# How To Combine Sentences

## Introduction

The most effective written texts are composed of a variety of sentence types and patterns. While longer sentences provide readers with information and can show relationships among ideas, shorter sentences provide clarity and can be used to make a point or summarize a main idea. However, texts full of short sentences are choppy, and texts full of only complicated sentences can be difficult to read. Skilled writers know how to combine sentences in different ways to increase sentence variety and improve readability. (See the BU Writing Centre *Vary Your Sentence Structure* handout.)

## Here are four ways to combine two simple sentences:

(See the BU Writing Centre *Types of Sentences* handout.)

1. **Form a compound sentence by using a semicolon rather than a period between the two sentences. The first word of the second sentence is not capitalized.**

   This works well for two sentences that share a clear relationship. In addition, if you can replace the semicolon with *and*, the semicolon is a good choice. Beware of using too many semicolons as they are rarely used, and if overused, the resulting text can be as choppy and monotonous as using simple sentences.

   > *Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; he was ecstatic.*

2. **Form a compound sentence by removing the period and adding a coordinating conjunction\* (FANBOYS = *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) after a comma.**

   > *Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools, so he was ecstatic.*
   > In this sentence, *so* introduces a result\*\*.

   > *Jonathan was ecstatic, for he was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools.*
   > In this sentence, *for* introduces a cause\*\*.

3. **Form a compound sentence by using a conjunctive adverb\* or transitional phrase\*, such as *therefore, additionally,* or *however,* in one of two ways:**

a. Form a compound sentence by inserting a semicolon after the first independent clause. Add an uncapitalized conjunctive adverb* followed by a comma at the start of the second independent clause.

> *Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; therefore, he was ecstatic.*

b. Keep two simple sentences, but show a relationship between them by adding a capitalized conjunctive adverb* followed by a comma at the start of the second independent clause. In this case, you are not combining sentences, but you are adding to sentence variety by explicitly showing the relationship between two sentences.

> *Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools. Therefore, he was ecstatic.*

4. **Form a complex sentence by using a subordinating conjunction\* such as *because, since,* or *when* to subordinate one of the independent clauses.** The subordinate (dependent) clause can be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence using different punctuation and sometimes a change in pronoun placement. The clause that is placed at the start of a sentence either carries more emphasis or is linked to the sentence previous to it.

   Unlike an independent clause, a subordinate clause cannot stand alone and must be connected to an independent clause. A subordinate clause standing alone is referred to as a sentence fragment or incomplete sentence.

> *Because Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools, he was ecstatic.* When the subordinate clause starts the sentence, a comma is placed before the subject of the independent clause.
> *Jonathan was ecstatic because he was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools.* When the subordinate clause is placed at the end of a sentence, no additional punctuation is required.

\* Each coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb/transition expression, and subordinating conjunction alerts the reader to a relationship between the two sentences/clauses it connects, so you must carefully choose the word or words that identify that relationship. (See the BU Writing Centre *Establishing Strong Connections* handout.)

\*\*Whether you start your compound sentence with a cause or a result depends on which independent clause you wish to emphasize. Ideas at the start of the sentence either carry more emphasis or connect with an idea in the previous sentence.