DEFINING A SENTENCE

To be a sentence, a word group must consist of at least one full independent clause. An independent clause has a **subject** and a **verb**, and it either stands alone as a sentence or could stand alone.

RECOGNIZING WRITTEN SENTENCES

The following lines appeared in students' essays describing vacation spots and beach scenes. Which ones are standard sentences in written English and which ones are not?

1. The sun is shining.

2. They walk slowly and quietly.

3. Watching themselves make steps on the white sand.

4. You can hardly see any sand.

5. Because there are so many people and so many umbrellas.

6. You can imagine walking on the white glittering sand.

7. The feeling of cool sand running through your toes.

8. There is a big coconut tree.

9. Some leaves on the sand.

10. Is a St. Croix beach in the Virgin Islands.

11. The tree on the beach is very big.

12. Shade from the sun some umbrellas provide.

13. On that beach, two people who are enjoying the beautiful weather.

14. The sun shining.

15. The people who are sitting on the beach feel very relaxed.

(over)
Write a correct version of each numbered line that is not a sentence. You can correct the grammar or punctuation, or combine one numbered line with the one that comes before or after it in the list.

**REQUIREMENTS OF A WRITTEN SENTENCE**

- A capital letter at the beginning.
- A period, a question mark, or an exclamation point at the end.
- A subject, stated only once. (*There* and *it* can act as filler subjects.)
- A complete verb phrase -- that is, any auxiliaries, such as *is, were, has, had, will, can, might, would, should, have, would have,* and *will be,* along with the verb forms used to form the verb phrase.
- Standard word order: in English, the regular sequence is *S + V + O* (subject + verb + object), with insertions possible at several points in the sequence.
- An independent core idea that can stand alone. (This is known as a *main clause* or an *independent clause.*)

**EDITING ADVICE**

Use the following flow chart with a piece of your writing to examine any sentences that you think might have a problem in structure. Begin with the last sentence of your draft and work backwards. In this way, you can isolate each sentence from its context and examine it more objectively. Ask these questions for each problematic sentence:
DEFINING A SENTENCE (Continued)

Does the sentence have a subject and a complete verb?

YES  NO

Change it so that it has a complete subject and a complete verb.

Does the sentence have a clearly written capital letter at the beginning and a period, question mark, or exclamation point at the end?

YES  NO

Make the necessary changes.

Does the sentence include an independent clause (a core idea that can stand alone)?

YES  NO

If the only clause (subject and verb combination) is introduced with a word such as when, if, or because, either remove that word or attach the whole group of words to another independent clause.

Check to see that everything else is correctly connected to that independent clause. Check for word order, inversions, and parallel structures.

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