

Sentences

SENTENCE: The assemblage of a Subject Phrase, Verb Phrase, and Object Phrase according to the grammar of a particular language or dialect in order to communicate a message or some part of a message.

There are few words that require more examination than this word “sentence.” It is a word whose import in college writing cannot be overstated. However, it is also a word that is, in my opinion, very poorly defined for most writing students. How do you define a sentence? The first and one of the oldest answers is, “A sentence is a complete thought.” OK. But let’s think about this definition logically. If a writer writes a complete thought, is that a sentence? The answer is: it depends on the writer, the genre, and the purpose of an act of communication. In college writing, a sentence is probably a complete thought. However, that is not what defines a sentence as a sentence in college writing. What defines a sentence as a sentence in college writing is that it adheres to the rules for complete sentences in Standard Written English. Furthermore, while everyone who has mastered SWE can recognize complete and incomplete sentences (at least most of the time), there are multiple ways of defining what a complete sentence is. You can find examples of several different definitions of “the sentence” from a variety of educational textbooks. The definition that follows is a very general one. However, I think you will find it useful.

[Understanding Sentences in SWE: An Introduction](#)

[Simple, Compound, and Complex Sentences](#)

["Building Sentences" by Douglas Glover](#)

[Sentence Fragments](#)

[Fused Sentences](#)

[Complex Sentences](#)

Adapted from *What Is Writing?: An Introduction to Writing as an Act and Medium of Communication* (2015).



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