

Varying Sentence Structure

Do writers want their readers to fall asleep in the middle of a sentence? Of course not. When a writer tells a story, he or she uses words to create a variety of interesting sentences. Read the following paragraphs. Which one sparks your interest more?

Paul Revere waited in Charlestown. He looked for a light at the Old North Church. He saw a light. He saw a second light. He leaped on his horse. He warned villagers of a British attack.

While Paul Revere waited in Charlestown, he looked for a light at the Old North Church. He saw one light, and then he saw a second light. He leaped onto his horse and warned villagers of a British attack.

The second paragraph contains a mixture of simple, compound, and complex sentences that makes the writing more interesting. A **simple sentence** has one independent clause. A **compound sentence** has two or more independent clauses. A **complex sentence** has one independent clause and at least one subordinate clause.

SIMPLE SENTENCE: Paul Revere pats his horse. [one independent clause]

NOTE: Simple sentences may have compound subjects, compound verbs, or both.

COMPOUND SENTENCE: Paul looked up at the church, and he waited for a signal. [two independent clauses joined by the conjunction *and*]

NOTE: Independent clauses in a compound sentence are usually joined by coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, or *yet*.

COMPLEX SENTENCE: When Revere receives the signal, he rides with determination. [one subordinate clause and one independent clause]

NOTE: A subordinate clause can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a complex sentence.

Exercise A Identifying Sentence Structure

Identify each of the following sentences as simple (S), compound (C), or complex (X).

- _____ 1. Harriet Tubman had an old injury.
- _____ 2. After Sarah fell to the ground, she begged Toby to say the magic words.
- _____ 3. Jethro Creighton and his cousin Ebenezer face a difficult decision.
- _____ 4. Paul Revere jumped on his horse, and they sped away.
- _____ 5. When Mary returned to the cabin, she was carrying a large mushroom.

- _____ 6. The farmer shouted at Harriet, and the words tumbled out of his mouth.
- _____ 7. As he asked about Mary, Father unloaded the pack.
- _____ 8. The general talked to Joby before the battle of Shiloh.
- _____ 9. The Master couldn't believe his eyes when he saw Toby flying.
- _____ 10. We warned them that their plan wouldn't work, but they would not listen to us.

Exercise B Writing a Variety of Sentence Structures

Write your own original sentences according to the following instructions.

1. a simple sentence with a compound subject

2. a compound sentence joined by *or*

3. a complex sentence with a subordinate clause at the end of the sentence

4. a complex sentence with a subordinate clause that begins with *who*

5. a complex sentence with a subordinate clause at the beginning of the sentence

Exercise C Revising a Paragraph

The following paragraph contains only simple sentences. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the paragraph by using two compound sentences and two complex sentences.

The stories in Collection Seven are about American heroes. Some of the selections are historical. Other selections portray legends. The poem about Paul Revere describes the hopes of a new nation. The stories about the Civil War illustrate its impact on young people. Another story is about a teenager. She learns too soon about life and death. "Go On or Die" is a biographical account about Harriet Tubman. The story describes the perils of the Underground Railroad.

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Answers are not available Online.