

DEFINING A SENTENCE

WRITING SERVICES - UNCW - DEPAOLO HALL, 1ST FLOOR - 962-7857

To be a sentence, a word group must consist of at least one full independent clause. An independent clause has a subject and a verb, and it can stand alone as a complete thought.

A sentence in standard English must consist of the following:

- A capital letter at the beginning
- Ending with a question mark, exclamation point or period
- A subject and complete verb phrase
- Standard word order (subject + verb + object)
- An independent clause.

SENTENCE EDITING ADVICE

As you read aloud through your paper, pay close attention to sentences and sentence structure. Look at any sentences that might have a problem with structure and examine them more objectively. Ask yourself the following questions for each sentence you feel might be a problem.

1. Does the sentence have a capital letter at the beginning and a period, question mark, or exclamation point at the end?
2. Does the sentence have a subject – the part of the sentence that names whom or what the sentence is about?
3. Does the sentence have a verb or verb phrase – the part of the sentence that says something about the subject?
4. Do the subjects and verbs in the sentence agree in number?
5. Are your sentences in active voice?
6. Do you vary the length of your sentences – some short, some long (and not too many of the same length in a row)?
7. Does the structure of your sentences vary, such as simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex?

The following style guide and handbooks were consulted for this handout:

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 271-278.
Glenco, *Grammar and Composition Handbook, High School*. Columbus, Ohio: Glenco/McGraw-Hill, 2000. 121-144.

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