Punctuation Patterns

Punctuating a sentence correctly can often seem difficult and arbitrary. But knowing how sentences and parts of sentences combine can take the guesswork out of using punctuation.

Pattern One: Simple Sentence

Independent Clause	.

Example: *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Pattern Two: Compound Sentence

Independent Clause	;	Independent Clause	.

Example: *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays; it is performed often. Remember, only capitalize the first word after an end punctuation mark (period, question mark, or exclamation point); do not capitalize the first word after a semicolon.

Pattern Three: Compound Sentence

Independent Clause	;	Transition Word	,	Independent Clause	.

Example: *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays; therefore, it is performed often. Common examples of transition words include *therefore*, *however*, *nevertheless*, *consequently*, *furthermore*, *moreover*, *thus*, *also*, etc.

Pattern Four: Compound Sentence

Independent Clause	,	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	.

Example: *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, so it is performed often. The seven coordinating conjunctions can be remembered by the acronym **FANBOYS**: **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o.

Pattern Five: Complex Sentence

Independent Clause	Subordinating Conjunction	Dependent Clause	.

Example: *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays because it is a timeless tragedy. Remember, dependent (subordinate) clauses begin with subordinating conjunctions; thus, watching out for these conjunctions can be helpful when determining which type of sentence pattern is being employed. Here are some examples of common subordinating conjunctions: *because*, *before*, *since*, *while*, *although*, *if*, *until*, *when*, *after*, *as*, *as if*.

Pattern Six: Complex Sentence

Subordinating Conjunction	Dependent Clause	,	Independent Clause	.

Example: Because it is a timeless tragedy, *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Pattern Seven: Sentence with Non-Essential Information

Clause, phrase, or word	**,**	Non-essential clause, phrase, or word	**,**	Clause, phrase, or word	**.**

> **Example:** William Shakespeare, the sixteenth century playwright, wrote *Hamlet*.
> **Example:** William Shakespeare, who is well known for his play *Romeo and Juliet*, wrote *Hamlet*.

Remember, a sentence element is non-essential if it can be removed without the main idea of the sentence changing.

Pattern Eight: Sentence with Essential Information

Clause, phrase, or word	Essential clause, phrase, or word	Clause, phrase, or word	**.**

> **Example:** The sixteenth century playwright William Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*.
> **Example:** The sixteenth century playwright who is well known for his play *Romeo and Juliet* also wrote *Hamlet*.

In contrast to non-essential sentence elements, essential sentence elements convey information necessary to the main idea of the sentence and, thus, cannot be removed without confusing the reader or changing the meaning of the entire sentence.

Key Terms

Phrase: A group of related words that functions as a single unit but lacks a subject, verb, or both.

Clause: A group of related words that has a subject and a verb.

Independent Clause: A group of related words containing a subject, a verb, and presenting a complete thought. Independent clauses can, therefore, stand alone as complete sentences.

Dependent Clause: A group of related words containing a subject, a verb, and beginning with a subordinating conjunction. A dependent clause does not present a complete thought. Instead, it *depends* on being joined with an independent clause to be complete.

Sentence: A group of related words containing at least one independent clause (has a subject, a verb, and presents a complete thought) which begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point.

Simple Sentence: A sentence that is made up of a single independent clause.

Compound Sentence: A sentence that is made up of two or more independent clauses joined by semicolon or a comma plus a coordinating conjunction.

Complex Sentence: A sentence that is made up of an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

Non-Essential Element: A word, phrase, or clause that communicates extra information which is not critical to the main idea of the sentence.

Essential Element: A word, phrase, or clause that communicates information that is critical the main idea of the sentence.