

# **The Parts of the Sentence**

The parts of the sentence are a set of terms for describing how people construct sentences from smaller pieces. There is not a direct correspondence between the parts of the sentence and the parts of speech -- the subject of a sentence, for example, could be a noun, a pronoun, or even an entire phrase or clause. Like the parts of speech, however, the parts of the sentence form part of the basic vocabulary of grammar, and it is important that you take some time to learn and understand them.

## ***Subject and Predicate***

Every complete sentence contains two parts: a subject and a predicate. The subject is what (or whom) the sentence is about, while the predicate tells something about the subject. In the following sentences, the predicate is enclosed in braces ({}), while the subject is highlighted.

Judy {runs}.

Judy and her dog {run on the beach every morning}.

To determine the subject of a sentence, first isolate the verb and then make a question by placing "who?" or "what?" before it -- the answer is the subject.

The audience littered the theatre floor with torn wrappings and spilled popcorn.

The verb in the above sentence is "littered." Who or what littered? The audience did. "The audience" is the subject of the sentence. The predicate (which always includes the verb) goes on to relate something about the subject: what about the audience? It "littered the theatre floor with torn wrappings and spilled popcorn."

## ***Unusual Sentences***

Imperative sentences (sentences that give a command or an order) differ from conventional sentences in that their subject, which is always "you," is understood rather than expressed.

Stand on your head. ("You" is understood before "stand.")

Be careful with sentences that begin with "there" plus a form of the verb "to be." In such sentences, "there" is not the subject; it merely signals that the true subject will soon follow.

There were three stray kittens cowering under our porch steps this morning.

If you ask who? or what? before the verb ("were cowering"), the answer is "three stray kittens," the correct subject.

### **Simple Subject and Simple Predicate**

noun or pronoun (or more) that, when stripped of all the words that modify it, is known as the simple subject. Consider the following example:

A piece of pepperoni pizza would satisfy his hunger.



The subject is built around the noun "piece," with the other words of the subject -- "a" and "of pepperoni pizza" -- modifying the noun. "Piece" is the simple subject.

Likewise, a predicate has at its centre a simple predicate, which is always the verb or verbs that link up with the subject. In the example we just considered, the simple predicate is "would satisfy" -- in other words, the verb of the sentence.

A sentence may have a compound subject -- a simple subject consisting of more than one noun or pronoun -- as in these examples:

Team pennants, rock posters and family photographs covered the boy's bedroom walls.  
Her uncle and she walked slowly through the Inuit art gallery and admired the powerful sculptures exhibited there.

The second sentence above features a compound predicate, a predicate that includes more than one verb pertaining to the same subject (in this case, "walked" and "admired").

## Objects and Complements

### Objects

A verb may be followed by an object that completes the verb's meaning. Two kinds of objects follow verbs: direct objects and indirect objects. To determine if a verb has a direct object, isolate the verb and make it into a question by placing "whom?" or "what?" after it. The answer, if there is one, is the direct object:

### Direct Object

The advertising executive drove a flashy red Porsche.

### Direct Object

Her secret admirer gave her a bouquet of flowers.

The second sentence above also contains an indirect object. An indirect object (which, like a direct object, is always a noun or pronoun) is, in a sense, the recipient of the direct object. To determine if a verb has an indirect object, isolate the verb and ask to whom?, to what?, for whom?, or for what? after it. The answer is the indirect object.

Not all verbs are followed by objects. Consider the verbs in the following sentences:

The guest speaker rose from her chair to protest.

After work, Randy usually jogs around the canal.

### Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Verbs that take objects are known as transitive verbs. Verbs not followed by objects are called intransitive verbs.

Some verbs can be either transitive verbs or intransitive verbs, depending on the context:

### Direct Object

I hope the Senators win the next game.



No Direct Object

Did we win?

Subject Complements

In addition to the transitive verb and the intransitive verb, there is a third kind of verb called a linking verb. The word (or phrase) which follows a linking verb is called not an object, but a subject complement.

The most common linking verb is "be." Other linking verbs are "become," "seem," "appear," "feel," "grow," "look," "smell," "taste," and "sound," among others. Note that some of these are sometimes linking verbs, sometimes transitive verbs, or sometimes intransitive verbs, depending on how you use them:

Linking verb with subject complement

He was a radiologist before he became a full-time yoga instructor.

Linking verb with subject complement

Your homemade chili smells delicious.

Transitive verb with direct object

I can't smell anything with this terrible cold.

Intransitive verb with no object

The interior of the beautiful new Buick smells strongly of fish.

Note that a subject complement can be either a noun ("radiologist", "instructor") or an adjective ("delicious").

## ***Object Complements***

An object complement is similar to a subject complement, except that (obviously) it modifies an object rather than a subject. Consider this example of a subject complement:

The driver seems tired.

In this case, as explained above, the adjective "tired" modifies the noun "driver," which is the subject of the sentence.

Sometimes, however, the noun will be the object, as in the following example:

I consider the driver tired.

In this case, the noun "driver" is the direct object of the verb "consider," but the adjective "tired" is still acting as its complement.

In general, verbs which have to do with perceiving, judging, or changing something can cause their direct objects to take an object complement:

Paint it black.

The judge ruled her out of order.

I saw the Prime Minister sleeping.



In every case, you could reconstruct the last part of the sentence into a sentence of its own using a subject complement: "it is black," "she is out of order," "the Prime Minister is sleeping."

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