



The GED Language Arts, Writing Test

Effective Sentences



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GED

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Passing the GED Writing Test

I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead.
Mark Twain

Video 7 Focus: Well-constructed sentences are the foundation of clear writing.

You Will Learn From Video 7:

- What makes a good sentence.
- How to recognize fragments and run-ons.
- How sentence length affects the sentence's rhythm and reader's impression.
- About simple, compound, and complex sentences.



Words You Need to Know:

While viewing the video, fill in the blank with the correct word.
Answers are on page 13.

1. A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete _____.
2. A good sentence has to be _____, _____ and have a theme the same way an essay does.
3. The two components of a sentence are _____ and _____.
4. Good writing begins with _____ and thoughtful _____.



Points to Remember:

- You can easily follow a correct sentence from beginning to end.
- A "primitive" command sentence will have few words and an implied "you."
- Fragments are sometimes used in dialog, for emphasis, and to get attention.

A GOOD SENTENCE

After the initial work of conceiving ideas and thoughtfully organizing them, then it's time to get down to work and create sentences and paragraphs that will communicate to the reader the ideas you have.

Each sentence, in its own way, tells a story. For it to be effective in telling the story, you must be able to put the sentence together, scrutinize it, and correct any problems the sentence might have. Unlike spoken language, written language does not give the luxury of a back and forth exchange. It is not possible to know if the reader understands, nor is it possible to go back and fill in the gaps if s/he doesn't. Writing must stand on its own.



The definition of a sentence is “a group of words that expresses a complete thought.” It must be focused, concentrated, and have a theme of its own the same way an essay does. You've written a correct sentence if it is easy to follow from beginning to end, has no missing parts, makes sense, and is understood by the reader.

SENTENCE COMPONENTS

A sentence has two components: a subject and a predicate. A subject must contain a noun (name of a person, place, thing, or idea) or pronoun and may contain individual words, clauses, or phrases that serve as adjectives or modifiers of the noun. A predicate must contain a verb (and maybe a helping verb like “is,” “are,” “have,” “has,” etc.) and may contain words, clauses or phrases that serve as adverbs or modifiers. A predicate may also contain an object, the receiver of the action of the verb.

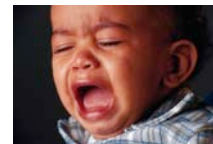
Complete sentences may range from one word through 20-30 words. The smallest, “primitive,” sentences are direct commands and may contain only one word, a verb. Examples of these are, “Stop!” and “Continue.” The reason direct commands can be considered complete sentences is because the subject, “you,” is understood.

Here are examples of complete sentences from very simple to more complex, short to long. Note that the subject is underlined once and the predicate twice.

- Help! (subject “you” is understood)
- Karen cried.
- The dog ran into the street.
- The red-tinged spider scared the children who were playing on the porch.
- House cats differ greatly from lions and tigers.
- The teacher taught the students the worthwhile lesson that honesty pays.

In each of those sentences, the subject comes first followed by the predicate. However, in sentence forms such as questions, the predicate (or part of it) may come before the subject or main verb.

- Do plants grow in the desert?
- Is Bobby crying?
- Are flashing red signals indicating danger?
- When will your softball team arrive for the game against your arch rival?



Both subjects and verbs can be compound. In other words, there may be more than one of them. They are most often joined by words like “and” and “or.” Look at these examples.

- Karen and Bobby cried.
- The dog ran into the street and jumped at the car.
- Are the potatoes or carrots sliced and cooked?



In the following sentences, underline the subject with one line and the predicate with two lines. Answers are on page 13.

1. DVD players have already captured most of today’s popular movies.
2. Be quiet!
3. Did the burglar rob the store before the police arrived?
4. Is the porch light still burning?
5. John has written a memo regarding Friday’s meeting.

SOMETHING MISSING

A good sentence is a complete thought with a subject and a verb. When one or the other is missing, then it interferes with the reader’s ability to grasp what you are saying. We call this a fragment, and we must add extra words or combine with another portion of a sentence to complete it. Look at these fragments and see what is missing.

Fragment

- The blond woman.
- Came through the door with brass hinges.
- Mrs. Kennedy, the director of the play.
- A very difficult and trying task.

What’s Missing

predicate/verb
subject/noun or pronoun
predicate/verb
predicate/verb

Exercise A

Decide if the following words make a complete thought or a fragment. Write C for complete or F for fragment on the line. Answers are on page 13.

- 1. Where the buffalo roamed. _____
- 2. Who will play the main character? _____
- 3. Large footprints marked the long and winding trail. _____
- 4. Talking over plans for the party. _____
- 5. After the play was over, the jubilant cast took many bows. _____
- 6. John and Bill hit. _____
- 7. The team, feeling disappointed. _____
- 8. Drenched through her clothes. _____

Now go back to those you marked F and write the rest of the sentence to make it complete. Possible answers are on page 13.

Generally speaking, fragments do not produce clarity. However, fragments are sometimes used intentionally in dialog, for emphasis, and to get attention. Whether they are acceptable depends upon the purpose of the writing. People often speak in fragments so they are frequently used in informal writing and to tell stories. They are never used in business or formal writing such as on the GED test.

GOES ON AND ON

Fragments do not give enough information, but run-on sentences do the opposite. They give too much information because they are made up of two or more complete thoughts stuck together when they should stand alone. It is difficult for the reader to know where one thought ends and another begins.

Run-on sentences are not necessarily long, but they usually lack ending marks like periods, question marks, or exclamation points. They may also lack commas, conjunctions like “and,” “but,” or “because,” or subordinating words. Look at these examples.

- The salesman was talking fast he was determined to make a sale he needed the commission.

Corrected: The salesman was talking fast. He was determined to make a sale. He needed the commission. (This produced correct but choppy sentences.)

Corrected: The salesman was talking fast because he was determined to make a sale. He needed the commission. (This is better. It joined two independent but related thoughts with a conjunction and let the final sentence stand alone.)



- Many children in Southern California have never seen snow they seldom get up to the mountains when on the rare occasion that it does snow, they rush outside and try to catch the snow on their tongues they are disappointed that the snow melts so fast.

Corrected: Many children in Southern California have never seen snow. They seldom get up to the mountains. When on the rare occasion that it does snow, they rush outside and try to catch the snow on their tongues. They are disappointed that the snow melts so fast.

Corrected: Many children in Southern California have never seen snow, and they seldom get up to the mountains. When on the rare occasion that it does snow, they rush outside and try to catch the snow on their tongues, but they are disappointed that the snow melts so fast. (This is better because it uses commas, conjunctions, and ending punctuation to create more complex sentences that increase clarity.)

Independent clauses have a subject and a verb and can stand alone as complete sentences. When two independent, but related clauses, are joined by commas and conjunctions, they produce a compound sentence with two **related** thoughts.

Dependent or subordinate clauses may have a subject and a verb, but they cannot stand alone. They are considered fragments. (Yes, a fragment can have both a subject and a verb and still be a fragment.) Here are some subordinating conjunctions that may introduce a dependent clause.

after	although	as	because
before	if	since	that
though	unless	until	what
when	where	which	while
who	whom	whose	consequently
therefore	so	however	nevertheless

Notice the following clauses. Even though they have subjects and verbs, they are fragments and cannot stand alone. They make you want to ask the question: so?

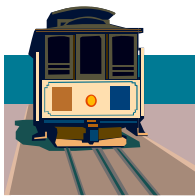
- although we got to the theater early
- since he helped us
- unless he finished his work on time

Here are some possible ways of connecting each fragment to an independent clause to produce clarity. The independent clause is underlined with a wavy line and the dependent clause is underlined with a dash. (Note: sometimes you need to add commas.)

- Although we got to the theater early, the tickets were sold out.
- Since he helped us, we gave him a pumpkin pie.
- The worker could not go home unless he finished his work on time.

Exercise B

Rewrite this paragraph using conjunctions, subordinating words, and punctuation to correct the run-ons and fragments and increase the clarity. Answers are on page 13.



When you go to San Francisco. Notice the way the city is built on hills the streets are often steep and crooked cars have to travel slowly around pedestrians and cable cars. The view is spectacular. Unless it's rainy or foggy. Tourists like to shop. In the many stores. And sightseeing brings in much money to the city economy.

WRITING WITH RHYTHM

Part of the impression you give the reader is created by the rhythm of your writing. The number of words in a sentence signals something: short, abrupt sentences signal urgency or seriousness, while long, leisurely sentences give a conversational quality. Long sentences convey complicated thoughts that can not be summed up in short sentences. Long sentences impart a sophistication to the reader.

Knowing when to use, alternately, short, medium, or long sentences is a powerful tool. To know which sentence to use, you must know about simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Simple sentences contain between one and ten or so words. This includes the subject (“you” understood in commands), verb, and adjectives and adverbs (modifiers) that may take the form of phrases. They consist of one independent clause that can stand alone. In these sentences, the subject is underlined once and the verb twice.

- Stand up! (command with understood “you”)
- Charlie, the calico cat, walked slowly into the crowded room.
- Bob and Carol traveled to Europe last summer.

Compound sentences are two or more independent sentences or complete thoughts separated by a comma with a coordinating conjunction (a connecting word.) You can take two or more short, choppy sentences, combine them with one of the following coordinating conjunctions, and create a clear sentence that adds interest and clarity to your writing.



The easy way to remember the connecting words is through

BOYS FAN: but, or, yet, so, for, and, nor.



The subject in each clause is underlined once and the verb in each clause is underlined twice.

- Stand up and bring me your paper! (two commands with understood “you”)
- Charlie, the calico cat, walked slowly into the room, but he did not stop to meow at the company.
- Bob and Carol traveled to Europe last summer, yet they did not get to France, nor did they visit Ireland.

Complex sentences are made up of at least one independent clause and one dependent or subordinate clause where the dependent clause wouldn't make sense standing on its own. It depends on the main or independent clause for clarity and meaning. Complex sentences indicate a relationship between the joined clauses and thoughts. Sometimes that relationship is cause and effect.

Independent and subordinate clauses are joined by one of the subordinating conjunctions on page 5 to form a complex sentence:



Join the clause from the first column with the clause from the second column adding a subordinating conjunction from page 5 to make a complex sentence. Possible answers are on page 13.

he worked hard at his job
he worked hard at his job
he never worked hard at his job

he was promoted
he was not promoted
he was not promoted

CONCLUSION

Remember that the purpose of writing is to communicate our ideas to others. The best way to do that is to use a variety of sentence types, simple, compound, and complex. Whether it is a letter to Mom or a GED Essay, the foundation of clear writing begins with a well-constructed sentence.

GED EXERCISE 1

On the editing part of the Writing Test, you will be expected to spot and correct fragments and run-ons. You'll also need to know construction and punctuation for the three kinds of sentences so you can use a variety of sentences on the essay part of the test. Look at this letter of complaint, and choose the best way to correct the sentences if necessary. Answers are on page 14.

January 14, 2004

Donald Simpson, General Manager
Golden Horse Restaurant
19001 Highway 99
Sacramento, CA 95864

Dear Mr. Simpson:

(1) Your restaurant it's one of the best steak places around.
(2) Go there all the time. (3) Man, it has great fries!

(4) Was there the other night though. (5) I don't like to complain. (6) I had a bad waiter the food was cold the steak was too well-done. (7) It was a bad scene all the way around.

(8) While I usually like going there. (9) I'm not sure I'll be back. (10) You guys need to get your act together.

(11) See ya,
Brandon Jones

1. Sentence (1): **Your restaurant it's one of the best steak places around.**

- 1) sentence is correct as it stands
- 2) contains slang
- 3) run-on sentence: put a period after restaurant and capitalize it's.
- 4) poor construction: change it's to is
- 5) sentence fragment

2. Sentence (2): **Go there all the time.**

- 1) fragment: add verb
- 2) contains jargon
- 3) fragment: add subject
- 4) sentence is correct as it stands
- 5) contains slang

3. Sentence (3): **Man, it has great fries!**

- 1) contains jargon
- 2) run-on sentence
- 3) sentence is correct as it stands
- 4) fragment: add a subject
- 5) fragment: add a verb

4. Sentence (4): **Was there the other night though.**

- 1) sentence is correct as it stands
- 2) fragment: add verb
- 3) informal writing
- 4) contains slang
- 5) fragment: add subject

5. Sentence (5): **I don't like to complain.**

- 1) fragment: add verb
- 2) sentence is correct as it stands
- 3) remove apostrophe in don't
- 4) contains jargon
- 5) combine it with sentence 6, add a comma and but to make a compound sentence

6. Sentence (6): **I had a bad waiter the food was cold the steak was too well done.**

- 1) run-on sentence: put period after "cold"
- 2) fragment: add verb
- 3) informal writing
- 4) run-on sentence: change to: I had a bad waiter. The food was cold and the steak too well done.
- 5) contains slang

7. Sentence (7): **It was a bad scene all the way around.**

- 1) run-on sentence: put period after scene
- 2) fragment: add subject
- 3) contains slang
- 4) sentence is correct as it stands
- 5) combine with sentence 9 with comma before while

8. Sentence (8): **While I usually like going there**

- 1) dependent clause: put a comma after there and combine with sentence 9
- 2) sentence is correct as it stands
- 3) contains slang
- 4) informal writing
- 5) contains jargon

9. Sentence (10): **You guys need to get your act together.**

- 1) combine with sentence 9
- 2) contains slang
- 3) fragment: add verb
- 4) fragment: add subject
- 5) put after sentence 1

10. Sentence (11): **See ya!**

- 1) run-on sentence
- 2) contains jargon
- 3) put after sentence 9
- 4) sentence is correct as it stands
- 5) informal writing

GED EXERCISE 2

Read the following letter and answer the questions. Answers are on page 14.



Dear Parents:

A

1) As you have probably heard on television or seen in the newspaper, childhood obesity is becoming a major problem in this country. 2) For children who are growing every day, it is wise to consider all aspects of a diet before putting them on severe restrictions. 3) It seems everyone is on a diet and they are putting their children on diets as well.

B

4) One area of concern is snacking. 5) Everyone believe that snacking is bad, but we believe like the Mayo Clinic that there are benefits to snacking. 6) Young children have tiny stomachs, and snacks, or mini-meals, several times a day will more readily satisfy their small appetites. 7) Snacks can provide extra nutrition and energy they can keep a child from overeating later at mealtime.

C

8) There are several kinds of snacks that can contribute to your child's health. 9) Foods that contain protein, complex carbohydrates, fiber, and some vitamins and minerals are the best for everyone, especially children. 10) These include whole grain crackers, pretzels, and breads, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and low-fat dairy products.

D

11) We here at Loving Child Preschool is helping to keep your child healthy by providing daily snacks that contribute to their growth and well-being. 12) Hope you're doing the same at home.

1. Sentence 2: **For children who are growing every day, it is wise to consider all aspects of a diet before putting them on severe restrictions.**

- 1) change who to whom
- 2) change them to him
- 3) move Sentence 2 after Sentence 3
- 4) capitalize children
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

2. Sentence 3: **It seems everyone is on a diet and they are putting their children on diets as well.**

- 1) change is to are
- 2) run-on sentence
- 3) change It to That
- 4) put a comma before and
- 5) sentence is correct as it stands

3. Sentence 4: **One area of concern is snacking.**
 - 1) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 2) fragment: combine with Sentence 5
 - 3) capitalize concern
 - 4) put comma after concern
 - 5) move Sentence 4 after Sentence 7
4. Sentence 5: **Everyone believe that snacking is bad, but we believe like the Mayo Clinic that there are benefits to snacking.**
 - 1) remove comma after bad
 - 2) remove capital from Clinic
 - 3) change believe to believe
 - 4) put comma after believe
 - 5) sentence is correct as it stands
5. Sentence 7: **Snacks can provide extra nutrition and energy they can keep a child from overeating later at mealtime.**
 - 1) capitalize nutrition
 - 2) run-on sentence
 - 3) change overeating to over eating
 - 4) put a comma after overeating
 - 5) put Sentence 7 at the end of Paragraph A
6. Sentence 8: **There are several kinds of snacks that can contribute to your childs health.**
 - 1) put a comma after kinds
 - 2) capitalize health
 - 3) change There to They're
 - 4) change childs to child's
 - 5) change your to you're
7. Sentence 10: **These include whole grain crackers, pretzels, and breads, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and low-fat dairy products.**
 - 1) sentence is correct as it stands
 - 2) remove comma after crackers
 - 3) capitalize dairy
 - 4) put Sentence 10 before Sentence 9
 - 5) run-on sentence
8. Sentence 11: **We here at Loving Child Preschool is helping to keep your child healthy by providing daily snacks that contribute to their growth and well-being.**
 - 1) run-on sentence
 - 2) put comma after healthy
 - 3) remove capital on Preschool
 - 4) change is to are
 - 5) change that to than
9. Sentence 12: **Hope you're doing the same at home.**
 - 1) put a comma after same
 - 2) combine with sentence 11 to create a complete sentence: ...well-being, and we hope you're...
 - 3) capitalize home
 - 4) run-on sentence
 - 5) sentence is correct as it stands

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Page 1: Words You Need to Know

1. thought
2. focused, concentrated
3. subject, predicate
4. ideas, organization

Page 3: Try This

1. DVD players have already captured most of today's popular movies.
2. Be quiet!
3. Did the burglar rob the store before the police arrived?
4. Is the porch light still burning?
5. John has written a memo regarding Friday's meeting.

Page 4: Exercise A

1. F
2. C
3. C
4. F
5. C
6. F
7. F
8. F

1. The Midwest is where the buffalo roamed.
4. They were talking over plans for the party.
6. John and Bill hit the balls.
7. The team, feeling disappointed, went into the next game with new resolve.
8. Barbara was drenched through her clothes.

Page 6: Exercise B (Note: other conjunctions may be used other than the ones shown here.)

When you go to San Francisco, notice the way the city is built on hills. The streets are often steep and crooked so cars have to travel slowly around pedestrians and cable cars. The view is spectacular unless it's rainy or foggy. Tourists like to shop in the many stores, and sightseeing brings in much money to the city economy.

Page 8: Try This (Note: other conjunctions may be used rather than the ones shown here.)

- He worked hard at his job, so he was promoted.
 He worked hard at his job, however, he was not promoted.
 He never worked hard at his job, consequently, he was not promoted.

Page 9: GED EXERCISE 1

- 1) 4 Restaurant is the subject so there is no need to include it
- 2) 3 This is a fragment so you will need to add a subject like I or We.
- 3) 3 This sentence is correct as it stands.
- 4) 5 This is a fragment so add the subject I.
- 5) 5 Combine with Sentence 6 to make a compound sentence: I don't like to complain, but I had...
- 6) 4 This is a run-on sentence. Change to: I had a bad waiter. The food was cold and the steak too well done.
- 7) 3 This sentence uses the slang bad scene.
- 8) 1 This is a dependent clause. Put a comma after there and combine it with Sentence 9: While I usually like going there, I'm not sure I'll be back.
- 9) 2 This sentence uses the slang get your act together.
- 10) 5 This is informal writing that should not be included in a letter of complaint.

Page 11-12: GED EXERCISE 2

- 1) 3 This is a thesis statement and needs to be the last one in the paragraph.
- 2) 4 This sentence needs a comma before the conjunction to separate the two independence clauses.
- 3) 1 This sentence is correct as it stands
- 4) 3 Everyone is singular and needs the singular form believes for agreement.
- 5) 2 This is a run-on sentence that can be corrected: ...and energy. They can...
- 6) 4 Use apostrophe to show possessive in child's.
- 7) 1 This sentence is correct as it stands.
- 8) 4 We is plural and must have the plural form are.
- 9) 2 This is a fragment and it can be combined with Sentence 11 to make it complete: ...well-being, and we hope you're...