

# The Well Bred Sentence

## Chapter 4: The Complex Sentence

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### The nature of the complex sentence

In the complex sentence, words and phrases embed a basic sentence to expand the scope of its statement. So when the copular-verb basic sentence:

Sir Edmund *gave* the diatribe

is embedded with an adverb phrase:

Twenty years ago Sir Edmund *gave* the diatribe

it becomes a complex sentence. Its complexity can increase with further embeddings. Here, two adjective phrases (underlined) describe the noun complement *diatribe*:

Twenty years ago Sir Edmund *gave* the first anti-family diatribe I ever heard.

### Embeddings are phrases

There is only one verbal element (verb, copula, copular verb) in the complex sentence. That verbal is always in its basic sentence. Sequences that embed the basic sentence to make a complex sentence of it perform nounal, adjectival and adverbial functions. None of them performs a verbal function. To make the latter point firmly, this book has completely rejected the notion 'clause and subordinate clause'. (A case for this rejection is argued in the Introduction.)

All elements of the complex sentence that are not the basic sentence are phrases. The validity of this claim will become clear later on in this Chapter, where sentence analysis will reveal that unintended nonsense results when a writer attempts to have two verbal elements operate in one complex sentence.

### Identifying the basic sentence in the complex sentence

When we compose a complex sentence we do not think up a basic sentence and then embed it with phrases. That is not the natural process of composition. Rather, our intention to say something simply launches us into complex-sentence mode when that it is the style best suited for conveying the sense we want to make. So it is not in order to *compose* a complex sentence that we need to be able to identify its basic sentence. We need to identify it in order to review our finished composition and to check it for sense: Does it

succeed to say what we meant to say and only what we meant to say?

It is essential to develop an ability to identify the basic sentence. This is so because the meaning-making procedures of the complex sentence are such that every embedded phrase attaches to some part of the basic sentence and does something to that part with the objective of driving the sentence towards its complete statement. Writers who cannot account for 'what is driving what' in their complex sentences are headed, like the blindfolded, towards the inevitable cropper.

Identifying the basic sentence is easier done than described. We read a sentence with the expectation of understanding what it says. The expectation is disappointed only when the complex sentence is defective. Understanding what it says, we know what subject it has raised and what it said about that subject.

### **Strategy for identifying the basic sentence**

The first thing to do is to revise the outline of the three models of the basic sentence in Chapter 1: 'What is a Sentence?' With the pattern of the behaviours of sentences in mind, read the sentence under investigation and ask two questions:

1. What subject does this sentence raise?

The answer will identify the noun, pronoun or noun phrase that is the syntactic subject in the sentence under scrutiny.

2. What is said about the subject?

The answer will identify either:

(i) the object of the verb, which is always in the basic sentence, and is a noun, pronoun or noun phrase,

or

(ii) the complement of the copula or the copular verb, which is always in the basic sentence, and is either a noun or noun phrase, or an adjective or adjective phrase.

Having found the subject and object or complement of the verbial, you have found the entire basic sentence. You are now in a position to observe what the words and phrases embedded into the basic sentence are doing: On which part of the basic sentence is each working, and to what end?

Doing these things, we engage in sentence analysis. As an introduction to this activity, a session in sentences analysis will follow.

## Analysing the complex sentence

This complex sentence:

Academic morale in Australia is being damaged by the never-ending demands on a resource-strained higher education system

raises the subject *Academic morale in Australia*, and says of it that it *is being damaged by demands*. The basic sentence, therefore, is this (in bold font):

**Academic morale in Australia is being damaged by the never-ending demands** on a resource-strained higher education system.

The object, *demands*, acts upon the subject, *Academic morale in Australia*, and the activity is denoted by the verb phrase *is being damaged*. So this complex sentence has a passive-voice (object acts upon the subject) **verb basic sentence**.

It is important to note that the subject raised (aka the subject of the verb), *Academic moral in Australia*, is a noun-phrase unit. It is its entirety, not its parts, that name the subject. The subject is not fully named by the noun *morale* alone: *morale* names something other than *academic morale*, and *academic morale* names something other than *Academic morale in Australia*.

Having identified the subject and object of the verb basic sentence, and identified as ‘verb’ the verbal that relates them, we can proceed to account for the remaining words and phrases embedded in its subject and object: In the subject, the noun ‘morale’ is described by the adjective ‘academic’, and by the adjective phrase ‘in Australia’. In the object, ‘never-ending’ is an adjective that describes the noun ‘demands’, and ‘on a resource-strained higher education system’ is an adjective phrase that also describes ‘demands’.

In this complex sentence:

A number of commentators have acknowledged how humiliating they found Peter’s distinction between guilt and shame

the subject is named by the noun phrase *A number of commentators*. We can identify the word that denotes their activity (just as we did in the verb sentence above): it is *have acknowledged*. But, unlike in the verb sentence, we cannot identify an object upon which the subjects acts, nor can we identify an object that acts upon the subject. So we know that we are looking for the complement of *have acknowledged*, not its object, and that therefore we are dealing with a copular verb. The complement specifies the content of the subject’s activity with the noun phrase *how humiliating they found*

*Peter's distinction.* We have now identified the basic sentence here as a **copular-verb basic sentence**:

**A number of commentators *have acknowledged how humiliating they found Peter's distinction* between guilt and shame.**

The only remaining sentence element is *between guilt and shame*. Clearly, this is an adjective phrase that describes *Peter's distinction*.

The appearance of *is* alongside the opening noun of the next complex sentence:

Clark is right in his condemnation of the lack of intellectual demand in many university courses

immediately alerts us to the fact that we are dealing with a copula basic sentence: If Clark *is right*, then he is not doing something to anyone/anything, nor is anyone/anything doing something to him. So there is neither a verb nor a copular verb in this complex sentence. Here, the basic sentence consists of the predicate-adjective complement *right* that describes the noun subject *Clark*. So this complex sentence has a **copula basic sentence**:

**Clark *is right*** in his condemnation of the lack of intellectual demand in many university courses.

Checking how this basic sentence is embedded by the remaining syntactic elements of this complex sentence, we find the following: The noun phrase *in his condemnation* names the existential location of where Clark is right. The noun phrase *of the lack of intellectual demand* names the existential location of *his condemnation*. The noun phrase *in many university courses* names the location of *the lack of intellectual demand*.

We can now dispense with the modelling of the reasoning that governs the identification of the basic sentence and its model (verb, copula, copular verb), and thus go about the analysis of the complex sentence much more quickly. In this one:

Many of **John's misrepresentations *seem to arise from a casual lack of concern with the details*** of Peter's thought

the genitive noun phrase *John's misrepresentations* names the subject. The noun-phrase complement *from a ... lack of concern with the details* names the location of the subject's act, denoted by the copular-verb phrase *seem to arise*.

The foregoing observations have identified the basic sentence. The remaining sentence elements embed it thus: The numerical adjective *many of* describes the subject, *John's misrepresentations*. The adjective phrase *of Peter's thought* describes the noun *details*, which

is part of the complement, and the adjective *casual* describes the noun phrase *lack of concern*.

In this complex sentence that contains a **verb basic sentence**:

**His** worthy ethical **concerns** about the plight of Australian Aborigines **were weakened by overkill**,

the noun phrase *by overkill* names the object that perpetrated the act *weakened* upon the subject, *his ethical concerns*. Two sets of attributive adjectives, *worthy ethical* and *about the plight of Australian Aborigines*, describe the noun subject *his concerns*.

In this complex sentence, there is a **copula basic sentence**:

**His argument is a defence of traditional intellectual learning** against the introduction of courses with explicit vocational purposes.

The noun-phrase complement *a defence of ... learning* defines the subject *his argument*. There we have the basic sentence. And this is how the other sentence elements embed it: The adjectives *traditional intellectual* describe the noun *learning*. And *against the introduction of courses* is an adjective phrase that describes *defence*. The adjective phrase *with explicit vocational purposes* describes *courses*.

Another copula basic sentence occurs in this complex sentence:

**Teachers of Philosophy are wise to enter discussion** with those who teach more constructive subjects.

The copula *are* assigns description by the predicate-adjective phrase *wise to enter discussion* to the noun-phrase subject *Teachers of Philosophy*. (Note that there is no intention in this sentence to claim that 'teachers of Philosophy are wise'.) The noun phrase *with those who teach more constructive subjects* is able to compound with the basic sentence because it locates the context in which *teachers of philosophy are wise to enter discussion*.

In the next sentence

**The people slipped into dejection** under the seemingly endless rain that pelted down day after day.

the noun complement *into dejection* names the existential place of the activity, denoted by the copular verb *slipped*, of the noun subject *the people*. The noun phrase *under the seemingly endless rain* locates the existential place of the subject's activity *slipped*. The attributive-adjective phrases *seemingly endless* and *that pelted down day after day* describe the noun *rain*.

## Adverb-led qualification of the absolute statement

One cannot call ‘adverb’ any word or phrase that acts upon a copula basic sentence: There is no verb in a copula sentence, and adverbs describe the activity denoted by verbs. Any qualification of the absolute statement of a copula sentence is performed by an adverb-led ‘other sentence’. A commonly-used absolute-statement qualifier is ‘as far as I know’:

As far as *I know*, **he is not at home.**

Here, the verb of the verb + subject sentence *I know* is qualified by the adverb phrase *as far as*. The whole of this verb + subject sentence then relates to the basic sentence as the qualifier of its absolute statement.

The ‘other sentence’ that qualifies the absolute statement of the following copula basic sentence, *The child is naughty*, is another copula sentence: *he is concerned about being ignored by his brothers*. The sequence that looks as if it is an adverb, *only when*, is the logical operator that compounds the two sentences *The child is naughty* and *he is concerned about being ignored by his brothers*. So some might want to say that we have a compound sentence here, not a complex sentence:

**The child is naughty** only when **he is concerned** about being ignored by his brothers.

Others, like the present writer, allow the ‘compound sentence’ classification, but posit that there is also a case for calling this sentence a complex sentence:

There is no ‘other sentence’ here. Instead, the entire sequence *naughty only when he is concerned about being ignored by his brothers* is the predicate adjective that describes the subject, *The child*. So we have only one copula sentence here.

## The embedded present-participle phrase

1. The present participle phrase is headed by the *-ing* form of any word that can be used as a verb: acting, dancing, viewing, *etc.* In complex sentences, the present participle phrase attaches to the verbal element like an adverb of manner (‘how’). The sequence it heads is a noun phrase (underlined):

**He died** pleading the rights of his countrymen.  
[copular verb basic sentence]

In this sentence, the present-participle phrase *pleading the rights of his countryman* attaches to the copular verb *died* by describing the qualitative content of the act *died* of the subject *He*.

2. The present-participle phrase attaches to the basic sentence also by acting as the adjective phrase that describes its object:

**We came upon them** crying their eyes out.  
[verb basic sentence]

In this sentence, the preposition *upon* is treated as part of the verb because the obvious infinitive from which the verb derives is ‘to come upon’: ‘to come upon’ has a meaning quite distinct from ‘to come’. Thus in this sentence, the activity that the pronoun subject *We* perpetrates upon the pronoun object *them* is denoted by the verb phrase *come upon*. The adjective phrase *crying their eyes out* describes the pronoun object *them*.

3. In another manifestation of itself, the present-participle phrase attaches to the verb of the basic sentence by acting as an additional adverb. Such an attachment is achieved successfully in this sentence:

**He ate his meal** greedily, giving us full view of his bad manners.  
[verb basic sentence]

Here, *greedily* and *giving us full view of his bad manners* are both descriptions of how the subject *he* performed the activity denoted by the verb *ate* upon the noun object *his meal*. Attachment of this kind cannot succeed if the present participle phrase does not perform as an adverb. It did not succeed in this sentence:

**He said he was surprised that the government had released information** about surplus workers, saying it was an unfortunate image to present to the public.  
[This is a defective sentence.]

It is impossible to suppose that the present-participle phrase *saying it was an unfortunate image to present to the public* in any way describes the activity *said* of the pronoun subject *He*. It is therefore unattached, left dangling. It should have been composed as a **compound sentence, not as a complex sentence:**

**He said he was surprised** that the government had released information about surplus workers, and that **it was an** unfortunate **image** to present | to the public.

### Validity in the complex sentence

The foregoing discussion concentrated upon instances of the well formed complex sentence. That discussion showed how some compositions of complex sentences are such that nouns, adjectives and adverbs embed successfully into well-formed basic sentences. The following discussion examines several failed attempts at

composing complex sentences, diagnoses the cause of each failure, and suggests the means of correcting it.

### **Is there a basic sentence?**

A complex sentence must contain a basic sentence. Without a basic sentence there is no complex sentence. Failing to provide one is absolutely the worst mistake a writer can make. This one made it:

The Smiths, much less a community to indicate a migration as an escape from distress.

[This is not a valid sentence.]

This writer has raised the subject *The Smiths*, then described it with the adjective phrase *much less a community to indicate migration as an escape from distress*. Description of the subject is only description. It does not make a point about it. A point about the subject is made by predication. The structure of predication is verbal + object/complement. There is no verbal in this sequence that purports to be a sentence, and it lacks an object or a complement. It is therefore not a sentence. Consequently, it is incapable of making a point about its subject. Whatever this writer meant to say about his subject *The Smiths* is hopelessly lost in his failure to write a basic sentence. No failure can be greater, for it excludes the possibility of sense. To make sense, it needs a basic sentence. Furthermore, the adjective phrase *much less a community to indicate migration as an escape from distress* is itself obscure to the point of being illogical: How can The Smiths be either ‘a community’ or ‘an escape’?

Writers who construct their subject by describing it, a process that is not only perfectly legitimate but also rather elegant, often get their sentences into the trouble we have just discussed. More dangerous still is the process of composition in which the writer constructs a complicated ‘that’-led noun-phrase subject and compounds an element to it:

That economic issues and environment issues are closely interlinked and interdependent and need to be dealt with together, whether with a new environmental ethic or with an improved version of the measures and processes that are already in practice.

[This is not a valid sentence.]

Here, the ‘that’-led noun-phrase subject: *That economic issues and environment issues are closely interlinked and interdependent and need to be dealt with together*, is a complex one, and the sequence *with a new environmental ethic or with an improved version of the measures and processes that are already in practice* is compounded to it by means of the logical operator *whether*. After all this, we still have only a subject and an element compounded to it. We do not



have a verbal or an object/complement. So we do not have a sentence.

As is often the case with subjects of this construction, words lurk in it that look as if they might be verbals (in the sentence above: *are*, *need to be*, *dealt with*). They are in fact **not** verbals in this construction: They are parts of the noun-phrase subject. They would have been verbals if the subject had not been named by means of the 'that'-led sequence that subsumed them. Nevertheless, these might-be verbals give some writers a 'feel good' confidence in the possibility that they are somehow succeeding to predicate the subject they constructed. They are not. This sequence has no verbal, so it has no object/complement. Nothing, therefore, is said about the subject. For it to become a sentence, a predicate has to be constructed for it. Thereby, a basic sentence will be supplied to it. That basic (copula) sentence is marked in bold in this reconstruction:

**That economic issues and environment issues are closely interlinked and interdependent and need to be dealt with together**, whether with a new environmental ethic or with an improved version of the measures and processes that are already in practice, *is* a generally accepted **fact**.  
[copula basic sentence]

### **Is there a sound verbal function?**

The writer of the sentence that follows did the next-to-worst thing a composer of a complex sentence can do. He allowed two verbal functions, a copula's and a copular verb's, to be active in it. The inevitable result was that he said something he did not mean to say:

Leadership in the universities *can no longer be* a reward for excellence in scholarship to be handed out to people who are benign amateurs in financial management.  
[This is a defective sentence.]

He wanted to say two things:

Leadership in universities *cannot be handed out* to people who are benign amateurs in financial management

and

Leadership in universities *can no longer be* a reward for excellence in scholarship.

But he scotched his ability to say either. His copula phrase *can no longer be* assigns the definition *a reward for excellence in scholarship* to the noun-phrase subject *Leadership in universities*. Any phrase that attaches to a definition (by nature a noun phrase) cannot but function as an adjective. The phrase that attaches to this definition is *to be handed out to people who are benign amateurs in*

*financial management*. This has two unfortunate and unintended results:

(i) The phrase *to be handed out to people who are benign amateurs in financial management* becomes the adjective phrase that describes *a reward for excellence in scholarship*.

(ii) It fatuously denies the inherent logic of *a reward for excellence in scholarship*: A reward for excellence in scholarship is necessarily a reward for excellence in scholarship. It is not *a reward to be handed out to amateurs*.

In any case, this writer did not mean to talk about the handing out of *reward*. He meant to talk about the handing out of *leadership*. That is the subject his sentence raised. No doubt he thought he had succeeded to say something about the handing out of *leadership*: He was misled by the verb-like appearance of *to be handed out* into thinking that it can engage the subject *Leadership in the universities* as a verbial does. But *to be handed out* is not a verb in his sentence. Its verbial is the copula phrase *can no longer be*. It does engage the subject. The phrase *to be handed out* can do no more than perform as part of an adjective phrase, albeit one that made this writer say something he did not mean to say. His sentence can be reconstructed to become a valid complex sentence. Its ambiguity is eliminated once its basic sentence is soundly constructed to contain only one verbial:

**Leadership in universities can no longer be handed out** to benign **amateurs** in financial management as a reward for excellence in scholarship.

[copular-verb basic sentence]

### **Are the nouns efficient?**

Obscure nouns can destroy the clarity of any sentence:

**It is difficult to develop the details** of a complex operation in the absence of a working model.

[copula basic sentence]

What kind of operation is this *complex operation*? Is it a complicated surgical intervention, or some kind of intricate manoeuvre? Is a *working model* a miniature in working order or a mannequin who has a job? Why does the absence of this working model make things difficult? Would his/her/its return make things easier? The sentence that followed this obscure one did reveal the meaning of the key puzzling noun:

**A complex is the** clearly defined **entity** that replaces a number of separate schools.

[copula basic sentence]

*Complex* turned out to be not an adjective at all but a noun: It is an entity. Given this clue, the reader can in due course work out that *a complex operation* is ‘the operating of a complex’, the *working model* is a *blueprint* or *sample*, and *the absence of* is *the non-existence of*. This sentence makes sense eventually. But no competent writer taxes the reader’s patience as heavily as this one did.

The other source of the problem in this sentence was that the vacant subject *It* had to be capable of occupation by the noun phrase *to develop the details of a complex operation* that is described by the adjective *difficult*. Yet the wording of the noun phrase itself was such that *complex* was easily mistaken for an adjective that describes *operation*. (It turned out that *complex operation* is a compound noun.) This confusion prevented instant recognition of the noun phrase.

In the next sentence, the noun phrase *a body which claims to be the leading educational institute in the country* is intended to be an alternate name for *Melbourne University*. But it miscarried to become an alternate name for the *Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne*. Only he is named in this sentence, so only he can be alternately named:

It is disconcerting that the Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University, a body which claims to be the leading educational institution in the country, should ignore the social arguments for curriculum breath.

[This is a defective sentence.]

Whatever else is true of *the Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University*, that an alternate name for him is *a body which claims to be the leading educational institution in the country* is certainly not true. The problem is that this writer did not realise that his comma-demarcated phrase is working as an alternate name for *he Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University*. He thought he was describing *Melbourne University*.

The mistake can be corrected by naming both the Vice Chancellor and the University:

**It is disconcerting that the Vice Chancellor** of a university such as Melbourne University, a body which claims to be the leading educational institution in the country, **should ignore the social arguments** [copula basic sentence] for curriculum breath.

The misfiring noun phrase in the original sentence is a clear example of a writer’s being unaware of the structure of his basic sentence: He raised the vacant subject *It* in a copula sentence and did not know which noun element would occupy it.

The failure to recognise a noun phrase as one naming unit, and the failure to provide a phrase that is sufficient to name, are two common problems of the complex sentence. This one suffers from both of them:

This fundamental fear, of not figuring in the scheme of things, is what motivated the Inca people to offer their spectacular sacrifice to the heavens, not to placate divine wrath, or to beg for manna.

[This is a defective sentence.]

The noun-phrase subject should have been a fluent unit uninterrupted by commas: *This fundamental fear of not figuring in the scheme of things*. (The commas suggest that its writer did not know he had composed a noun phrase.) And there should not have been a comma between this noun phrase and the copula *is*. The sequence *not to placate divine wrath, or to beg for manna* was appended to this sentence, of which both the subject and complement are named by noun phrases, with a dash. This appendage is puzzling until (or if) it dawns on the reader that it wants to be another noun phrase: *not the desire to placate divine wrath or to beg for manna*, that names an alternate subject:

**This fundamental fear** of not figuring in the scheme of things, not the desire to placate divine wrath or to beg for manna, **is what motivated the Inca people to offer** their spectacular **sacrifice** to the heavens

[copula basic sentence]

### Are the adjective and adverb phrases successfully embedded?

A misplaced adjective or adverb phrase can cause the writer to say something he does not mean to say:

The Government plans to sell a nine-hole golf course attached to Mont Park Psychiatric Hospital as part of its rationalisation of assets.

[This is a defective sentence.]

The adjective phrase *attached to Mont Park Psychiatric Hospital* intended to describe the object *a golf course* upon which the subject *the Government* perpetrated the act denoted by the verb phrase *plans to sell*. The adverb-headed noun phrase *as part of its rationalisation of assets* intended to name the bent (or direction) of the subject's act. But the two phrases were run together and became one adjective phrase that describes *a golf course* as *attached to the Mont Park Psychiatric Hospital as part of its rationalisation of assets*. As a result, the noun function is lost. To enable the noun phrase *as part of its rationalisation of assets* to act as a noun phrase that locates the bent of the subject's act *plans to sell*, it must be kept distinct from the adjective phrase:

As part of its rationalisation of assets **the Government plans to sell a nine-hole golf course** attached to Mont Park Psychiatric hospital.

[verb basic sentence]

### **Is the present-participle phrase successfully embedded?**

The present-participle phrase must attach to the verbal element of the basic sentence as an adverb, or as an adjective that describes its noun-object. Otherwise there is an illogical syntax such as the one in the following sentence:

Lurking behind the recent demand for public apology for ancestral racism lies the hoary legend of the noble savage.  
[This is a defective sentence.]

Is the *hoary legend* lurking or lying? Doing one, it cannot also be doing the other. This attempt to claim that it can results in the loss to this sentence of a basic sentence, and therefore, of a sense. This writer should have done without his present-participle phrase, *Lurking behind the recent demand for public apology for ancestral racism*:

**The hoary legend** of the noble savage *lies* (or *lurks*) **behind** the recent **demand** [copular-verb basic sentence] for public apology for ancestral racism.

Another kind of problem occurs when the present-participle phrase wanders too far from the verbal element of the basic sentence. Distance reduces the possibility of successful attachment:

Some question what Ansell was doing in the bush when his boat capsized, muttering darkly about crocodile poaching.  
[This is a defective sentence.]

It was the people who *questioned what he was doing* who were *muttering darkly about crocodile poaching*, not Ansell nor the capsized boat. This sentence is corrected when the present-participle phrase precedes the basic sentence to avoid the unintended meaning made by the original sentence:

Muttering darkly about crocodile poaching, **some question what Ansell was doing** in the bush when his boat capsized.  
[verb basic sentence]

### **Is the writer sober?**

Intention to say lofty things has led many a writer into composing impressionistically rather than syntactically. The result is a disaster that defies comprehension as thoroughly as a drunken rave. This sentence is a particularly extravagant example of the sort of thing:

**Government in Australia exists to serve and protect all citizens** in an equal dignity which may never be infringed by fashion or ideology or invoked against achievement.

[This is a defective copular-verb sentence.]

The noun phrase *to serve and protect all citizens* names why the subject, *Government in Australia*, exists. So far, we have a sound basic sentence. The problem begins with the sequence: *in an equal dignity*. First of all, the meaning here is impenetrable: Does anyone know of something called ‘an equal dignity’ that can be lived in? Most of us prefer houses. And what part of the basic sentence does this puzzling phrase embed? What part-of-speech function does it perform? It appears to be a noun phrase because the adjective phrase *which may never be infringed by fashion or ideology or invoked against achievement* that follows it cannot but describe it. (Of course, adjectives can describe only nouns.) If *in an equal dignity* is a noun, then to what purpose is it naming? Being in the complement sector of this copular-verb basic sentence, it must have some intention with regard to the verbal or the subject. But what is that intention?

Perhaps *in an equal dignity* is meant to be part of a noun phrase *to serve and protect all citizens in an equal dignity*. It could function there as an adjective that describes *citizens*, and thereby make the sense: *Government in Australia exists to serve [only] all citizens [who are] in an equal dignity*, but not citizens who are not in an equal dignity. But then, the sentence does not seem intent on saying that the Australian government exists to serve some citizens and not others.

One might go on trying to identify the syntactic function of *in an equal dignity* in the hope that the identification will prove helpful in shedding light on its meaning. But there really is no point in pushing it. When it becomes obvious that meaning cannot be teased out of a noun phrase (if it is a noun phrase), best policy is to scrap it.

‘Scrap it’ suggests itself even before we begin to contend with the obvious adjective phrase *which may never be infringed by fashion or ideology or invoked against achievement*. (This is obviously an adjective phrase, given its header *which*). But how might *equal dignity*, albeit disallowed by *equal dignity*, be *invoked against achievement*? The mind boggles. Scrap it.

### **The complex sentence is an essential tool**

Making a series of single statements in simple sentences is not the same intellectual activity as making a basic statement developed with the informative embeddings of the complex sentence. A series of simple statements deals with simple matters. When we deal with

complex matters the very nature of our thinking directs us to the procedures of the complex sentence.

Occurrence of the complex sentence increases in the measure that the density of detail, or the level of abstraction, of a writer's topic intensifies. And the writer's lucidity when he writes about complicated or abstract topics is commensurate with his ability to control the complex sentence. This should alert writers to the need to hone their complex-sentence writing skills, if only for the sake of having the style handy to use when needed.

There is no obligation upon any writer to use the complex sentence. The choice of not using it is available to everyone. But it is well to remember that a writer is read and assessed. And writers have been criticised for their limited repertoire of sentence styles. Avoidance of the complex sentence does not reduce the writer's repertoire by one; it handicaps it like a missing wing a bird.

### *A caution against advice*

It is quite a common experience for writers to have someone scribble an irritable 'write shorter sentences!' command on their scripts. The worst thing about such commando raiders of other people's writing is that they tend to be the very people who mark your essays or edit the work you have put up for publication. Some of them will even wax technical and tell you to 'avoid writing complex sentences'.

Ignore them: They know not what they say! If you are thinking your way through a body of information, and are intent upon saying something about it, you do not want your reasoning processes hampered by the edict of a stylistic commando. If you take your commando seriously and you try to make yourself avoid thinking in a way that leads you into complex sentence structures, your thinking processes will be severely hampered. As you are thinking your way through a body of information, nothing will be further from your mind than 'which style of the sentence shall I use?' You will instead be organising your thoughts to get them out as statements. When your information is detailed or its conceptual density is high, your statements will turn out as complex sentences. Neither you nor the commando can help this.

Once your thoughts are externalised as sentences, you will review them for their syntactic validity. If you make sure that they are all well formed, no commando will even notice that you are using complex sentences, for you have made easy reading for him.

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