

## Varying Sentence Structure: Four Basic Sentence Types and Modifying Phrases

You know the difference between independent and dependent clauses. To begin experimenting with sentence shape, you must first know that different combinations of independent and dependent clauses produce four basic sentence types.

### Four Basic Sentence Types

1. A **simple sentence** contains one independent clause.
  - a. Consumers shop.
2. A **compound sentence** contains two independent clauses joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.
  - a. Producers manufacture, and consumers shop.
3. A **complex sentence** consists of a single independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.
  - a. Although mail-order merchandising has increased, most consumers still shop unwisely.
4. A **compound-complex sentence** consists of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.
  - a. Consumers shop in ways that can be predicted by such determinants as income level, sex, and age; consequently, producers use market research that aims to identify different target groups for their products.

In addition to constructing sentences with independent and dependent clauses, writers use **modifying phrases** to vary sentence structure and to improve clarity. See the examples below.

1. **Absolute phrase:** a word group that modifies a whole clause or sentence. Absolute phrases usually consist of a noun followed by a participle or participial phrase.
  - a. He was known to have written, cigarette in mouth, for hours at a time.
2. **Appositive phrase:** a noun or a noun phrase that renames a nearby noun or pronoun.
  - a. I often read Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, my favorite novel.
3. **Prepositional phrase:** a phrase beginning with a preposition and ending with a noun or noun equivalent (called the *object of the preposition*).
  - a. To the hikers, the brief shower was a welcome relief.
4. **Participial phrase:** a phrase beginning with a present or past participle and its objects, complements, or modifiers.
  - a. \*Hint: A present participle and a verb form ending in *-ing*. A past participle is a verb form ending in *-d*, *-ed*, *-n*, *-en*, or *-t*.
  - b. Running every day, Anna hoped to improve her cardiovascular health.
5. **Gerund phrase:** A noun in verb form ending in *-ing*
  - a. Running every day made Anna feel great.
6. **Infinitive phrase:** An infinitive and its objects, complements, or modifiers.
  - a. \*Hint: An infinitive is the word *to* followed by the base form of a verb (to think, to dream, etc.)
  - b. To talk to her mom without losing her temper was an accomplishment.

Look at the compound sentence below. The independent clauses are bolded. The comma and coordinating conjunction are highlighted. The modifying phrase is italicized.

**John Darnielle**, *leader of a veteran band called the Mountain Goats*, **writes songs that unspool like short stories,** and **his new album, "Heretic Pride,"** *is full of desperate characters and evocative settings.*