

Let's Refresh the Basics

In English, there are three main types of sentences.

Simple sentence

Compound sentence

Complex sentence

A simple sentence has just one clause. A complex sentence has one main clause and one or more subordinate (dependent) clauses. A compound sentence has more than one main clause. Expert English writers will use a variety of these structures in their writing. This is what the IELTS examiner is also looking to see a candidate demonstrate.

Study the examples given below.

A) Copyright laws are necessary for society.

As you can see this sentence has just one clause and therefore it is a simple sentence. The number of clauses in a sentence is equal to the number of finite verbs in it. Note that to-infinitives and –ing forms are not finite verbs.

B) Copyright laws are necessary for society, as they provide rewards and protection to original artwork creators.

This sentence has two independent main clauses which have been joined by a co-ordinating conjunction.

C) Because they provide rewards and protection, copyright laws are necessary for society.

As you can see this sentence has two clauses: one main clause (Copyright laws are necessary for society) and one subordinate clause (Because they provide order and reward) We have already learned that a sentence containing one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses is called a complex sentence.

Below are some simple ways to transform a simple sentence into a complex or compound sentence:

Use co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that 'join' two parts of a sentence or separate phrases within a sentence together. Co-ordinating conjunctions, such as 'and', 'but', 'or', 'yet', and 'so', are used to join two parts of a sentence that are grammatically equal. The two parts may be single words or clauses. Co-ordinating conjunctions always come between the words or clauses that they join. Most intermediate ESL students are comfortable with using co-ordinating conjunctions.

For example:

Traditional schooling is out of date. There should be educational alternatives.

Traditional schooling is out of date, and there should be educational alternatives.

Subordinating conjunctions; however, often prove more challenging to master. Subordinating conjunctions are used to join a subordinate (or dependent) clause to a main (or independent) clause. They are the essential ingredient in a complex sentence. Subordinating conjunctions usually come at the beginning of the subordinate clause.

Below are some common subordinate conjunctions:

For example:

Communication between family members is less nowadays (independent clause), even though (subordinating conjunction) we have more technological advances (dependent clause).

Children often play video games (independent clause), rather than (subordinating conjunction) conversing with their parents (dependent clause).

Change the part of speech used

You will recall that there are 9 main parts of speech in the English language – nouns, pronouns, verb, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections and articles. The function of an individual word and the word class it belongs to depends on where it is positioned in a sentence and its relationship to other words. (i.e. the meaning of the word ‘work’, for example, can function as a noun or verb.) In general, sentences in English follow the standard pattern of subject – verb – object. However, by changing up the pattern and using different parts of speech we can vary our sentence structures.

For example:

A) From 1990 to 1998, UK car sales fluctuated slightly (verb + adverb)

B) From 1990 to 1998, there was a slight fluctuation in UK car sales. (adj. + noun)

Start the sentence with a prepositional phrase

Prepositions link nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence. A prepositional phrase is made up of the preposition, its object and any associated adjectives or adverbs. Common prepositions include: ‘about’, ‘among’, ‘at’, ‘of’, ‘since’, ‘through’, and ‘with’. These are the patterns for a prepositional phrase: Preposition + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause / Preposition + Modifier(s) + Noun, Pronoun, Gerund, or Clause

For example:

Since the beginning of the 1990s, technology has become an increasingly important part of our everyday lives. With regards to age group three, one can see that over 50 year olds ate 60% more pulses than 0-24 year olds. In time, I hope that copyright laws become obsolete.

Use relative pronouns

At the base level, pronouns replace and/or moderate nouns. We are probably more familiar with personal pronouns such as ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘him’, etc. Relative pronouns are important parts of speech to use when you want to link subordinate clauses in sentences. The most common relative pronouns are: who, whom, which, whoever, whomever, whichever, and that.

Study the examples given below.

A) Children enjoy video games. Children prefer playing sports. They have better reflex abilities and social skills. In this example we have three simple sentences. We can combine them together and form a complex sentence:

B) Children who (relative pronoun) enjoy video games and playing sports have better reflex abilities and social skills.

Creating a variety of complex and compound sentences, through the use of subordinating conjunctions, different parts of speech, prepositional phrases, and relative pronouns, will ensure that you get full points for grammatical range on your IELTS exam. Use the worksheet below to practice some of the above techniques.

Sentence Transformations Worksheet (PDF FORM)

Complete the gaps in the sentences below so that the second sentence is expressed in a different way.

Example (Change using a different part of speech):

There were dramatic fluctuations in the number of people who bought used cars in the UK from 1990 to 1998.

The number of people who bought used cars in the UK fluctuated dramatically from 1990 to 1998.

1. The cost of relocating a company from the city to a regional location is expensive. You have to build new facilities. (Change using a subordinating clause)

The cost of relocating a company from the city to a regional location is expensive _____ you have to build new facilities.

2. It is highly advantageous to stay in the same job for life. (Change using a prepositional phrase.)

_____ same job for life, _____.

3. A dramatic change in technology in over the last ten years has led to a decline in family communication. (Change using a different part of speech).

Technology _____ over the last ten years, _____ in family communication.

4. Humans should adapt to technology. Humans are inherently lazy. (Change using a relative pronoun.)

Humans, _____, should adapt to technology.

5. In general, American businesses will spend much more on relocating companies than China over the next 20 years. (Change using a different part of speech).

In general, _____ on relocating companies by America businesses than in China over the next 20 years.

6. Copyright laws reward creativity. Copyright laws protect the creator's works of art. (Change using a subordinating conjunction).

Copyright laws reward creativity _____ protect the creator's works of art.

7. The aging population in America has grown incrementally over the the last 10 years. (Change using different part of speech).

_____ in the aging population in America over the last 10 years.

8. The price of educating children has risen dramatically since 2010. (Change using prepositional phrase).

_____, the price of education children has risen dramatically.

9. Family members like communicating through Skype. Family members can now communicate with each other anywhere in the world for free. (Change using relative pronoun)

Family members _____, _____ communicate with each other anywhere in the world for free.