

The Parts of a Sentence

A *sentence* is a group of words expressing a complete thought. It is composed of two parts:

1. The *subject*: the part about which something is being said
2. The *predicate*: the part that says something about the subject

In the following examples, the subject has been underlined and the *predicate* has been italicized:

1. Coyotes *were howling in the distance.*
2. The telephone in the lobby *rang.*

However, occasionally the complete subject can be in the middle or end of a sentence. The subject of the following sentences is in **bold**.

1. In dim light, will **this camera** take pictures?
2. On the table was **a silver vase**.
3. Does **Brian's car** have a tape deck?

Practice (Write the complete subject of each sentence):

1. The first repair job in space took place in 1984.
2. The Solar Maximum Mission satellite had made spectacular discoveries about solar flares.
3. Unfortunately, Solar Max blew three fuses.

Now, within the **complete subject** is a main word or group of words. This is known as the **simple subject**.

- a. The simple subject is the most important word in the complete subject. This word names the person, place, thing, or idea being talked about.
- b. Adjectives and prepositional phrases that modify the simple subject are included in the complete subject only.
- c. When I ask for the *subject* of a sentence, I want the simple subject unless otherwise stated.
 - a. Examples:
 - i. Their scientific discoveries made them famous.
 1. *complete*: Their scientific discoveries
 2. *simple*: discoveries
 - ii. The eloquent Martin Luther King, Jr., made many fine speeches.
 1. *complete*: The eloquent Martin Luther King, Jr.
 2. *simple*: Martin Luther King, Jr.

The same thing can apply with a **complete predicate**. The **simple predicate**, or **verb**, is the main word or group of words within the **complete predicate**.

- a. The essential word (or words) in the complete predicate is always the simple predicate, usually referred to as the *verb*.
- b. It is the *verb* which is essential in completing a statement.
 - a. Example:
 - i. The ambulance raced out of the hospital drive and down the crowded street.
 1. *complete*: raced out of the hospital drive and down the crowded street.
 2. *simple (verb)*: raced
- c. The simple predicate can be one verb or a verb phrase such as what we have discussed earlier in the semester.

Practice (Follow the directions below):

Write both the complete and simple subject of each sentence.

1. At first Nelson was unable to dock the satellite.

2. A docking adapter on the front of his spacesuit failed to latch onto the special pin on the satellite.

3. The two astronauts were able to begin the repair job three days later.

Write both the complete and simple predicate of each sentence.

1. Many writers' first novels are autobiographical.

2. *Look Homeward, Angel*, the first novel of Thomas Wolfe, was written about his early life in Asheville, North Carolina.

3. In the novel appear the people and scenes of Wolfe's youth.

The Parts of a Sentence, continued

I. More about the Subject

1. The best way to find the subject of a sentence is to find the verb, or *simple predicate*, and ask “Who?” or “What?” in front of the verb.
 - a. Examples
 - i. Here you can swim year-round. [The verb is *can swim*. Who can swim? The answer is *you*, the subject.]
 - ii. Over the hill thundered the horses. [The verb is *thundered*. What thundered? The *horses* thundered; therefore, *horses* is the subject.]
 - iii. The price of those tapes seemed too high to us. [The verb is *seemed*. What seemed? *Price* is the subject.]
2. **Practice (Write each verb and its subject):**
 - a. Even before the equal rights movement, American women became leaders in their professions,
 - b. Evangeline Booth was General of the International Salvation Army from 1934 to 1939.
 - c. The Salvation Army has always treated men and women equally.
3. The subject of a verb is **never** in a prepositional phrase.
 - a. Examples
 - i. Most **of the women** voted.
 1. Subject: Most (not **women**)
 - ii. Around the corner from here is a store.
 1. Subject: store (not **corner**)
4. **Practice (Write each verb and its subject):**
 - a. Many regions of America have their own local legends.
 - b. A pine-forested area of New Jersey is supposedly haunted by the Jersey Devil.
 - c. This fearsome monster reportedly chases campers and wayward travelers through the woods.

II. The Subject in an Unusual Position

5. Sentences that ask questions
 - a. An easy way to find the subject in sentences that ask questions is by rearranging the question into a statement, and then asking “Who?” or “What?” in front of the verb.
 - i. Examples
 1. Was the train late? *becomes* The train was late. [What was late? *Train*.]
 2. Has she answered the letter? *becomes* She has answered the letter. [Who has answered? *She*.]

6. Sentences beginning with *There*
- a. *There* is never the subject of a sentence except when spoken of as a word, as in this sentence. Don't be confused because it appears in the spot the subject normally would some of the time.
 - b. To find the subject of such sentences, omit *there* and ask "Who?" or "What?" before the verb.
 - c. Examples
 - i. There is a drawbridge over the river.
 1. subject: drawbridge
 - ii. There are insects in our garden.
 1. subject: insects
7. **Practice (Write each verb and its subject):**
- a. There are many questions on American history in my book.
 - b. Naturally, there are answers, too.
 - c. Under whose flag did Columbus sail?
8. The Understood "You"
- a. In a request or command, the subject of a sentence is usually not stated.
 - b. In such cases, the person spoken to is understood to be the subject, and so an unstated "you" is the subject.
 - i. Examples
 1. Please answer the phone. [subject: you]
 2. Listen carefully to his question. [subject: you]
 - c. However, it gets tricky when there is a name in the sentence as well.
 - i. Examples
 1. Ellen, please answer the phone. [subject: you]
 2. Listen carefully to his question, class. [subject: you]
 - d. These are known as "nouns of direct address". This is one of those things you just need to trust me on. Your instincts tell you that "Ellen" or "class" should be the subject, but it is still an understood "you".

III. Compound Subjects

9. A *compound subject* consists of two or more subjects joined by a conjunction (usually *and/or*) and having the same verb.
- a. **Antony** and **Mae** baked the bread. [Who baked the bread? Antony baked it. Mae baked it. *Antony* and *Mae*, then, form the compound subject.]
10. **Practice (Write the compound subjects and their verbs):**
- a. Moles and bats supposedly have very poor eyesight.
 - b. Kettles of soup and trays of sandwiches were prepared.
 - c. April, May, and June are related to what famous comic book character?

IV. Compound Verbs

11. A *compound verb* consists of two or more verbs joined by a conjunction and having the same subject.
 - a. Valerie Brisco-Hooks **entered** and **won** her Olympic events.
 - b. They **looked** but **saw** nothing.
 - c. The committee **met**, **voted** on the issue, and **adjourned**.
 - d. My sister **will buy** or **lease** a car.

12. **Practice (Write the compound verbs in the following sentences):**
 - a. Visit, shop, and relax.
 - b. Pete sings, acts, and dances in the show.
 - c. At the pie-eating contest, Dan devoured four large apple pies and won the prize of twenty-five dollars.

Practice

Rewrite on a separate sheet of paper the ten sentences in this exercise. Then, for each sentence, complete the steps that follow:

1. **Cross out all prepositional phrases so that you can isolate the verb and the subject.**
 2. **Cross out a *here* or *there* at the beginning of a sentence, thus eliminating these words as possible subjects.**
 3. **Underline all verbs TWICE; be sure to include all helpers and all parts of a compound verb.**
 4. **Underline all subjects ONCE; be sure to underline all parts of a compound subject.**
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1. There are ballads for different tastes and occasions.
 2. Ballads tell simple stories and create strong moods.
 3. In ballads people live, work, love, and die.
 4. There words of ballads were written by the common people and therefore relate the concerns of the common people.
 5. In one ballad can be heard a jilted lover's complaints.
 6. In another is found the lament of a mother for her dead son.
 7. The death of a dog and the heroism of a coal miner are related in still other ballads.
 8. How can anyone resist the appeal of such simple tales?
 9. Everyone at some time or other has felt the emotions of the characters in ballads.
 10. Here, then, are some of the popularity of ballads since the Middle Ages.

Number a separate sheet of paper 1-10. Label each word group *S* for sentence if it contains a subject and a predicate, or *F* for fragment if it does not contain both parts. Then copy the simple subject, underlining it once, and the simple predicate, underlining it twice. (Fragments will lack one or both parts.)

Example: 1. The talented musicians played well together.

1. *S* musicians played

1. The jazz sound filled the room.
2. Behind the other instruments was a gently tinkling piano.
3. The saxophonist, with lazy, lingering notes.
4. His friend, the bass player, lent a rich depth to the ensemble's music.
5. A female vocalist with a throaty voice.
6. Charmed the audience with her delivery.
7. Yet, the star of the show was the drummer.
8. For most of the evening she stayed in the background.
9. Until the last half hour.
10. Then she dazzled everyone with her brilliant, high-speed technique.