Sentence FAQs

Metro State Writing Center, Fall 2023

# **What is a sentence?**

A sentence is a statement. It is a complete thought beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period, question mark, or exclamation point. A grammatically complete sentence communicates something about a subject.

# **Vocabulary for Words**

**Noun:** a person, place, thing, or idea

* writer, America, period, theory

**Pronoun:** a substitute for a noun

* I, you, it, their, this, who, anyone

**Verb:** an action or way of being

* write, begins, is, communicate

**Adjective:** describes nouns or pronouns

* complete, capital, precise

**Adverb:** describes verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs

* clearly, quickly, first

**Preposition:** describes words in terms of their relationship to place or time

* before, during, near

**Conjunction:** describes relationship of words, phrases, and clauses to each other

* for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

**Interjection:** expresses emotional tone, usually at the beginning of a sentence

* oh, wow, hey, indeed

# **Vocabulary for Sentences**

**Subject:** who or what the sentence is about, the main point

* The \*food\* on the plate grew cold.

**Object:** something that receives an action

* The students revised their \*drafts.\*

**Predicate:** the main action and/or description of a sentence, the verb phrase

* The pizza on my plate, a large slice, \*was growing cold.\*

**Nominalization:** making words or phrases into nouns

* \*The distribution\* of the pizzas was fair.

**Phrase:** a small group of words without a subject or verb used for a single idea

* The pizza on my plate, \*a large slice,\* was growing cold.

**Clause:** a group of words with a subject and verb communicating a larger, but not complete, idea

* While I ate, \*chewing slowly as I thought of other things,\* the food grew cold.

**Fragment:** a phrase or clause punctuated as if it were a sentence

* While I ate.

**Run-on:** a sentence where clauses are not properly separated with punctuation, or that makes more than one statement

* Students achieve their goals they study many hours a week.

# **How do I punctuate a sentence?**

## **At the end of a sentence:**

* Periods imply neutral statements.
* Question marks ask something?
* Exclamation points indicate excitement!
* Numbers above the text at the end of a sentence indicate a footnote or endnote used for citation or explanation of something relevant.1

## **Inside a sentence:**

* Commas separate ideas, notions, or simple lists.
* Em dashes highlight important ideas—notions that are related but slightly different.
* Semicolons; indicate closely related clauses.
* Colons: introduce an independent clause, a complicated list, a block quote, dialogue, an indented list, or separate titles from subtitles.
* “Quotation marks” go at the beginning and end of words that are exactly quoted from a source or for dialog; most punctuation is placed inside the mark at the end, “like this.” Semicolons and colons go outside them. If there is a citation, place the period after the second parenthesis, “like this” (Author, Page).
* Parentheses are used to set apart points (that can be left out but explain something useful) or citations (Author, Year, Page).
* Square brackets are used inside a quote for “things like that are [added or changed] to make the quotation useful” in the context of the sentence.
* Ellipses are three spaced periods indicating, “Something . . . was left out of a quote.”
* Apostrophes can indicate ownership, as in “the writer’s pen”; a contraction, as in “don’t”; or mark a secondary “quote ‘inside’ a quotation.”

# **How can I correct sentences?**

## **Tips for Proofreading**

* Read the piece backward, starting with the last paragraph
* Only work with one sentence at a time
* Read very slowly or out loud; it is best if someone who is not the original writer reads

## **Clarity**

Read the sentence slowly to someone else. If it seems unclear to either one of you, use other words, punctuate, or rearrange the phrases.

* **Unclear:** I ate, thought other thoughts chewing slowly while the food lost its taste the plate grew cold.
* **Revised:** While I ate, chewing slowly as I thought of other things, the food grew cold and lost its taste.

## **Sentence Fragments**

Either add what is missing or attach it to another sentence in order to make a complete statement.

* **Fragment:** While they slowly ate.
* **Revised 1:** While they slowly ate, the food lost its taste.
* **Revised 2:** The food lost its taste while they slowly ate.

## **Run-on Sentences**

Separate the ideas with punctuation or explain how they are related. Split it into two sentences by using a period. Use a semi-colon to connect closely related clauses. Use a comma and a conjunction so your reader knows how the ideas are related.

* **Run-on:** Metro students reach their goals they study many hours.
* **Revised 1:** Metro students reach their goals. They study many hours.
* **Revised 2:** Metro students reach their goals; they study many hours.
* **Revised 3:** Metro students reach their goals, but they study many hours.