Experienced writers use a variety of sentences to make their writing interesting and lively. Too many simple sentences, for example, will make your writing sound choppy and immature while too many long sentences will make your writing difficult to read and hard to understand. This handout explains three different types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex.

Sometimes, simple sentences have compound structures. There are four main types of compound structures:

• Compound subject: A subject that has two parts that are often connected with a coordinating conjunction. Example: Cassidy and Arturo like to study in the morning. ("Cassidy" and "Arturo" are two separate nouns. When they are connected together using "and," they create a compound subject.)

• Compound verb: A verb that has two parts often connected with a coordinating conjunction. Example: Alicia goes to the library and studies every day. (In this example, "goes" and "studies" are two separate verbs that make a compound verb. The coordinating conjunction, "and" connects them.)

• Compound direct object: A noun that receives the action of the verb. To find the direct object, you can usually ask "who?" or "what?" Ex: The green dish hit the ground. (What did the dish hit? The ground. When "ground" is added to the rest of the sentence, it shows where the dish broke. The ground receives the action.)

• Compound prepositional phrase: A phrase that begins with a preposition (see our prepositional phrase handout for more information). Ex: The llama spit at the man's head. (The word, "at" is a preposition. This means that "at the man's head" is a compound prepositional phrase.)

A compound sentence has two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). Except for very short sentences, a comma goes right before a coordinating conjunction. Examples: I tried to speak Spanish, and my friend tried to speak English. Alejandro played football, so Ahmed went shopping

A compound sentence contains two main clauses joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction or a semi-colon. • Compound sentences connect two simple sentences, but they often do not show a clear relationship between the two parts.

Ex. I waited for the bus, but it was late. Independent clause, Independent clause

Below are two simple complete sentences, each with its own subject and verb:

I have a pet iguana. His name is Fluffy.

To combine them into a compound sentence, we simply add a comma plus the coordinating conjunction *and*:

I have a pet iguana, and his name is Fluffy.

Alternatively, we can make a compound sentence by adding only a semicolon, and the sentence will still be correct:

I have a pet iguana; his name is Fluffy.

Although they're talking about the same topic, the subject of each independent clause is different: The first clause's subject is *I*, and the second one's subject is *name*. That's part of what makes them independent, and a sentence is considered compound only when it consists of independent clauses. For example, the sentence below is *not* a compound sentence:

I have a pet iguana whose name is Fluffy.

To be a compound sentence, it needs at least two subjects and two verbs. If both independent clauses use the same subject, it must be stated twice, as in the quote below, for the sentence to be compound:

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create many ripples." —Mother Teresa

Be careful of sentences with only two subjects or only two verbs—these are not the same as compound sentences. The following sentence is not a compound sentence, because there is only one subject (*I*) even though there are two verbs (*chew* and *study*), and because what comes after the conjunction *and* is not an independent clause:

I came here to chew bubblegum and study grammar.

However, you can turn this sentence into a compound sentence by adding another independent clause with a second subject:

I came here to chew bubble gum and study grammar, but I'm all out of gum.

Keep in mind that imperative sentences don't always show their subjects, because they're implied. That leads to compound sentences like this example, the first independent clause of which has the implied subject *you*:

Get me some water, or the fire will spread!

Let's look at some more compound sentence examples from some of history's greatest writers:

"*Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.*" —Lao Tzu

"*Be yourself; everyone else is already taken*." —Oscar Wilde

"*You will face many defeats in life, but never let yourself be defeated.*" —Maya Angelou