

University of Tikrit
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English Grammar

Complex Sentences in English

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1. Introduction

Sentence structure is one of the most important areas of English grammar. According to the number and type of clauses they contain, sentences are commonly classified into four major categories:

1. Simple Sentences
2. Compound Sentences
3. Complex Sentences
4. Compound-Complex Sentences

Among these types, complex sentences are particularly significant because they enable speakers and writers to express sophisticated relationships between ideas.

Consider the following examples:

- I stayed at home because it was raining.
- Although she was tired, she continued working.
- The student who won the prize is my friend.

Each sentence contains a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Such structures allow language users to express cause, contrast, condition, time, purpose, and many other logical relationships.

Complex sentences are therefore essential for effective academic writing and advanced communication.

2. Definition of a Complex Sentence

A complex sentence consists of:

- One independent (main) clause
- One or more dependent (subordinate) clauses

Example

- She stayed at home because she was sick.

Independent Clause:

- She stayed at home.

Dependent Clause:

- because she was sick.

The subordinate clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence because it depends on the main clause for its interpretation.

3. Independent and Dependent Clauses

3.1 Independent Clause

An independent clause expresses a complete thought and can function as a sentence by itself.

Examples

- The students attended the lecture.
- She completed her assignment.
- We enjoyed the trip.

Each example can stand alone as a complete sentence.

3.2 Dependent Clause

A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb but cannot function independently.

Examples

- because she was tired
- although it was raining
- when the lecture ended

These clauses require a main clause to complete their meaning.

Incorrect:

- Because she was tired.

Correct:

- Because she was tired, she went to bed early.
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4. The Concept of Subordination

The defining characteristic of complex sentences is **subordination**.

Subordination occurs when one clause is made grammatically dependent on another clause.

Example

- We postponed the meeting because the manager was absent.

Main Clause:

- We postponed the meeting.

Subordinate Clause:

- because the manager was absent.

The subordinate clause provides additional information but depends on the main clause.

5. Position of Subordinate Clauses

Subordinate clauses may occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Initial Position

- Because it was raining, we stayed indoors.

Final Position

- We stayed indoors because it was raining.

Medial Position

- The students, who had prepared carefully, performed well.

The position often affects punctuation but not the basic meaning.

6. Complex Sentences in Academic Writing

Complex sentences are particularly valuable in academic writing because they:

1. Express logical relationships.
2. Connect ideas smoothly.
3. Reduce repetition.
4. Increase textual cohesion.
5. Demonstrate syntactic sophistication.

Example

Simple Style:

- The experiment was successful. The researchers continued their work.

Complex Style:

- Because the experiment was successful, the researchers continued their work.

The second version is more cohesive and academically appropriate.

14. Summary

A complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. The relationship between these clauses is based on subordination, which allows speakers and writers to express logical and semantic connections among ideas.

The three principal types of subordinate clauses are:

1. **Noun Clauses** – functioning as nouns.
2. **Adjective (Relative) Clauses** – modifying nouns.
3. **Adverbial Clauses** – expressing time, cause, condition, contrast, purpose, and other relationships.

Complex sentences play a central role in academic and professional communication because they enable precise, coherent, and sophisticated expression. Mastery of complex sentence structures is therefore essential for developing advanced proficiency in English grammar, writing, and discourse.