

# Punctuating the Four Sentence Types

First, let's review what a clause is. A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb. A clause has to contain both a subject and a verb. There are **two types** of clauses.

- An **independent clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence. That is why it is an independent clause—it's independent; it can stand alone.
- A **dependent clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb, but it is dependent on another clause, an independent clause, to be a complete sentence. That is why it is a dependent clause—it's dependent; it can't stand alone.

Now that you understand what a clause is and the two types of clauses, punctuating the four sentence types (i.e., **where to put those pesky commas!**) will make more sense.

1. **Simple:** A simple sentence is one independent clause that may or may not contain adjectives, adverbs, and phrases. But, a simple sentence only has one independent clause.

- John Adams nominated George Washington as the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

2. **Compound:** A compound sentence has two or more independent clauses. Join the independent clauses with both a comma and a coordinating conjunction (remember *fanboys*—*for, and, not, but, or, yet, so*) or a semicolon.

- George Washington married the wealthy Martha Custis after the French and Indian war, **and** he spent the years before the American Revolution enjoying the life of a Southern gentleman.
- George Washington married the wealthy Martha Custis after the French and Indian war; he spent the years before the American Revolution enjoying the life of a Southern gentleman

3. **Complex:** A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. The independent clause is called the main clause. Use a comma after the dependent clause that comes before the main clause (i.e. the dependent clause begins the sentence). However, you do not need to use a comma after the main clause when the dependent clause follows it.

- To show that he was ready for war, George Washington attended the Second Continental Congress in a military uniform.
- George Washington attended the Second Continental Congress in a military uniform to show that he was ready for war. (**Notice, no comma!**)

4. **Compound-Complex:** A compound-complex sentence has at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. To correctly punctuate a compound-complex sentence, you apply the rules in combination for punctuating a compound sentence and a complex sentence.

- George Washington was unanimously elected the first president, **and** although he never officially joined a political party, he earned the affection of most Americans during his two terms as president just as he remains popular with most Americans today regardless of their political party.

