PUNCTUATION

Sentences

A sentence is a complete statement. A complete sentence is a group of words that makes complete sense on its own. Complete sentences start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

These are complete sentences:

Anglia Ruskin University encourages students to take responsibility for their own personal development.

Most learning at Anglia Ruskin is delivered in modules.

These are not:

By improving existing skills, for example.

Which have a credit value.

The words “by” and “which” are really joining words here, connecting the ideas to something that has gone before – in this case the complete sentences given as examples above. So:

Anglia encourages students to take responsibility for their own personal development, by improving existing skills, for example.

Most learning at Anglia is delivered in modules, which have a credit value.

Which of the following are complete sentences?

Decide which are complete sentences (there are four) then change or add something to the others to make them complete (answers at end of the guide).

1. To ensure the reader’s understanding.
2. Because this was not a fair test.
3. Several aspects need to be considered.
4. Subject to the views of the participants.
5. Suggesting that a different approach is required.
6. There is insufficient evidence for this claim.
7. Which caused a number of difficulties.
8. A significant improvement was noticed.

9. Including the following.

10. A number of changes are recommended.

**Put in full stops and capital letters.**

(Answers are at the end of the guide.)

1. Anglia officially opened a new bridge at the Rivermead Campus recently the Vice-Chancellor cut the ribbon to mark the full opening of the bridge, which was put in place in May the bridge opens up access to more of Chelmsford, making it easier for pedestrians to get to the town and university it will also allow students to make more use of the large parkland on the other side of the River Chelmer

2. Life can be tough for students on a limited budget it is important to budget carefully from the start, making sure you have accounted for priorities such as accommodation, food, books, course-related expenses and travel

**Commas - Different Uses**

**To separate words in a list:**

A good student is motivated, organised, efficient, active and creative. (No comma usually before ‘and’)

This is a provocative, disturbing book.

But:

I prefer Australian red wines to all others.

(No comma – “Australian” relates to red wines, not just wines)

**To separate groups of words in a list:**

I walked up to the Rivermead site, popped into the library, ordered some books, went up to the department office, made an appointment to see my tutor and then went to my lecture.

Before and after interjections:

That lecture was, I’m sorry to say, the most boring I’ve ever been to. However, it’s early days yet! These findings, we would suggest, cast doubt on his hypothesis.
To mark off groups of words beginning with e.g. when, if, but, after, unless, although – if a pause is needed:

- If you want to succeed in your studies, it is important to take responsibility for your own learning.
- He was determined to make it to his 9 o’clock lecture on Monday morning, although he hadn’t arrived home from the club until 3.00 a.m.
- Lectures often provide the basic core to modules, but seminars, tutorials, individual and group presentations, case studies and study visits are used extensively.

Before and after words in a sentence that give extra information:

- The School of Education, which opened in spring 2000 and has 750 students and 75 staff, is based in the Sawyers Building at the Rivermead campus.
- Reading my essay through this morning, I realised that I had made a number of mistakes.
- Because I couldn’t find my glasses, I was unable to prepare for the seminar.

(Without the words marked off by commas, the sentence still makes sense.)

Put in Commas

(Answers are at the end of the guide.)

The student recruitment section offers free services to pupils teachers parents and careers advisers.

Anglia prides itself on being a modern flexible university.

I left the tutorial grabbed a quick coffee went to the library to return some books and went home to start work on my essay.

The course I’ve chosen is I’m afraid not what I expected.

Life as a student can be stressful and demanding but it has its rewards.

The new South Bridge which was put in place in May was officially opened last month.

The Apex which is a newspaper produced by students for students can be found around the campuses free of charge.

Counselling takes place in a relaxed setting where you can talk freely in a way not always possible with friends or family to someone independent.
Wrong Uses of the Comma

(To join two sentences together – a common mistake in essays)

The research conditions were poor, this resulted in an unreliable set of conclusions.

This essay is late, it should have been handed in last week.

The proposal to refurbish the students’ bar has been well received, many students have expressed their support.

Fred Bloggs has carried out considerable research into how the brain works, his findings have been documented in several publications.

Mature students may find University life stressful, they have so many conflicting demands on their time.

Use a full stop or semicolon instead!

How meaning can be influenced by commas

Each sentence in the following pairs of sentence has a different meaning, dependent on where the comma is placed or whether there is a comma at all.

1. She is a pretty energetic girl.
   (She is quite an energetic girl.)
   
   She is a pretty, energetic girl.
   (She is a pretty girl and also energetic.)

2. However you feel, you must treat her with respect.
   (Whatever your personal feelings, you must treat her with respect.)
   
   However, you feel you must treat her with respect.
   (Despite everything, you feel you must treat her with respect.)

3. Call him Charles and see if he answers.
   (Address him by the name of Charles and see if he answers.)
   
   Call him, Charles, and see if he answers.
   (Charles, call him and see if he answers.)

4. The busker who played the clarinet entertained the crowd.
   (There was more than one busker, but the one who played the clarinet entertained the crowd.)
   
   The busker, who played the clarinet, entertained the crowd.
   (There was one just busker entertaining the crowd and he played the clarinet.)

5. He did not behave as expected.
   (He did not behave in the way that we’d thought he would.)
He did not behave, as expected.
(He behaved badly, just as we’d expected.)

6. The picture was bought for £1,000 more than it was worth.
(We don’t know what the picture was worth or what the actual purchase price was, but the purchase price was £1,000 more than the value.)

The picture was bought for £1,000, more than it was worth.
(The purchase price was £1,000 and this was more than it was worth.)

Put in full stops and commas:

(Answers are at the end of the guide.)

1. After a study session it is worth briefly reviewing your work by looking at the main points again following the logical progression of ideas and studying your conclusions once more. Further reviews at intervals of a day a week a month and three months have a tremendous effect on the amount of information maintained in the long term memory. Most students however do not review because it requires organisation yet in comparison to the hours spent in study a few minutes spent reviewing is an excellent investment.

2. Often mature students worried that mental abilities decline with age do not expect to do well there is no reason however why adults provided they are healthy well motivated and have a positive organised approach to their study should not achieve as good results as younger students. An organised approach involves setting realistic targets planning ahead using time effectively and establishing a study routine. It is also important to get enough sleep allowing time for relaxation and take regular exercise. Exercise of the heart, lungs and blood system ensures a constant supply of oxygen to the brain improves circulation and relieves stress leading to better mental performance.

The Colon

The colon is used to introduce:

A list

The Learning Support Team aims to support students with a range of disabilities: mobility problems, hearing impairment, visual impairment, dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health difficulties.

It is recommended that:
(1) A feasibility study be carried out;
(2) A further meeting be held in six months to consider the results of the study.

A long quotation or speech
Fairbairn and Winch (1996) suggest that:
“Writing is difficult and very few people have the ability to write an essay at one sitting in a form that is adequate.”

Speaking at Caesar’s funeral, Anthony addresses the crowd: “Friends, Romans, Countrymen …”

A clause which explains the previous statement

The school is highly regarded: academic standards are high, the staff are committed and the students enjoy going there.

The colon can also be used to emphasise a close link between two clauses which could stand alone as separate sentences. For example:

The lecturer loves role play exercises: the students hate them.

The semi-colon

The semi-colon is halfway between a comma and a full stop. It can be used where the connection between two clauses is very close, and a full stop is too strong a break but a comma does not seem quite enough. For example:

The work was inadequate; consequently the project failed.

This guide cannot cover all aspects of punctuation fully; for that you should consult a more comprehensive text.

The semi-colon can also be used to separate groups of words in a list. For example:

Students can come under many different pressures: the academic demands of their course; family expectations and fear of failure; financial concerns and the associated need to take on paid employment.

Apostrophes

There are two main uses of the apostrophe:

1. To denote a missing letter (or letters)
   e.g. in contractions such as: isn’t, he’s, can’t, I’m, we’ve
   NB: It’s = it is, or it has, not “belonging to it"

2. To show possession
   Don’t worry about the “S”!
   First decide who or what the thing/idea belongs to – underline it if necessary.
Then put the apostrophe after the underlined word

e.g.:  

- Children’s rights  
  (the rights of children)

- The student’s essay  
  (the essay of the student)

- The students’ concerns  
  (the concerns of the students)

Often needed for expressions of time – e.g. a week’s work, ten days’ supply

**Where should the apostrophe go in the following sentences?**

(Answers are at the end of the guide.)

- Mr Davies business contacts extend all over the world.
- Londons streets are supposed to be paved with gold.
- The company is concerned about the increase in customers complaints.
- Do you support the NHS workers action?
- It will take a weeks work to decorate this room.
- Politicians promises should be taken with a large pinch of salt.
- I’m looking for a pair of mens extra large trousers.
- The next camp is two days walk away.
- He found it difficult to live up to his parents expectations.
- The Council sought neighbouring residents views.
- The Pensioners Association aims to improve its members standard of living.
- The campaign for womens rights still has a long way to go.
- There is no denying the Beatles importance in the history of pop music.
- Parents should be held responsible for their childrens behaviour.
- The tenants protests at the proposed rent increase were voiced at the Housing Committees last meeting.
You must be careful not to hurt peoples feelings.

The jurys verdict came as a surprise after the witnesses evidence and the judges summing up.

The schools reputation was damaged by the pupils decision to go on strike.

**Answers**

*Which are complete sentences?*

1. To ensure the reader’s understanding. Incomplete.
   
   Possible amendments:
   
   This is necessary to ensure the reader’s understanding.
   
   Clarity of expression is important to ensure the reader’s understanding.
   
   To ensure the reader’s understanding, clarity of expression is important.

2. Because this was not a fair test. Incomplete.
   
   Possible amendments:
   
   This was not a fair test.
   
   The results were unreliable because this was not a fair test.
   
   Because this was not a fair test, the results were unreliable.

3. Several aspects need to be considered. Complete.

4. Subject to the views of the participants. Incomplete.
   
   Possible amendments:
   
   This is subject to the views of the participants.
   
   Subject to the views of the participants, a number of changes will be made.
   
   A number of changes will be made, subject to the views of the participants.

5. Suggesting that a different approach is required. Incomplete.
   
   Possible amendments:
   
   This suggests that a different approach is required.
   
   Problems have arisen with the present methods, suggesting that a different approach is required.
6. There is insufficient evidence for this claim. Complete.

7. Which caused a number of difficulties. Incomplete.

Possible amendments:

This caused a number of difficulties.

The equipment was unavailable, which caused a number of difficulties.

8. A significant improvement was noticed. Complete.

9. Including the following. Incomplete.

Possible amendments:

This included the following.

Several suggestions have been made, including the following.

10. A number of changes are recommended. Complete.

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