

English Language Lesson: The Sentence

A sentence is a collection of words that work together to express a complete thought. Sentences form the most basic building blocks of the English language. Once you've mastered the sentence, you have created a foundation for all of your academic writing.

Types of Sentences

There are four types of sentences, categorized by the purpose of the sentence.

1. Declarative: A declarative sentence makes a statement.
That cloud looks like a pirate ship.
Summer classes take too much time.
I want to go home and take a nap.
2. Interrogative: An interrogative sentence asks a question.
Did you take pictures at Megan's wedding?
Who put my dishes on the counter?
Did Jon play his guitar at the concert last night?
3. Imperative: An imperative sentence gives an order or command.
Please don't leave your socks on the floor!
Turn right at the stop light.
Phil, pour us some glasses of soda.
Note: Imperative sentences may end with an exclamation mark.
4. Exclamatory: An exclamatory sentence expresses strong emotion.
Oh no!
What a coincidence!
Bother!
Note: Exclamatory sentences often do not have a subject and predicate.

Sentence Composition: Subject and Predicate

Sentences are composed of two parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject is the focus of the sentence – it's the thing being talked about. The predicate is what we are saying about the subject.

Examples:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Predicate</u>
The weather	will be rainy and cold for the rest of the summer.
Abbi	has a new baby named Micah.
You	are going to the store with me whether you like it or not.

Not all sentences are as cleanly divided. In some cases, the subject of the sentence appears at the end:

Normal order: The car came around the corner.

Reversed order: Around the corner came the car.

In imperative sentences, the subject is often not stated. The recipient of the sentence is understood to be the subject.

Stated: Turn the car at the stoplight.

Understood: (You) turn the car at the stoplight.

In other cases, the predicate of the sentence is split on either side of the subject:

Normal: Barack Obama was elected president of the USA after a hard-fought campaign.

Split: After a hard-fought campaign, Barack Obama was elected president of the USA

This is true of interrogative sentences, or questions:

Where was the church?

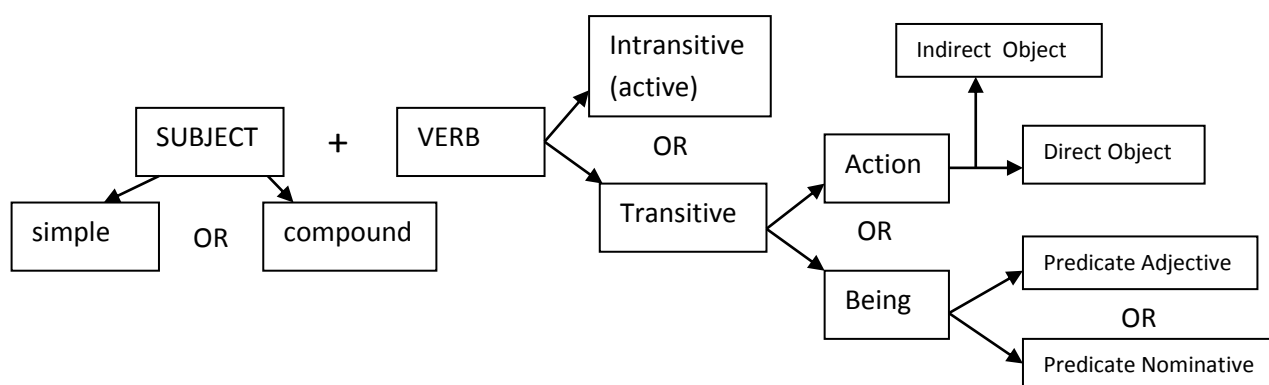
The subject is “the church”; the predicate is “was where.”

Note: Words that modify the subject belong to the subject. Words that modify the predicate belong to the predicate.

Example: [The blue and green tent] [was slowly sagging to the ground.]

Advanced Sentence Composition: Subjects Verbs, Complements

Both the subject and the predicate of a sentence can be broken down into smaller parts. As we look at the different parts, it may be helpful to keep this chart in mind:



Subjects

Sometimes, there will be more than one thing composing the subject. Multiple parts of a subject will be joined by an “and” or an “or.”

Simple subject: The hat was sitting on the table.

Compound subject: The hat and the gloves were sitting on the table.

You’ll notice that when a subject is compound, the predicate changes to match it. You can look at this in more detail in the handout on verbs.

Verbs

The predicate of the sentence is broken down into several parts. The first part is the verb, the word that indicates what the subject is doing or being. In the previous examples, the verbs are “was sitting” and “were sitting” – the groups of words that indicate what the subjects, “the hat” or “the hat and gloves,” were doing.

Verbs: Transitive and Intransitive

Verbs can be one of two types: transitive and intransitive. An *intransitive* verb can stand alone as an action. It does not need additional information to make sense.

Example: The girl blushed. (*We wouldn't ask "The girl blushed what?"*)
 We arrived. (*We wouldn't ask "We arrived what?"*)

It is possible to elaborate on intransitive verbs by using modifiers (words that elaborate on *how* a verb operates; ie. Where? When? In what manner?), but it is not necessary (see the resource on modifiers).

A *transitive* verb is a verb that suggests more information. A sentence with a transitive verb must have an object, something or someone that receives the action of the verb.

Example: James is a drummer. (*We couldn't stop with the verb "is." We would have to ask, "James is what?"*)

Kaitlin wants a candy bar. (*The verb needs an object to tell us what Kaitlin wants.*)

Some verbs can be either transitive or intransitive depending on what we want to express:

Example: Ben plays outside. (*Intransitive: there is no object to the playing.*)

Ben plays the bass. (*Transitive: There is an object that receives the playing.*)

Transitive Verbs: Being and Action

If the verb of a sentence is intransitive, it needs no further action and the sentence can end. If the verb is transitive, it may be one of two types: action or being.

An *action verb (transitive)* suggests that something occurs. Unlike an *action verb (intransitive)*, a transitive action verb indicates that an action is being done to or upon something or someone.

Example: Vic invests money in the stock market. (*Vic performs the investing on the money.*)

Example: The hot dog stand sells bratwurst and sodas. (*The hotdog stand performs the selling of the brats and sodas.*)

Example: After the show, Jarrod watched the television. (*Jarrold performed the watching on the television.*)

A *being verb* indicates existence or a state of being. It tells us what the subject *is*. Being verbs must take a predicate nominative or adjective (additional information after the verb, like an object but not always a noun) because they elaborate on the quality or type of existence. There are eight being verbs: *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*.

Example: Kaylin is a basketball player. (*The verb connects Kaylin to what type of thing Kaylin is.*)

Example: Ben is exasperated. (*The verb connects Ben to the state Ben is in.*)

Example: Matt's degree was a fake. (*The verb connects Matt's degree to the quality of the degree.*)

Objects, Predicate Nominatives, Predicate Adjectives

As we mentioned earlier, transitive verbs need additional information to complete the sentence. There are three types of this information: direct objects, predicate nominatives, and predicate adjectives. Direct objects belong with action verbs while predicate nominatives and adjectives belong with being verbs.

A direct object receives the action of an action verb. It is always a noun (person, place, or thing) that is being acted upon.

Example: The groomer trimmed the dog. (*The dog is receiving the action of grooming*).
 I don't remember this city. (*The city is the object of my remembering*).
 Jana left the books in the rain. (*The books received the action of being left*).

Direct objects have a special quality: they can take additional information about to whom or for whom the action occurs. The recipient the direct object is called the *indirect object*.

Example: The groomer trimmed the dog *for Jed*. (*"The dog" receives the action of grooming, but the grooming is done for Jed.*)
 Jana gave *me* the books. (*"Me" is the recipient of the books Jana gave.*)

A predicate nominative (PN) is a noun that stands for or re-describes a subject with a being verb.

Example: The heart is a muscle in the body. (*"Muscle" renames "heart" – it tells the reader what the heart is.*)

The iphone is a powerful tool. (*"Tool" renames "iphone."*)

One way to test if an object is a predicate nominative is to see if it can be reversed with the subject.

Example: Dr. Baldwin is the Vice President.

The Vice President is Dr. Baldwin.

(*These sentences convey the same meaning, even if the subject and PN are reversed.*)

A predicate adjective (PA) is an adjective that tells us the quality of the subject. An adjective is a descriptor that provides more information about a noun.

Example: After supper, the dog is tired. (*"Tired" gives information about the state of being of "the dog"*).

The t-shirt was stained with sweat. (*"Stained" tells us what state the t-shirt was in.*)

Sometimes, a predicate nominative has its own adjective, so remember to perform the reversing test:

Example: Mt. Everest is the tallest mountain in the world. (*It looks like "tallest" is the predicate adjective. However, "tallest" is describing "mountain" not "Mt. Everest." Because we can reverse the sentence and retain the meaning – The tallest mountain in the world is Mt. Everest – we have a predicate nominative.*)