

# Grammar and punctuation

## Activity A • Reading and writing

A common mistake people make when writing is to insert a comma at the end of a sentence, in place of a full stop. One reason for this is that they do not always realise that they have written a complete sentence, especially when it is a short, 'simple' sentence.

### A simple sentence

A simple sentence is one that contains one main clause. Here are some examples:

I like chocolate biscuits.

My cat is frightened of birds.

The boy bought apples.

Many people mistakenly think that these cannot be proper sentences because they are short and they therefore put commas after them.

How can we tell when we have written a simple sentence? Understanding grammar can help.

A sentence:

- contains a verb (a word or words telling us what the subject is doing, feeling, experiencing or being)
- contains a subject (who or what is responsible for the action, feeling or experience conveyed by the verb).

In the six sentences below, underline all the verbs with a pen and the subjects with a pencil.

- 1 Birds fly.
- 2 I read newspapers.
- 3 Children love scary movies.
- 4 Shakespeare wrote plays in the sixteenth century.
- 5 Khalid is sixteen years old.
- 6 Mary will be at my house tonight.

### The verb 'to be'

The words 'am', 'is', 'are', 'was' and 'were' are also verbs and come from the verb 'to be'.

### Tip

If you are not sure whether you have written a full sentence or not, give it the 'subject + verb' test. If it has a subject and a verb and makes sense, then you have written a simple sentence, as long as it is followed by another whole sentence. See the example below.

My mother went to town. She bought a new coat.

'My mother' is the subject. 'Went' is the verb. 'My mother went to town' is followed by another sentence with a subject and verb. These are both examples of simple sentences.

## Activity B • Reading and writing

Simple sentences can be very effective in writing. However, lots of them together can become repetitive. Simple sentences can be made more interesting by adding conjunctions to join simple sentences together. Conjunctions make compound sentences. Here's an example:

The school spent its lottery grant on library books. Most parents were pleased.  
One governor complained. He thought a new minibus was more important.  
(Four simple sentences)

The four simple sentences can be turned into two compound sentences, using conjunctions.

The school spent its lottery grant on library books **and** most parents were pleased.  
One governor complained **because** he thought a new minibus was more important.

Here are some examples of conjunctions: 'and', 'but', 'because', 'so that'.

Re-write the following sentences, adding conjunctions between them so that they still make sense.

- 1 Ella Fitzgerald was an international singer and composer. She sometimes performed in England.  
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- 2 Simple sentences can be useful. They can also make writing sound boring.  
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- 3 Most people think Henry Bogart comes from a family of actors. His father was a doctor.  
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- 4 I will put the ornament on the highest shelf. The children will not be able to reach it.  
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- 5 I went to town. I bought some fruit from the market.  
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## Activity C • Writing

Using a range of simple and compound sentences, write a paragraph about an experience of work that was particularly memorable and explain why. If you have no experience of paid work, you may wish to concentrate on a work task you have performed at home or elsewhere.

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