

## SPANISH SENTENCE TYPES

In order to improve the quality of what you write or say in Spanish, you should aim to vary the sentence types you use in any written work or oral presentations.

Sentence types fall into four broad categories:

1. Declarative
2. Interrogative (E.g. *¿Por qué te vas?*)
3. Exclamatory (E.g. *¡Qué viaje tan largo!*)
4. Imperative (E.g. *¡No me digas!* or *¡Hable con ella!*)

Sentence types 2 – 4 are more straightforward and self-explanatory; declarative sentences require some detailed analysis, as follows:

### 1.0 Declarative Sentences

1.1. Declarative sentences are by far the most common sentence type you will use. As the name suggests, they declare something; they introduce facts:

*Examples:* We went to the beach  
***Fuimos a la playa***

We had to get up early  
***Tuvimos que madrugar***

I found the return journey very boring  
***El viaje de regreso me resultó muy aburrido***

1.2. Declarative sentences can be broken down into three further categories:

- Simple
- Compound
- Complex

#### 1.2.1 Simple Declarative Sentences

A simple declarative sentence is the most basic form – an independent clause, containing no subordinate (relative / dependent) clauses, such as the examples above.

#### 1.2.2 Compound Declarative Sentences

A compound declarative sentence is used to join two simple declarative sentences together, either (i) with a comma and/or conjunction (e.g. so, and, then):

*Example:* I was very tired (simple declarative sentence)  
***Estaba muy cansado***  
I went to bed early (simple declarative sentence)  
***Me acosté temprano***

I was very tired, so I went to bed early (compound declarative sentence)  
***Estaba muy cansado, por lo que me acosté temprano***

or (ii) with a semi-colon and/or a transition word (e.g. however, besides, therefore, in fact):

*Example:* I was very tired; however, I had to finish my homework  
***Estaba muy cansado; sin embargo, tuve que terminar mis deberes***

### 1.2.3 Complex Declarative Sentences

Complex declarative sentences are those that contain an independent (main) clause (i.e. a “stand alone” simple sentence) **and** one or more subordinate (relative / dependent) clauses, introduced by a relative pronoun (e.g. that, which, who, whom).

*Examples:* I read all the books (independent clause, i.e. can be used on its own)  
***Leí todos los libros***

That he sent me (dependent clause, i.e. cannot be used on its own)  
***Que me mandó***

I read all the books that he sent me (complex declarative sentence)  
***Leí todos los libros que me mandó***

The journey was boring (independent clause)  
***El viaje fue aburrido***  
Which took more than 3 hours (dependent clause)  
***Que duró más de 3 horas***

The journey, which took more than 3 hours, was boring (complex declarative sentence)  
***El viaje, que duró más de 3 horas, fue aburrido***

The matter is slightly complicated in Spanish as (i) clauses or sentences cannot end with a preposition:

*Example:* The girls were wearing school uniform (independent clause)  
***Las chicas llevaban uniforme escolar***  
Whom I spoke with (dependent clause)  
***Con las que (con quienes) hablé***

The girls I spoke with (with whom I spoke) were wearing school uniform  
***Las chicas, con las que (con quienes) hablé, llevaban uniforme escolar.***

and (ii) the prepositional accusative (“personal a”) may be required too:

*Example:* The boys were playing football (independent clause)  
***Los chicos jugaban al fútbol***  
Whom I knew (dependent clause)  
***A los que (a quienes) conocía***

The boys I knew (whom I knew) were playing football  
***Los chicos, a los que (a quienes) conocía, jugaban al fútbol***

### 1.3 Cleft Sentences

Cleft (meaning “divided” or split”) sentences are those that divide or split grammatical components into two halves, transforming simple declarative sentences into a complex sentences with a relative pronoun, **starting with the verb “to be” in any tense**. They should be used sparingly, but will nevertheless enhance the quality of your written or spoken Spanish as an alternative to a simple declarative sentence, and they can often add a nuance to the meaning too.

*Examples:* My mother usually does the shopping  
***Mi madre suele hacer las compras***  
It is my mother who usually does the shopping (cleft sentence)  
***Es mi madre la que (quien) suele hacer las compras*** OR:  
***Suele ser mi madre la que (quien) hace has compras***

Juan told me (it)  
***Juan me lo dijo***  
It was Juan who told me (it) (cleft sentence)  
***Fue Juan el que (quien) me lo dijo***

I like this subject

***Me gusta esta asignatura***

It is this subject that I like the most (cleft sentence)

***Es esta asignatura la que más me gusta***

We used to stay in that hotel during the holidays

***Nos quedábamos en ese hotel durante las vacaciones***

It was in that hotel that we used to stay during the holidays (cleft sentence)

***Era en ese hotel en el que (donde) nos quedábamos durante las vacaciones***

For that reason we decided never to return

***Por esa razón decidimos nunca volver***

It was for that reason that we decided never to return (cleft sentence)

***Fue por esa razón por la que decidimos nunca volver***

Therefore we decided not to go out

***Por eso decidimos no salir***

That was why we decided not to go out (cleft sentence)

***Fue por eso por lo que decidimos no salir***

I wanted to go out, but...

***Yo quería salir, pero...***

I was the one (it was I) who wanted to go out, but... (cleft sentence)

***Fue yo el que (quien) quería salir, pero...***

I had met her at a party

***La había conocido en una fiesta***

It was at a party that I had met her (cleft sentence)

***Fue en una fiesta donde la había conocido***

ETC...

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