



THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

29a The simple sentence

A simple sentence contains a subject and main verb combination, either or both of which may be conjoined. There are two kinds of clauses: independent and dependent. An independent clause, sometimes called a main clause, can stand alone as a simple, but complete, sentence. A dependent clause—with its own subject and verb—can never stand alone and is never part of a simple sentence.

Independent clause/simple sentence → Sam saw the stop sign.

Conjoined noun phrase → **Sam and Chris** saw the stop sign.

Conjoined verb phrase → Sam **saw the stop sign and braked the car** at the same time.



An independent clause can be modified in a variety of ways and still be a simple sentence. Most often, simple sentences are modified with either participial verb phrases, which are verb phrases that do not include an auxiliary, or prepositional phrases (see 6c3).

→ **Driving down Elm Street,**
Participial VP
Sam saw the stop sign.
Independent Clause

- ➔ **Stopped at the corner, Sam saw the stop sign.**
Participial VP Independent Clause
- ➔ **Sam saw the stop sign at the corner.**
Independent Clause Prep Phrase

Simple sentences can be modified by participial phrases and prepositional phrases at the same time.

- ➔ **Driving down Elm Street, Sam saw the stop sign at the corner.**
Participial VP Independent Clause Prep Phrase



Multiple prepositional phrases can also be used in the same simple sentence.

- ➔ **Sam saw the stop sign at the corner of Elm and Sixth.**
Independent Clause Prep Phrase Prep Phrase

As you may have already noticed, participial phrases that appear at the beginning of the sentence always have a comma that separates the phrase from the independent clause. In fact, all phrases or clauses that contain a verb and occur at the beginning of a sentence should be separated from the main clause by a comma.

When you write a sentence that has a prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence, you have the option of including a comma or not; however, if the introductory prepositional phrase is five words or longer, it usually takes a comma.

- OK ➔ In spring the stop sign at Elm and Sixth is covered with a tree branch.
- OK ➔ In spring, the stop sign at Elm and Sixth is covered with a tree branch.
- OK ➔ At the corner of Elm and Sixth, the stop sign is covered with a tree branch.

29b

Check for common errors with the simple sentence

1. Check for overuse of simple sentences

Simple sentences are often used for effect or emphasis and should be used sparingly. Be sure that you do not overuse simple sentences, so when you are ready to use them for emphasis, they can stand out from the more complex sentences around them. See how the addition of a simple sentence in the combination below stands out against the more complex sentence that precedes it.

- Our city manager says that there are no funds available to cut the overgrown tree branch on Elm and Sixth; however, there were enough funds for her recent junket to Las Vegas. **She needs to stop irrelevant spending now.**

2. Check for fragments

Be sure that simple sentences have both a subject and predicate. If one or the other is missing, you have created a common sentence error—the fragment.

Fragment (missing a subject) → Leaving the party with his friends in the blue car.

OK → **Sam left the party with his friends in the blue car.**

OK → **Leaving the party early, Sam went with his friends in the blue car.**

Fragment (missing a predicate) → My neighbor Sam and his friends, along with many of the people at the party.

OK → **My neighbor Sam and his friends, along with many of the people at the party, were in the backyard.**

Sentences that give directions or a command have an understood subject (*you*), so even though a subject may not appear explicitly in the sentence, the implied subject makes the sentence an independent clause and not a fragment.

- (You should) Go east on Elm, and then turn on Sixth.

3. Check for parallelism

When conjoining multiple instances of the same type of word class or phrase, be sure that they are in parallel form.

Not parallel → Sam **ran** quickly to the sign at the corner, **re-turned** just as quickly, and **singing** all the while.

OK → Sam **ran** quickly to the sign at the corner, **returned** just as quickly, and **sang** all the while.

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Revise any fragments below into full sentences.

Example: Many people have had accidents at the tree-covered stop sign. For instance, my neighbor John. → Many people, including my neighbor John, have had accidents at the tree-covered stop sign.

1. Nothing has been done to fix the problem. No tree work. No sign moving.
2. I like to visit my friends on Elm Street. Who have a pool and a hot tub.
3. My friends' daughter had an accident at the stop sign at Sixth and Elm. Not seeing the sign.
4. The city manager needs to take the accidents seriously. Along with other city officials losing more funds due to court cases.
5. Running for office to fix the small problems of our city, including the overgrown trees that are blocking traffic signs.