

Combo Sentences and Further Premises: Exercise Discussion

Put the following arguments in **standard form**.

1. “It is not surprising that some of the most spritely examples [of folk figures] are concentrated in the New England area, **for** it was here that the idea, already centuries old in Europe, was first transplanted to these shores. It was here, too, that the custom thrived and developed a distinctly American style before traveling westward on the waves of **land-hungry immigrants.**” (From Avon Neal and Ann Parker, *Ephemeral Folk Figures* [Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1969], p. 12.)

Discussion: The first sentence is a **combo** sentence, featuring the marker “*for*.”

It is not surprising that some of the most spritely examples [of folk figures] are concentrated in the New England area, **for** it was here that the idea, already centuries old in Europe, was first transplanted to these shores.

Since “for” is a **premise marker**, the sentence that follows must be the **premise** of this little combo argument. And that means that the sentence before “for” must be the conclusion.

So far, the argument in standard form would look like so.

1. It was here [New England] that the idea [of folk figures], already centuries old in Europe, was first transplanted to these shores.

∴ It is not surprising that some of the most spritely examples [of folk figures] are concentrated in the New England area

The next sentence,

It was here, too, that the custom thrived and developed a distinctly American style before traveling westward on the waves of land-hungry immigrants.

is not a combo sentence, just an additional premise. It is numbered and added to the standard form of the argument.

1. It was here [New England] that the idea [of folk figures], already centuries old in Europe, was first transplanted to these shores.
 2. It was here, too, that the custom thrived and developed a distinctly American style before traveling westward on the waves of land-hungry immigrants.
-

∴ It is not surprising that some of the most spritely examples [of folk figures] are concentrated in the New England area

As evidence that this last sentence acts as a further premise, note that it contains the word “too,” which here acts as a “follow-up phrase,” marking an additional premise.

This example highlights an important basic point about combo sentence arguments and argument structure: while a combo sentence, taken alone, states a conclusion, and a premise in support of that conclusion, the larger argument (which the combo sentence is part of) may add *further* premises in support of that conclusion. So: just because a combo sentence provides only one premise (like sentence 2) to support its conclusion (sentence 1), there may be further premises, outside the combo sentence (like sentence 3) also supporting that conclusion.

2. Whoever broke into the cafeteria stole a side of ham and 10 pounds of shrimp. So Rex couldn't be the burglar, since he's allergic to shrimp.

Discussion: In this little argument, the second sentence is a combo sentence.

So Rex couldn't be the burglar, since he's allergic to shrimp.

It's easy to see which part is which here: the first sentence ("Rex couldn't be the burglar") is marked by "So" as a conclusion; and the second sentence ("He's allergic to shrimp") is marked by "since" as a premise. The negative modal phrase "couldn't" is also probably acting as a conclusion marker here.

So far the argument falls into standard form like so.

1. He [Rex] is allergic to shrimp.

∴ Rex [isn't] the burglar

The remaining sentence is an additional premise in support of the conclusion. It is numbered and added to the standard form of the argument.

1. He [Rex] is allergic to shrimp.

2. Whoever broke into the cafeteria stole a side of ham and 10 pounds of shrimp.

∴ Rex [isn't] the burglar

Note finally that this little argument is a bit peculiar, since the conclusion ("Rex isn't the burglar") comes in the middle of the passage, wedged between two premises.

That's something that only happens in small arguments like this, where – precisely because the argument is so small – every sentence is at or near the beginning, or else at or near the end. In longer, more complex arguments we won't find the conclusion stuck in the middle like this.