

# SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A *sentence* is a unit of thought or a unit of feeling expressed through a logically related subject and predicate. Ordinarily the sentence serves as part of a larger unit, the paragraph, which in turn serves as part of a still larger unit, the whole composition. For the sake of simplicity, however, this chapter deals with the sentence as an independent unit, out of context of the paragraph and the whole composition.

Although it is the smallest of the units of thought or feeling important in theme-writing, the sentence is the largest of three kinds of word groups called grammatical units. The smaller grammatical units, the phrase and the clause along with other points of grammar. This section examines the basic kinds of sentences and the qualities that make them effective.

## KINDS OF SENTENCES

A sentence is a means by which one person attempts to make clear to another what he thinks or feels. But since thoughts and feelings vary in kind, and since the reasons for communicating them differ, sentences are of different kinds also. What these kinds are can best be seen through a simple but orderly analysis. Like other plural subjects having common bases, sentences are classified for convenience in study. Just as, for instance, automobiles are classified according to body style, manufacture, and color, sentences are classified according to:

- function,
- grammatical structure, and
- rhetorical form.

## Sentences Classified by Function

Sentences are classified on the basis of *function* as:

- declarative,
- interrogative,
- imperative, and
- exclamatory sentences.

Although both the speaker and the writer use the declarative sentence most frequently, they find the other three types useful too. The speaker uses intonation to help make clear whether he is making a statement, asking a question, giving a command, or making an exclamation. The writer relies on punctuation to help make these distinctions.

### ***1. Declarative Sentences***

A *declarative sentence* is a single, complete statement. It is the kind of sentence that the writer almost always employs when his purpose is to convey information to his reader. He regularly closes the declarative sentence with a period.

e.g. Although he was born in Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln spent most of his early life in New York.

## ***2. Interrogative Sentences***

An *interrogative sentence* is a single, complete question. This is the kind of sentence the writer uses when he is seeking information for himself or trying to lead the reader into a consideration of possible answers. The writer helps to accomplish his purpose by closing the interrogative sentence with a question mark.

Questions frequently begin with words called interrogatives. In the first three examples the introductory words (*who, what, which*) function as subjects of verbs and are called interrogative pronouns

e.g. Who called for a vote?

What happened to the ballots?

Which is correct, the first tally or the second?

In the next two examples the introductory words (*which, what*) modify nouns and are called interrogative adjectives

e.g. Which book do you prefer?

What change in policy would you propose?

In the next example the introductory words (*when, where, how, why*) modify the verb (*did join*) and are called interrogative adverbs. (Ordinarily only one interrogative adverb begins a question.)

e.g. When, where, how, and why did Brutus join the conspiracy against Julius Caesar?

\*Questions sometimes begin with verbs or parts of verb phrases.

e.g. Has he any living relatives?

Does he have any living relatives?

\*Occasionally a question is written in the same order as a declarative sentence and is distinguished only by the question mark.

e.g. His grandfather was a king.

His grandfather was a king?

### ***3. Imperative Sentences***

An *imperative sentence* is a single, complete command or a single, complete request. It is a convenient kind of sentence for the writer who is giving directions or instructions. Unless it includes a negative term (*not, never*), the imperative sentence is a call for action. The writer usually closes it with a period but may occasionally use an exclamation point for emphasis.

The pronoun (*you*) is sometimes expressed but more commonly understood as the subject of an imperative sentence.

e.g. You lead the way.

Commence firing!

Get on your mark! Get set! Go!

Occasionally the command or request is addressed to an audience through the use of

- an indefinite pronoun like (everyone, everybody, etc.)
- a person's name, or
- a noun.

e.g. Everyone please stand and sing the school song. (no comma after everyone)

Tom, help yourself to the candy and pass the box around. (comma is used)

Friend, stop! (comma is used)

#### ***4. Exclamatory Sentences***

An *exclamatory sentence* is a single, complete expression of sudden or strong feeling. Because of its tendency to make the writer seem unbecomingly emotional, this kind of sentence appears infrequently in good composition, especially on the formal level. It normally ends with an exclamation point but may end with a period.

e.g. What a boon the slide rule is to the engineer!

What a pleasant companion is a collie puppy!

Good grief! My pen has disappeared!

How inconsequential yesterday's problem looks today.

❖ Label these sentences according to their functions (declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory sentences)

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