Having the ability to write complete and effective sentences is a significant factor in being a successful academic writer and requires a comprehensive understanding of sentence structure. It is important to create sentences that are correct, inventive, and engaging to the reader while conforming to the grammatical conventions and expectations of good writing. This enhances the development of a writing style and demonstrates a level of confidence and expertise.

In order to be complete, a **sentence** must consist of a subject and predicate that combine to form an independent clause. The subject of a sentence names "who" or "what" the sentence is about and refers to the person or thing doing or performing an action. The simple subject of a sentence is always a noun or pronoun used without single-word modifiers, phrases, and subordinate clauses; the complete subject includes the simple subject and any modifying words or word groups. A predicate is the part of a sentence that contains the verb and its modifiers and that makes a comment or assertion about the subject.

Sentences can be classified by their **structure** (the relationship between the number and types of clauses contained within the sentence), their **purpose** (the objective of the sentence), and their **pattern** (the flow from subject to verb to objects or complements). Most sentences follow a subject-predicate order and open with the subject of an independent clause. Other patterns are formed with different types of predicates or inverted word order. Sentences can also be categorized by the writer's purpose in communicating, e.g., whether s/he is asking a question or making a statement, giving a command or showing an emotional response.

As indicated above, a word group must meet specific requirements in order to be considered a complete sentence, and academic writing is measured by competency as well as proficiency. With the exception of a command, in which the subject of the sentence ("you") is implied rather than stated, a complete sentence must meet the following requirements:

REQUIREMENTS OF A SENTENCE

- a sentence must begin with a capitalized letter or word
- a sentence must end with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point
- a sentence must have a subject (a word or words that name the topic of the sentence)
- a sentence must have a predicate (a complete verb that shows tense)
- a sentence must have at least one independent clause

GUIDELINES FOR SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Depending on the number and types of clauses they contain, sentences can be classified as **simple**, **compound**, **complex**, or **compound-complex**. Clauses can be connected to form sentences by coordination, using a coordinating conjunction to connect two independent clauses, and by subordination, using a subordinating conjunction to connect one or more dependent clauses to an independent clause.

- A **simple sentence** is an independent clause with no subordinate clauses: "My sister is a talented musician."

- A **compound sentence** is composed of two or more independent clauses with no subordinate clauses usually joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) or by a semicolon: "My sister is a talented musician, **but** she doesn't like to practice."

- A **complex sentence** contains an independent clause and one or more dependent or subordinate clauses, which may come before or after the independent clause: "**If we are not going to the restaurant**, we need to cancel our reservation."

- A **compound-complex sentence** contains two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent or subordinate clause: "When the package finally arrived, after a delay of more than two weeks, she was anxious to open it, but she decided to wait until we could share the experience with her."

SENTENCE PURPOSES

In addition to their structure, sentences are also classified according to their purpose or how they are used within a text. There are four types of sentences: **declarative**, **imperative**, **interrogative**, or **exclamatory**.

- A **declarative sentence** makes a statement or provides information: "The results of the exam were posted on the department's website."

- An **imperative** sentence gives a command or issues a request: "Do not answer me in that tone of voice."

- An **interrogative** sentence asks a question: "When do you expect to graduate?"

- An **exclamatory** sentence expresses surprise or a similar emotional response: "I just can't believe it!"

COMMON SENTENCE PATTERNS

Common sentence patterns range from a basic subject-verb pattern to a variety of patterns with different types of predicates or inverted word order, as follows:

- **Subject + [Verb]**: a simple subject is followed by a verb

    "The performance ended."

In this example, "performance" is the simple subject and "ended" is the verb; together they form an independent clause that can stand alone as a complete sentence. The sentence can be

expanded in various ways by adding words, clauses, and/or phrases, but the position of the subject and verb will remain consistent: e.g., "As the dancer left the stage and the light disappeared into darkness, the superb performance ended with tremendous applause and a standing ovation from the audience."

- **Subject + [Verb + Direct Object]**: the direct object completes the meaning of the verb

    "The doctor prescribed medication."

In this example, "doctor" is the simple subject, "prescribed" is the verb, and "medication" is the direct object telling what the doctor prescribed. Note that a sentence can also have a compound subject: two or more simple subjects joined with a coordinating conjunction:

    "Both the dean and the provost made speeches at the orientation."

In this example, the "dean" and "provost" are compound subjects, "made" is the verb, and "speeches" is the direct object.

- **Subject + [Verb + Subject Complement]**: a linking verb is followed by a subject complement, a noun or pronoun that refers to and names or describes the subject

    "The speaker seemed nervous."

In this example, "speaker" is the simple subject, "seemed" is the linking verb, and "nervous" is the subject complement, describing the subject.

- **Subject + [Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object]**: the verb is followed by an indirect object, referring to the person or thing doing or performing the action, and by a direct object

    "The chairman of the department offered the new candidate a full-time position."

In this example, "chairman" is the simple subject, "offered" is the verb, "the new candidate" is the indirect object, and "a full-time position" is the direct object.

- **Subject + [Verb + Direct Object + Object Complement]**: the object complement refers to and renames or describes the direct object

    "The committee awarded the annual prize for fiction to a first-time novelist."

In this example, "committee" is the simple subject, "awarded" is the verb, "the annual prize for fiction" is the direct object, and "a first-time novelist" is the object complement.

- **[Implied Subject] + Verb**

    "[You] Answer me!"

In this example, the sentence functions as a command: the subject "You" is implied rather than stated, "Answer" is the verb, and "me" is the direct object.

- **[Verb] + Subject**: in specific contexts, the verb precedes the subject (inverted word order)

  "There were many more applicants for the position than we expected."

In this example, "applicants" is the simple subject and "were" is the verb. Inverted word order is often used in sentences for emphasis and coherence.

COMMON SENTENCE ERRORS

There are numerous grammatical elements that can create sentence errors, including sentence fragments, run-on sentences and comma splices, lack of subject-verb agreement, nonstandard verb forms and inconsistent verb tense, and faulty pronoun case and reference.

- **sentence fragments**: a group of words incorrectly punctuated as if it were a complete sentence that lacks a subject, verb, or both; or is a dependent clause that is not attached to an independent clause

- **run-on sentences and comma splices**: two or more independent clauses that are connected incorrectly

- **lack of subject-verb agreement**: incorrect use of verb forms in relation to their subjects

- **nonstandard verb forms and inconsistent verb tense**: verb forms that are not accepted as standard usage; shifts in verb tense that cause confusion or ambiguity

- **faulty pronoun case and reference**: incorrect use of subject and object pronouns or unclear pronoun reference