

“Combo” Sentences

1. Combo Sentences

In the arguments we’ve looked so far every premise and conclusion has been stated as a separate sentence. But English allows a more compact alternative where an entire argument can be collapsed into one long sentence. Since every argument has a conclusion and at least one premise, such a single-sentence argument must contain at least *two* smaller sentences as parts. We will call such a premise-conclusion combination a **combo sentence**.

Here is an example.

The light is off, so he’s already gone to bed.

The conclusion marker “so” tags what follows (“*He’s already gone to bed*”) as the conclusion.

The light is off, **so** he’s already gone to bed.

↖ *Conclusion*

The sentence before this (“*The light is off*”) is presented as the reason why we should believe that conclusion – the premise.

The light is off, **so** he’s already gone to bed.

↖ *Premise*

↖ *Conclusion*

This pattern is typical of every combo sentence.

Combo sentence: a single sentence containing a premise, a conclusion, and at least one premise or conclusion marker.

Combo sentences introduce a new complication when putting arguments in standard form: since the standard form of an argument lists each premise and conclusion on a separate line, combo sentences in standard form must be split into two separate sentences

Our previous combo sentence will have this standard form.

The light is off, so he's already gone to bed.

1. The light is off

∴ He's already gone to bed

The marker in a combo sentence provides us an easy point of entry. The next example uses the marker “since” to flag its first part as the premise.

Since the square has a side two inches long, it has an area of four square inches.

↖ *Premise*

The other little sentence is then the conclusion.

Since the square has a side two inches long, it has an area of four square inches.

↖ *Premise*

↖ *Conclusion*

In standard form this combo-sentence argument looks like this.

1. The square has a side two inches long.

∴ It [the square] has an area of four square inches.

While the examples so far had the premise first, combo sentences can put their parts in either order. To illustrate, we recast the last example into this combo sentence.

The square has an area of four square inches, since it has a side two inches long.

With “since,” coming before the little sentence “*it has a side two inches long*,” we see that here the premise comes second. The sentence that comes first, “*the square has an area of four square inches*,” is the conclusion.

The square has an area of four square inches, since it has a side two inches long.

↖ Conclusion

↖ Premise

Though the order of their appearance is reversed here, these parts fall into the same standard form as before.

1. It [the square] has a side two inches long.

∴ The square has an area of four square inches.

2. Arguments with Combo Sentences

Combo sentences are pretty tame stuff. But when featured in more complex arguments, combo sentences provide a handy point of entry for hammering such arguments into standard form.

We begin with a simple example.

Interest rates are rising. But since interest rates and bond prices are inversely related, that means that bond prices are falling.

The second sentence is a combo sentence, with two different markers: “since” is a premise marker, while “that means that” marks a conclusion.

Since interest rates and bond prices are inversely related,

that means that bond prices are falling.

↖ Premise

↖ Conclusion

This combo sentence is broken up in standard form like so.

Interest rates and bond prices are inversely related.

∴ Bond prices are falling.

But so far we've skipped over the first sentence in this example, "Interest rates are rising."

Interest rates are rising. But since interest rates and bond prices are inversely related, that means that bond prices are falling.

This isn't a combo sentence. And it doesn't look like the conclusion of the whole passage, since it has no conclusion marker (unlike the later sentence "*Bond prices are falling*"). This sentence acts like another **premise**.

What we find here is nothing new: the first premise ("*Interest rates are rising*") combines with a second premise ("*Interest rates and bond prices are inversely related*") to jointly support a conclusion ("*Bond prices are falling*").

1. Interest rates are rising.
 2. Interest rates and bond prices are inversely related.
-

∴ Bond prices are falling.

This example illustrates how the premise of a combo sentence can team up with an outside premise to support the conclusion.

Recognizing this pattern helps make sense of an otherwise puzzling cluster of markers – as in the following example.

Zeke won't be coming on the camping trip. So, since Janice won't go without Zeke, she won't be coming either.

Here the second sentence is a combo sentence with two markers: the conclusion marker "so," and premise marker "since". Curiously, both markers are stacked up before the same little sentence, "*Janice never goes anywhere without Zeke*". Is that sentence a premise, or a conclusion?

Seeing how it combines with the first sentence of the passage (“*Zeke won’t be coming on the camping trip*”), this sentence acts like a **premise**: both sentences are supporting the conclusion “*She [Janice] won’t be coming either*”.

Zeke won’t be coming on the camping trip. **So, since** Janice won’t go without Zeke, she won’t be coming either.

1. Zeke won’t be coming on the camping trip.
 2. Janice won’t go with Zeke.
-

∴ She [Janice] won’t be coming either.

But if “*Janice won’t go without Zeke*” is a premise, why was it preceded by both a premise and conclusion marker?

Because after the first premise, the author was preparing to draw a conclusion (hence the “so”). But before proceeding to that conclusion, the author paused to insert a second premise (hence the “since”).

In each case the “so since” pattern will be the same.

Premise. So, since Further Premise, Conclusion.

1. Premise
 2. Further Premise
-

∴ Conclusion

“So” marks the (upcoming) conclusion; but before getting to that, the author inserts an additional premise (marked by “since”).

Despite the initially confusing string of markers, “so since” examples turn out to fit a familiar pattern: a combo sentence, supplemented by an outside premise.