

# Sentence Types, Variety, and Concision – Vidcast Transcript

## Slide 1

Hi, everyone! This is Heather from the Purdue Writing Lab. In this video, we will be talking about sentences. More specifically, we will be talking about different types of types of sentences, the importance of incorporating a variety of sentences into your work, and strategies to write sentences concisely.

## Slide 2

As always, let start with a five-minute warm-up activity. For this opening exercise, please look at a small portion (maybe 2 to 3 paragraphs) of your current writing project. If you are still in the drafting stage of your work, you may also use a piece of recent writing from a different project to complete this activity.

Please pause the video here and set a five-minute timer for yourself while you reflect on the following:

- Identify at least one sentence you think is effective and strong. What do you like best about this sentence? What makes it “work” well? For example, does it do a good job of representing your argument? Does it “flow” well, meaning is it easy to understand and follow? What makes it easy to understand?
- Next, identify at least one sentence that you do *not* like. What makes that sentence feel weak to you? For example, does it feel unneeded because it simply repeats a point made in a previous sentence? Is it confusing and long-winded? What, specifically, makes it confusing?
- Finally, jot down some of your general observations about your sentences. What do you notice about your sentences as a whole? Do you tend to write long sentences or short ones? Do you notice that your sentence lengths and types vary, or do many of your sentences feel the same?

To complete this exercise, it’s helpful to read your work out loud if you can. When you’re ready, pause the video and start working. See you five minutes!

### **Slide 3**

Welcome back! There are four types of sentences that we'll talk about today. The first type of sentence is a Simple sentence. These are sentences with one independent clause and no dependent clauses.

In case you need a refresher, independent clauses are clauses that contain a subject and a verb. Independent clauses can stand alone as complete sentences. Dependent clauses, on the other hand, cannot stand alone as a complete sentence.

We have two examples of simple sentences here. First, here, "The Writing Lab hosted an Intensive Writing Event for dissertators." Our subject, the Writing Lab, performed the action of hosting an event.

Our second example models a simple sentence that you might find in an academic piece of writing. Here, we have: "Several methodological features characterized the majority of samples in this area of research." Again, we have the subject of the sentence—several methodological features—doing the action of characterizing samples.

Don't shy away from simple sentences! Sometimes, writers can neglect simple sentences in academic writing out of fear that they sound elementary or not sophisticated. Simple sentences are a great way to grab your reader's attention by making short, to-the-point statements. If you want to offer a sense of emphasis in your writing, think about offering simple sentences to assert your main point. You can also offer a sense of emphasis by including a simple sentence after a series of longer sentences. This change in variation will catch your reader's attention and allow that shorter, punchy sentence to stand out.

### **Slide 4**

Although simple sentences play an important role in academic writing, too many simple sentences in a row can feel dull or repetitive. Let's take a moment and practice combining short, choppy simple sentences together. This activity is adapted from the exercise created by Linda Hayne's from the Purdue University Department of English.

Here, we have five simple sentences:

1. Hundreds of people dressed up in gorilla outfits.
2. They ran through the streets of London.
3. They wanted to bring awareness to the public.
4. The awareness they want to make public concerns the plight of the apes.
5. The apes are endangered.

These five sentences are made up of 40 words total. How can we shorten down this word count?

Pause the video here and see if you can condense these five, choppy sentences into one, concise sentence. I'll share my version with you in a moment. Hint: I got my sentence down to 23 words. See if you can beat me! But remember – the trick here is to combine these sentences **WITHOUT** losing any of the original meaning from the original five sentences.

See you in a few minutes!

### **Slide 5**

Welcome back!

Here is my example answer for this activity. Like I said before, I managed to reduce the previous 40 words down to 23 words. I wrote, "Dressed as gorillas, hundreds of people ran through London streets because they wanted to bring public awareness to the plight of endangered apes." In our next group conversation, let's share our answers and see who has the shortest sentence that still maintains meaning.

### **Slide 6**

Moving away from simple sentences, the second type of sentence that we'll talk about today is the compound sentence. These are sentences with multiple independent clauses and no dependent clauses. Again, this means that each of the clauses found within a compound sentence could stand alone as their own, individual simple sentences.

Take a moment and pause the video here to locate the independent clauses within these two examples.

## Slide 7

As you can see here, I have color-coded the independent clauses that make up these two compound sentences.

In the first example, we have two similar ideas being joined together by a comma and the coordinating conjunction “or.” A helpful way to remember the coordinating conjunctions is to think of the acronym FANBOYS: F, A, N, B, O, Y, S. This stands for: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

In the first example, both independent clauses describe how writers might use their time during IWE, so it makes sense to join these two ideas together into one compound sentence.

In the second example, we have two independent clauses being joined together with a semi-colon. The first independent clause—Infants were exposed to multiple trials to collect data—is made even clearer by the second clause that explains how the infants’ looking-time scores were averaged.

If you’re feeling rusty about punctuation, don’t worry. We will continue to talk about punctuation and grammar rules during our Intensive Writing Experience.

## Slide 8

The third type of sentence is the complex sentence. These are sentences with one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. As a reminder, this means that one of the clauses in a complex sentence can stand alone as its own independent, complete thought while at least one other clause is dependent and cannot stand by itself.

Pause the video for a moment and locate the independent and dependent clauses in these examples.

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Here, I have color coded the independent clauses in gold, underlined text, and I have bolded the dependent clauses in black. In both examples, the dependent clauses offer clarifying information about the independent clauses with which they are joined.

For example, in the first complex sentence, we know can understand that the writer felt motivated to finish her work only *after* she completed the IWE.

In the second complex sentence, the use of “although” indicates that there is some sort of nuanced point that the reader must acknowledge. From this sentence, we can understand that the current meta-analysis is important, it is not sufficient enough to prove a specific claim and that more research is needed.

### **Slide 10**

The fourth and final type of sentence is the complex-compound sentence. These are sentence with multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. These sentences tend to be longer sentences, and they can be useful when trying to weave together or illustrate key differences between multiple ideas, theories, or observations. Because these sentences can be quite long, try to use them carefully. Again, it’s helpful to read your work out loud to help catch errors and locate points of confusion. If a sentence is starting to feel unwieldy, see if you can split it up into multiple, shorter sentences.

Like we’ve done before, pause the video here to locate the independent and dependent clauses in each of these examples.

### **Slide 11**

Here, I’ve gone ahead and coded the independent clauses, gold, underlined text, and I have coded the dependent clauses in black, bolded text. As you can see, complex-compound sentences allow you to offer context while also adding emphasis or stress to the parts of the sentence that appear in gold.

If you want more examples of ways to punctuate long sentences like these, check out the Purdue Online Writing Lab or the Purdue OWL.

### **Slide 12**

Thank you for learning about sentences with me. As you look ahead to your next reserved writing time, it might be helpful to take a few minutes to code some of your sentences. Using one color, highlight each of your simple sentences. Using another color, highlight each of your compound sentences, and so on.

- What do you notice? Do you tend to favor a specific type of sentence?
  - Are there a couple of short sentences that you could combine together?
  - Is there a long, confusing sentence that might benefit from being broken up into smaller parts?

**Slide 13**

Thank you again for joining me today! Happy writing and revising, everyone. Until next time...

