

Sentence Parts

Remember

Different schools of grammar use differing terminology and sometimes postulate different explanations of grammatical meaning. Remember, whether there are nine principal parts of speech, or eight, or eighteen (the pie gets sliced in different ways), you need to have intuitive working definitions for each. If I ask you what an *adjective* is, or a *preposition*, you need to be able to say something. If I ask you to identify the parts of speech within a sentence, you need to be able to give it a shot.

Stepping through the Material

We need to go over some *sentence basics*. This may be simple stuff, but it is also foundational material. You need to keep the simple distinctions up front in your mind in order to attempt more complex analysis.

Many folks write “sentence fragments” or “incomplete sentences.” Such constructions don’t have both subject and predicate and they don’t express complete ideas. Really good writers get away with fragments: they construct ideas where the subject or predicate are well understood, if not stated. These writers are making conscious, stylistic decisions. They are often mimicking spoken English. Generally speaking, we don’t get to do this.

There are four types of sentences: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory. If one of our goals is to be able to take apart the grammar of a sentence, knowing some of the tricks is helpful.

Declarative sentences are normally Subject + Verb order. *This is the typical order in the English language. In some languages, Verb + Noun is typical (classical Arabic, Insular Celtic languages, and Hawaiian).*

Interrogative sentences, questions, often reverse the normal sentence order. This is good to remember when working to identify the parts of a complex interrogative sentence. They may split the verb: *Do you remember your first grade teacher? Do you?*

Imperative sentences most often have as their subject “You” understood. They are normally commands. (“Think of an imperative

sentence that is not a command.” *I don’t think you can do so.*)

Exclamatory sentences. There is not much to say about exclamatory sentences. They often use interjections. Most good writers do not overuse them.

A *Subject* is a noun, pronoun, or *noun group* (noun phrase) about which something is said. The subject can be divided into simple subject and complete subject.

The big shaggy dog noisily slurped the warm, greenish water.

“dog” is the simple subject. “The big shaggy dog” is the complete subject (that is, the simple subject plus all words that modify or complete it).

Again, the complete subject is the simple subject plus all words that are associated with it: these are additional words that *modify* or *complete* the simple subject.

A *Predicate* is the part of the sentence that makes a statement about the subject.

The predicate includes the verb (which may be made up of main verb plus helping or auxiliary verbs), various verb objects or complements that complete the statement begun by the verb, plus any modifiers.

Grammatical Analysis

Many grammarians suggest that you should begin grammatical analysis by finding the verb. Although this is good advice – verbs are deeply important (and often powerful), you can follow any method that works. But remember that the verb is important. If you cannot find it, you are sunk.

Parts of Speech

Consider the following sentences.

The *counter* was made from granite and steel.
I will *counter* with a left hook of wit.
The poor odd fellow made a strange *counter* offer.

The fact that many words can function as more than one part of speech is extremely important. You cannot memorize the usage every individual word in complete detail; context is essential.

Consider the parts of speech listed below. Write two sentences that use each part of speech. You can use definitions provided here:

https://blogs.stockton.edu/grammar/files/2023/09/8_principal_parts_F2023.pdf .

If we were meeting on this day, I would ask for volunteers to go up to the board to write sentences using each part of speech. I would then ask you to explain the part of speech and how it functions within your sentences.

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|---------------|--|
| 1) Nouns | 6) Conjunctions (coordinating & subordinate) |
| 2) Pronouns | 7) Prepositions |
| 3) Adjectives | 8) Interjections |
| 4) Verbs | |
| 5) Adverbs | |

Note that some grammarians describe *articles* (or *determiners*) – *a*, *an*, *the* – as a separate part of speech. Admittedly, they are specialized adjectives. In this course we will consider them as a type of modifying adjective.

A Bit More

Perhaps no single word or part of speech is too tricky (quick, define an adverb). But when words and parts of speech start to work together, things can get more complicated.

Let's start with a simple *prepositional phrase*. At its simplest the prepositional phrase has a preposition (such as *in, on, of, at, by*) and an object of a preposition, a noun or pronoun (such as *in house, by heart, of you, at the corner, etc.*). The preposition joins its object with some other word in the sentence and indicates a relationship between those words.

Perhaps the key point is that each word of the prepositional phrase joins together in a unit of meaning and the entire phrase functions as though it were an adjective or adverb (sometimes but not often as a noun).

Dickie drove (to the Wawa) (with a friend) (from her old neighborhood).

The first prepositional phrase, "to the Wawa," modifies "drove," telling where Dickie traveled; "drove" is a verb, so it is an adverbial prepositional phrase. The second prepositional phrase also modifies "drove," so it is also adverbial. The third prepositional phrase modifies "friend," a noun, so it is an adjectival prepositional phrase.

Marge's need (for silence) (in the morning) was famous (on the lake).

The first prepositional phrase modifies "need," a noun, so it is adjectival. The second modifies "silence," noun, so it is also adjectival. The third modifies "famous" an adjective, so it is adverbial.

A Discriminating Point of Grammar

Consider the following sentences. Can you see the difference in the use of the word “down”?

Tom scanned down the page. (adverb)

Tom jumped (down the hole). (preposition)

One way to view the grammatical difference in the use of “down” is to delete the word from each sentence.

Tom scanned the page.

Tom jumped the hole.

In the first sentence, the general meaning is retained even without “down.” Tom still scanned the page; we just don’t know in what direction; “down” is a useful but not necessary modifier. In the second sentence, however, without “down” the meaning has been completely altered. “Tom jumped down the hole” means just that: Tom jumped *into* a hole. With “down” removed, though, the meaning shifts to something like “Tom jumped *over* the hole.” This suggests the greater significance of “down” in the second example. Here “down” is acting as a preposition and not only joins but adds meaning (as part of an adv. prep. phrase).

Remember, understanding words in context is essential to analyzing grammar.

Phrases

Phrases are groups of words that can be seen to act as a single part of speech, that have an internal grammar, but do not have both a subject and predicate.

some phrases

noun phrase

verb phrase

prepositional phrase

verbal phrases

The driving snow made tobogganing better. [noun phrase]

The kids had been sitting (at the edge) (of the hill). [verb phrase, two prepositional phrases.]

Clauses

Clauses are groups of words that *do have both a subject and a predicate*.

Dependent clauses can be seen to act as a single part of speech, have an internal grammar, and have both a subject and predicate.

There are two major types of clauses

1) those that can stand alone = Independent clauses

2) those that cannot stand alone = Dependent clauses There are two types of Dependent clauses

Subordinate clauses

Relative clauses

Subordinate clause (*if, although, when*)

If you read that book, your mind may be scarred.

Relative clause (begins with a relative pronoun: *who, which, that*. Etc.)

I knew a cat who had ten lives.

We will spend quite a bit of time on phrases and clauses during this course. For now I will simply state that the distinction between phrases and clauses is one of the most basic and important distinctions in grammar. Despite their fundamental differences, phrases and clauses operate in strikingly similar ways.

I am not concerned that you memorize the distinctions between simple, compound, complex, compound-complex sentences, but you should understand the distinctions being made. It is these sorts of rich sentences that provide grammatical challenges.

- Simple = independent clause
- compound = two or more independent clauses
- complex = independent clause and dependent clause
- compound-complex = at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause

The differences, when you come down to it, depend on the mix of dependent and independent clauses. We need to get used to recognizing clauses. They often hide in plain sight.

There is a point to be made about compound sentences and punctuation. A compound sentence has two independent clauses. When they are joined by a coordinating conjunction, they need to employ a comma (except for short or quite informal writing).

Another challenge is presented by sentences (whether simple, compound, complex or otherwise) that have multiple subjects and multiple verbs.

The computer, the robotic toy, and two dogs WALKED in the park and LAUGHED at the park benches.

Sentence Patterns

Sentence patterns help to sort out and understand various types of verb objects and complements.

S-AV	Queen Jane walked.
S-AV-DO	She fed the fish.
S-AV-IO-DO	She threw Zoey the bone
S-AV-DO-OC	She called Dylan brother / She called Dylan silly.
S-LV-SC	She is a character / She has been sick. ¹

(S = subject. AV = action verb. DO = direct object. IO = indirect object. OC = object complement. LV = linking verb. SC = subject complement.)

You must be aware of definitions for the 8 principal parts of speech. You must also have working definitions for the following grammatical concepts.

Subject
Predicate
direct object
indirect object
object complement (n. or adj.)
subject Complement (PN + PA)

The sentence patterns described above are a useful way to divide the grammatical universe into categories. Below is another way to understand this universe. Consider what this imperfect chart is attempting to explain. It suggests that a basic divide exists between “modifiers” and “verb objects and complements.”

¹ These sentence patterns are borrowed from David and Barb Daniels, *HarperCollins College Outline: English Grammar*, p. 20.

An imperfect chart

<i>Modifiers</i>	<i>Verb Objects & Complements</i>
adjectives	Action Verbs
adverbs	DO
prepositional phrases [†]	IO
participles	Object Complements, nouns <i>and</i> adjectives [*]
participial phrases	
infinitives (where they modify)	
infinitive phrases (where they modify)	Linking Verbs
Subordinate clauses (where they modify)	SC (PA* + PN)
Relative clauses (where they modify)	

† The chart breaks down a bit here since prepositional phrases are made from prepositions and *objects* of prepositions; nevertheless, prepositional phrases function as a unit, and the way that they function is to modify (except in very rare occasions when they act as nouns).

* The chart breaks down here as well because these items serve as complements, but they also modify.

Thanks for your patience working through this set of notes.

Here's a fun sentence

“The scholar, despite the lack of air conditioning, kept on working by the hot window.”

Sentence by Bill Wend – note the adverb “on” and the gerund “working.” See the OED for “despite,” here a preposition short for “despite of.”