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Sentence Structure

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What Is a Sentence?

A sentence is a group of written words expressing a statement, question, command, or exclamation that always begins with a capital letter and must end with an appropriate punctuation mark. A sentence's purpose is to provide or request information. When reading a sentence, the reader distinguishes each word with patterns of stress, pitch, and pause, giving the sentence meaning, feeling, and a purpose. We speak using words, phrases, and sentences, but we don't necessarily write the way we speak. There are rules to follow. Teaching children to write sentences well, in turn, helps them become better readers and communicators.

Rules of Sentence Building

Use the following rules to introduce or extend sentence building with your students.

1. Complete sentences have at least two words that make an independent clause, meaning the two words can stand alone – a noun (person, place, or thing) or pronoun (a word that takes the place of a noun), a verb (an action word), and ending punctuation. The first word always begins with a capital letter. These two words in correct order can stand alone – independently.



- I sleep.
- Dad drives.
- Babies cry.
- May I? (I may.)
- Will they? (They will.)

2. Add a dependent clause – a clause or phrase that cannot stand alone (often referred to as a *fragment*) – to extend the sentence's information.

- I sleep *in my bed*.
- Dad drives *home from school*.
- Babies cry *when they're hungry*.

The bold words make a *dependent clause* (fragment) which cannot stand alone. Dependent clauses can follow an independent clause as in the previous sentences or introduce an independent clause, as in, "**When they're hungry**, babies cry," or "**In my bed**, I sleep."





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(cont.)

3. Introduce other parts of speech...

- **Articles** (a, an, the) – *identify nouns* without describing them [*an* always comes before a word beginning with a vowel or vowel sound (an umbrella, an hour)].

The apple...
An octopus...
A girl...

- **Adjectives** – *describe nouns*

I sleep in a *soft* bed.
Dad drives a *fast* car.
Little babies cry a lot.



- **Adverbs** – *describe when, where, or how an action occurs* and can appear before or after the verb.

I sleep *soundly* in a soft bed.
Dad *always* drives a fast car.
Little babies *usually* cry a lot.

- **Conjunctions** – *link phrases or clauses together* with words like *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

I sleep soundly **and** wake up early. Dad drives a fast car, **but** he obeys the speed limit. Little **or** young babies cry a lot.
I sleep soundly, **so** I feel good in the morning. Dad drives a fast car, **yet** he is careful. Babies cry, **for** they are hungry.

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