

CHAPTER 2

SENTENCE PARTS AND PATTERNS

This chapter will review sentence types and structure. First, a definition:

A **sentence** is a series of words that (1) contains a **subject** and a **predicate** and (2) expresses a **complete thought**.

Imagine a house in which the front door opens into a closet. To get to the kitchen, you have to go through the attic; the windows are all in the corners. It might have all the right elements, but they're not in the right place.

Now imagine a house that has its kitchen without a floor. Or a house with a foyer and hallway but no doors. The pieces may be where they belong, but essential pieces are missing.

To be functional, a house—whatever its size or style—must have certain basic elements joined in a logical way. The same goes for sentences. They may come in different sizes and styles, but they must contain the same basic elements and follow certain patterns.

Just about every rule you read in this book can and will be broken. English grammar is full of exceptions. So when we say that every sentence has a subject and a verb, we mean it—mostly. An interjection like *Wow!*, for example, is a special kind of sentence.

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT: THE SUBJECT

The **subject** of a sentence is *who* or *what* the sentence is about. You can usually find the subject by asking who or what carries out the action of the sentence:

<u>I</u> love to paint.	<i>Who</i> loves to paint? <i>I</i> do.
On Wednesdays and Fridays, <u>Pearl</u> and <u>Jasmine</u> attend karate class.	<i>Who</i> attends karate class? <i>Pearl</i> and <i>Jasmine</i> .
<u>Absolute power</u> corrupts absolutely.	<i>What</i> corrupts absolutely? <i>Absolute power</i> .
<u>Remaining silent</u> can be just as destructive as telling a lie.	<i>What</i> can be just as destructive? <i>Remaining silent</i> .

As you can see, the subject usually comes before the verb (what the subject is or does or has done to it). There are three exceptions:

1. When writers invert the order for effect
2. When sentences begin with *there is/are*, *it is/they are*, or *was/were*
3. Questions

Sorry are <u>we</u> who pretend to be what we are not.	Who or what is sorry? <i>We</i> are.
There is <u>no excuse</u> for your behavior.	Who or what is there? <i>No excuse</i> .
Do <u>you</u> really believe in UFOs?	Who believes? <i>You</i> .
No <u>applications</u> will be accepted after July 15.	What will not be accepted? <i>Applications</i> .

Understood Subjects

Do your homework!

Who or what does the homework? The subject is understood to be *you*. This is an imperative sentence—it gives advice or issues a command:

Please feed the dog.

Try the delicious fried calamari!

PRACTICE 1

Underline the subject in each of the following sentences.

1. A watched pot never boils.
2. Every evening, the sun sets over these hills.
3. There are strange goings-on around here these days.
4. What are you doing?
5. Ever since childhood, Lukas has been very artistic.
6. Choose your friends carefully!

Kinds of Subjects

The **simple** subject is the subject without any modifiers or articles (*a/an, the*). The **complete** subject is the subject with its modifiers and articles

Simple: The old yellow house on Turner Road is being demolished tomorrow.

Complete: The old yellow house on Turner Road is being demolished tomorrow.

The simple subject can be a single word, a phrase (a group of words without a subject and verb), or a clause (a group of words containing both a subject and verb)

One word: There's a rabbit in your hat.

Phrase: The phrase "once in a blue moon" means every two and a half years.

Clause: What you just said was the best thing anyone has ever said to me.

These subjects are still simple even though they contain more than one word.

SINGLE AND COMPOUND SUBJECTS

Subjects can be **single** (one person or thing) or **compound** (two or more people or things):

Single subject: Donovan has entered the contest.

Compound subject: Donovan, Ivan, and Melissa have entered the contest.

Single subject: Chimpanzees have highly complex social structures.

Compound subject: Chimpanzees or gorillas have highly complex social structures.

When a compound subject is joined by *and*, the subject is plural; when it is joined by *or*, it is singular if the last item is singular and plural if the last item is plural.

MEMORY TIP

Don't confuse *singular* with *single*. A single subject is one subject performing the action, but that subject can be plural: *The cats were chased up the tree.*

PRACTICE 2

Underline the complete subject in the sentences below. Is the subject single or compound?

1. Unfortunately, Carlos and Jude did not get along well.
2. Thinking of you is my favorite pastime.
3. Unlike Lucinda, I do believe in miracles.
4. There are many false claims and exaggerated truths during a political campaign.
5. No termites or carpenter ants were found by the inspector.

Where the Subject Is—and Isn't

Because most subjects come before the verb, we usually find them toward the beginning of a sentence. But sometimes one or more words or phrases precede the subject:

Honestly, I did not lie to you.

In the middle of the hottest day of the hottest summer on record, Kiku was born.

If you're having trouble identifying the subject, look for the verb. Then, see who or what performs that action. Who didn't lie? *I* didn't. Who was born? *Kiku*.

Sometimes words or phrases—especially those that come between subjects and verbs—impede your search for the subject. Here's a helpful rule: subjects are never in prepositional phrases.

Prepositional phrases—like adverbial and adjectival phrases—are not part of the core sentence. You can eliminate them and still have a completely coherent thought:

Memories, like diamonds, are imperfect.

Both *memories* and *diamonds* are imperfect, but *memories* is the subject. *Diamonds* is part of the prepositional phrase *like diamonds*; we can take that phrase out and still have our core sentence. Without *memories*, on the other hand, the sentence wouldn't make sense:

Memories are imperfect. Like diamonds are imperfect.

In the following sentences, we've bracketed and crossed out prepositional phrases to eliminate other candidates for the subject:

Honestly, I did not lie [~~to you~~].

[~~In the middle~~] [~~of the hottest day~~] [~~of the hottest summer~~] [~~on record~~], Kiku was born.

PRACTICE 3

Underline the subject(s) in the following sentences.

1. With my costume on, I won't be recognizable.
2. The boys on the baseball team planned a surprise party for their coach.
3. Raj, terrified of making a mistake, would not raise his hand in class.
4. The gym in the school is in serious disrepair.
5. The color of these walls is quite soothing.

MEET THE PREDICATES

The **predicate** of a sentence is the verb and anything that logically belongs with it—the objects, modifiers, or complements (we'll define these shortly). The predicate usually ends the English sentence. In the sentences below, complete subjects are underlined and predicates are in brackets:

I [love to paint].

Pearl and Jasmine [attend karate class on Wednesdays and Fridays].

Remaining silent [can be just as destructive as telling a lie].

MEMORY TIP

The subject is who or what the sentence is about (who or what performs or receives the action). The predicate is the verb and any objects, complements, or modifiers.

Predicates can be single or compound. A compound predicate has the same subject for two or more different verbs:

Single predicate: A good neighbor [helps when asked].

Compound predicate: A good neighbor [helps when asked] and [asks for help].

PRACTICE 4

Put a slash (/) between the subject and predicate in each sentence.

Example: The Willow River/floods every spring.

1. For many years, the Republic of Congo was a colony of Belgium.
2. Contrary to popular belief, most species of snakes are not poisonous.
3. The most popular fruit worldwide is the mango.
4. The African continent is full of rich natural resources, including diamonds and oil.
5. Have you heard the news?

Predicates and Sentence Patterns

As you've seen, the basic English sentence pattern is subject-predicate. Predicates come in different shapes and sizes, forming four main sentence patterns:

- s-v: subject-verb
- s-lv-c: subject-linking verb-complement
- s-v-o: subject-verb-direct object
- s-v-io-o: subject-verb-indirect object-object

LINKING VERBS AND COMPLEMENTS

In some sentences, the base verb is a **linking verb (lv)**—a verb that links a **subject (s)** to its **complement (c)**.

A complement is the part of a predicate that describes or renames the subject. To *complement* means to make perfect or complete; a complement completes the subject. Complements are connected to the subject by a linking verb:

I / am / a painter.
s lv c

"Once in a blue moon" / means / about once every two and a half years.
s lv c

The complement *a painter* describes the subject *I*. The phrase *about once every two and a half years* defines *once in a blue moon*.

Forms of the verb *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were, being, and been*) often serve as helping verbs, but when *to be* is the base verb (as in the first example) it is a linking verb. Descriptive verbs, such as *become, feel, appear, look, seem, taste, sound, and smell*, are often linking verbs as well.

To test for a linking verb, remove the verb and insert an equal sign; does it make sense?

I = painter

Once in a blue moon = about once every two and a half years

This *doesn't* work for predicates that do *not* have subject complements:

Absolute power *corrupts* absolutely. I *understand* your message.

Absolute power \neq absolutely. I \neq your message.

PRACTICE 5

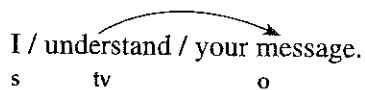
Here are the sentences from Practice 4. Does each follow the **s-lv-c** pattern?

1. For many years, the Republic of Congo was a colony of Belgium.
2. Contrary to popular belief, most species of snakes are not poisonous.
3. The most popular fruit worldwide is the mango.
4. The African continent is full of rich natural resources, including diamonds and oil.
5. Have you heard the news?

RECEIVING THE ACTION: DIRECT OBJECTS

While linking verbs connect a subject and complement, **transitive verbs (tv)** take their action out on a **direct object (o)**: a person or thing in the predicate. There are a number of types of object; when we simply say *object* we mean the direct object.

I / understand / your message.
s tv o



In this sentence, *message* receives the action of the verb; it is what is being understood.

I / will pick up / some milk on the way home from work.
s tv o [prepositional phrases]

Like subjects, direct objects are never in prepositional phrases.

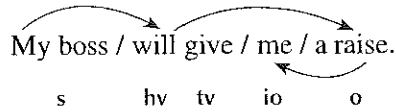
PRACTICE 6

Circle the direct objects in the following sentences.

1. For some reason, Peter Pumpkin Eater put his wife in a pumpkin shell.
2. The alarm startled me.
3. The general found shelter for his troops.
4. The bus drops Tyler off at his front door.

WHO IT'S FOR: INDIRECT OBJECTS

The direct object *directly* receives the action of the verb. The **indirect object (io)** receives the direct object:



A *raise* is what will be given, so it is the direct object. But who will receive that raise? *Me*—the indirect object.

Here's one more example:

The police / questioned / Anna about the accident.

s tv o [prepositional phrase]

The police / asked / Anna / many questions about the accident.

s tv io o [prepositional phrase]

In the first sentence, there is no indirect object; Anna directly receives the action of the verb *questioned*. In the second sentence, *questions* is the direct object and *Anna* is the indirect object.

PRACTICE 7

In the following sentences, put a slash (/) between the subject and predicate, underline the verb, and use arrows to indicate the movement of the action from subject to verb, from verb to direct object, and from direct object to indirect object.

1. Between you and me, Sanford should offer Anne that position.
2. Please give Elliot my best.
3. I am offering you a second chance.
4. Minsun is sending me mixed signals about our relationship.

INTRANSITIVE VERBS

In the most basic sentence pattern, **s-v**, the verb is **intransitive (iv)**; no object receives the action. That doesn't mean nothing follows the verb:

Geese / fly south in the winter.

s iv[adverb] [prepositional phrase]

Some verbs are only transitive, some only intransitive, and others, like *fly*, can be either. In the sentence before, it's intransitive, but in the following sentence, it's transitive:

I / fly / a private jet / for a government official.
 s tv o [prepositional phrase]

PRACTICE 8

Mark each verb **lv** for linking verb, **tv** for transitive verb, or **iv** for intransitive verb. Circle the direct object, if any.

1. I love chocolate chip cookies.
2. You are my true love.
3. I offer you my unconditional love.
4. I live for love.
5. Only love can save me now.

Pattern Variations

As you've seen, the four basic sentence patterns—**s-v**, **s-lv-c**, **s-v-o**, and **s-v-io-o**—can vary (1) when writers invert order for effect, (2) in questions, and (3) in *there is/are* constructions:

[Why] did / you / give / Michaela / credit [for my work]?
 [adv] hv s v io o [prep phrase]

TYPES OF SENTENCES

Sentence type is determined by the number and type of clauses a sentence contains. Before attacking them, quickly review what a subordinate clause is. A subordinate clause cannot stand alone. It is *subordinate* to an independent clause, without which it doesn't express a complete thought.

As you saw in chapter 1, subordinate clauses usually begin with a **subordinating conjunction** or a **relative pronoun**. In the following examples, each clause is bracketed with a slash between subject and predicate, and the subordinate clause indicator (the conjunction or relative pronoun) is in bold:

[You / act] [as if you / don't care].
 [independent clause] [subordinate clause]

[[Whoever / finds my wallet] / will get a reward].
 [[subordinate clause within] independent clause]

Note that in the second example, the subordinate clause is the subject of the sentence.

MEMORY TIP

Subordinate means inferior to or subject to the control of. At work, you are subordinate to your boss. A subordinate clause is inferior to an independent clause.

Type 1: The Simple Sentence

A simple sentence contains one independent clause and no subordinate clauses. The subject and predicate can be single or compound, but the sentence contains only *one* subject-predicate pair:

I / must be true to myself.
 s v

Then I / can be true to others.
 s v

Type 2: The Compound Sentence

A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses and no subordinate clauses. The two independent clauses are connected by a **coordinating conjunction** or by a semicolon with or without a **conjunctive adverb** (see chapter 1).

[You / must be true to yourself]; otherwise, [you / cannot be true to others]
 [independent clause]; conjunctive adverb [independent clause]

Type 3: The Complex Sentence

A complex sentence contains one independent clause with one or more subordinate clauses:

[Before you can be true to [those you / love]], [you / must be true to yourself].
 [subordinate clause [subordinate clause]], [independent clause]

Type 4: The Compound-Complex Sentence

A compound-complex sentence consists of two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

[I / know that [if I / am not true to myself]], [I / cannot be true to others].
[independent clause [subordinate clause]], [independent clause]

PRACTICE 9

Identify subject-predicate pairs in each proverb below. Bracket each clause; determine whether it is independent or subordinate and how the clauses relate to each other. Mark each sentence S for simple, C for compound, X for complex, or CC for compound-complex.

Example: [The believer is happy]; [the doubter is wise]. —*Hungarian*
(s) (p) (s) (p) =C

1. A stumble may prevent a fall. —*English*
2. Never trouble trouble until trouble troubles you. —*Chinese*
3. Deceive the rich and powerful if you will, but don't insult them. —*Japanese*
4. Speak the truth, but leave immediately after. —*Slovenian*
5. A handful of patience is worth a bushel of brains. —*Dutch*
6. Be happy while you're living, for you're a long time dead. —*Scottish*

SUMMARY

A **sentence** is a group of words containing both a **subject** and a **predicate** and expressing a **complete thought**. The subject is who or what the sentence is about. In imperative sentences, the subject is understood to be *you*. Subjects are never in prepositional phrases. The predicate is the verb with its objects, modifiers, and complements.

Both subjects and predicates can be **single** (one singular or plural subject or predicate) or **compound** (two or more singular or plural subjects or predicates).

The basic order for English sentences is subject-predicate, but that order is reversed in questions, *there is/are* statements, and sentences that are inverted for effect. There are four common subject-predicate patterns: **s-iv-c**, **s-v-o**, **s-v-io-o**, and **s-v**.

A **clause** is a group of words containing a subject and predicate. Clauses may be **subordinate** or **independent**. There are four types of sentences: **simple** (one independent clause), **compound** (two independent clauses), **complex** (one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses), and **compound-complex** (two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate clauses).

PRACTICE ON YOUR OWN

Choose a page in a newspaper, magazine, a memo from work or school, or a book you've been reading. Identify sentence parts and patterns—subjects and predicates, complements and objects. Find all four sentence patterns and all four types of sentences.
