

Creating Complex Sentences

Essays can be improved by varying the sentence length and complexity. An essay composed primarily of short, simple sentences usually sounds choppy and disconnected. This resource describes several ways to combine simple sentences into more complex ones that clearly express the relationship between the ideas being combined.

1. To emphasize a time relationship between ideas expressed in two simple sentences, combine the sentences with the linking words **when**, **while**, **before**, or **after**. For example:

Sentence 1: *Losha immigrated to Montreal in 1959.*

Sentence 2: *Quebec's Quiet Revolution took place between 1960 and 1966.*

These two sentences can be combined with the word **before**.

- *Losha immigrated to Montreal in 1959 **before** Quebec's Quiet Revolution took place between 1960 and 1966.*

2. To emphasize a causal relationship between ideas expressed in two simple sentences, combine the sentences with the linking words **because**, **since**, or **for**. For example:

Sentence 1: *Stalin refused to believe that Germany would attack the Soviet Union.*

Sentence 2: *Stalin's madness led him to believe the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact meant what it said.*

These two sentences can be combined with the word **because**.

- *Stalin refused to believe that Germany would attack the Soviet Union **because** his madness led him to believe the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact meant what it said.*

3. To emphasize other possible relationships between ideas expressed in two simple sentences, combine the sentences with a comma and one of the linking words **and**, **but**, **or**, **so**, or **yet**. For example:

Sentence 1: *Most community members participate in the annual event.*

Sentence 2: *Their behaviour is highly regulated.*

These two sentences can be joined **with a comma** and the linking word that best expresses the intended relationship between them.

- *Most community members participate in the annual event, **and** their behaviour is highly regulated.*
Or,
- *Most community members participate in the annual event, **but** their behaviour is highly regulated.*
Or,
- *Most community members participate in the annual event, **so** their behaviour is highly regulated.*

4. Combine simple sentences that share a common element by replacing that element with **which**, **that**, **who**, or **whose** in an embedded phrase. For example:

Sentence 1: *The clothes designed by Santana were always in style.*

Sentence 2: *Santana was the envy of every designer in the world.*

These two sentences can be connected by replacing the designer's name with **who** or **whose** and embedding the result within the other sentence.

- *The clothes designed by **Santana, who** was the envy of every designer in the world, were always in style.*
- Or,
- ***Santana, whose** clothes were always in style, was the envy of every designer in the world.*

Notice that the resulting sentences give more emphasis to the idea in the main portion of each sentence than they do to the idea of the embedded portion.

The following is another example of how this strategy can be applied to show the relationship between two simple sentences:

Sentence 3: *The philosophers have debated Aristotle's idea for centuries.*

Sentence 4: *Aristotle's idea was contentious in his own time.*

These two sentences can be connected by replacing the common item, "Aristotle's idea," with **which** in one sentence and embedding the result within the other sentence.

- *The philosophers have debated **Aristotle's idea, which** was contentious in his own time, for centuries.*
- ***Aristotle's idea, which** philosophers have debated for centuries, was contentious in his own time.*

Again the emphasis in the combined sentence depends on which idea is embedded in the other.