Basic sentence structure

- What is a sentence?
- How do I write one correctly?
- What kind of sentences are expected in academic writing?

**A complete sentence:**

- Has a capital letter at the beginning
- Has a fullstop at the end (either . or ? or !)
- Needs to make sense on its own

Examples:
1. My garment range was inspired by fashion icon Princess Diana.
   - Capital letter – YES
   - Fullstop – YES
   - Makes sense on its own – YES
   
   This is called a **simple sentence**. It is a complete sentence. It has just **one clause**.

2. While I specialise in designing outdoor wear.
   - Capital letter – YES
   - Fullstop – YES
   - Makes sense on its own – NO

   This is **not** a complete sentence.

3. I will take you on a tour of Taranaki and we will look for examples of agricultural excellence.
   - Capital letter – YES
   - Fullstop – YES
   - Makes sense on its own – YES

   This is called a **compound sentence**. It is a complete sentence. It has **two clauses** and each one makes sense on its own.

4. Your goldfish died because you did not feed them.
   - Capital letter – YES
   - Fullstop – YES
   - Makes sense on its own – YES

   This is called a **complex sentence**. It is a complete sentence. It has **two clauses**. If you take out the first clause, the second clause makes no sense. The second clause depends on the first clause to make meaning. The second clause is called a **dependent clause** or a **subordinate clause**.

*Effective academic writing contains lots of subordinate clauses.*
How can I make sure I am structuring my sentences correctly?

The rules and patterns of written English can be learned. Here are three of the most important ones:

- **Word order** = what goes where in a sentence. Check by reading it aloud.

  Example: Then New Zealand was made a British colony. ✓
  It was then made New Zealand a British colony. ×

- **Time (or tense)** = writing in the past (I was), present (I am) or future (I will). If you begin using the past tense, keep the whole piece of writing in the past tense.

  Example: Piaget was an educational theorist who was influenced by research into children’s behaviour. ✓
  Piaget was an educational theorist who is influenced by research into children’s behaviour. ×

- **Paragraphs** = groups of several sentences. Break up the writing by starting a new paragraph for each main point. Find a piece of text and look at the shape of the writing using paragraphs.

Further source of assistance:

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise
Heading: Words or Heading: Words
Click on Writing or Click on Grammar
Click on Paragraphs or Click on Making Sentences
Click on Factsheet or Click on Factsheet
Click on Factsheet 1 or Click on Factsheet 1

Further Learning Centre Handouts related to this topic:

- Parts of speech
- Apostrophes
- Articles
- Punctuation

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