



Writing complex sentences

Frequent use of short sentences can be strange to read. Writing can be made more interesting by using two sorts of longer sentences: **compound** and **complex** sentences. This factsheet looks at the **complex sentence**.

Making a complex sentence

When you make a compound sentence you are joining two or more simple sentences together with a conjunction. If you took the conjunction away, the sentences would be complete and they would still make sense.

For example: ‘I hate curry but I like Thai food.’ = ‘**I hate curry**’ + **but** + ‘**I like Thai food**.’

It isn’t the same for complex sentences. Complex sentences don’t just divide into neat, complete, simple sentences if you take out the conjunctions. In complex sentences the conjunction is used to join together **clauses**. A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. Some of these clauses might be complete short sentences, but in a complex sentence at least one of them will **depend on the conjunction for its meaning**. In other words, if you take the conjunction away, the sentence won’t divide into complete units that make sense by themselves.

For example: ‘The dinner was burned because she had forgotten it.’
= ‘**The dinner was burned**’ + ‘**because**’ + ‘**she had forgotten it**.’

This is a complex sentence:

‘**The dinner was burned**’ = complete, short sentence.
‘**because**’ = conjunction (joining word).
‘**she had forgotten it**’ = subordinate clause. This doesn’t make sense on its own. What had she forgotten? This is called a ‘subordinate clause’ because without the rest of the sentence it doesn’t really make sense.

For example: ‘Although I’m not very good, I really enjoy playing football.’
= ‘**Although**’ + ‘**I’m not very good**’ + ‘**I really enjoy playing football**.’

Again, this is a complex sentence:

- ‘**Although**’ = conjunction (joining word). Yes, sometimes conjunctions can appear at the beginning of a sentence!
- ‘**I’m not very good**’ = subordinate clause. This doesn’t make sense on its own. What are you not very good at? This is called a ‘subordinate clause’ because without the rest of the sentence it doesn’t really make sense.
- ‘**I enjoy playing football**’ = complete short sentence.

Beware!

As for compound sentences, commas are **not** conjunctions and they should never be used to join short sentences or clauses together.

For example: ‘The dinner was burned, she had forgotten it.’ = incorrect
‘The dinner was burned **because** she had forgotten it.’ = correct