

# Elements of a Sentence

The sentence is the unit of expression in English. A sentence can be defined as group of words that starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. It can also be said to be a group of words with an explicit or implied subject, and finite verb and that expresses a complete thought.

A sentence is made up of five elements which are subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial. An understanding of these elements is necessary if we are going to construct correct sentences. we will discuss this below

**1. SUBJECT:** The subject is usually the first thing that appears in the sentence, except the sentence is a question. The subject of a sentence is the performer of the action specified in the sentence or the focus of sentence (the word around which every other word in the sentence revolves). Below are examples (the subjects are underlined)

- ◆ James loves writing.
- ◆ The wicked man left his children in the rood.
- ◆ Reading in the night is not a good habit.
- ◆ That you know him is not the problem.
- ◆ He is a very interesting character.

As the above sentences illustrate, the position of the subject is filled by nouns (sentence 1), noun phrases (sentences 2 and 3), noun clauses (sentence 4) and pronouns (sentence five). That means it will be a misnomer to use an adjective (except a category adjective-see concord) as the subject of a sentence. That is why a sentence like Beautiful is your name is not correct.

**2. VERB:** The verb follows the subject, except the sentence is a question. For a full explanation of the verb, click here. But here it will be enough to say that a verbs shows the action performed by the subject or the condition or state of being of the subject. It is that element in the sentence that gives the sentence meaning and makes it a complete though. A group of words without the verb cannot express a complete thought. The underlined part of the following sentences illustrate the verb

- ◆ James loves writing.
- ◆ The wicked man left his children in the rood.
- ◆ Reading in the night is not a good habit.
- ◆ That you know him is not the problem.
- ◆ He was a very interesting character.

**3. OBJECT:** The object of a sentence is the one that receives the action of the verb performed by the subject. That means that the subject performs the action, the action is the verb, but the one on whom the action is performed, the one that receives the action is the verb. The object comes after the verb is the verb is a lexical verb. The grammatical classes that function as the



object of a sentence are nouns, noun phrases and pronouns. Again the underlined parts of each of the following sentences illustrates the object:

- ◆ Alison bought a car this morning
- ◆ The thief broke into the room on the opposite street
- ◆ The black man loves his wife dearly
- ◆ I saw you last night.

■ ■ There are two types of object:

1. direct objects and 2. indirect object.

The indirect object comes first (if the two of them appears in the same sentence), and it is the one that benefits from the action of the verb. The direct object is a “sufferer”, it suffers from the action of the verb. Consider these sentences, the first part underlined is the indirect object, while the second part is the direct object:

My dad gave me a wristwatch

The president left his wife much money

**4. COMPLEMENT:** The complement is an attribute or quality of the subject or object. If a verb BE or any other copula verbs (like seem, become, appear) comes after the subject, what comes after that verb is not a not object, but a complement in that it will refer back to the subject (or object) and tell us more about it. The grammatical classes that function as complement are adjective and noun phrases. Below are examples

- ◆ The man is a real hero.
- ◆ They elected Johnson president.
- ◆ The day seems beautiful.

**5. ADVERBIAL:** The adverbial is the most mobile element of the sentence. That means it can come anywhere in the sentence (beginning, middle or ending)- unlike the subject, verb, object and complement, which have fixed positions. Adverbials tell us about the place, time, manner, etc of an action. The underlined part of each of the following sentences are adverbials:

- ◆ Alison bought a car this morning.
- ◆ The thief broke into the room on the opposite street.
- ◆ The black man loves his wife dearly
- ◆ I saw you last night.

Of these five elements, only two- the subject and the verb- are compulsory, the rest are optional.

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