

# from SENTENCE to TEXT

## SIMPLE SENTENCES AND CLAUSES

A simple sentence consists of a single clause. Most people probably could not define a clause, even though we all produce them easily when speaking and writing. But, to teach well, we need to be **aware** of the ways we put language together.

Every clause has a **subject** and a **verb**.

The subject might be a noun phrase, a single noun, or a pronoun.

<b>S</b>		<b>V</b>
<i>The queen</i>	<i>was eating.</i>	
<i>Teachers</i>	<i>teach.</i>	
<i>I</i>	<i>sleep.</i>	

The verb might be a single word or a verb chain.



Word order changes, according to grammatical rules, when you change a statement into a question.

These are known as **SV** sentences.

But there might be other elements in the clause. One common element is called an **object**.

<b>S</b>		<b>V</b>		<b>O</b>
<i>The queen was eating</i>	<i>a jam sandwich.</i>			
<i>Teachers teach</i>	<i>children.</i>			
<i>I sleep.</i>				

Not all verbs take objects (eg *sleep*).

The first two examples are **SVO** sentences.

**Word order** is important in grammar. Most of the time we take it for granted that certain words come before or after others in order to make sense (eg in an English noun phrase, we say *The big dog*, not *The dog big*). The way we order words in a clause is important for conveying our meaning (*The queen ate the jam sandwich* has a very different meaning from *The jam sandwich ate the queen*.)



In a simple statement, the **subject**, **verb** and **object** (if there is one) always come in that order.

Another common clause structure is the **SVC** – Subject Verb Complement. This structure occurs with the verb *to be* and other verbs indicating state rather than action, such as *seem*, *look* and *feel*.

<b>S</b>		<b>V</b>		<b>C</b>
<i>The queen</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>a friendly person.</i>		
<i>Teachers</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>wonderful.</i>		

**Adverbial** chunks (answering questions like *how?* *where?* or *when?*) might be single adverbs or adverbial phrases, including those common phrases that begin with prepositions. Unlike other elements of a clause, which tend to be bound by word order, the adverbial has **mobility**.

<b>A</b>		<b>S</b>		<b>V</b>		<b>O</b>
<i>Very daintily,</i>	<i>the queen was eating</i>	<i>a jam sandwich.</i>				

<b>S</b>		<b>V</b>		<b>O</b>		<b>A</b>
<i>The queen was eating</i>	<i>a jam sandwich</i>	<i>very daintily.</i>				

**Awareness of this can help us to help children vary their sentence construction.**

A good way to alert children to the possibilities of word order is to create 'concrete sentences' which can be moved around. You can do this by writing words, phrases or clauses on strips of card, which can be stuck on a magnetic board, velcro strip or washing line, or held by children to create human sentences.

# JOINED-UP

## Compound sentences

The simplest way to link clauses together is to use one of the coordinating conjunctions: **and**, **but**, **or**. This is called a compound sentence, and the clauses on either side of the conjunction have equal weight – they're both main clauses:

*The dog barked **and** the baby woke up.*

Children often produce compound sentences in which the subject of each clause is the same:

*The dog barked **and** the dog whined.*  
or  
*The dog barked **and** it whined.*

You can sometimes improve the sentence by deleting the second subject:

*The dog barked **and** whined.*

Compound sentences are common in speech, where we don't have much time to think things through, and where we can use intonation patterns and gesture to show how we link our ideas together.

However, we want children to explore and express the possible relationships between ideas – this aids their development not just in writing, but in thinking logically. So they need to learn about more

sophisticated conjunctions which encapsulate those inter-relationships.

## Complex sentences



*The dog barked **until** the baby woke up.*  
*The dog barked **so that** the baby woke up.*

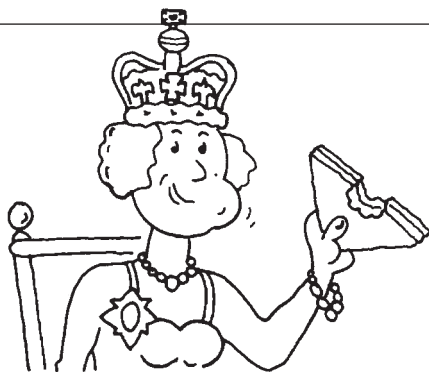
The words in bold are **subordinating conjunctions** – when you put one at the front of a clause you automatically make it subordinate to the main clause.



***Because** the dog barked, the baby woke up.*  
***Whenever** the dog barked, the baby woke up.*

Subordinate clauses starting with a conjunction are **adverbial** ... and this means they're mobile. In some of our examples, we could reverse the order of the clauses:

***Whenever** the dog barked, the baby woke up.*  
*The baby woke up **whenever** the dog barked.*



**S**                      **V**                      **O**

*The queen was eating a jam sandwich.*

This is an active sentence. The subject – the queen – is actively tucking into her jam sandwich. But we could express the same event with the jam sandwich as the subject:

**S**                      **V**

*The jam sandwich was being eaten by the queen.*

## WHODUNNIT? ACT

The new version is a passive sentence. The subject – the jam sandwich – is 'passively' having something done to it. It is being eaten.

In a passive construction we can remove the 'agent' of the action:

*The jam sandwich was being eaten.*



We don't have to say Whodunnit.

There are many reasons why you may not want to say Whodunnit. For instance, you may not know:

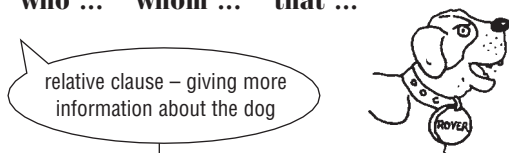
*The house was burgled on Saturday.*  
*A box of chocolates was left on the doorstep.*

# P WRITING

When you open a sentence with a subordinate clause, you need a comma before the main clause to signal to your reader that you've reached a grammatical boundary. You don't necessarily need a comma if the subordinate clause comes after the main clause because the conjunction signals the grammatical boundary.

## Relative clauses

A **relative clause** gives more information about a noun. You can help children extend their sentences in this way by showing them how to open clauses with **which ... who ... whom ... that ...**



*The dog, **which was called Rover**, was barking.*

In this example, the relative clause (in bold) has been 'dropped into' the main clause. When a subordinate clause is embedded within another clause, we often need to separate it off with commas to indicate where the extra grammatical unit has been inserted.

But not always!

*The dog that barked in the night woke me up.*

Your intonation when you read the sentence aloud is the best guide to whether commas are required.

## Non-finite clauses

*Smiling to himself, **Robin** at last returned to the forest.*

*Tired of waiting, **Marian** had already gone to bed.*

In these complex sentences, the subordinate clauses (in bold), which have **non-finite** (or incomplete) verbs, are separated off by a comma. In both cases, the non-finite clause could also be embedded within the main clause – again, with implications for punctuation.

***Robin**, smiling to himself, at last returned to the forest.*

***Marian**, tired of waiting, had already gone to bed.*

These non-finite clauses are a feature of mature, fluent writing. They can sound less cumbersome than the other subordinate clauses we have investigated, and with the added advantage of mobility, they are very versatile.

A non-finite clause (beginning with an *-ing* or *-ed* word) can be a useful starting point for composing a sentence in shared writing.

# ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

Or you may not wish to mention:

*'This ruler got broken, Miss.'*

It may also be more polite, less confrontational:

*I wasn't given a pencil.*

If you don't mention the agent, you don't hurt anyone's feelings.

In Year 6, one important function of the passive is in the construction of certain types of formal, impersonal texts. In science reports, for instance, the point is to record what happened, not Whodunnit. So children need to be aware of impersonal styles, including the passive voice.



Shared writing: a member of Year 6 spots a deliberate mistake. (A deliberate mistake is spotted by a member of Year 6.)

# THE COMMA SPLICE

The comma is the 'weakest' of the punctuation marks, used *within a sentence*, to help the reader notice where one chunk of meaning ends and another starts.

Children often use commas incorrectly to mark **any** grammatical boundary. When a comma is placed between two main clauses, it is known as 'the comma splice', eg:

*She turned round but there was no one there except a painting, all of a sudden the people in the painting moved and started talking again, Jade couldn't believe her eyes.*

Commas are not strong enough to separate main clauses in this way, so this punctuation is incorrect.

You could always substitute a full stop for a comma splice, but this might lead to very staccato sentences. Sometimes you may wish to suggest a closer link between the clauses. In this case, you could try a

punctuation mark which is 'stronger' than a comma – a dash, a semi-colon or possibly a colon. Or you could link the clauses by inserting a conjunction.

There are several acceptable ways of correcting the example. This probably captures the writer's intention:

*She turned round but there was no one there except a painting. All of a sudden, the people in the painting moved and started talking again – Jade couldn't believe her eyes.*

A simple rule of thumb to tell whether you've got a comma splice is to see **if you could substitute a full stop**. In each case in the example in the left-hand column above, a full stop would work ... so both the commas must be splices, and therefore incorrect.

## MAKING IT ALL HANG TOGETHER: COHESION

If writing is to be intelligible, it must be produced in coherent sentences, clearly linked together to produce a 'joined up' message. Writers create **cohesion** in a text in many ways and, once we share a grammatical vocabulary, we can help children recognise these cohesive devices so they are aware of them in their own writing.

There are examples of all the cohesive devices described here in the short text at the bottom of the page.

### Connectives

A connective is a word or phrase that links clauses or sentences. Connectives can be:

- **conjunctions** (eg in the example text: *and, so, until*)
- connecting **adverbs** or adverbial phrases (eg *moreover, however, eventually, at last*).

Conjunctions and connecting adverbs function differently:

- Conjunctions join clauses within a sentence.
- Connecting adverbs connect ideas but the clauses remain separate sentences.

As children's writing grows more sophisticated, connectives become increasingly important. Adverbial connectives act as 'linguistic signposts' to the reader, indicating a change of direction between sentences. As adverbs, they are also mobile and varying their position can lead to an increasingly 'writerly' style.

### Pronouns

Pronouns help the cohesion of a text by making references between sentences. In our example below, the pronouns *he* and *himself* refer back to the noun phrase *the big dog*, creating links between a number of sentences.

### Tense

Consistency of tense (in our example, the past tense) is another important aspect of cohesion. Experienced writers may use changes of tense for effect, but children tend to fluctuate inadvertently.

It's important that children learn to reread as they write in order to achieve cohesion. If they don't reread, they lose the thread and fail to realise that they haven't made these essential connections.

*The big dog enjoyed barking. Moreover, he was very good at it and very loud. The baby, however, needed some sleep, so the dog was despatched to the garden. He barked and yelped for some time, until he grew sleepy himself. Eventually, he stretched out under the stars and fell into a deep sleep.*

*The big dog – at last – stopped barking.*

