence, also named an independent clause, includes a complete idea. A simple sentence has a **subject**, a main **verb** and sometimes an object. For example, **Sam has** many hobbies.

What do these words mean?

A **subject** is the person or thing that 'does' the verb.

Sam likes dogs. Sam is 'doing' the liking, so Sam is the subject.

Tom denies that. Tom is 'doing' the denying, so Tom is the subject.

It has become a significant problem. The it is becoming the problem, so it is the subject.

Verbs are action words e.g. walk/ walked/ walking, or state words e.g. think, feel, believe, be, have. They can be a word or a collection of words e.g. walk or have been talking.

Example: The subject and the verb have been identified in each sentence.

Petrol is becoming more expensive.

The Federal Government has implemented the new bill.

Smith states there are a number of significant issues surrounding tax cuts.

Common errors with simple sentences

Leaders of all organisations are role models they have to set an example to their staff. X

This is a run-on, and it should be avoided in academic writing. A run-on occurs when two sentences are blended together without a full stop or a semicolon. Correction: Place a full stop or semicolon after the word *models* to create two separate sentences.

The environmental targets set by the government have yet to be met, it is these targets that are the focus of this discussion. X

This is a comma splice, and it should be avoided in academic writing. A comma splice occurs when two sentences are punctuated with a comma instead of a full stop or a semicolon.

Why is this important? Knowing when a new sentence starts helps to avoid grammatical errors.

Other types of simple sentences

Questions

Avoid direct questions in academic writing, unless otherwise stated by your lecturer.

Verb+ ing

We often use *verb + ing* when there is not a noun to describe a particular idea. Example: *Identifying key issues is central to policy making*. Therefore, the *verb+ ing* becomes the subject of the sentence. The use of *verb+ ing* is acceptable in academic writing.

Passive structure

A passive structure is another way to vary your sentence. Example: *The computer was fixed*. Passive structures are often used to create an objective tone. The structure is used when we are less interested in who or what has completed the action. Passive structures can be useful for paraphrasing. Example: *It is claimed that...* However, try to be as specific as possible in academic writing to avoid ambiguity.

Imperative sentence

Example: *Try to keep an open mind*. Imperatives are used to give orders, instructions or advice. These sentences start with a verb and do not need a subject. This type of sentence structure is rarely used in academic writing.

Sentence tips

Punctuation is used to make information easily accessible to the reader. Therefore, try reading your work aloud or to another person. If you find yourself emphasising words to make the meaning clear, it may be because your punctuation needs correcting. Punctuation has a number of specific rules, which may assist you in evaluating where to put the punctuation marks. By varying your sentence lengths and word order, you are likely to keep the reader's interest and communicate your ideas clearly.

Practice

Test your understanding using the Simple Sentence Activity Sheet.