Writing Interesting, Grammatically Correct Sentences

This Workshop is Brought to You by the NVCC-Annandale RWC
OBJECTIVES

- In this workshop we will talk about the four kinds of sentences.
- We will define sentence fluency and view examples of writing passages that demonstrate fluency.
- We will review the comma rules that often stand in the way of clarity, correctness, and fluency in writing.
PART ONE

(KINDS OF SENTENCES AND SOME COMMA RULES ALONG THE WAY...)
Terminology

Before we begin, let’s review:

What is the definition the following term?
Vocabulary Review

- independent clause
An *independent clause* is a part of a sentence that contains a subject and a verb. It could, therefore, stand on its own because it has the two necessary components of a sentence.

For example, the sentence below contains an independent clause. Can you name it?

*When I was a young girl, I loved to dance.*
The four kinds of sentences include *simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex*. The differences between the four have to do with how they are structured.
Simple Sentences are also known as independent clauses. They are complete thoughts (containing both a subject and a verb), which stand on their own.
Simple Sentence Example:

Students at NVCC gather in cafeteria.
A compound sentence joins two independent clauses by a conjunction. Conjunctions are as follows: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS).

I have a cat, and his name is Asha.
COMMA RULE

Each time you join two independent clauses using a conjunction, you MUST use a comma.

According to this rule, how do the following sentences look in terms of correctness?
EXERCISE ONE:

1. Mary wanted to do well in college, so she consistently worked on her skills outside of class.
2. The show starts in ten minutes but I am running late.
3. Timothy played football and coached little league.
4. Students at NVCC gather in the cafeteria, but students at GMU congregate in the Johnson Center.
COMPLEX SENTENCES

- A complex sentence has an independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses.
- Complex sentences have either subordinators such as *because, since, after, although,* or *when* or they have relative pronouns such as *that, who,* and *which.*
Complex Sentences with a Subordinator

1. When you are finished with your homework, please help me with mine.
2. Bill and Mary will see the movie after they eat dinner.

As you can see from these examples, when the independent clause begins the sentence, no comma is required. When a complex sentence begins with the subordinator, a comma at the end of the dependent clause is necessary.
Complex Sentences with Relative Pronouns

1. The novel that you were looking for is on the counter.
2. The town where I grew up is not in Northern Virginia.
3. The blue bike, which I got for my birthday, has 21 speeds.
Which vs. That: Which is Which?

According to *Painless Grammar* by Rebecca Elliot, Ph.D.:

- “’That’ is the first word of a phrase or clause that is essential for the sentence to make sense or to mean what you want it to mean” (200).
- “’Which’ is the first word of a phrase or clause that is not essential. If you can insert the words ‘by the way’ and the sentence still means what you want it to mean, use *which*” (200).
COMMA RULE:

- "When information is essential, use *that* and don’t use commas. When information is not essential, use *which* and do use commas" (Elliot 201).

1. The course that I enjoy the most is English.
2. My house, which is near the lake, has a tin roof.
Compound-Complex Sentences

Compound-complex sentences share characteristics of both sentence forms, as in the following example:

I like math, and I like English, which is why I am a tutor.

In the above example, if the statement were to end with the word “English,” it would merely be a compound sentence. Because it doesn’t and the statement goes on to include a relative pronoun, the result is a more complicated sentence form called “compound-complex.”
EXERCISE 2

Are the following sentences simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex?

1. I love to sing, but Maria loves to dance.
2. Mary likes Bob, and because she does, she won’t return William’s call.
3. Because he was diving in shallow water, John was injured.
4. John loves to sing karaoke and chat with his friends.
5. Maria is a mother of four.
PART TWO

(Fragments, Run-ons, and Writing Fluent Sentences)
Sentence Fragments

Sentences fragments lack either a subject or a verb. Often, they are created when adding a period too soon:

He likes to sing. And hang out with his friends.

In this case, “He likes to sing” is an independent clause, but “And hang out with his friends” is not. It relies on the first part to make a meaningful, complete thought. Therefore, we need a comma instead of a period.
Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentences contain multiple independent clauses that are not properly joined together. We know joining two independent clauses makes a compound sentence, but there are rules about how independent can be linked.
1. Independent clauses can be joined with a comma AND a conjunction. The comma alone is not enough to do the trick. Independent clauses joined only by a comma are run-ons, and that inappropriate use of punctuation is called a comma splice.

We go to the best lake in the world, it is called Lake Havasu.
This mistake has three remedies:

a) add a conjunction
We go to the best lake in the world, and it is called Lake Havasu.

b) use a semicolon to separate the clauses
We go to the best lake in the world; it is called Lake Havasu.

c) separate the clauses with a period
We go to the best lake in the world. It is called Lake Havasu.
1. I hope the Red Sox beat the Orioles, the Sox are the better team.
2. I hope the Red Sox beat the Orioles because the Sox are the better team.
3. Beat the Orioles because they are the better team.
4. The Red Sox beat the Orioles, but the Orioles are the better team.
Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency is the sense of rhythm and grace in writing.

You can achieve sentence fluency by writing a combination of simple, compound and complex sentences that begin AND end in different ways.
Sentence Fluency Checklist

- Do you get out of breath reading the sentences? If so, check for run-ons.
- Are the areas of a passage that feel short and choppy? If so, there may be fragments or too many simple sentences.
- Rewrite sentences that begin and/or end in the same way.
Checklist Continued…

- Vary sentence length.

- Are there areas where the reader has to backtrack in order to achieve clarity (i.e.: confusing pronouns or words like “this” without antecedents)?
Achieving Sentence Fluency

- Sentences that are fluent sound effortless, flowing, and rhythmic.
- Good sentences want to be read aloud! If you are writing well, people will want to hear it, not just their head.
- To achieve sentence fluency, look for places where you can be more clear and/or concise.
Exercise 4: Sentence Fluency

1. The dog ate his food. His food was beside the refrigerator. The refrigerator was white.
2. The students were tired. They were tired from a long year of studying. They were studying chemistry.
3. My mother is a good cook. Her name is Joni. My mother is also a good golfer.
The red barn, roofed with pine needles and dead leaves, seemed to appear out of nowhere. A crack ran down its length to reveal spring to its inhabitants. It was lovely.
Write your own fluent passage...

Using the previous passage as a model, write your own description of an object or place. Write as many drafts as you need to until you have achieved fluent sentences. Keep in mind the sentence types and comma rules we have already covered.
Thank you for your time and attention. Please continue to use our resources.