

# The Writing Center @ KUMC

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## Periodic and Loose

Periodic and loose sentences are two of the most common forms of sentence structure in English. Both of these forms are types of complex sentences. The four sentence structure types are as follows:

- 1) *Simple*: Sentences consist of a subject and a verb to form an independent clause. "The boy is hungry."
- 2) *Compound*: Sentences consist of two or more independent clauses joined by a conjunction or semicolon. Each of these clauses could form a sentence alone. "I like coffee and Sarah likes tea."
- 3) *Complex*: Sentences consist of an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. "He left in a hurry after he got a phone call."
- 4) *Compound-complex*: Sentences consist of at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. "Laura forgot her friend's birthday, so she sent her a card when she finally remembered."

As mentioned, periodic, also known as interruptive, and loose, also known as cumulative, are both types of complex sentences. But although both are complex, the order of the independent and dependent clauses differentiates them. In **periodic sentences**, the main point (independent clause) occurs at the end of the sentence, after one or more side points (dependent clauses) lead up to the main point. Each of the following periodic sentences includes several dependent clauses leading to the independent clause at the end.

### Periodic Sentence Examples:

"In the almost incredibly brief time which it took the small but sturdy porter to roll a milk-can across the platform and bump it, with a clang, against other milk-cans similarly treated a moment before, Ashe fell in love." (P.G. Wodehouse, *Something Fresh*, 1915)

"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius." (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841)

"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." (I Cor. 13, KJB)

**Loose sentences** have a structure that is the opposite of periodic sentences. In loose sentences, the independent clause is at the beginning, followed by one or more dependent clauses.

## Loose Sentence Examples:

“I found a large hall, obviously a former garage, dimly lit, and packed with cots.” (Eric Hoffer)

“I knew I had found a friend in the woman, who herself was a lonely soul, never having known the love of man or child.” (Emma Goldman)

“We must be wary of conclusions drawn from the ways of the social insects, since their evolutionary track lies so far from ours.” (Robert Ardrey)

These two kinds of complex sentences produce different effects. A **periodic sentence** often produces a dramatic tension and suspense to the main point at the end of the sentence. The dependent clauses that come before the independent clause serve to stress the importance of the key idea. A **loose sentence**, in contrast, creates the effect of immediacy and naturalness. English writers tend to use loose sentences much more often than periodic ones.

During revision, pay attention to sentence structure. Using too many loose sentences can be monotonous, while overusing periodic sentences lessens their rhetorical power. Instead, use various sentence structures. Sometimes simpler sentences are truly powerful. Most importantly, as you revise, **read sentences out loud**. By doing so, awkward and/or unclear sentence structures come to light.