What makes a good sentence?
Content

• What makes a complete sentence
• Improving sentence structure
• Identifying common mistakes and learning how to rectify them

This material is not discipline-specific.
What is a sentence?

- The expression of a complete idea
- It makes sense on its own
- It can combine with others, but only with the correct bonds (punctuation)
- It is made up of (grammatical) components
What does a sentence contain?

• Needs subject/verb pair *e.g. Jane snored*
  • Subject = someone or something who is being or doing. (*Jane*)
  • Verb = what they are doing (*snored*)
  • Subject and verb need to match (not *Jane snore*)
  • Length of sentence not important

• Starts with capital letter

• Ends with a full stop
  • in other styles of writing, question marks and exclamation marks – but you’re not likely to need these in academic writing.
Fragments

• Fragments are incomplete things.
• Sentence fragments
  • where there isn’t a proper subject or verb
  • the ‘sentence’ sounds as though something is missing
Sentence Fragment

- Lost motivation to work at some point.
  - *incomplete* – *who has lost motivation?*

Making the fragment a full sentence

- Everyone loses their motivation to work at some point.
  - *complete* – *everyone is the subject*
Sentence fragments compared to full sentences

**Sentence fragments**
- ✗ Thinking positively about solutions. *(who is thinking?)*
- ✗ Plagiarism, using other people’s writing without referencing. *(needs is)*
- ✗ Simultaneously supported by national and international legislation *(what is supported?)*

**Full sentences**
- ✔ Plagiarism is cheating.
Run-on sentences (Sometimes called comma splices).

• Run-on sentences = two sentences separated by a comma.
  • The comma isn’t strong enough to keep them apart.

• How can you tell if it’s a run on sentence?
  • Separate the two parts – do they still make complete sense?
  • If so, they’re two sentences and need a full stop between them.
Run-on sentence example

• An essay should present an argument, all the content makes sense because of the argument.
  • *two sentences*

Making the run-on sentence a full sentence

• An argument is the case that is being made in an essay.
  • *single sentence*
Run on sentences compared to full sentences

Run on sentences
❌ An essay should present an argument, consequently its content will make sense. (Consequently is as a false conjunction or a sentence adverb. A conjunction is a word that lets you bring two sentences together such as but, and, because. False conjunctions, such as nevertheless, therefore, however, then and consequently shouldn't be used part way through a sentence.)

❌ Generally, arguments should build up through the essay, their conclusions should appear to lead on from thoughts already expressed (‘from their conclusions ...’ could be another sentence)

Full sentences
✔️ An essay should argue a case, so that its content makes sense.

✔️ If an essay presents an argument, its content will make sense.
Sentences with style: keep it clear

• Not too long. Your sentence shouldn’t be like a maze to read.
  • No more than two ideas in one sentence
• Read it aloud – can you breathe?
• Keep subject and verb close together so don’t have to remember something from the start of the sentence

Poor example of a sentence

Qualitative research which is analysed using words rather than numbers and has a smaller sample size than quantitative research, because it considers both feelings and experiences, aims to develop an in-depth understanding of complex issues and relationships.

What’s wrong with it:

• Several ideas discussed in one sentence about qualitative research: uses words, has smaller sample size, considers feelings and experiences, results in in-depth understanding. This is too much to take in.
• Subject (qualitative research) and verb (aims) are too far apart.

If a lecturer needs to read a sentence several times to understand it, they’re not going to look favourably at your writing.
Possible improved example

Qualitative research aims to develop an in-depth understanding of complex issues and relationships.

• You can then put the rest of the information in separate sentences.
Sentences with style: keep it fresh

• Vary structure
• Vary length – don’t just use lots of short sentences
• Reduce repetition
Improving sentences

**Example:**

It is very important to consider the words that have been selected, as they can provide a huge variety of extensive opportunities for original and interesting expressions.

- Repetitive and wordy – e.g. do not need “it is very important to”.

**Possible improvement:**

Word selection is important, as it provides opportunities for interesting expressions.
Avoiding repetition and wordiness

Example:

A new argument will attract a lecturer’s attention. It will lead to higher grades. A new argument will avoid common examples. It is necessary to know what examples are common in order to write a new argument.

- The word choices are too similar in choice (e.g. could use ‘original’ instead of ‘new’)
- Sentences are too similar in structure (too many short sentences)
- Uses ‘will’ 3 times

Possible improvement:

A new argument will attract a lecturer’s attention, leading to higher grades. Once common answers have been identified, they can be avoided in order to create a more original response.
Support Available

• Learning Hub
  • Website including online tutorial on academic writing: http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/learning_hub
  • One-to-one tutorials http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/lrs/tutorials
If you found this useful, we also have information available on:

- Apostrophes (and how to use them)
- Proofreading

Available from the [Learning Hub LibGuide](http://libguides.tees.ac.uk/workshops)