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Compound sentences:
Adding interest

This guide is intended to help you approach the teaching of writing in your classroom and build on the knowledge learnt in the Simple sentences guide.

As highlighted in that guide, great writing will generally feature a mix of sentence types, all of which are structured and punctuated correctly. Choice and mix of sentences in a text should be informed by an understanding of the purpose and audience for the writing. The choice of sentence types may also be influenced by the genre of the writing, which will be informed by the curriculum area for which it is being produced. This is why writing needs to be taught explicitly and systematically, across all year levels and subjects, beginning with the essential foundation of sentences.

This guide provides clear grammatical definitions, and unpacks the features of compound sentences and how they function. The guide also offers, as a starting point, some strategies for implementing sentence-level instruction in your classroom. And yes, compound sentences need to be taught in both primary and secondary classes!

1. What are compound sentences?

Compound sentences are created when 2 or more independent clauses[1] are joined using a **conjunction** or a punctuation mark (a semicolon) to show a connection between 2 (or more) ideas.

Compound sentences offer us the opportunity to express multiple thoughts, provide detail and depth with our writing, and create efficiency in conveying meaning. When students can confidently understand how to write a simple sentence, the transition to compound sentences will be quite easy.

2. Using conjunctions

Conjunctions are 'joining words' that seamlessly create the link between one independent clause and another. They can also join 2 complex ideas together or, conversely, can pivot the reader's thinking, by starting with one idea and then offering an alternate one.

This is the second in a suite of guides designed to help teachers explain and demonstrate the fundamentals of writing to their students. The content increases in complexity across the guides, so it is helpful to read them in order. These guides take a functional view of language as it aligns with the Australian Curriculum: English. This means the parts of speech are considered in terms of what they are doing in a sentence, as well as their formal characteristics.

1. Simple sentences: are not necessarily simple!

2. Compound sentences: adding interest.

3. Complex sentences: creating agility and depth in your writing.

3. Coordinating conjunctions

A coordinating conjunction is a word that is used to join 2 or more words or word groups. Some coordinating conjunctions are: **for, and, nor, but, or** and **yet** (the acronym FANBOY is one way of remembering the coordinating conjunctions). You can also use **then** and **so**. The coordinating conjunction ensures that both of the independent clauses are equal in emphasis.

The most commonly used coordinating conjunctions are **and**, **or**, and **but**. Here are some examples:

> Earth is an ellipsoid, **and** it has a circumference of about 40,000 km.
>
> We could go to mini golf, **or** you could go home.
>
> I like going to the beach, **but** sometimes it rains.

4. Using semicolons

A more sophisticated approach to joining 2 independent clauses is to use a semicolon (**;**). The semicolon replaces the coordinating conjunction, and the result is a more precise and succinct sentence. Here are examples:

> Earth is an ellipsoid**;** it has a circumference of about 40,000 km.
>
> I love to run through the forest**;** my brother often joins me.
>
> He was an eccentric pianist**;** music was his passion.

4.1. Adverbs acting as conjunctions

Joining 2 independent clauses can sometimes appear abrupt. A way to address this situation is to use an adverb to ease the connection between the 2 independent clauses. This means that the adverb now identifies as a conjunction; however, there are a few punctuation rules attached.

- The adverb can only be used immediately after the semi-colon
- There must be a comma after the adverb.

Here are some examples:

> We found all the pieces of glass; **however**, Mei still managed to cut herself.
>
> Grace tried to email Oliver; **unfortunately**, Oliver's computer was not working.

5. Common problems with compound sentences

Sometimes it's difficult to see where to punctuate compound sentences, particularly in a semicolon compound sentence. It becomes tempting to exclusively use commas, particularly when it comes to adverbs such as 'however'. Here are some common mistakes:

We worked hard on our English assessment, finally it was finished.

Incorrect – this is a run-on sentence.

We worked hard on our English assessment; finally, it was finished.

Correct – after the semicolon there is an adverb, followed by a comma.

Zara slipped over on the icy path, unfortunately she broke her ankle.

Incorrect – this is a run-on sentence.

Zara slipped over on the icy path; unfortunately, she broke her ankle.

Correct – after the semicolon there is an adverb, followed by a comma.

6. How can compound sentences improve your writing?

Compound sentences present an opportunity to make your writing more interesting and easier to follow. Mastering compound sentences also allows you to explore more options than always using 'and' to bring together 2 ideas. You can have greater control by getting to the point and demonstrating detail in your writing.

It's important to highlight the function of compound sentences, when discussing them with students. When students develop an independent clause, encourage them to add some new information — it provides more interest and information for the audience.

For example:

> I like bikes. I like skateboards.
>
> Try
>
> I like bikes; however, my preference is skateboards.

Or

> I will give you my decision tomorrow. I might tell you the next day.
>
> Instead
>
> I will give you my decision tomorrow or I might tell you the next day.

7. Suggestions for teaching compound sentences in the classroom

The following strategies are provided without context of any specific subject area, genre or text. Teachers should adapt teaching strategies accordingly.

7.1. Planning

Have a clear scope and sequence to map out when you are teaching sentences, to what year level, and in which subject area. Sentence activities can be built into your lessons and adapted to the lesson context.

At the planning stage, teachers must consider and contextualise how compound sentences function in the type of text you are using in class (texts are used in all learning areas, for example, a written source in History). Regularly review your scope and sequence, to ensure compound sentence writing is embedded into your practice.

7.2. Lesson activities

7.2.1. Defining and writing compound sentences

2. Present new learning
   a. Define compound sentences.
   b. Explain the function of compound sentences with a coordinating conjunction (see activity challenge on page 6).
   c. Explain that the comma needs to go before the coordinating conjunction.
   d. Provide examples of sentences that use a variety of coordinating conjunctions.

3. Guided practice
   a. Demonstrate writing multiple worked examples of compound sentences using coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS).
   b. Provide examples of prewritten simple sentences. Have students join the sentences with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

4. Independent practice
   a. Ask students to write 5 examples of compound sentences, with a variety of coordinating conjunctions. Monitor initial practice attempts and plan time for continual practice until skills are automatic.
   b. Provide correction and feedback.

5. This process can be applied to teaching subordinating conjunctions as well.

7.2.2. Teaching compound sentences using a semicolon

1. Present new learning

   a. Explain and demonstrate the function of compound sentences with a semicolon.

   b. Present examples of compound sentences with a semicolon and check for understanding.

   c. Explain about and demonstrate adverbs acting as conjunctions.

   d. Present examples of an adverb acting as a conjunction. Emphasise that the adverb can only be used immediately after the semicolon and there must be a comma after the adverb. Check for understanding.

2. Guided practice

   a. Teach how to use a semicolon using worked examples and guided practice.

   b. Provide correction and feedback.

3. Independent practice

   a. Students create compound sentences with a semicolon and adverb acting as a conjunction. Monitor initial practice attempts and plan time for continual practice until skills are automatic.

   b. Students write 5 compound sentences about a key topic you are working on in class.

   c. Provide correction and feedback.

8. Activity challenge

Ask students to identify which of the following sentences are simple and which ones are compound.

Various minerals have been mined since the very early periods in history [Simple]. The removal of water from the mines posed a problem to miners in ancient times [Simple]. For this reason, their mines were simply shallow holes and they hacked away stone with primitive iron tools [Compound].

At a later period in history, fire-setting was introduced and used in mines for many centuries [Compound]. The transport of the ore to the surface of the mine was also a difficult task [Simple]. Wooden or wicker trays were filled with the ore and drawn along the bottom of the mine to the shaft [Compound].

Messel et al. *Science for High School Students*.
Science Foundation for Physics, Sydney. 1964: 42–7.

What is the function of simple sentences in this piece of writing?
What is the benefit of using simple and compound sentences?

9. Appendices: Connecting to the Australian Curriculum and National Literacy Learning Progressions

9.1. Appendix A: Relevant Australian Curriculum content descriptors

Alignment with the Australian Curriculum Content Descriptions (English)	
Foundation	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 1	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 2	• Understand that connections can be made between ideas by using a compound sentence with two or more independent clauses usually linked by a coordinating conjunction (AC9E2LA06) • Create and edit short imaginative, informative and persuasive written and/or multimodal texts for familiar audiences, using text structure appropriate to purpose, simple and compound sentences, noun groups and verb groups, topic-specific vocabulary, simple punctuation and common 2-syllable words (AC9E2LY06)
Year 3	Understand that a clause is a unit of grammar usually containing a subject and a verb that need to agree (AC9E3LA06)
Year 4	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 5	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 6	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 7	Understand how complex and compound-complex sentences can be used to elaborate, extend and explain ideas (AC9E7LA05)
Year 8	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 9	Not identified at this stage/year level
Year 10	Not identified at this stage/year level

9.2. Appendix B: Relevant Literacy Learning Progressions

Creating Texts	Grammar
CrT1 not identified at this stage/year level	**Gra1** not identified at this stage/year level
CrT2 not identified at this stage/year level	**Gra2** not identified at this stage/year level
CrT3 not identified at this stage/year level	**Gra3** uses basic text connectives repetitively (and, then)
CrT4 not identified at this stage/year level	**Gra4** writes compound sentences to make connections between ideas using coordinating conjunctions (and, but, so)
CrT5 writes identifiable clauses often linked using 'and'	**Gra5** • writes simple and compound sentences correctly • writes generally accurate simple, compound and complex sentences with few run-on sentences and dangling clauses (Because he was afraid.)
CrT6 • writes simple and compound sentences related to a topic using conjunctions (and, but, so, because, when) • maintains tense within a sentence • uses simple cohesive language (then, after, and)	**Gra6** selects simple, compound and complex sentences to express and connect ideas, occasionally manipulating the structure for emphasis, clarity or effect
CrT7 expands ideas through intentional use of simple and compound and occasional complex sentences	**Gra7** • crafts both compact and lengthy sentences with challenging structures, such as embedded/relative clauses, non-finite clauses, interrupting clauses, nominalisations, passive voice • makes more sophisticated connections between ideas by creating complex sentences expressing relationships of cause, reason, concession
CrT8 • consistently writes compound sentences correctly and uses a greater range of complex sentences • uses a variety of sentence structures and sentence beginnings	not identified at this stage/year level
CrT9 not identified at this stage/year level	not identified at this stage/year level
CrT10 not identified at this stage/year level	not identified at this stage/year level
CrT11 not identified at this stage/year level	not identified at this stage/year level

1   Please see the Simple sentence guide for explanation about 'Independent Clauses'

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