



SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101

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LESSON #6

More Connectors and Dotted Lines

Up to this point, we've been diagramming sentences with one independent clause (simple sentences) or sentences with one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses (complex sentences).

Simple sentence: Jane drove to the store in her new Toyota.

Complex sentence: Jane drove to the store in her new Toyota because she needed milk.

In this lesson, we'll learn how to diagram compound sentences (two independent clauses) and compound-complex sentences (two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses).

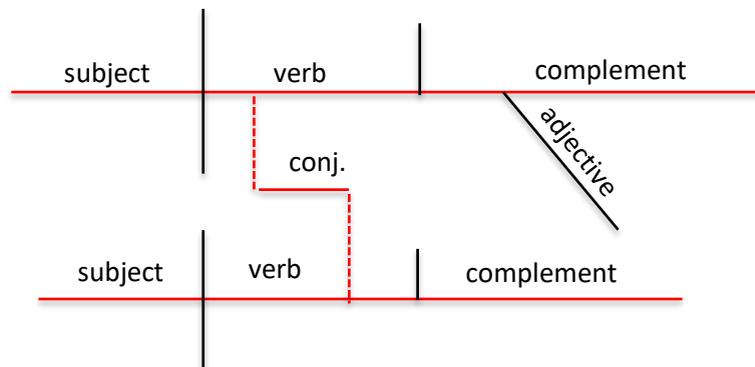
Compound sentence: Jane drove to the store in her new Toyota, and then she headed to the mall to buy new shoes.

Compound-complex sentence: Jane drove to the store in her new Toyota because she needed milk, and then she headed to the mall to buy new shoes.

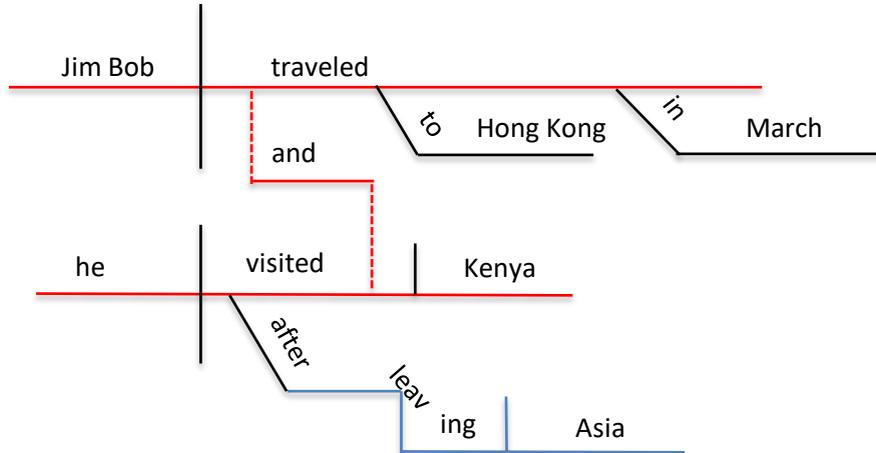
Obviously, the more complicated the sentence, the more complicated the diagram. We'll begin with two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, *yet*).

Compound and Compound-Complex Sentences

Diagrams for compound and compound-complex sentences require at least two main lines, one for each independent clause. The two independent sentences are joined with a stair-step connector: two vertical dotted lines and one solid horizontal line for the coordinating conjunction. Connect the two independent clauses verb to verb:



Jim Bob traveled to Hong Kong in March, and he visited Kenya after leaving Asia.

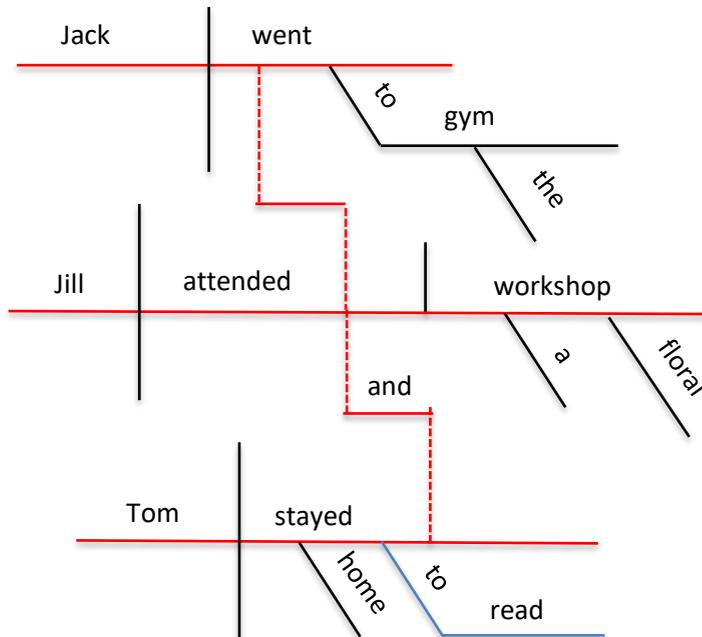


Note: Don't forget about verbals. In this case, *leaving* is a gerund functioning as the object of the preposition.

Question: Why is *in March* connected to *traveled* rather than *to Hong Kong*?

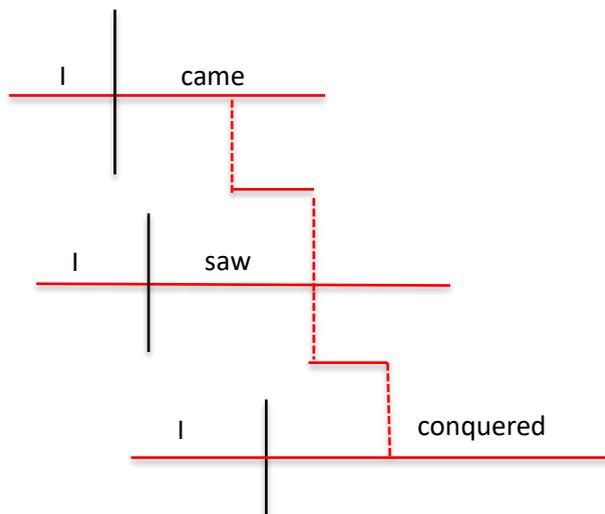
Adding multiple independent clauses creates some interesting diagrams:

Jack went to the gym, Jill attended a floral workshop, and Tom stayed home to read.

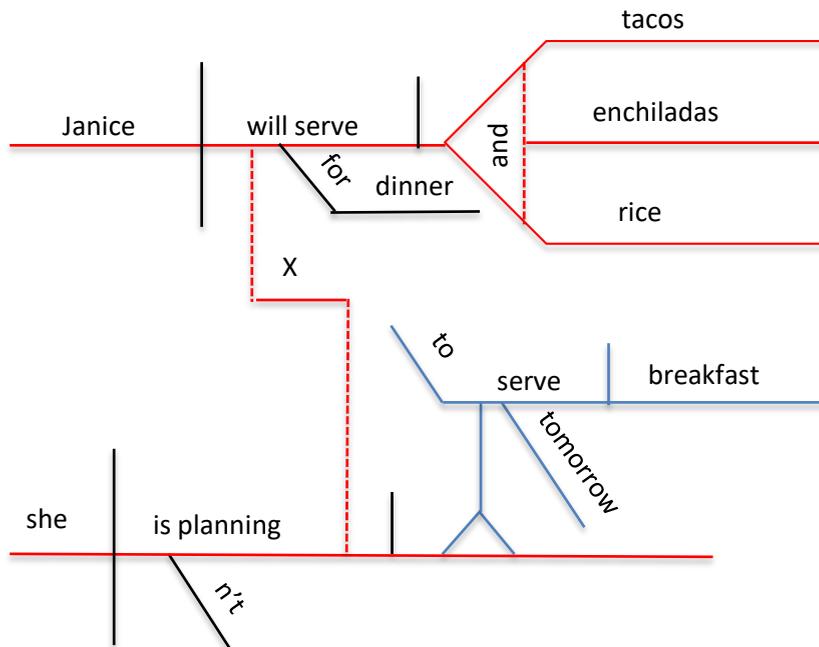


Notice that the line for the conjunction separating the first two independent clauses is blank. Why? The first two independent clauses are connected with a comma instead of a conjunction. Usually, punctuation marks are not included in diagrams.

We'd diagram Julius Caesar's famous quote this way:

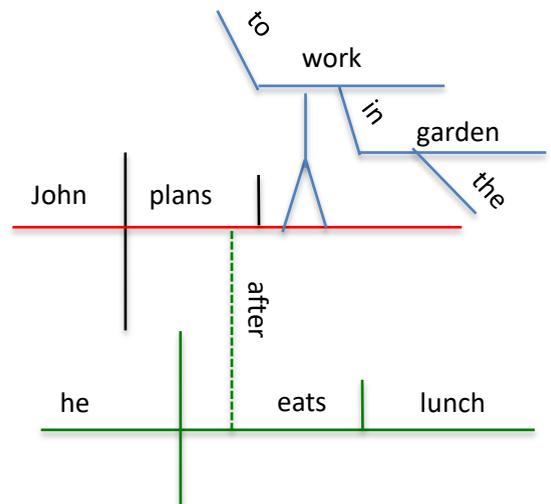
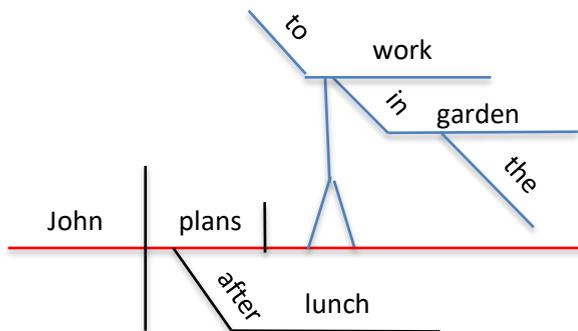


Here's a slightly more complicated compound sentence, which includes three direct objects: Janice will serve tacos, enchiladas, and rice for dinner; she isn't planning to serve breakfast tomorrow.

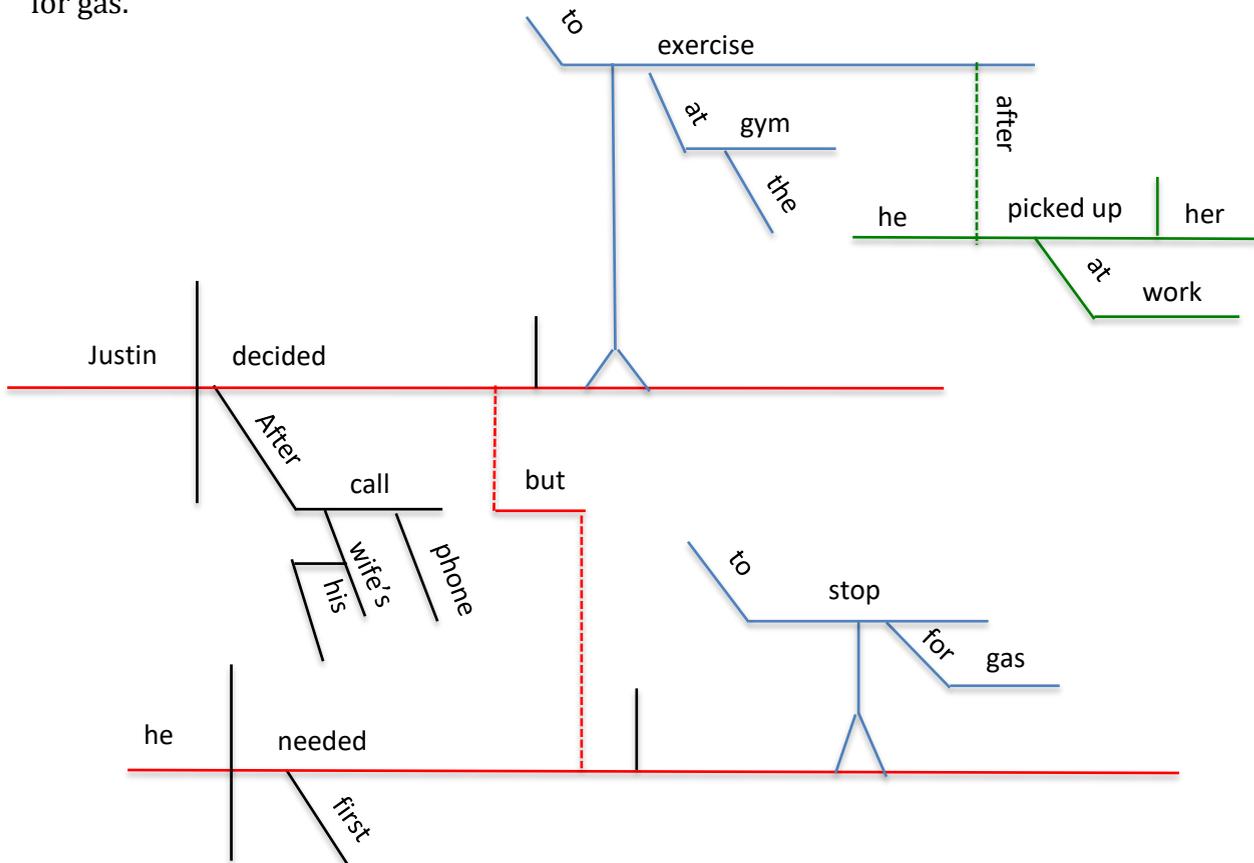


Note: Some diagrammers use an *X* to represent missing punctuation, in this case, the semicolon.

The word *for* can be a coordinating conjunction or a preposition. Words such as *after* and *before* can be prepositions or subordinating conjunctions. You may want to create a document that lists coordinating conjunctions, prepositions, and subordinating conjunctions to help you keep track of which words can be used in more than one way. In the sentences below, how can you tell whether *after* begins a prepositional phrase or an adverbial clause?

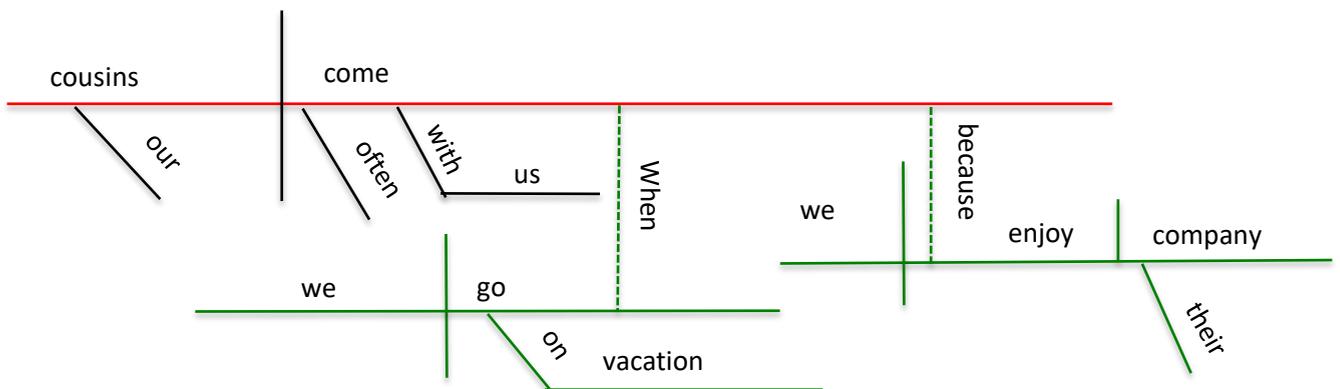


Diagramming compound-complex sentences. When we add dependent clauses to a pair of independent clauses, diagrams can become quite lengthy. Here's an example: After his wife's phone call, Justin decided to exercise at the gym after he picked her up at work, but first he needed to stop for gas.

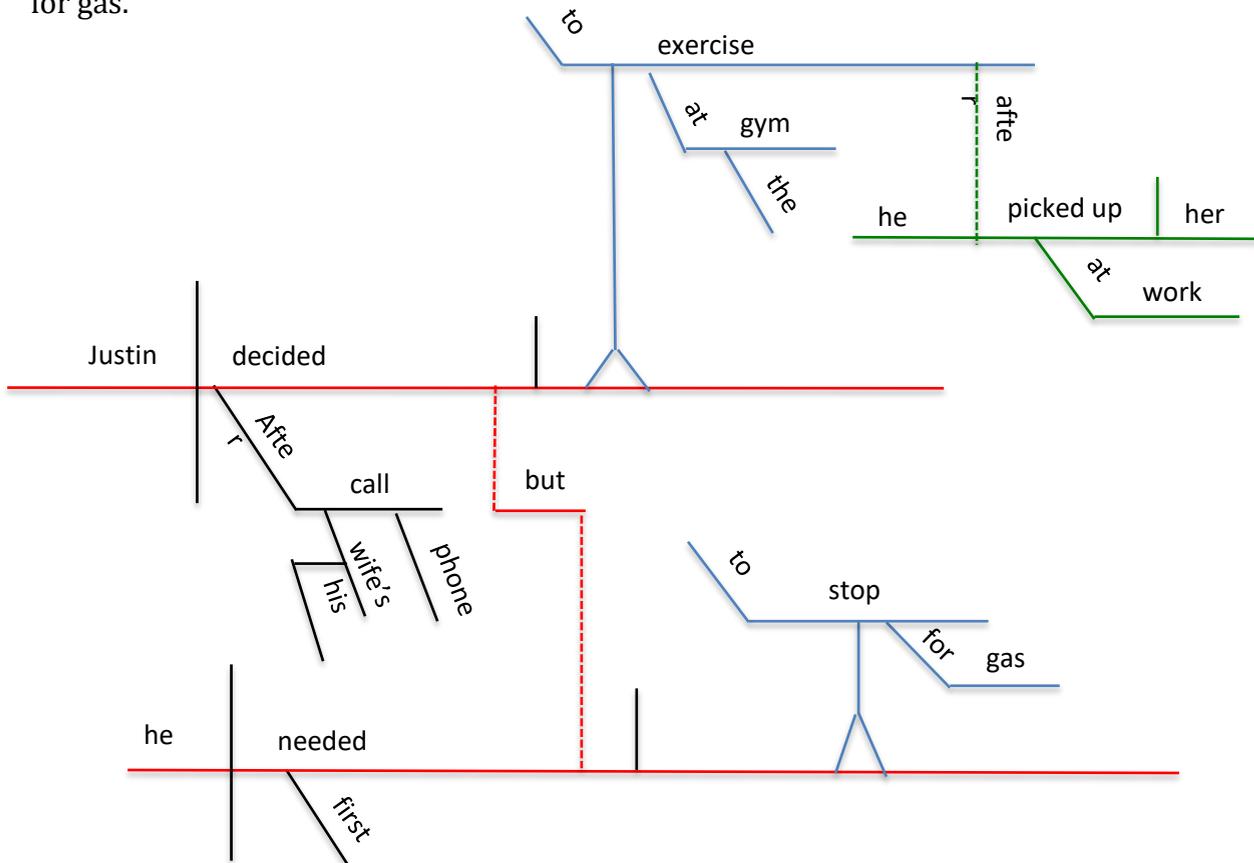


Note: I created an awkward sentence intentionally. As an editor, what possible revisions would you suggest to a client who wrote a sentence like the one above?

Here's a complex sentence with two dependent clauses: When we go on vacation, our cousins often come with us because we enjoy their company.

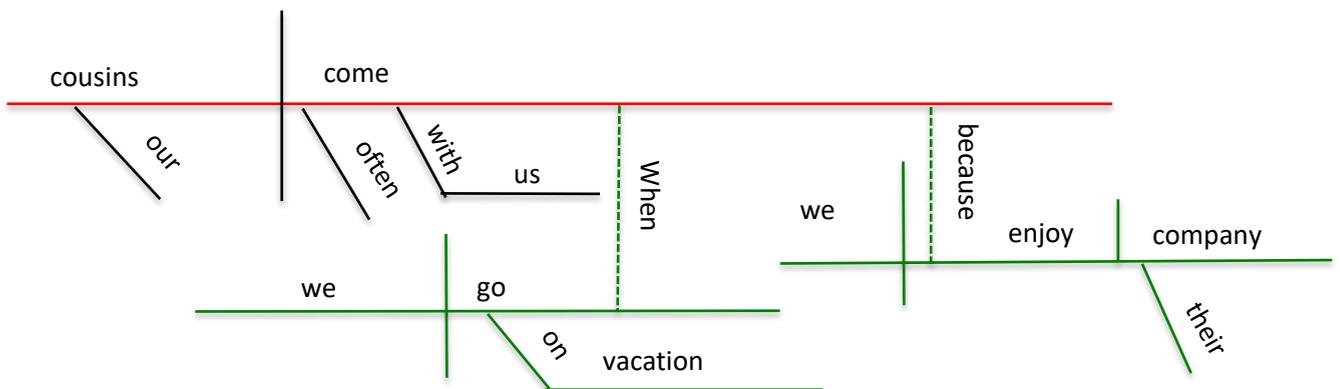


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Sentence variety is important. You should advise clients to use all four sentence structures: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. And—dare I say it?—a few fragments now and then for drama.

Nevertheless, the goal in writing is clear communication. In *Communicate to Change Lives in Person and in Print*, author James Watkins says, “Most Americans read on a sixth-grade level, so it’s important to keep the level of writing as close to sixth grade as possible.”* If you check the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (under Options in Word’s Tools, Spelling and Grammar), you’ll discover that the average length of a sentence for sixth graders is about fourteen words.

Some writers assume that longer sentences sound more educated. But the goal is to communicate not to sound educated, right? Encourage your clients to vary sentence structure, but also be on the lookout for compound-complex sentences that confuse rather than clarify.

Lesson Review

- A complex sentence contains one independent clause coupled with one or more dependent clauses.
- A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon. They are connected with a stair-step dotted line, verb to verb. Place the conjunction on the solid step.
- A compound-complex sentence contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.
- The clauses in complex or compound-complex sentences are connected to the independent clauses with dotted lines (adverb and adjective clauses) or with stilts (noun clauses). For adverb clauses, the connection occurs between the verbs. For an adjective clause, the connection is made between the relative pronoun and the word the clause is modifying.

* James N. Watkins, *Communicate to Change Lives in Person and in Print* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 52.

Lesson #6 Assignments

To receive a Certificate of Completion you must successfully complete all assignments.

Assignment #1

Diagram the following compound-complex sentences. You should be able to diagram every word in each sentence.

- A. This is the room that we use for crafts, and those are the craft supplies that you should use.
- B. Joe plays golf whenever he can leave work early, but on too many days, he works late and can't get to the course before dark.
- C. Most TV programs either bore, annoy, or anger me, so I read a few chapters in a humorous book that provides much more entertainment.
- D. While Louis watched birds fighting for the best perch at the feeder, he remembered the chaos of Thanksgiving dinner at his parents' house, and a smile spread across his face.
- E. What you say may be true, but I don't believe it for a minute.
- F. Tammy's parents rejected whatever she and Ralph said about their wedding plans, but Ralph's parents, who weren't contributing any money, seemed supportive of all of the couple's unconventional, even outlandish ideas.

Assignment #2

Find one to three compound-complex sentences in a manuscript you're editing. Diagram as many of the words, phrases, and clauses as you can.

Assignment #3

Suppose that a client had written the six sentences given in Assignment #1. What revisions would you recommend for each sentence? Would you keep the wording of any of the sentences? Why?

Reminder: The diagrams of the sentences in each lesson's assignments are provided in the Answer Key. Resist the urge to look at the answers before you attempt to diagram the sentences.