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# Writing in Health and Physical Education

## Highlighting the use of simple, compound and complex sentences in student writing

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**This practice guide is one in a series that focuses on the types of sentences students should use in their writing in the subjects of English, Science and Health and Physical Education.**

It has been developed for secondary teachers of Health and Physical Education (HPE) and builds on the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s [simple](#), [compound](#) and [complex](#) sentence practice guides. It offers guidance for analysing and providing targeted feedback on your students' sentence structure, grammar and punctuation. We recommend referring to the glossary in the [simple sentence practice guide](#) for definitions of key technical terms used in this practice guide.

Whether you're an experienced teacher or new to the profession, this practice guide is designed to enhance your ability to teach simple, compound and complex sentences in HPE. Through exploring annotated writing examples written at a Year 8 level, we hope you'll gain valuable insights into the impact of teaching specific sentence types and providing targeted feedback to improve student writing.

# 1. Simple, compound and complex sentences in Health and Physical Education

In HPE, students are often required to recount information and analyse sources. The strategic use of simple, compound and complex sentences in a piece of HPE writing can support students in articulating their ideas effectively.

**Modal verbs** are helpful in persuading and providing recommendations relating to health.

**Gerunds** (non-finite verbs acting like nouns) enable students to express actions related to health in a concise manner (for example, '*Exercising regularly improves overall health and wellbeing*'). Carefully chosen **adjectives** and **adverbs** provide detailed descriptions and clarifications and are handy when comparing different aspects of health and physical activity. Using **third-person pronouns** is also important in HPE writing, helping to shift the focus away from the writer's personal perspective and biases, toward a more academic style of writing.

**Articles** (definite and indefinite) ensure grammatical correctness and clarity when referring to specific or general subjects and/or objects.

Incorporating these language features into sentences can help students communicate their thinking clearly, express informed opinions about a range of health issues and evaluate others' views.

**Simple sentences** allow students to focus on specific details and articulate concepts succinctly.

Road safety is a big issue relevant to young people.

Protective driver behaviours include wearing a seatbelt and knowing the consequences of drink driving and speeding.

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**Compound sentences** provide an opportunity to connect related ideas and emphasise similarities or differences effectively.

Some people drive carelessly, and they don't consider the safety of their passengers.

Speeding is one of the main factors linked to crashes, yet only a small number of drivers perceive speeding as an imminent threat to their personal safety.

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**Complex sentences** can help clarify the relationships between ideas with precision.

Whether you like it or not, it is mandatory for drivers to know all road rules.

Although seatbelts are one of the most effective safety features in vehicles, there are still many people who choose not to use them, increasing their risk of serious injury or death in the event of an accident.

These examples highlight the power of each sentence type to clearly communicate meaning. The following section outlines the features of quality HPE writing in more detail.

## 2. Student writing samples and feedback: Focusing on simple, compound and complex sentences

A good piece of HPE writing will:

- **be clear and concise.** This includes using a logical structure and precise, relevant language that's easy to follow. Connectives such as, 'In addition', 'As a result', 'For example', 'Alternatively' and 'However' can help to support cohesion between ideas and sections.
- **use nouns (for example, nutrition), noun groups (for example, a balanced diet), and gerunds (for example, exercising) to recount specific information.** These language features are important to progressing students' writing from describing (using action verbs) to a more abstract and analytical form of writing.
- **include a variety of sentence types.** An effective combination of simple, compound and complex sentences can help clarify the relationships between ideas and create emphasis. This also ensures the writing is more engaging for the reader.

With this in mind, we have analysed three Year 8 HPE writing examples to explore the types of sentences used and examine whether the author has been effective in communicating their ideas to the reader. The sentence types have been highlighted in different colours (teal for simple, purple for compound and orange for complex). The verbs in each sentence have been marked in bold and the gerunds have been underlined. Each example has been assessed and comments provided about the effectiveness of the sentence types used in relation to HPE.

As part of a unit of work on personal safety, students wrote a persuasive essay to address the issue of road safety in the community. This analysis provides insights into some of the strengths and areas for development in students' writing to help you identify opportunities for targeted teaching and feedback.

## Writing example 1

### Improving road safety in the community<sup>1</sup>

**(simple)** Road safety **is** a big concern in a community. **(complex)** In this text I **will talk** about some strategies for individuals and the community **can do** to make our roads safer to **help** everyone **make** better choices which **will be** better.

**(complex)** One simple thing **is** everyone **can wear** seatbelts because seatbelts **save** lives but then some people still **don't wear** them. **(simple)** This **is** dangerous to everyone; individuals and the community.

**(complex)** Everyone **should wear** seatbelts every time they **get** in a car and **go**. **(compound)** **It's** not hard and **can keep** everyone safe. **(complex)** Telling everyone about why they **should wear** a seatbelt **will** also help.

**(complex)** One thing we **can** also **do is make** more bike lanes. **(complex)** These **will be** better and safer for cyclists because bikes and cars on the same road **can be** dangerous and unsafe therefore **cause** accidents and deaths. **(complex)** Then accidents **wont happen** so much because more cyclists **will be** safer so more of them **will go** on roads. **(complex)** If there **are** bike lanes on more roads everyone in the community including drivers **will be** safer.



<sup>1</sup> Sections of this student's work have been used to illustrate writing features.

## Key takeaways

**Student writing:** ‘One simple thing is everyone can wear seatbelts because seatbelts save lives but then some people still don’t wear them.’

**Teacher feedback:** This sentence contains complex ideas that can be simplified for clarity and impact. Replacing one complex sentence with 2 simple sentences enables the student to convey their ideas more succinctly – for example, ‘Wearing seatbelts is a simple action that can save lives. Despite this, not everyone chooses to use them.’

**Student writing:** ‘In this text I will talk about some strategies for individuals and the community can do to make our roads safer to help everyone make better choices which will be better.’

**Teacher feedback:** This sentence (and others in the example) includes personal pronouns that can be omitted for precision but also to ensure objectivity in the language. Including some gerunds would also help to improve clarity – for example, ‘This text will propose strategies for enhancing road safety, enabling the community and individuals to make better choices.’

**Student writing:** ‘Then accidents won’t happen so much because more cyclists will be safer so more of them will go on roads.’

**Teacher feedback:** The vocabulary in this text is somewhat limited. Using a gerund to start the sentence and a coordinating conjunction to join the independent clauses creates a cause and effect relationship and demonstrates critical thinking – for example, ‘Increasing the number of bike lanes will make roads safer and encourage cyclists to ride with greater confidence.’

**Student writing:** ‘These will be better and safer for cyclists because bikes and cars on the same road can be dangerous and unsafe therefore cause accidents and deaths.’

**Teacher feedback:** The run-on sentences in this text reduce the cohesion and logic of the student’s arguments. Splitting this run-on complex sentence into 2 simple sentences supports the logical flow of the argument – for example, ‘Bikes and cars sharing the same road can be hazardous and lead to accidents. These changes will create a safer environment for cyclists.’

**Student writing:** ‘If there are bike lanes on more roads everyone in the community including drivers will be safer.’

**Teacher feedback:** Correctly punctuated, this sentence reads, ‘If there are bike lanes on more roads, everyone in the community, including drivers, will be safer.’

Inserting a comma to indicate the dependent clause and noun phrase helps to make the student’s idea clearer.

## Summary

This text would benefit from greater sentence variety and more deliberate vocabulary choices. These adjustments would enhance the structure and coherence of the writing and make it more enjoyable to read. While the student demonstrates a basic understanding of how conjunctions can connect ideas and express more complex thoughts, these result in run-on sentences that are difficult to follow due to a lack of punctuation. The student has attempted to use dependent clauses, however, these are not correctly punctuated either. These issues detract from the meaning of the text and suggest that the student requires support to properly construct compound and complex sentences.

## Writing example 2

### Improving road safety in the community<sup>2</sup>

**(simple)** Creating more public transport options **is** one step to make all roads safer. **(complex)** By having more public transport options and improving these the number of cars on the road **will be reduced** so there **will be** less traffic and therefore less accidents. **(complex)** Individuals **can take** public transport more often for this change to happen but also the community **should fight** for better options when it **comes** to public transport. **(compound)** This **will** not only improve road safety but it **will** also **make** the community more environmentally friendly and more sustainable.

**(complex)** Driving when people **are** distracted, especially due to using mobile phones **cause** many accidents every single day. **(complex)** We **need to raise** awareness of how dangerous using mobile phones **is** when driving to better educate people about the risks. **(complex)** There **are** already a lot of advertisements about this issue however more that **target** young people who **use** their phone a lot **will help to show** them how dangerous and irresponsible it really **is**. **(complex)** Ads that **showed** how quickly just checking a message on a phone **can lead** to harm **will be** helpful for this reason. **(complex)** When young people **put** their phones on “Do Not Disturb” they **are reducing** their chances of their phone distracting them and this **is** just one way that accidents **can be** avoided to improve safety for all.



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<sup>2</sup> Sections of this student's work have been used to illustrate writing features.

## Key takeaways

**Student writing:** ‘Ads that showed how quickly just checking a message on a phone can lead to harm will be helpful for this reason.’

**Teacher feedback:** The first part of this sentence is in the past tense (‘showed’), but the second part switches to the present tense (‘can lead’).

Using the present tense consistently is important. Tense can change during the course of an extended response, but a level of control is required when changing tense in the same sentence. Using a punctuation mark such as a semicolon can also highlight the main message – for example, ‘Advertisements can show how quickly checking a message on a phone can lead to accidents; making it helpful if only for this reason.’

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**Student writing:** ‘There are already a lot of advertisements about this issue however more that target young people who use their phone a lot will help to show them how dangerous and irresponsible it really is.’

**Teacher feedback:** Students often try to cover a lot of information in one sentence. In this instance, the student’s analysis would be more effective if they separated their first idea into a compound sentence followed by a simple sentence that summarises the analysis – for example, ‘Many advertisements already address this issue, but we need more targeting young people who use their phones frequently. These will help to show the dangers and irresponsibility involved.’

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**Student writing:** ‘When young people put their phones on “Do Not Disturb” they are reducing their chances of their phone distracting them and this is just one way that accidents can be avoided to improve safety for all.’

**Teacher feedback:** Once again this sentence contains too much information. The student is trying to create a ‘solution’ to the issue and summarise an ‘action’ in one sentence. The sentence needs to be separated into 2 or more sentences for clarity and effect – for example, ‘When young people activate the ‘Do Not Disturb’ mode on their phones, they reduce the chances of their phones distracting them. This is just one way to avoid accidents and improve safety for everyone.’

## Summary

This student is beginning to experiment with more sophisticated sentence structures, however, there are some issues with structure and punctuation that require attention. As a starting point, incorporating some simple sentences would help reduce the number and length of compound and complex sentences and improve the text’s conciseness.

Complex sentences are effective, but only if there’s a clear intention and control of the idea being communicated. The number of run-on sentences evident in the text also implies that the student may not understand how to properly construct compound or complex sentences. As a starting point, practising using simple sentences can be helpful to clarify one idea or argument clearly. Explicit instruction relating to each sentence type would support them in revising the text and convey a clearer, more concise message to convince the audience. Finally, ensuring consistent and appropriate tense throughout the text would also help reduce confusion for the reader. These improvements would enhance the overall clarity and precision of the piece.

## Writing example 3

### Improving road safety in the community<sup>3</sup>

**(Complex)** One significant action that both individuals and the community **can take to enhance** road safety **is to educate** and **enforce** the importance of seatbelt usage. **(simple)** This simple yet effective strategy **can be achieved** by raising awareness through advertising campaigns and educational programs.

**(complex)** Individuals **need to make** wearing seatbelts a habit as this can significantly **reduce** the risk of a crash as well as the seriousness of injuries. **(complex)** Seatbelts **save** lives, and **it's** essential that we **make** wearing them a habit.

**(complex)** In addition to promoting seatbelt usage, creating dedicated bike lanes for cyclists **is** another essential strategy that **can improve** road safety. **(complex)** Cyclists usually **share** the road with cars which **can lead** to potentially dangerous situations. **(simple)** Creating more dedicated and safe lanes for cyclists **will reduce** the risk of accidents. **(complex)** While separate lanes for cyclists **will improve** safety, they **will** also **encourage** more people **to cycle**. **(compound)** This **is** a 'win win' situation so individuals and the community **must** campaign for an increased number of bike lanes.

**(complex)** Addressing the issue of mobile phone usage while driving **is** also vital for road safety.

**(complex)** Many accidents **occur** due to distracted driving, which **can result** from using mobile phones behind the wheel. **(simple)** Public awareness campaigns and educational programs **must show** the dangers of mobile phone **use** in cars. **(simple)** Encouraging drivers to **switch off** their phones **will** improve road safety and **save** lives.

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3 Sections of this student's work have been used to illustrate writing features.



## Key takeaways

**Student writing:** ‘Creating more dedicated and safe lanes for cyclists will reduce the risk of accidents.’

**Teacher feedback:** This simple sentence functions effectively to convey a clear and direct statement about the proposed action without unnecessary complexity.

**Student writing:** ‘While separate lanes for cyclists will improve safety, they will also encourage more people to cycle.’

**Teacher feedback:** This complex sentence uses a subordinating conjunction (‘while’) to add depth to the argument by elaborating on the benefits of dedicated bike lanes.

**Student writing:** ‘Addressing the issue of mobile phone usage while driving is also vital for road safety.’

**Teacher feedback:** Nominalisation has been used to successfully form nouns from verbs, thus avoiding verbs being repeated unnecessarily. By using ‘mobile phone usage’ (active) instead of ‘mobile phones being used’ (passive), this sentence establishes a concise and academic tone.

**Student writing:** ‘In addition to promoting seatbelt usage, creating dedicated bike lanes for cyclists is another essential strategy that can improve road safety.’

**Teacher feedback:** Gerunds (‘promoting’, ‘creating’) have been used effectively in places to convey the proposed actions in a more formal manner.

**Student writing:** ‘This simple yet effective strategy can be achieved by raising awareness through advertising campaigns and educational programs.’

Individuals need to make wearing seatbelts a habit as this can significantly reduce the risk of a crash as well as the seriousness of injuries. Seatbelts save lives, and it’s essential that we make wearing them a habit.’

**Teacher feedback:** Varied sentence beginnings and types of sentences allow the student to be strategic when persuading the reader. In this example, the simple sentence articulates the benefits of the strategy and includes technical vocabulary through noun phrases (‘advertising campaigns’, ‘educational programs’). The complex sentence uses modal verbs to **state** what strategies are essential (‘need to make wearing seatbelts a habit’) and the subordinate clause **explains** why this is essential. The compound sentence summarises the argument in the first independent clause effectively (‘Seatbelts save lives’) and quantifies this in the second independent clause (‘and it’s essential that we make wearing them a habit’).

## Summary

This student has effectively employed a combination of simple, compound and complex sentences to organise, expand upon and connect their thinking. Complex sentences enable the student to express more abstract ideas and show cause and effect, which makes the shorter, simple sentences present more impactful.

The gerunds add further variety to the sentence structure, and the nominalised verbs help the writing move towards a more formal and academic tone. Subordinating conjunctions (for example, ‘while’, ‘as’) have been used to join independent and dependent clauses and establish cause and effect relationships, and present contrasting ideas. While there is certainly room for improvement in this student’s writing (specifically relating to vocabulary and commas), the use of different sentence types throughout the text demonstrates an awareness of the intended purpose and audience.

### 3. Suggested teaching activities

#### Simple, compound and complex sentences

1. Present new learning
  - a. Provide students with an example of HPE writing (for example, informational text, news article).
  - b. Identify the simple, compound and complex sentences in the text as you explain and demonstrate their function in HPE.
  - c. Model writing a simple, compound and complex sentence to summarise the main ideas in the text.
2. Guided practice
  - a. Support students to work in pairs or small groups to identify simple, compound and complex sentences in the text provided, using worked examples.
  - b. Ask students what types of sentences this topic or text uses and discuss the effect of combining sentence types.
  - c. Working together, students can practise writing one simple, one compound and one complex sentence to summarise the main ideas in the text.
3. Independent practice
  - a. Students identify simple, compound and complex sentences in the text provided, using worked examples to guide them.
  - b. Using the text as a model, they can practise constructing a variety of sentence types in their own writing.
  - c. Monitor initial attempts and plan time for continual practice.
  - d. Provide correction and feedback.

#### Pre-writing activity: Verbs

1. Present new learning
  - a. Explain and demonstrate the function of verbs in relation to a topic – for example: ‘First Aid – DRSABCD’
  - b. Generate a list of verbs related to the topic – for example:
    - assess
    - monitor
    - observe
    - identify
    - remove
    - tilt.
  - c. Model using the verbs in simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic – for example:
    - First, the responder must **assess** the scene for any potential dangers.
    - The victim is responsive, so the responder **monitors** their condition closely.
    - If the airway is blocked, **tilt** the head gently to **remove** the obstruction.
2. Guided practice
  - a. Ask students to select a verb/s from the list to practise writing simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic.
  - b. Provide correction and feedback.
3. Independent practice
  - a. Students generate their own list of verbs and practise using them to write a range of simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic.
  - b. Monitor initial attempts and plan time for continual practice.
  - c. Provide correction and feedback.

## Pre-writing activity: Nouns

1. Present new learning
  - a. Explain and demonstrate the function of nouns in relation to a topic – for example: ‘Stereotypes’
  - b. Generate a list of nouns related to the topic – for example:
    - race
    - gender
    - discrimination
    - prejudice
    - inclusivity
    - conformity.
  - c. Model using the nouns in simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic – for example:
    - **Race** and **gender** stereotypes can lead to unfair judgements and **discrimination**.
    - Stereotypes often arise from **prejudice**; we must challenge these preconceptions to foster **inclusivity**.
    - While **conformity** reinforces stereotypes, challenging assumptions helps us to avoid bias.
2. Guided practice
  - a. Ask students to select a noun/s from the list to practise writing simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic.
  - b. Provide correction and feedback.
3. Independent practice
  - a. Students generate their own list of nouns and practise using them to write a range of simple, compound and complex sentences about the topic.
  - b. Monitor initial attempts and plan time for continual practice.
  - c. Provide correction and feedback.