

# But of Course Start Sentences with *And* and *But*



By Judge Mark P. Painter

**D**o not be afraid to start sentences with *and* or *but*. This signifies good writing. The reason your grammar-school teacher told you not to start a sentence with *and* was because you wrote, *I have a mother. And a father. And a dog.* The last two weren't sentences.

But unfortunately, the teacher didn't later disabuse you of the "rule." It has never been a rule, and has never been in any grammar book. There are many of these false rules, which Bryan Garner, in *Garner's Modern American Usage* — a book you must have — calls "superstitions."

Use *but* rather than *however* to start a sentence, and see how much better it reads. When you start with *however*, it takes a comma; why make the reader pause before you've said anything? And *however* has two senses: the *but* sense and the *either way* sense: *However you look at it, you lose.* Sometimes the reader

## Examples of *And* and *But*

### Holmes:

Courts proceed step by step. **And** we now have to consider whether the cautious statement in the former case marked the limit of the law . . .

**But** to many people the superfluous is necessary, and it seems to me that Government does not go beyond its sphere in attempting to make life livable for them.

### Jackson:

**But** we think the previous cases indicate clearly that respondents are within the Act.

**And** the government tells the Court that not even a court can find out why the girl is excluded. **But** it says we must find that Congress authorized this treatment of war brides and, even if we cannot get any reason for it, we must say it is legal; security requires it.

### Pound:

Hence it is an unjustifiable interference with a natural right. **And** this is exactly what the court said in an actual case.

### William Faulkner:

**But** it was not for him, not yet. The humility was there; he had learned that. **And** he could learn patience.

### Shakespeare:

**But** I am very sorry, good Horatio  
That to Laertes I forgot myself;  
For, by the image of my cause, I see  
The portraiture of his: I'll court his favours.

**But**, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me  
Into a towering passion.

Thou hadst, and more, Miranda. **But** how is it  
That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else  
In the dark backward and abysm of time?

### Tom Wolfe:

He had grown up associating religion with the self-delusion and aimlessness of adults. **But** now he thought about the soul, his soul. Or he tried to. **But** it was only a word!

### Isaac Asimov:

**But** it would be silly to wear clothes in the rain. You didn't wear clothes in the shower. If it rained, you would take off your clothes. That would be the only thing that made sense.

### Lincoln:

**But** in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground.

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has to back up to be sure of the meaning. Any time the reader backs up, you have lost your flow. So if you mean *but*, write it.

Almost any example of good writing pulled at random will contain numerous examples. *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* are well-written — look at the front page of either and circle the number of sentences beginning with *and* or *but*. And the examples provided in the box (page 15) should convince any skeptic.

Pick up any work by a good writer, and you will find countless examples.

Readability

*I always show the readability levels for the column. They are (for my writing only) 14 words per sentence, 0% passive voice, and grade level 6.8. ☑*

*Mark Painter has served as a judge on the Ohio First District Court of Appeals for 14 years, after 13 years on the Hamilton County Municipal Court. Judge Painter is the author of 380 nationally published decisions, 130 legal articles, and 6 books, including The Legal Writer: 40 Rules for the Art of Legal Writing, which is available at <http://store.cincybooks.com>. Judge Painter has given more than 100 seminars on legal writing. Contact him through his website, [www.judgepainter.org](http://www.judgepainter.org).*

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