Sentence Structure

A sentence is a group of words that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. Together, these words must express an idea, and express it clearly.

The active voice puts the emphasis on the doer, i.e. the person or thing doing the action. It is more direct and less wordy.

Subject = Doer	Verb = Action	Object = Receiver
The boy	threw	the ball.

The passive voice puts the emphasis on the receiver, i.e. the person or thing receiving the action. It can be used when the doer is unknown or when the receiver is more important.

Subject = Receiver	Verb = Action	Object = Doer
The ball	was thrown	by the boy.

Clauses

A clause contains at least two elements (a subject and a verb), and sometimes three (a subject, a verb, and an object). It expresses one idea.

An **independent clause** (or main clause) is a group of words including a subject and a verb that can stand on its own.

[The boy threw the ball].

A **dependant clause** (or subordinate clause) is a group of words including a subject and a verb that cannot stand on its own. It must be connected to the independent clause, and it can act as a noun, as an adjective or as an adverb.

[The boy threw the ball] [while his teammate was running toward him].

Sentences

A sentence contains one or more clauses. Depending on the number of clauses that it contains, a sentence can express one or more ideas.

A **simple sentence** is made up of one independent clause.

[The boy threw the ball].

A **compound sentence** is made up of two or more independent clauses that are joined by a conjunction, a colon or a semicolon.

[The boy threw the ball], and [his friend caught it].

A **complex sentence** is made up of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

[The boy [who was wearing a green shirt] threw the ball].

A **compound-complex sentence** is made up of two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. It can express three or more ideas.

[The boy [who was wearing a green shirt] threw the ball], and [his friend caught it].

Here is a list of common errors:

A **comma splice** refers to two clauses joined by a comma without a conjunction. To fix this, form two complete sentences, change the comma for a semicolon or add a conjunction.

> The dog barked, the mailman was at the door.
> The dog barked. The mailman was at the door.
> The dog barked; the mailman was at the door.
> The dog barked because the mailman was at the door.

A **dangling modifier** refers to a sentence beginning with a word or a phrase that modifies an element that is implied but absent. To fix this, change the subject of the main clause to specify the element that is described by the modifier, or change the structure of the modifier to form a complete clause including a subject and a verb.

> Before driving away, the cat was put in its travelling cage.
> Before driving away, we put the cat in its travelling cage.
> Before we drove away, the cat was put in its travelling cage.

A **faulty parallelism** refers to the use of irregular structures to list equal ideas in a sentence. To fix this, use parallel structures (like nouns, verbs, clauses or phrases) in a series.

> It offers better security, faster access, and the features are superior.
> It offers better security, faster access, and superior features.

A **faulty pronoun agreement** refers to the use of a plural pronoun when its referent is an indefinite pronoun (like *someone* or *everyone*), a generic noun or a collective noun. Use a singular pronoun or pluralize the referent.

> Every family has their problems.
> Every family has its problems.

A **run-on sentence** refers to two clauses joined without a conjunction or punctuation mark. To fix this, form two complete sentences, or add a semicolon or a conjunction.

> He smiled it was his lucky day.
> He smiled. It was his lucky day.
> He smiled; it was his lucky day.
> He smiled because it was his lucky day.

A **sentence fragment** refers to a dependant clause used on its own. To fix this, delete the conjunction or merge the sentence fragment with a neighbouring sentence.

> So she left.
> She left.
> He started crying, so she left.