



Life Sentence

Sentence Structure

Transcript

Voiceover: This is Gil T. Gil is about to be cross-examined by the prosecution, who accuse him of stealing a priceless sculpture from an art gallery.

Gil: I'm innocent, I swear.

Voiceover: Like most people, Gil likes to make sense and be understood. It's important to make sense when we communicate, because it gives us the best opportunity to be successful in conversations, schoolwork, job interviews or, in Gil's case, avoiding prison. To make sense, we use well-constructed sentences.

Prosecutor: So, sir, you say that on April the 6th, the very day of the crime, that you were with your friend, Claire. Tell me, what was Claire doing when you bumped into her?

Gil: Claire was buying groceries.

Voiceover: Freeze. Hear that? That was a sentence. Claire was buying groceries. We call this sentence structure a simple sentence. We can tell it's a simple sentence because it follows three rules.

Number one: it has a subject, a person, or thing that is doing or being something. In this case, the subject is Claire.

Number two: a verb, which tells us what the subject does or is like. In this case, "was buying" forms the verb.

Number three: it is an independent clause. It is a complete thought or idea that makes sense on its own.

Whenever we write a sentence, we need to make sure that at the very least it follows these three rules. Oh, and don't forget: a capital letter at the start and a full stop at the end.

Now, let's see if we can catch another sentence.

Prosecutor: You say that you don't often see your friend Claire. Why is that?

Gil: Claire travels a lot.

Voiceover: Oh, there's another sentence! See if you can figure out if it meets the three rules.





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Is there a subject? Yes. The subject of the sentence is Claire again.

Is there a verb? Yes. The word “travels” tells us what Claire does.

Finally, can we consider this sentence an independent clause? Does it make sense without anything around it? Yes, it does.

So this is a correct simple sentence.

Prosecutor: Tell me, what does your friend Claire do for a living?

Gil: Claire works as a pilot.

Voiceover: I think that may be another simple sentence. Does it follow the rules?

Is there a subject? Yes. The subject of the sentence is Claire again.

Is there a verb? Yes. What Claire does is works as a pilot. So “works” is the verb.

Finally, can we consider this sentence an independent clause? Well, it makes sense on its own, so this is another simple sentence.

So far, so good. But let’s see what happens when we leave something out of Gil’s next answer.

Gil: Remove something? What are you playing at? This is my best chance to prove I’m not guilty.

Prosecutor: Sir, you said you met your friend Claire on the night of the crime, meaning you couldn’t have committed it. What did you two do after you met up?

Gil: Claire and I dinner.

Prosecutor: Pardon? You and Claire dinner?

Gil: No. Claire and I... um... dinner.

Prosecutor: I’m sorry, but what exactly did you ... dinner? Did you *eat* dinner? Did you *make* dinner? You can’t just dinner.

Gil: No. Fix it!

Voiceover: Oh, do you know what I left out?





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- Gil: The doing word. The thing me and Claire did with dinner. The verb!
- Voiceover: Aha! Okay, I'll add in a verb.
- Prosecutor: Sir, what did you do with dinner?
- Gil: We ate! Sorry, we ate dinner. Claire and I ate dinner.
- Prosecutor: Spanish food, by any chance?
- Gil: Pardon me?
- Prosecutor: Sir, would you take a look at this photograph for me, please? Taken on April the 6th, at the same time you were apparently with your friend Claire buying groceries and having dinner. And tell me what you see.
- Gil: I see a tree.
- Prosecutor: Yes, there is a tree. What else?
- Gil: I see a beach.
- Prosecutor: What else?
- Gil: Oh, I see — What? What is it?
- Voiceover: I'm sorry, but listening to you speak like that is extremely boring, not to mention it sounds like you are evading the actual question.
- Gil: Evading? Me? I'm just using simple sentences, just like we practiced.
- Voiceover: Well, Gil, when you want to fit more information in, you should use a compound sentence.
- Prosecutor: Sir!
- Gil: Sorry!
- Voiceover: Ha, told you so!
- Gil: I also see the ocean.
- Prosecutor: Oh, for the love of God, would you please use a different sentence structure?





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- Gil: I ... How do I make a compound sentence?
- Voiceover: Just take two simple sentences or independent clauses and stick them together with a conjunction—a joining word, like “and” or “but” or “nor”.
- Gil: There are people on the beach, and the sun is shining. Yeah.
- Voiceover: Well done, Gil. You made a compound sentence. See how there are two independent clauses: people are on the beach; the sun is shining. These would make sense as two separate simple sentences, because each has its own subject and each has a verb. But we have joined them together with a connecting word, or coordinating junction, “and”.
- There are seven of these connecting words. They are: for, and, now, but, or, yet and so.
- Oh, and don't forget that a comma always goes before the connecting word in a compound sentence.
- Prosecutor: Do you have any idea where this photo was taken?
- Gil: It looks like Italy, and I think it is Spain.
- Prosecutor: What? How can it be Spain and Italy?
- Gil: I used a conjunction, but it didn't sound right.
- Voiceover: Oh, Gil, that's because you can't just use any old word. You need to use a conjunction that makes sense.
- Gil: Sorry. “And” didn't work ... no. “Or”? No, no, no. “Nor”? No. “But”? “But”!
Pardon me. I meant to say it looks like Italy, but I think it is Spain.
- Prosecutor: It is indeed Spain. Now tell me, sir, do you recognise the woman in that photo?
- Gil: Oh, that is Claire.
- Voiceover: Oh, that was a sentence. It's a simple sentence because it is one independent clause with a subject and a verb, and by the look of it, it's a sentence that's made things very difficult for our friend Gil.





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Gil: I mean, it *is* Claire, but it is not my *friend*, Claire.

Voiceover: Another sentence. You are really making a mess of this, Gil!

There are two independent clauses. The first is, "it is Claire". The second is, "it is not my friend, Claire". The two clauses are joined by the word "but".

Prosecutor: Sir, I assure you that is your friend Claire. Can you explain to me how she can both be in Spain and having dinner with you while the crime, of which you are accused, was committed?

Gil: My friend Claire. The thing about her shopping ...

Voiceover: Oh, no, he's speaking in fragments. A fragment is a phrase that doesn't stand on its own as a sentence.

Prosecutor: Answer the question, sir.

Gil: Claire was buying groceries in Mallorca not here she was buying souvenirs
Claire was in Mallorca eating she was actually on Skype and I set up my laptop at my table here so Claire ...

Voiceover: Oh, no! Now he's using a run-on sentence. A run-on sentence is full of independent clauses without conjunctions.

Gil: I mean mainly it's iPhones but I really think that...

Prosecutor: Please, sir, I ask you once more. How is it that Claire was in Spain at the time you supposedly met up here?

Gil: Psst, a little help?

Voiceover: Stop looking over here. I'm just a voiceover.

Gil: Oh, alright! Alright. I did it! I stole the sculpture.

Prosecutor: Your honor, I rest my case. I have no further questions. It is up to you now to choose the sentence.

