

1.4. 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 option 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'll call such a premise-conclusion combination a “**combo sentence**”.

Here's an example.

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

The conclusion marker “so” tags what follows (“Dr. Slim's already gone to bed”) as the conclusion.

The light is off, **so** Dr. Slim'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** Dr. Slim'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 Dr. Slim's already gone to bed.

1. The light is off

∴ Dr. Slim'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 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. Consider first this unpuzzling example.

Jake won't be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer. **So** Jezebel won't be attending either, **since** she won't go without Jake.

The second sentence is a combo sentence with two markers: “so” marking the first part as the conclusion, and “since” marking the second part as a premise.

Jake won’t be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer. **So** Jezebel won’t be attending either, **since** she won’t go without Jake.

1. Jake won’t be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer.
2. She [Jezebel] won’t go without Jake.

∴ Jezebel won’t be attending either

A slight scrambling of sentence order yields a more perplexing phrasing.

Jake won’t be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer. **So** **since** Jezebel won’t go without Jake, she won’t be attending either.

The second sentence is still a combo sentence with conclusion marker “so” and premise marker “since”; but now both markers are stacked up at the beginning, before “Jezebel won’t go without Jake”. Judging by markers alone, it’s not clear whether that sentence is a premise, or a conclusion.

But recognizing this argument as a harmless variation on the earlier one, we see that it’s still arguing that Jezebel won’t be attending Blazing Cat either. That means the other part of the combo sentence, “Jezebel won’t go without Jake,” is a premise, and this argument falls into the same standard form as its earlier variant.

Jake won’t be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer. **So** **since** Jezebel won’t go without Jake, she won’t be attending either.

1. Jake won’t be attending the Blazing Cat festival this summer.
2. Jezebel won’t go without Jake.

∴ She won’t be attending either

Here the combo sentence is a “**so since**” sentence. “So” marks the (upcoming) conclusion; but before getting to that, the author inserts an additional premise (marked by “since”).

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

*Premise. **So, since** Further Premise, Conclusion.*

1. Premise
 2. Further Premise
-

∴ Conclusion

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.

3. Additional Premise Markers. We note finally how the introduction combo sentences brings with it additional ways of marking a premise.

First, note that within a combo sentence English allows us to tag a sentence (or its equivalent) as a premise by phrasing it in **gerund** form, where the verb of the sentence ends with “-ing” rather than having tense – as in this example.

Having five members, our band is a quintet.

In this combo sentence the first part – “Having five members” – is in effect a sentence stated in abbreviated form. “Having five members” here acts as premise, with “Our band is a quintet” as the conclusion meant to follow from that sentence.

By rephrasing the premise as a normal sentence of English (giving it the same subject and tense as the sentence which follows), we can put the combo sentence into standard form like so.¹

1. [Our band has] five members.

∴ Our band is a quintet.

The following combo sentences thus have the same meaning.

Having five members, our band is a quintet.

Since [our band has] five members, our band is a quintet.

Two further premise markers appearing in combo sentences are “given that” and “in light of (the fact that)”.²

¹ Marking a sentence as a premise through such a subject-less “-ing” phrasing can of course only be used within a larger sentence such as a combo sentence, since “Having five members,” for example, can’t stand on its own as a grammatical sentence of English.

² While we take “given that” to serve unambiguously as a premise marker, the word “given” on its own is ambiguous. For “given” sometimes does mark a premise in a combo sentence – as in “Given the increased enrollment, we’ll need to hire more staff,” where “given” is equivalent to “since”. But in other cases “given” marks one part of a conditional sentence – as in “Given sufficient funding, we could accommodate the increased enrollment,” where “given sufficient funding” means “if we were given sufficient funding”.

Note that “in light of” can occur on its own (without “the fact that”) when it precedes a genitive (possessive) nominal – as in this sentence.

In light of **Dr. Slim’s tendency to exaggerate**, the report is doubtful.

This sentence is equivalent in meaning to the following.

Since Dr. Slim tends to exaggerate, the report is doubtful.

And where “given” (without “that”) occurs before such a genitive nominal, it likewise marks a premise.

Given **Dr. Slim’s tendency to exaggerate**, the report is doubtful.

Whereas when “given” appears before a more generic nominal, it often instead carries a conditional meaning – as in the following.

Given **an opportunity**, Neko and Suki will eat everything.

Conditional phrases such as “if” are discussed in 3.2.

Given that our band has five members, it is a quintet.

In light of the fact that our band has five members, it is a quintet.

So having recognized combo sentences, we come to recognize as well a new group of premise markers.