

How to use varied and correct sentence structures

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Cranes Fly South” by Edward McCourt**

Exit with Success and *The Bare Essentials Plus* (optional)

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

Using correct sentence structure is a very important part of expressing yourself well. You must always remember that when you are writing an essay you should be using formal English. Writing for a specific purpose, such as writing about a literary text, is quite different from the English you might use in casual conversation. You are expected to write in complete sentences. Furthermore, strong writing uses sentences of differing lengths and levels of complexity, while weak writing uses the same sentence pattern repeatedly and thus becomes monotonous. English Exit Exam graders will look for sentence variety (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, and parallel structure sentences). You must also pay attention to your use of punctuation in order to maintain correct sentence structure.

Simple Sentence (also called an independent clause—simple subject and verb): Cranes are nearly extinct.

Compound Sentence (with conjunction): Cranes are nearly extinct, and they are protected by law.

Compound Sentence (with semi-colon): Cranes are nearly extinct; they are protected by law.

Complex Sentence (dependent clause joined to an independent clause): Because cranes are nearly extinct, they are protected by law.

Compound-Complex Sentence (dependent clause joined to a compound sentence): Because cranes are nearly extinct, they are protected by law, but they are still shot by hunters.

Parallel Structure Sentence (parallel sequence/the same grammatical form): Cranes are nearly extinct, are protected by law, and are still shot by hunters.

Instructions

The following exercise, based on Edward McCourt's short story "Cranes Fly South," has been designed to provide practice in writing varied and correct sentences.

Rewrite the sentences below into either **complex**, **compound**, **compound-complex**, or **parallel structure** sentences. Leave out unnecessary words. There are many possible answers for each sentence in this exercise. If you are unsure of your sentence construction, compare it with the samples in the box above or with those in the **Answer key**.

Exercise

1. Lee's mother warns him that he should not get the old man too excited. He is an old man, after all. **(Compound sentence using semi-colon)**

2. The grandfather is a paradox of strong and weakness, life and dead, submission and dominating. **(Parallel structure)**

3. He pleads with Lee to take him out in the buggy. He screams, "You git along boy... or I'll welt the hide off you." **(Compound)**

4. The grandfather seems willing to return home. He is very tired. Lee wants to bring his grandfather to the slough to see the crane. **(Compound-complex)**

5. The flat, bleak life on the prairies is suggested by the prairies. The sky with the thundering white bird flying into the clouds suggests the possibility of a higher, less boring life. **(Parallel structure)**

6. The dialogue creates a realistic reflection of Lee and his grandfather's developing relationship. The diction is colloquial. The tone varies from desperation and hopelessness to exultation and excitement. **(Compound-complex)**

7. McCourt suggests a contrast between Lee and his grandfather in terms of their ages. Later he brings them together with a bonding experience when they witness the flight of the crane. **(Compound-complex)**

8. The old man shouted, “‘Great God in heaven’—the cry that was at once a shout of exultation and a prayer.” He had seen the crane fly out of the slough and disappear into the sky. **(Compound-complex)**

9. The old man and the boy are no longer just grandson and grandfather. They are now allies who have travelled through forbidden territories. They have witnessed a rare occurrence. They also shared a spiritual experience. **(Complex with parallel structure)**

10. You go through an intense experience with someone. The two of you are held together by an enchantment and a mystery. **(Complex)**

Answer key

Compare your sentences to the ones below.

1. Lee's mother warns him that he should not get the old man too excited; he is an old man, after all. **(Compound sentence using semi-colon)**
2. The grandfather is a paradox of strength and weakness, life and death, submission and domination. **(Parallel structure)**
3. He pleads with Lee to take him out in the buggy and screams, "You git along boy...or I'll welt the hide off you." **(Compound)**
4. The grandfather seems willing to return home because he is very tired, but Lee wants to bring him to the slough to see the crane. **(Compound-complex)**
5. The flat, bleak plains suggest the boring life on the prairies, while the sky with the thundering white bird flying into the clouds suggests the possibility of a higher, more exciting life. **(Parallel structure)**
6. The dialogue creates a realistic reflection of Lee and his grandfather's developing relationship because the diction is colloquial and the tone varies from desperation and hopelessness to exultation and excitement. **(Compound-complex)**
7. McCourt suggests a contrast between Lee and his grandfather in terms of their ages, but later brings them together with a bonding experience when they witness the flight of the crane. **(Compound- complex)**
8. The old man shouted "'Great God in heaven'—the cry that was at once a shout of exultation and a prayer" because he had seen the crane fly out of the slough and disappear into the sky. **(Compound-complex)**

9. The old man and the boy are no longer just grandson and grandfather because they are now allies who have travelled through forbidden territories, witnessed a rare occurrence, and shared a spiritual experience. **(Complex with parallel structure)**

10. When you go through an intense experience with someone, the two of you are held together by an enchantment and a mystery. **(Complex)**