Short Simple Sentences and Fragments

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Short Simple Sentences

**Definition:** Has a subject and a verb; consists of one independent clause. May have a [compound subject](#), a [compound verb](#), a [modifier](#), or an object or complement, but is still one independent clause.
Compound Subject

A **compound subject** is when a sentence has two or more subjects. The multiple subjects are joined together by a **coordinating conjunction** (and, or, neither, nor, etc.)

Examples:

- Both *men and women* enjoy yoga (men, women,)
- *Dolphins and elephants* are highly intelligent creatures (dolphins, elephants)
- *Mom or Sharon* will bring the dessert (Mom, Sharon)
Compound Verbs

A compound verb is when a sentence has a multi-word compound that function as a single verb.

Examples:

- Mary will take off her makeup before bed
- Someone will need to proofread my manuscript
- We really need to air-condition the house
Modifiers

In grammar, a modifier is an optional element in phrase structure or clause structure. Modifiers add limits, details, or changes to the meaning of a word or phrase.

Examples:

- She served hamburgers on paper plates to children
- We returned the toy that was broken to the store
- Jones lifted the heavy box containing supplies
Back to Simple Sentences

Now that we know what a compound subject, a compound verb, and a modifier is, we can understand what a simple sentence is.

Examples: (Subject is in yellow, verb is in pink)

- “There is a problem, though” (“Though” is considered an adverb)
- “What had I been thinking?”
- “This must be Philip’s theory, anyway” (“Anyway” is considered an adverb)
- “But the chances of this are miniscule”
- “Finally she tells me not to take her wrong”

*Taken from Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Serving in Florida”*
Simple Sentences

Simple sentences do not necessarily have to be short; they can be long as well

Example:

- “The **e-mails and phone messages** addressed to my former self **come from** a distant race of people with exotic concerns and far too much time on their hands.” from Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Serving in Florida”
  - “Addressed to my former self”, “distant”, “exotic”, “far too much time on their hands” add detail so they are considered **modifiers**
  - “E-mails **and** phone messages” are two subjects so this sentence includes a **compound subject**
**Sentence Fragments**

**Definition:** An incomplete sentence, often the result of careless writing. However, an **effective fragment** is an incomplete sentence that readers understand to be complete.

Some fragments are missing a **subject**, a **verb**, or **both**.

Others have a subject and verb but are **dependent clauses** (group of words with a subject and a verb, but does not express a complete thought).
Example of a Sentence Fragment

- “Despite all the attention paid to companies like Enron, academics know very little about the practicalities of white-collar crime. The reason? There aren’t enough data.”- from Dubner and Levitt’s “What the Bagel Man Saw”

The fragment asks a question but has no subject or verb to make it a complete sentence

As a complete sentence:

- “Despite all the attention paid to companies like Enron, academics know very little about the practicalities of white-collar crime. And what is the reason for this? There aren’t enough data.”
More Examples of Sentence Fragments

It is common for fragments to be posed as a question. They also can be used to express doubt, surprise, shock, and even outrage.

Example:

- “And in the Great Recession, it has been these middle-class folks who have been hammered. Why?” - Fareed Zakaria

“How?” is considered a one-word fragment and again has no verb and no subject

As a complete sentence, it might look like this:

- “And in the Great Recession, it has been these middle-class folks who have been hammered. Why is this the case?”
More Sentence Fragments

Fragments can also provide both economy of expression and emphasis:

Examples from John Ruskin:

- And the duty of all these men is, on due occasion, to die for it.
  
  “On due occasion,” namely:
  
  The Soldier, rather than leave his post in battle.
  The Physician, rather than leave his post in plague.
  The Pastor, rather than teach Falsehood.
  The lawyer, rather than countenance Injustice.

The antecedent (an expression that gives meaning to a pro-form) of “it” is “every civilized nation”. If an example of John Ruskin’s was re-written as a complete sentence it would read:

- “The due occasion for the soldier would be to die for his civilized nation rather than leave his post in battle”

This would also go for the rest of Ruskin’s fragments as well.
Sentence Fragments Continued...

Fragments also are able to suggest rhythm and patterns of natural speech.

Examples from “The Case for Working with Your Hands” by Matthew B. Crawford:

● “He spun the shaft that ran through the center of the motor, as I had. **No problem** it spun freely. Then he hooked it up to a battery. It moved ever so slightly but wouldn’t spin. He grasped the shaft, delicately, with three fingers, and tried to wiggle it side to side. **‘Too much free play,’** he said.

The 1st fragment (**“No problem”**) delivers the natural mental response to the activity; the second one, (**“Too much free play”**) delivers the person’s natural expression.

**“Too much free play”** also has both a subject and verb but is not a complete thought, therefore it is a **dependent clause**, and is a sentence fragment.
Using Short Sentences Rhetorically

- A few short simple sentences can be rhetorically effective...
  - After several long sentences
  - As a summary of what the writer has just said
  - As a transition between sentences or paragraphs
- One or two simple sentences create emphasis by contrast
Using Short Sentences Rhetorically (cont)

Example of using short sentences rhetorically:

“...Whom, exactly, did the masters of Enron steal from? And how can you measure something if you don’t know to whom it happened, or with what frequency, or in what magnitude?

Paul F.’s bagel business was different. It did present a victim. The victim was Paul F.”

- The short sentences of the second paragraph stand out after the longer sentences from the first paragraph - create emphasis
Sentence Fragments

- Can use sentence fragments for effect
- Use them the same way you would use a short simple sentence - deliberately
- Also used...
  - To make a transition
  - To signal a conclusion
  - To emphasize an important point
Overview

- Use short simple sentences and fragments sparingly
  - Can be very effective if used infrequently
  - Lose their effect when overused
  - Only use short simple sentences and fragments if you believe your audience will recognize them as so
  - A simple sentence CANNOT contain a dependent clause - only an independent clause
Quiz

In the following examples, identify the short simple sentence or sentence fragment.

1. Because the sky was growing noticeably darker, Michelle became worried. She waited for the bus in silence.
2. Michelle and I arrived at the venue early and waited hours for the concert to begin. Because we stood around for so long, we were extremely tired by the end of the show.
3. When I go to the beach, I usually bring sunscreen. I was distraught when I couldn't find it.
4. Mrs. Smith always sets an alarm for early in the morning, but last night she forgot to do so. She slept through breakfast and lunch!
5. The puppy was not used to his new environment, therefore he had trouble sleeping at night. He barked and cried until the sun came up.
6. Most of the science class failed the final exam. Why? Simply because the teacher failed to teach.
8. The little girl ran to the largest box, tearing the wrapping paper before looking inside. Her eyes immediately lit up with joy.
9. The family was taking a break from their journey when they noticed the sky beginning to grow dark. Time to keep moving.
10. The family was defeated, realizing that they weren't going to make it to the party on time. Their train was late.
Quiz Answers

1. She waited for the bus in silence. (she - subject) (waited - verb)
2. Michelle and I arrived at the venue early but waited hours for the concert to begin. (Michelle and I - compound subject) (arrived, waited - compound verb)
3. I was distraught when I couldn't find it. (I - subject) (was - verb)
4. She slept through breakfast and lunch! (She - subject) (slept - verb)
5. He barked and cried until the sun came up. (He - subject) (barked, cried - compound verb)
6. Why? (No subject or verb)
7. No school. (No verb) No responsibilities. (No verb) Just relaxation. (No verb)
8. Her eyes immediately lit up with joy. (Her - subject) (lit - verb)
9. Time to keep moving. (No subject) (moving - verb)
10. The train was late. (train - subject) (was - verb)

