Grammar, Composition & Rhetoric

KMHS English Department

Preface

The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and beauty in the world.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

English, the language of Shakespeare, Milton, Joyce, and countless other great minds, comes to us through the family of Germanic Languages descended from an earlier tongue called Proto Indo-European. It is through this common ancestor that English shares its similarities to Latin and the Romance Languages. The peculiar history of our language accounts for its unusually large vocabulary, flexibility, and many idiosyncrasies. As a result, learning and mastering the English language is truly the work of a lifetime. To commence this study, we will begin with individual words, proceed to various types of word groupings, and conclude with the study of larger compositions.

Just as the aim of grammar study is to provide the student with an understanding of clear usage, this text will aim at clarity in its explanations and examples. All efforts have been made to ensure ease of understanding.

In presentation, rules are meant to be **descriptive**, rather than **prescriptive**. That is, the explanations offered convey how the English language has been used effectively based on the natural and historical course of language development instead of arbitrarily imposing a supposed order on the language itself. Language, itself a human construct, is a living, breathing commodity that changes each day. Therefore,

writing down its rules is akin to shooting at a moving target. However, in the attempt, the language's essence often reveals itself. A student's careful observation of the rules described in this text will create a reader, a speaker, and a writer of considerable confidence, fluency, and precision in one of human history's most expressive tongues.

Parts of Speech

1

I believe in New Yorkers. Whether they've ever questioned the dream in which they live, I wouldn't know, because I won't ever dare ask that question.

Dylan Thomas

Overview

English words may be divided into eight types called **parts of speech**. These parts of speech are distinct from one another in their function. Taken together, the eight parts of speech make it possible to express complete thoughts of great simplicity or complexity.

A **noun** names a person, a place, a thing, or an idea.

A **pronoun** takes the place of a noun.

An **adjective** modifies or limits a noun or pronoun.

A **verb** expresses an action or a state of being.

An **adverb** modifies or limits a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

A **preposition** shows the relationship between a noun and some other word in a sentence.

A **conjunction** joins together words or groups of words.

An **interjection** expresses emotion.

Nouns

A noun is essentially a naming word. It may refer to any person, place, thing, or idea. Nouns have the quality of number, which means that they may be **singular** or **plural**. A singular quantity refers to one person, place, thing, or idea. A plural quantity refers to two or more.

Singular	Plural
man	men
friend	friends
goose	geese
library	libraries
bus	buses

As you may observe from the table above, many nouns in English form their plural by adding *-s* or *-es* to their singular form, but exceptions are plentiful.

Common Nouns

A **common noun** is a general name for any person, place, thing, or idea. It takes a lowercase letter and may be preceded by an article (*a, an,* or *the*).

	Common Noun
person	teacher
place	city
thing	game
idea	love

Proper Nouns

A **proper noun** names a specific person, place, thing, or idea. It takes an uppercase letter.

	Proper Noun
person	Peter
place	New York
thing	Macintosh
idea	Christianity

Compound Nouns

A name composed of two or more word forms is called a **compound noun**. In English, these take three forms:

open form: where the word forms are kept separate, as in *lawn chair* or *guitar case*
hyphenated form: where the word forms are linked by a hyphen, as in *wire-cutter* or *eye-opener*
closed form: where the word forms are joined, as in *firefly* or *eyewitness*

If you are unsure about the spelling of a particular compound noun, be sure to check a reliable dictionary.

Collective Nouns

A noun that names a group of items is called a **collective noun**.

a *class* of students
a *troupe* of dancers
a *platoon* of soldiers

In most uses, the collective noun is treated as a singular unit.

Concrete Nouns

Any noun that denotes a tangible, material object is a **concrete noun**. These nouns may be perceived by the five senses.

flower *sweetness* *heat* *tone* *odor*

Abstract Nouns

The name of any idea or concept that cannot be perceived by the senses is said to be an **abstract noun**.

love *patriotism* *fear* *intelligence* *evil*

Pronouns

A word that takes the place of a noun is a **pronoun**. Pronouns exhibit the qualities of **gender**, **number**, and **case**. A pronoun's gender tells if it is masculine, feminine, or neuter (has no gender). Number, as with nouns, shows if a pronoun is singular or plural. A pronoun's case shows its grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence. Put another way, the pronoun's case shows the role that the pronoun plays in the sentence (e.g., a subject, an object, or a predicate nominative). Case will be handled in more detail in the chapter on **Parts of the Sentence**.

There are many types of pronouns, each with its particular use.

Personal Pronouns

In addition to gender, number, and case, personal pronouns also exhibit a certain grammatical **person**.

- **first person** refers to the person (or people) speaking
- **second person** refers to the person (or people) spoken to

- **third person** refers to the person (or people) spoken about

The personal pronouns are as follows:

Personal Pronouns	*Singular*	*Plural*
first person	I, me, my, mine, myself	we, us, our, ours, ourselves
second person	you, your, yours, yourself	you, your, yours, yourselves
third person	he, him, his, himself, she, her, hers, herself, it, its, itself	they, them, their, theirs, themselves

Reflexive and Intensive Pronouns

Personal pronoun forms may have *-self* or *-selves* added to them to form the reflexive or intensive form.

first person	myself, ourselves
second person	yourself, yourselves
third person	himself, herself, itself, themselves

Though reflexive and intensive pronouns use the same form, their usage is different.

A **reflexive pronoun** refers to (or replaces) the subject of a sentence and functions as a complement of the verb (this will be explained later in Parts of the Sentence) or as an object of a prepositional phrase (this will be explained later in Phrases).

> *I allowed **myself** plenty of time to drive there.*
>
> *The boss gave **himself** a huge raise.*
>
> *Jill and David left a lot of work for **themselves**.*

An **intensive pronoun** merely adds emphasis to the word it replaces. It has no grammatical role to play in the sentence.

> *He finished the pizza **himself**.*
>
> *I **myself** had to check the answer.*
>
> *Check the movie times **yourself**.*

Demonstrative Pronouns

A **demonstrative pronoun** points to a person, place, thing, or idea.

this	that	these	those

That *is the jacket he wore to the game.*

It will be difficult to sell ***these*** *tickets.*

Note in the second example that the pronoun *these* is used before a noun. In such a case, the word is called a **demonstrative adjective**.

Interrogative Pronouns

A pronoun used to introduce a question is called an **interrogative pronoun**.

who	whom	which	what	whose

Who *told you about the party?*

Which *of these sweaters do you like best?*

Relative Pronouns

A **relative pronoun** introduces a subordinate clause. Subordinate clauses are groups of words that contain a subject and verb (these will be explained in the chapter on **Clauses**).

that	which	who	whom	whose

My friend ***who*** *grew up in California is named Stephen.*

The Empire State Building, ***which*** *was constructed in 1929, is an iconic symbol of New York City.*

Indefinite Pronouns

A word that refers to a person, place, thing, or idea not specifically named (or not specifically known) is an **indefinite pronoun**.

Could ***someone*** *tell me the way to the cafeteria?*

Each *of the teams must win to advance to the finals.*

all	another	any	anybody
each other	either	everybody	everyone
most	much	neither	nobody
one another	other	several	some

anyone	anything	both	each
everything	few	many	more
none	no one	nothing	one
somebody	someone	something	such

Adjectives

An **adjective** is a type of modifier, a word that limits or describes something else. Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns. Adjectives may be thought of as answering specific questions about the nouns or pronouns they describe.

Which one?	*The **gray** suit*
What kind?	*A **plastic** cup*
How much?	***Adequate** time*
How many?	***Three** dollars*

Though adjectives typically stand in front of the noun or pronoun they describe, they may be separated from it.

*An **impressive** victory.*

*That victory was **impressive**.*

In the second example, the adjective follows a linking verb and describes the subject of the sentence. This is called a **predicate adjective** and will be discussed further in the chapter on **Parts of the Sentence**.

The most frequently used adjectives are called **articles** (*a, an,* and *the*). Since *a* and *an* may refer to any one of a general

group, they are called **indefinite articles**. Since *the* refers to a specific member of a group, it is called the **definite article**.

(Please note that *a* is used before a word beginning with a consonant sound, while *an* is used before a word beginning with a vowel sound.)

Many words commonly used as nouns or pronouns may also be used as adjectives. When the word stands on its own as a person, place, thing, or idea, it is a noun or pronoun. When it stands in front of some other noun or pronoun and describes it, it is an adjective.

*A green **salad** (noun)*

*A **salad** bowl (adjective)*

***Those** are my glasses. (pronoun)*

***Those** glasses are broken. (adjective)*

Verbs

A **verb** expresses an action or a state of being.

*I **waited** for hours.*

*He **was** the class treasurer.*

*My friends **were leaving** in ten minutes.*

A sentence may contain a **verb phrase**, consisting of a **main verb** and one or more **helping verbs** (also called **auxiliary verbs**). Helping verbs often indicate the **tense**, **voice**, or **mood** of the verb.

Tense refers to the time of an action or state of being. **Voice** refers to the relationship between the subject and the action. **Mood** refers to the attitude toward the action or state of being. Helping verbs that indicate mood are called **modals**. The qualities of tense, voice, and mood will be discussed in more detail in the chapter **Verb Usage**.

Common Helping Verbs:

Forms of *be*: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

Forms of *have*: has, have, had, having

Forms of *do*: do, does, did

Modals: can, could, may, might, must, ought, shall, should, will, would

Sometimes, particularly in questions, a helping verb will be separated from a main verb in a sentence.

***Will** you **help** me with this?*

When a sentence is written in negative form, be aware that *no, not, never*, or the contraction *n't* are considered modifiers, not part of the verb phrase.

*I **would**n't **consider** him a close friend.*

Action Verbs

A verb expressing physical or mental activity is called an **action verb**.

*He **kicked** the ball through the goal.*

*I **guessed** how many ping-pong balls filled the fish bowl.*

Linking Verbs

A verb that connects the subject to a word that renames or describes it is called a **linking verb**.

*George Washington **was** the first president.*

*The soup **tastes** salty.*

*The day **was becoming** warmer with each hour that passed.*

Commonly used linking verbs include the forms of *be* (previously noted) and other verbs that relate to the five senses:

appear	become	feel	grow	look	remain
seem	smell	sound	stay	taste	turn

Note that the verbs in this chart may be used as action verbs or linking verbs, depending on the sentence's meaning.

*That actor **appears** in more than ten episodes of the show. (action)*

*The painting **appears** darker in the textbook than on the wall of the museum. (linking)*

Verbs may also be classified as **transitive** or **intransitive.**

A **transitive verb** moves action to a receiver called an **object**. An **intransitive verb** does not. This will be covered in more detail in the chapter **Parts of the Sentence.**

Adverbs

Like adjectives, **adverbs** are modifiers. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They do this by answering certain questions:

How?	*He answered the phone **quickly**.*
When?	***Yesterday**, I walked four miles.*
Where?	*Look out **below**!*
*To what extent?**	*Please answer each question **completely**.*

** To what extent may also be phrased as "Under what condition?"; "How much?"; "How long?"; or, "How often?"*

Unlike adjectives, an adverb does not need to be close to the word it modifies for it to make sense.

***Suddenly**, he heard a loud boom.*

*He heard a loud boom **suddenly**.*

Both of the above examples are acceptable. The writer would place the adverb according to the effect he or she wished to create.

You may note from the examples that adverbs frequently (though, certainly not always) end in the suffix *-ly*.

An adverb that modifies a verb may be placed at any point in the sentence.

***Lately**, I <u>have eaten</u> lunch in my office.*

*He <u>studied</u> **diligently** for the test.*

*We <u>waited</u> for the exam results **anxiously**.*

An adverb modifying an adjective or another adverb will typically stand immediately before the word it describes.

*She was **incredibly** <u>brave</u>.*

*James sang **remarkably** <u>well</u>.*

Certain words may be used as either nouns or adverbs. To determine their usage, ask the adverb questions to see if they are acting as modifiers.

***Today** is Friday. (noun acting as a subject)*

*I have a doctor's appointment **today**. (adverb telling you "when?")*

*His **home** is in Montauk. (noun acting as a subject)*

*He was **home** in bed with a fever. (adverb telling you "where?")*

Prepositions

A **preposition** shows a relationship between a noun or pronoun and some other word in the sentence. The noun or pronoun connected to the preposition is called the **object of the preposition**. The preposition, its object, and any modifiers associated with it make up a **prepositional phrase**. Prepositional phrases will be discussed in detail in the chapter on **Phrases**.

> *Please put your book **next to** the black backpack.*
>
> *He wrote his name **on** the cover.*
>
> ***During** the night, the child felt sick.*

Prepositions frequently indicate a location in time or place.

Prepositions that consist of more than one word are called **compound prepositions**.

While there are hundreds of English words used as prepositions (many infrequently), the following list includes the most commonly seen prepositions:

aboard	about	above	according to	across	after
against	along	amid	among	around	at
because of	before	behind	below	beneath	beside
besides	between	beyond	but (meaning *except)*	by	by means of
concerning	down	during	except	for	from
in	in addition to	in front of	in spite of	inside	instead of
into	like	near	of	off	on
on account of	onto	outside	over	past	prior to
since	through	to	toward	under	underneath
until	up	upon	with	within	without

Many words used as prepositions may also be used as adverbs. When used as a preposition, the word will have an object associated with it. When used as an adverb, it will serve as a modifier.

*Please turn the lights **off**. (adverb)*

*The pencil rolled **off** the desk. (preposition)*

*It is easy to fall **down** since so much ice is on the ground. (adverb)*

*We went **down** the steps carefully since it was dark. (preposition)*

The preposition *to* will be followed by a noun or pronoun acting as its object. When *to* is followed by a verb, it is not considered a preposition but instead part of an infinitive.

to the door (prepositional phrase)

to jump (infinitive)

Conjunctions

A **conjunction** joins words or groups of words.

*Bill **and** Mike became friends in college.*

*He hid the keys under the bed **or** in the drawer.*

*The war had ended, **but** the soldiers had not yet returned home.*

Coordinating conjunctions join together words or groups of words that are used in the same way (or in coordinate form).

and but for nor or so yet

The examples above are all coordinating conjunctions. The first example joins single words, the second joins phrases, and the third joins together clauses.

Correlative conjunctions are pairs of conjunctions that join words or groups of words used in the same way.

both...and
not only...but also
either...or
neither...nor
whether...or

When using correlative conjunctions, be sure to join equal grammatical items (this is known as parallel structure).

***Either** my friends **or** my family will get my that present for Christmas.*

Not only *did you forget your book,* ***but*** *you* ***also*** *lost the copy I lent you.*

A third kind of conjunction, **subordinating conjunctions**, will be discussed in the chapter on **Clauses**.

Interjections

An **interjection** is a word that expresses emotion. It has no grammatical relationship to any other word or part of the sentence.

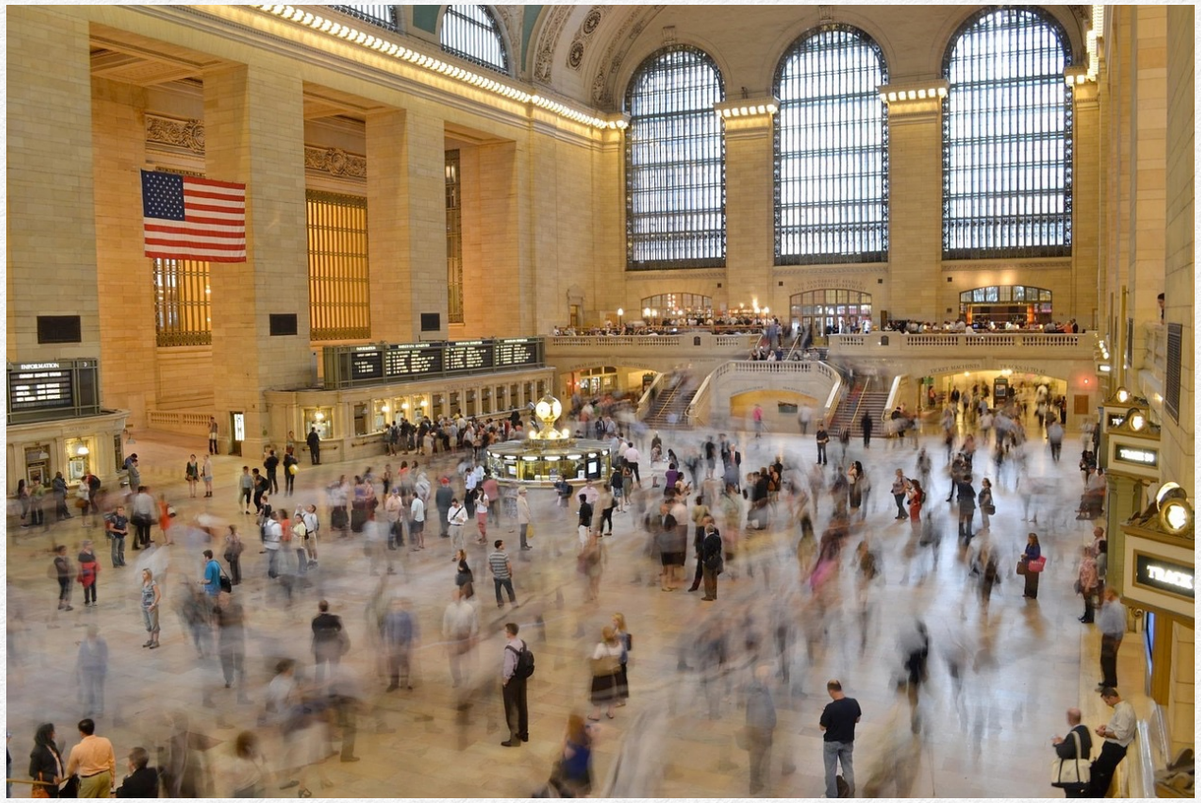
Interjections are frequently set off from the rest of a sentence by some form of punctuation, such as commas or exclamation points.

> ***Wow***! *That was fast!*

> ***Oh***, *I didn't know you'd be here.*

While many interjections are used colorfully in speech, they are avoided in formal writing and speaking situations.

Chapter Review



EXPLORE THE PARTS OF SPEECH

Tap here to examine a model sentence.

Real Text

Parts of the Sentence

2

London is satisfied, Paris is resigned, but New York is always hopeful. Always it believes that something good is about to come off, and it must hurry to meet it.

Dorothy Parker

Overview

A **sentence** is a group of words that contains a **subject** and a **verb** and that expresses a complete thought.

A **sentence fragment** is a word group that either lacks a subject or verb or does not express a complete thought. Though using sentence fragments to express yourself in conversation is usually acceptable, formal writing situations call for complete sentences.

A complete sentence contains two basic divisions: the subject and the **predicate**. These, in turn are further divided.

Words that complete the meanings of verbs are called **complements**, of which there are several types.

The Subject

The **subject** may be loosely defined as the person, place, thing, or idea that a sentence is about. From this definition, we can see that a subject must contain a noun or a pronoun (or some word group acting that way).

The main noun or pronoun that the sentence is about is called the **simple subject**. The simple subject plus any words that relate to it or modify it are called the **complete subject**.

> *My friend's **uncle** used to be a guitar player in The Cars.*
>
> *The first **train** to Boston this morning was delayed by thirty minutes.*

Both of the above examples follow what we may call "natural order" in English. That is, the sentence begins with the subject and is followed by the verb and its complements and modifiers (what we will later call the predicate). While many English sentences follow natural order, there are many other possibilities.

> *How did Kevin's old, dirty **sweater** end up in the backseat of your car?*
>
> *There are ten important **reasons** to vote for that candidate.*

To find the subject of a sentence, first locate the verb. Then place the question "Who?" or "What?" before that verb.

"Who used to be a guitar player in The Cars?"

My friend's uncle used to be a guitar player in The Cars.

"What was delayed by thirty minutes?"

The first train to Boston this morning was delayed by thirty minutes.

Note that the words *here* and *there* are never subjects. When beginning sentences, *here* and *there* act either as adverbs (telling *where?*) or as placeholders (called **expletives**).

There is my coat. (there *is an adverb, but the subject of the sentence is* coat*)*

There is little doubt in my mind. (there *is a placeholder, the subject is* doubt)

In English, commands have the understood subject of *you* (the person spoken to).

Please be quiet. *Help me with this box.*

Both of the commands above are addressed to the listener.

A sentence may also have two or more subjects taking the same verb that are joined by a conjunction. These are called **compound subjects**.

*Both my friend **James** and his brother **Ethan** work at the grocery store.*

*The **class** and the **teacher** forgot about the test.*

Also, note that the simple subject is never found in a prepositional phrase.

*The best **student** (in my French class) won an award.*

While the phrase in my French class *is part of the complete subject,* student *is the simple subject.*

The Predicate

The **predicate** of a sentence contains the verb or verb phrase, along with any words or word groups that describe the verb or complete its meaning. The predicate contains some action or state of being with which the subject is engaged.

The **simple predicate** is simply the **verb** or **verb phrase** in the sentence, since it describes the main action or state of being.

The **complete predicate** includes the verb (or verb phrase) and all words describing it or completing its meaning.

*Many of my friends **visited** family over the vacation.*

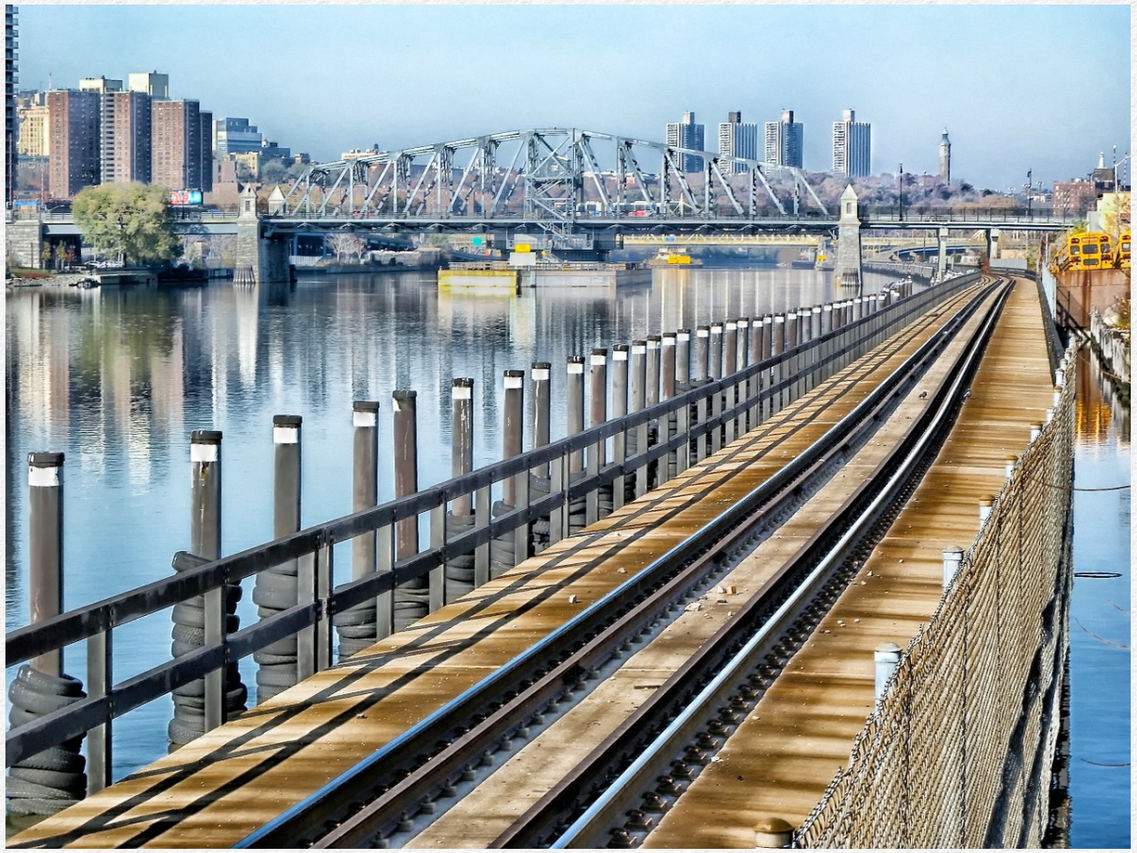
*It **has been** incredibly cold this past winter.*

Just as with subjects, you may have a compound predicate, where two or more verbs are linked and describe actions or states of being performed by the same subject (or subjects).

*We **brushed** our teeth and **washed** our faces before bedtime.*

*The extremely patient man **waited** on line, **paid** for his purchases, and **drove** home in heavy traffic.*

Complements



A word that helps complete the meaning of a verb is called a **complement**. There are several types of complements that vary depending on the type of verb used in the sentence. Since complements relate to the meaning of the verb, they are considered part of the predicate.

Objects of Verbs

Many times, an action verb will take a complement called a **direct object**. A direct object receives the action of the verb (it is the person, place, thing, or idea that the action is done to).

*The batter hit the **ball**.*

*She failed the **test** on the rock cycle.*

*Help your **mother** with the groceries.*

In each of the examples above, the word in bold receives the action of the verb. You may find the direct object by asking "what?" or "whom?" after the action verb.

Hit what? The ball

Failed what? The test

Help whom? Your mother

Since the direct object must always answers these questions, several things may be noted:

1. A direct object is always a noun or pronoun

2. A direct object always follows an action verb.

3. A direct object is never found in a prepositional phrase.

A verb that takes a direct object is said to be a **transitive verb**. Only action verbs may be considered transitive.

Please note that a verb may be used as transitive in one sentence but intransitive in another.

*You may begin the **movie** at 9:00 p.m.*

He began with a question from the homework.

All transitive verbs take direct objects, and some transitive verbs take an additional complement called the **indirect object**. The indirect object refers to the person, place, thing, or idea to whom or for whom the action is done. In this way, it indirectly receives the action.

*Hand the **teacher** your test paper.*

paper *is the direct object,* teacher *is the indirect*

*He gave the new **car** a thorough cleaning.*

cleaning *is the d.o.,* car *is the i.o.*

*She allowed **me** a chance to see her painting.*

chance *is the d.o.,* me *is the i.o.*

Please note that a sentence must first have an direct object to have an indirect object. Like direct objects, indirect objects must be nouns or pronouns, must follow action verbs, and cannot be found in prepositional phrases.

When a sentence contains an indirect object, it will be found between the verb and the direct object, as shown above.

While objects follow action verbs, **subject complements** follow linking verbs. A subject complement is so-named because it refers to the subject by renaming it or describing it.

A **predicate nominative** is a noun or pronoun that follows a linking verb and renames the subject.

*George Washington was our first **president**.*

*The Yankees have been **champions** more than any other team in professional sports.*

A **predicate adjective** is an adjective that follows a linking verb that describes the subject.

*George Washington was **courageous** and **honorable** as a general.*

*The Yankees were **fortunate** to draft Derek Jeter out of high school.*

***Note: direct objects and predicate nominatives are easily confused. Remember that direct objects follow action verbs, while predicate nominatives follow linking verbs. A direct object receives action, while a predicate nominative merely gives another name for the subject.

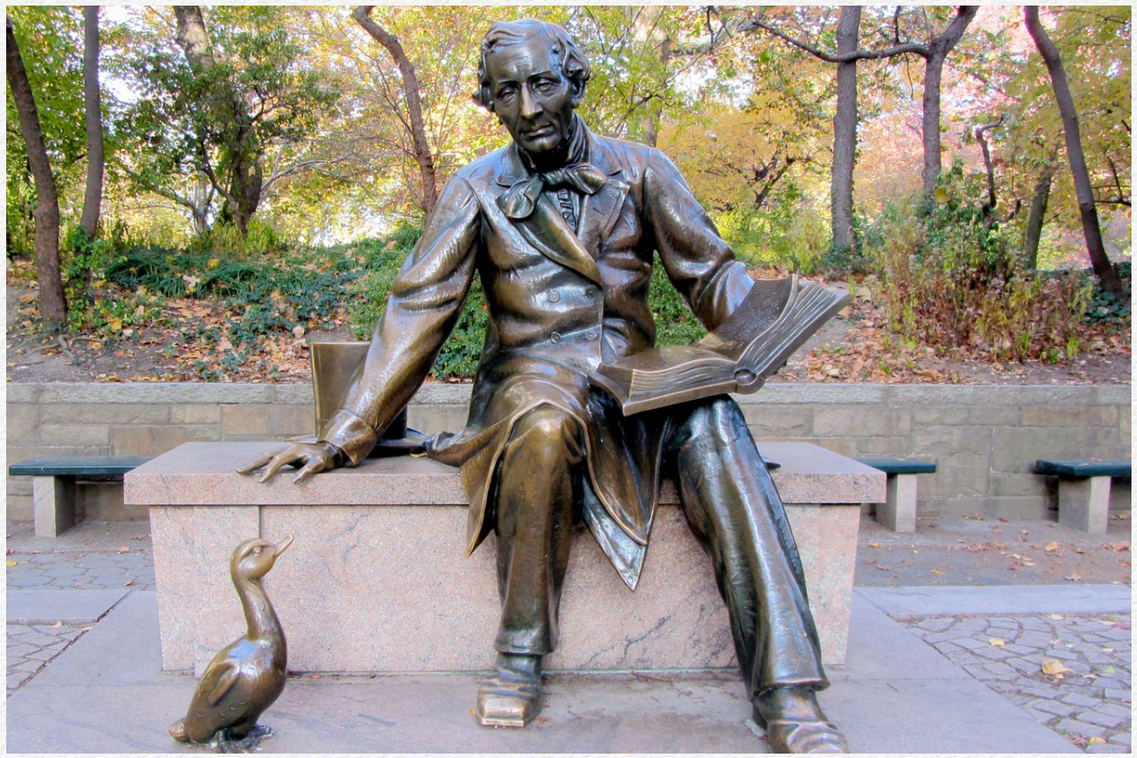
*Mark <u>was</u> a good **friend** of my brother.*

predicate nominative

*I <u>helped</u> my **friend** with his homework.*

direct object

Classifying Sentences by Purpose



English sentences may be classified by their effect or purpose. There are four sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory.

A **declarative sentence** states a fact or an opinion.

This water is cold.

Springfield is the capital of Illinois.

I don't like to drive long distances.

An **interrogative sentence** asks a questions (and therefore ends in a question mark).

Where is that smell coming from?

Who won the World Series in 1996?

How did you remember that?

An **imperative sentence** gives a command. Its subject is understood to be *you* (the person spoken to).

Help me with the groceries.

Please give me another five minutes to finish this.

Stop!

Please note that commands may end in a period or an exclamation point.

An **exclamatory sentence** expresses emotion.

What a fantastic view you have!

How terrible she must feel!

Such a lovely home you have here!

Please note that, while exclamatory sentences may also convey a fact or opinion, their structure and purpose are fundamentally different from a declarative sentence.

Chapter Review

Question 1 of 6

Identify the underlined portion of the sentence.

Sharon's friend Eli lives in Connecticut.

- A. Simple Subject
- B. Complete Subject
- C. Simple Predicate
- D. Complete Predicate

◀ Check Answer ▶

Agreement

He adored New York City. He romanticized it all out of proportion. To him, no matter what the season was, this was still a town that existed in black and white and pulsated to the great tunes of George Gershwin.

Woody Allen

Overview

Agreement refers to a word's form changing to relate to a specific element in the sentence.

In English, agreement concerns the relationship between subjects and verbs, as well as pronouns and **antecedents**. An antecedent is the word that a pronoun refers to and replaces.

Subject-verb agreement concerns **number**. A singular subject must take a singular verb. A plural subject must take a plural verb.

Pronoun-antecedent agreement concerns both number and **gender**. In addition to having the same number, personal pronouns must have masculine pronouns for masculine antecedents, feminine pronouns for feminine antecedents, and neuter pronouns for neuter antecedents.

Subject-Verb Agreement

A sentence's verb should agree with its subject in number. In other words, a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb.

*My **friend** always **wears** a baseball cap to the beach.*

*Over eight million **people live** in New York City.*

In most cases, agreement is straight-forward. However, certain types of subjects pose difficulty.

Indefinite Pronouns

An **indefinite pronoun** refers to a person, place, thing, or idea not specifically named.

Many indefinite pronouns are singular and, therefore, take singular verbs.

Has anybody seen my lawn chair?

Neither of the twins remembers his kindergarten teacher's name.

Singular Indefinite Pronouns					
another	each	everyone	much	nothing	someone
anybody	either	everything	neither	one	
anyone	enough	less	nobody	other	something
anything	everybody	little	no one	somebody	

Only four indefinite pronouns are always plural and, therefore, take plural verbs.

Plural Indefinite Pronouns			
both	few	many	several

Only a few of her friends live in their hometown.

> *Many of the pianos made by Steinway are still in use in concert halls throughout the world.*

There are six indefinite pronouns that may be singular or plural depending upon the way in which they are used. In order to tell their number, you must look to the object of the prepositional phrase that follows them.

Singular/Plural Indefinite Pronouns					
all	any	more	most	none	some

> ***All** of the chocolate **cake** **was eaten** at the picnic.*
>
> ***All** of the **hamburgers** **were eaten** at the picnic.*
>
> ***Some** of my **time** **was wasted** in a traffic jam.*
>
> ***Some** of my **friends** **were involved** in a traffic jam.*

Please note that these six pronouns are the only time in which a prepositional phrase helps determine agreement.

Compounds

A **compound subject** (two or more nouns or pronouns that take the same verb) may be singular or plural depending on certain circumstances.

Generally, two or more subjects joined by *and* are considered plural.

> ***James** and **Karen** are good friends.*
>
> *The **NFL** and **Major League Baseball** both contribute to charitable organizations.*

As an exception, two nouns joined by *and* are treated as singular when the pair comprise an item usually treated as one entity.

> ***Macaroni** and **cheese** is his favorite meal.*

Turks *and* ***Caicos*** *was a popular vacation spot.*

Nouns or pronouns joined by the conjunctions *or* or *nor* retain their number. Therefore, two singular nouns or pronouns joined by *or* or *nor* will remain singular.

Either ***Jim*** *or* ***Sheila*** *was likely to win the competition.*

Neither the ***rain*** *nor the* ***wind*** *was going to stop this football game!*

Two plural nouns or pronouns joined by *or* or *nor* will remain plural.

My ***friends*** *or family* ***members*** *were traveling great distances to the wedding.*

The ***Romans*** *or the* ***Greeks*** *are responsible for most of our literary heritage.*

If a singular and a plural are joined by *or* or *nor*, use the noun or pronoun closest to the verb to determine agreement.

The ***teacher*** *or the* ***students*** *want to reschedule the test.*

The ***students*** *or the* ***teacher*** *wants to reschedule the test.*

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns usually take a singular verb, particularly when the group acts in unison.

The ***platoon*** *was sent into active combat.*

The ***audience*** *has applauded graciously for the performers.*

When members of a collective act as individuals, the noun may be considered plural and assigned a plural verb.

The ***class*** *have begun their research projects on the topics they chose.*

The ***jury*** *disagree about the innocence of the accused.*

Numbers, Fractions, Percentages, and Measurements

Many different measurements using numbers, such as dollar amounts, weights, and other quantities may be singular or plural, depending upon the way in which they are used. Try to determine if the sentence logically refers to a single unit or multiple pieces.

> ***Twenty dollars*** *<u>is</u> a lot to spend on a pizza.* (Singular, one amount)
>
> *All* ***twenty dollars*** *<u>have</u> George Washington's face on them.* (Plural, distinct items)
>
> ***One quarter*** *of the* ***profits*** *<u>are donated</u> to charity.* (Plural, refers to *profits*)
>
> ***One quarter*** *of this* ***year*** *<u>has passed</u> quickly.* (Singular, refers to *year*)

In cases such as those above, allow context to help you.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

A pronoun should agree with its antecedent in both number and gender. If gender is not specified for singular personal pronouns, be sure to allow for both possibilities.

*Did **someone** lose <u>his or her</u> book?*

***One** of my friends called from <u>his or her</u> cell phone.*

In the examples above, it is not clear if the person in question is male or female. Therefore, both singular pronouns are used. Do not substitute the plural pronoun *their* in these situations, as it does not agree in number.

Indefinite Pronouns

The same rules apply for the use of indefinite pronouns as antecedents as for subjects. Refer to the lists and descriptions in the previous section for aid.

Singular indefinite pronouns are replaced by singular personal pronouns. Plural indefinite pronouns are replaced by plural personal pronouns.

***One** of the girls forgot <u>her</u> violin.*

***Many** of his friends professed **their** admiration for him.*

Remember that six indefinite pronouns (*all, any, more, most, none,* and *some*) may be singular or plural depending on their use.

***None** of the **participants** finished their tests on time.*

***None** of the **candy** was left in its package.*

Compounds

Here again, the same rules apply as for subject-verb agreement.

Compounds joined by *and* are generally plural unless commonly used to refer to one thing.

*My **parents** and my **brother** took their vacation in Hawaii.*

***Peanut** and **jelly** deserves its place as America's favorite sandwich.*

Singulars joined by *or* or *nor* remain singular, while plurals remain plural.

*Either **Jillian** or **Sarah** will take her piano lesson after school.*

*The **Yankees** or the **Dodgers** are perpetual favorites in their divisions.*

If a singular and a plural are joined by *or* or *nor*, use the item closer to the pronoun to determine agreement.

*The **conductor** or the **musicians** are waiting for their cues.*

*The **musicians** or the **conductor** is waiting for his cue.*

Note in the example above how the verb changed as well as the pronoun.

Collective Nouns

Though collective nouns will usually be treated as singular items, watch for collectives that are considered plural because the members act as individuals.

*The **team** greatly respected its manager.* (Singular, acting in unison)

Our congress debated their options for health care. (Plural, acting as individuals)

Numbers, Fractions, Percentages, and Measurements

As with subject-verb agreement, use logic and context to determine if a number or quantity is singular or plural.

***Two thirds** of the **students** passed their tests.* (Plural)

***Fifteen percent** of the **company** sold its stock options.* (Singular)

Phrases

4

The true New Yorker secretly believes that people living anywhere else have to be, in some sense, kidding.

John Updike

Overview

A **phrase** is a group of words acting as a single part of speech. This chapter will begin with **prepositional phrases**, which can act as **adjective phrases** or **adverb phrases**.

It will then discuss three kinds of **verbal phrases**: **participial phrases**, **gerund phrases**, and **infinitive phrases**.

Finally, it will discuss **appositive phrases**.

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, a noun or pronoun acting as the object of the preposition, and any modifiers of that object.

Please put your paper ***on my desk****.*

The squirrel ran ***up the tree branch****.*

Adjective Phrases

A prepositional phrase that sits beside a noun or pronoun and describes that noun or pronoun is called an adjective phrase. It answer the questions *which one?* or *what kind?* about the noun or pronoun preceding it.

The man ***in the yellow hat*** *is Curious George's keeper.*

Kevin's friend ***from Southampton*** *showed us around town.*

Adverb Phrases

A prepositional phrase that modifies a verb or other modifier is called an **adverb phrase**. Unlike adjective phrases, which immediately follow the word they describe, adverb phrases may be placed at any point in the sentence.

Adverb phrases answer the questions *how?* or *where?* or *when?* or *to what extent?*

> ***Before ten o'clock***, *I must return her call.* (Answering *when must I return her call?*)
>
> *He found ten dollars* ***on the sidewalk***. (Answering *where did he find ten dollars?*)
>
> *He broke the wooden plank* ***with great force***. (Answering *how did he break the wooden plank?*)
>
> *She answered the question* ***with great thoroughness***. (Answering *to what extent did she answer?)*

Note that any of the above examples could be easily reordered, but the prepositional phrase would still act as an adverb.

> *With great thoroughness, she answered the question.*

Verbal Phrases

A **verbal** is a word formed from a verb that acts as some other part of speech. There are three kinds of verbals:

A **participle** is a form of a verb used as an adjective to modify a noun or pronoun.

*The cabin did not have **running** water.*

*The **broken** watch was fixed at the jewelry store.*

A **gerund** is a form of a verb used as a noun.

***Skiing** requires skill and athleticism.*

*While many people turned off their TVs, John kept **watching**.*

An **infinitive** is a construction of *to* and a verb. It may be used as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

*The students want **to learn**.*

*The first contestant **to answer** will receive credit.*

*It can be difficult **to relax**.*

A **verbal phrase** is a group of words that includes a verbal and any words that complete it or modify it.

The boy ***running for the bus*** *is named Stephen.* (Participial phrase modifying *boy)*

Watching television for hours *can hurt your eyes.* (Gerund phrase)

The school children wanted ***to have a snow day****.* (Infinitive phrase)

Participial Phrases

A **participial phrase** consists of a participle and any words that complete or describe the participle. This may include prepositional phrases. Participial phrases act as adjectives.

The baby ***sleeping peacefully in his crib*** *was awakened by a sudden noise.*

The window ***rattled by the high winds*** *was almost shattered in the storm.*

Stretching for over 2,000 miles*, Route 66 connects Chicago with Los Angeles.*

Note that a participial phrase usually immediately follows the noun or pronoun it describes, as in the first two examples. When a participial phrase begins the sentence, as in the third example, it must, as a rule, modify the subject.

Gerund Phrases

A **gerund phrase** consists of a gerund and any words that complete or describe the gerund. Gerund phrases may also include prepositional phrases.

Wildly choosing a movie at random *is no way to enjoy the cinema.*

At noon, they will begin ***eating their lunches****.*

My favorite pastime is ***playing the ukulele****.*

Since a gerund is a noun, it may be used the same way any noun might. Common uses of the gerund are shown above. In the first example, the gerund phrase is a subject. In the second, the gerund phrase is a direct object. In the third, it is a predicate nominative.

Infinitive Phrases

An **infinitive phrase** consists of an infinitive, along with any words that complete it or describe it, including prepositional phrases.

> ***To score your best on the exam*** *demands careful study.*
>
> *The time* ***to pick fruits and vegetables*** *varies by season.*
>
> *It can be fun* ***to try new board games with your friends***.

The first of these examples uses an infinitive phrase as a noun, the subject of the sentence. The second uses an infinitive phrase as an adjective to describe *time*. The third uses an infinitive phrase as an adverb modifying the adjective *fun*.

Appositive Phrases

An **appositive** is a noun or pronoun that sits beside another noun or pronoun and gives more information about it.

> *Virginia, a **musician**, has incredibly sensitive hearing.*
>
> *Our lawyer **Mr. Lafayette** set the appointment for Thursday.*

An **appositive phrase** is an appositive, along with any words related to it or describing it.

> *Derek Jeter, **shortstop for the New York Yankees**, will most definitely be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.*
>
> ***The first African-American in the Major Leagues**, Jackie Robinson was an inspiration to countless children.*

Note that appositives immediately follow the noun or pronoun they refer to in most cases. Appositives beginning sentences are exceptional, as in the second example above.

Many appositives and appositive phrases are set off by commas, particularly when moving from a proper noun to a common appositive.

> *Denzel Washington, **a famous film actor**, attended Fordham University.*
>
> *The Empire State Building, a steel skyscraper, was built in 1929.*

Note, however, that if the order is reversed, the appositive is no longer set off by commas when moving from a common noun to a proper appositive.

> *The famous film actor* ***Denzel Washington*** *attended Fordham University.*
>
> *The steel skyscraper* ***the Empire State Building*** *was built in 1929.*

Clauses

5

One belongs to New York instantly, one belongs to it as much in five minutes as in five years.

Tom Wolfe

Overview

A **clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and verb. An **independent clause** (also called a **main** clause**)** may stand on its own as a complete thought or sentence. A **subordinate clause** (also called a **dependent clause**) cannot stand on its own and requires some other word group to express a complete thought.

There are three types of subordinate clauses: **adjective clauses** that modify nouns or pronouns; **adverb clauses** that modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs; and **noun clauses** that act some vital part of the sentence, such as the subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate nominative, or object of a preposition.

Once the number and type of clauses in a sentence can be ascertained, that sentence may be classified by its structure as **simple**, **compound**, **complex**, or **compound-complex.**

Independent and Subordinate

A **clause** is a group of words with a subject and verb. A clause may be a complete sentence or only part of a sentence.

Clauses that can stand on their own as sentences are called **independent clauses**. These word groups express a complete thought and are not dependent on any other word group for their meaning to be clear.

> ***Help me with the laundry.***
>
> ***California is the largest state in the U.S. by population.***
>
> ***I need a ticket for the train*** *that leaves from Penn Station.*

In the first two examples, the independent clause forms a whole sentence. In the third, the independent clause *could* stand on its own, but the writer or speaker has provided more information in a **subordinate clause**.

A subordinate clause contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. It requires some other word group to make its meaning clear.

> *A bag* ***that leaks constantly*** *is of no use to me.*
>
> ***When the clock strikes twelve****, I will be fast asleep.*
>
> *He gave* ***what I thought was a rousing speech****.*

In these examples, the clause needs the rest of the sentence to provide vital information.

Types of Subordinate Clauses

Subordinate clauses function as one of three parts of speech:

adjective clauses modify nouns and pronouns

adverb clauses modify verbs, adjective, and other adverbs

noun clauses serve a vital function in a larger clause, such as the subject, an object, or a predicate nominative.

Adjective Clauses

Adjective clauses commonly follow the noun or pronoun they describe. Adjective clauses begin with **relative pronouns** (see **Parts of Speech: Pronouns**), which replace the word the clause describes.

Relative Pronouns				
that	which	who	whom	whose

*The run **that won the game** was scored on an error.*

*Tomatoes, **which were a New World fruit**, were transported back to Europe by explorers.*

*Michael Jordan, **whose fame has spread worldwide**, is one of the richest athletes of all time.*

Note that the relative pronoun *that* is restrictive, which means that the clauses it starts are not set off by commas. The relative pronoun *which* is nonrestrictive, which means that the clauses it starts are always set off by commas. The other relative pronouns may be either. The context of the sentence will determine if commas are needed.

> *The woman **who cuts my hair** has the day off.*
>
> *Christopher Columbus, **who sailed for Spain**, was actually Italian.*

Also note that only human antecedents take *who*, *whom*, or *whose*. Any other antecedent takes *that* or *which* depending on context.

Certain adjective clauses begin with **relative adverbs**.

Relative Adverbs		
where	when	why

The structure and function of these adjective clauses is largely the same.

> *The reason **why you lost** is very clear to me.*
>
> *The Romantic Age, **when much great poetry was written**, also featured famous composers.*
>
> *The space **where you can park** is behind the building.*

Note that the relative pronoun *that* can sometimes be omitted in an adjective clause.

> *The dress **that she wore to the dance** was made by her grandmother.*
>
> *The dress **she wore to the dance** was made by her grandmother.*

When a word or words are left out of a clause, such as the second example, the clause is called an **elliptical clause**.

All adjective clauses serve to modify, so they are never essential to the meaning of the sentence in which they occur.

Adverb Clauses

An **adverb clause** contains a subject and verb and modifies a verb, adjective, or other adverb.

> ***When he was born**, Ronald Reagan was president.*

He wanted to be <u>tall</u> ***like his father was***.

She ran <u>faster</u> ***than any woman had ever run before***.

The words that begin adverb clauses are called **subordinating conjunctions**.

Common Subordinating Conjunctions			
after	lest	though	wherever
although	no matter	till	whether
as	how	unless	which
because	since	until	while
before	so that	what	who
but that	supposing	when	why
if	than	whenever	even though
in order that	that	where	

Like adjective clauses, adverb clauses only modify and are not essential to a sentence's meaning. Unlike adjective clauses, an adverb clause does not need to be near the word it modifies.

Though she was prepared for the test*, she still failed.*

She still failed ***though she was prepared for the test***.

Noun Clauses

A **noun clause** contains a subject and verb and functions as a noun in the sentence. A noun clause may be a subject, a direct object, an indirect object, a predicate nominative, or the object of a preposition.

Where you want to go to college *is an important decision.*
(Subject)

You will lose ***whatever you do not pack safely in your bag***.
(Direct Object)

Please give ***whoever asks for one*** *a new copy of the schedule.*
(Indirect Object)

She was ***what you would call a perfectionist***.
(Predicate Nominative)

From ***what I could see****, the day was clear and warm.*
(Object of a Preposition)

Since noun clauses all fulfill a vital role in the sentence, they are deemed essential. A noun clause, therefore, is embedded in and inseparable from the larger independent clause.

Classifying Sentences by Structure

Sentences may be categorized by four potential structures:

A **simple sentence** contains only an independent clause (no subordinate clauses).

The principal reprimanded the unruly students.

Help me with my chores.

In the beginning of the semester, you should ask lots of questions of your teachers.

Please note that, while simple sentences may contain various types of phrases, they may contain only one clause.

A **compound sentence** contains two or more independent clauses with no subordinate clauses.

Liam wanted another pork chop, so he took one from the platter.

The wind blew softly over the plains; no other sound was heard.

I was eager to get there, and she had no plans, so she joined me for the ride.

Please note that independent clauses may be joined in a sentence in one of two ways:

1.) with a comma and coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)

2.) with a semicolon between the clauses

Independent clauses may **not** be joined with a comma only. This error is called a comma splice and is one of the most common errors in student writing.

A **complex sentence** consists of one independent clause with one or more subordinate clauses.

The team that wins the most games will get home-field advantage in the playoffs.

When you get home, be sure to call me so that I know you arrived safely.

Whatever you need can be found in the bookstore.

The subordinate clauses are underlined in the examples above. Note that, while a complex sentence may have multiple subordinate clauses, it may have only one independent clause.

A **compound-complex sentence** contains at least two independent clauses and at least one subordinate clause.

While you were at work, I started to clean the house, yet I became bored of it quickly.

You may ask why I studied Latin, but the choice was clear to me.

Autumn, which begins in late September, is a beautiful season; however, it cannot compare to Summer, whose warm days and breezy nights will always be my favorite.

Subordinate clauses are underlined in the sentences above. Again, please note how the independent clauses are properly joined by coordinating conjunctions in the first two examples and by a semicolon in the third.

The Correct Use of Verbs

I once started out
to walk around the world
but ended up in Brooklyn,
that Bridge was too much
for me.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Overview

Verbs in English have four distinct **principal parts**. These principal parts are used to construct various tenses and other verbal forms.

Verbs exhibit different **tenses**. Verb tense includes both the time and aspect of action.

Verbs also exhibit **voice**, or the relationship of the subject to the action, either **active** or **passive**.

A verb's **mood** indicates the attitude toward the action.

In English, three particular pairs of verbs create confusion. These are referred to as the **six troublesome verbs**.

Principle Parts of the Verb

Just as students of foreign languages learn the **principal parts** of a verb, students of English should be aware of the verb's four principal parts: the base form, the present participle, the past form, and the past participle. These four forms are called "principal parts" because any other necessary tenses or forms of the verb are derived from them.

Principal Parts of the Verb			
base	**present participle**	**past**	**past participle**
jump	jumping	jumped	jumped
attack	attacking	attacked	attacked
sing	singing	sang	sung
give	giving	gave	given

Please note that the first two example verbs have the same past and past participle forms. This is an indication that these are **regular verbs** in English. Regular verbs form the past and past pariciple by adding *-d* or *-ed* to the base form of the verb.

The third and fourth examples exhibit different past and past participle forms, indicating that these are **irregular verbs**.

The base form of regular verbs is used for the present tense and is combined with *to* to form the infinitive of verbs.

The present participle of the verb is used as a gerund, a participle, or is combined with a form of *be* to create progressive tenses (this will be discussed more on the section on **Tense**).

The past form is used for the past tense of verbs.

The past participle is used as a participle and with forms of *have* to form perfect tenses.

Tense

A verb's **tense** indicates the time of its action or state of being. Tense also indicates a verb's **aspect** or relative completion of the action.

The simple distinctions of past, present, and future are supplemented by the **perfect tenses**. A perfect tense is used to indicate that an action has been completed by the specified time. The perfect tense, therefore, can be used to indicate that one action has taken place or been completed before another.

*He **went** to the store. He **had been** to that store many times before.*
(Past -- Past Perfect)

*He **goes** to the store. He **has been** to that store many times before.*
(Present -- Present Perfect)

*He **will go** to the store. He **will have been** to that store many times before.*
(Future -- Future Perfect)

To show these six tenses on a continuum, each perfect tense would precede its simple tense equivalent.

Each of these six tenses also has a **progressive tense** equivalent. Progressive tenses are used to indicate that an action is ongoing at a specific time.

*I **walked** ten miles.* (Past tense -- at some point in the past)

*I **was walking** ten miles.* (Past progressive tense -- happening at the specific moment in the past mentioned)

The Verb "Take" in All Twelve Tenses

Past Perfect	Singular	Plural
1st person	I had taken	We had taken
2nd person	You had taken	You had taken
3rd person	He (she, it) had taken	They had taken

Past Perfect Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I had been taking	We had been taking
2nd person	You had been taking	You had been taking
3rd person	He (she, it) had been taking	They had been taking

Past	Singular	Plural
1st person	I took	We took
2nd person	You took	You took
3rd person	He took	They took

Past Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I was taking	We were taking
2nd person	You were taking	You were taking
3rd person	He was taking	They were taking

Present Perfect	Singular	Plural
1st person	I have taken	We have taken
2nd person	You have taken	You have taken
3rd person	He has taken	They have taken

Present Perfect Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I have been taking	We have been taking
2nd person	You have been taking	You have been taking
3rd person	He has been taking	They have been taking

Present	Singular	Plural
1st person	I take	We take
2nd person	You take	You take
3rd person	He takes	They take

Present Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I am taking	We are taking
2nd person	You are taking	You are taking
3rd person	He is taking	They are taking

Future Perfect	Singular	Plural
1st person	I will have taken	We will have taken
2nd person	You will have taken	You will have taken
3rd person	He will have taken	They will have taken

Future Perfect Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I will have been taking	We will have been taking
2nd person	You will have been taking	You will have been taking
3rd person	He will have been taking	They will have been taking

Future	Singular	Plural
1st person	I will take	We will take
2nd person	You will take	You will take
3rd person	He will take	They will take

Future Progressive	Singular	Plural
1st person	I will be taking	We will be taking
2nd person	You will be taking	You will be taking
3rd person	He will be taking	They will be taking

Voice

A verb's **voice** indicates its relationship to the subject. A verb in **active voice** has its action performed by the subject. A verb in **passive voice** performs its action on the subject.

*The batter **hit** the ball.* (Active Voice)

*The ball **was hit** by the batter.* (Passive Voice)

*My teammates **celebrated** the win with ice cream sundaes.*
(Active Voice)

*The win **was celebrated** by my teammates with ice cream sundaes.*
(Passive Voice)

As a rule, passive voice verbs are formed with a form of *be* and the past participle.

In writing, the active voice should be used whenever possible because it is more direct and forcible. Exceptions occur when you want to make a particular word the subject of the sentence, you wish to convey inactivity, or you simply do not know who or what performed the action.

Critics of the Restoration did not value Shakespeare as highly as we do. (Active Voice, generally preferred)

Shakespeare was not valued highly during the Restoration.
(Passive Voice, preferred if Shakespeare is the main subject of discussion)

Mood

A verb's **mood** indicates the attitude of the action or state of being. In English, there are three primary moods.

The **indicative mood** is used to express facts or opinions or to ask questions.

> *Napoleon **invaded** Russia despite the conventional wisdom of his day.*
>
> *I **believe** this **is** the finest wine made in the United States.*
>
> *Where **can** you **find** an available hotel room?*

The **imperative mood** expresses commands or requests.

> ***Stop** talking and **listen** closely.*
>
> *Please **speak** clearly into the microphone.*
>
> ***Wait** for you grandmother and **help** her cross the street.*

The **subjunctive mood** expresses suggestions, necessities, wishes, or conditions contrary to fact.

> *I recommend that you **ready** yourself for a difficult exam.* (suggestion)
>
> *It is required that you **fill** out all forms in advance.* (necessity)

*If I **were** you, I would start studying now.* (condition contrary to fact)

*I wish I **were** still on vacation.* (wish)

Note that verbs in the subjunctive mood are often in subordinate clauses. The verb in the main clause often indicates that the subjunctive is necessary.

Six Troublesome Verbs

Certain verbs prove especially tricky in their usage, particularly three pairs called the **six troublesome verbs**. In each of these pairs, one verb is transitive (meaning it must take a direct object) and one verb is intransitive (meaning it never takes an object).

Lie and *Lay*

The verb *lie* means "to rest" or "to recline." It is intransitive and never takes an object. The verb *lay* means "to put" or "to place." It is transitive and requires a direct object.

Principal Parts of *Lie*			
lie	lying	lay	lain

Principal Parts of *Lay*			
lay	laying	laid	laid

The confusion with these verbs stems from their overlapping forms. The past form of *lie* is the same as the base form of *lay*. Remember to determine which verb to use based on the presence or lack of a direct object.

I was lying on the beach when the rain started. (Intransitive)

She was laying the forks next to the knives. (Transitive)

Sit and *Set*

The verb *sit* means "to rest in a seated position." It is intransitive. The verb *set* means "to put" or "to place" and is transitive.

Principal Parts of *Sit*			
sit	sitting	sat	sat

Principal Parts of *Set*			
set	setting	set	set

If you sit for too long, you will get sleepy. (Intransitive)

Please set the time on the alarm for 7:00 a.m. (Transitive)

Rise and *Raise*

The verb *rise* means "to go up" and is intransitive. The verb *raise* means "to cause something or someone to go up" and is transitive.

Principal Parts of *Rise*			
rise	rising	rose	risen

Principal Parts of *Raise*			
raise	raising	raised	raised

Soldiers on Iwo Jima raised the flag to create an iconic image. (Transitive)

Before he rises each morning, Samuel says his prayers. (Intransitive)

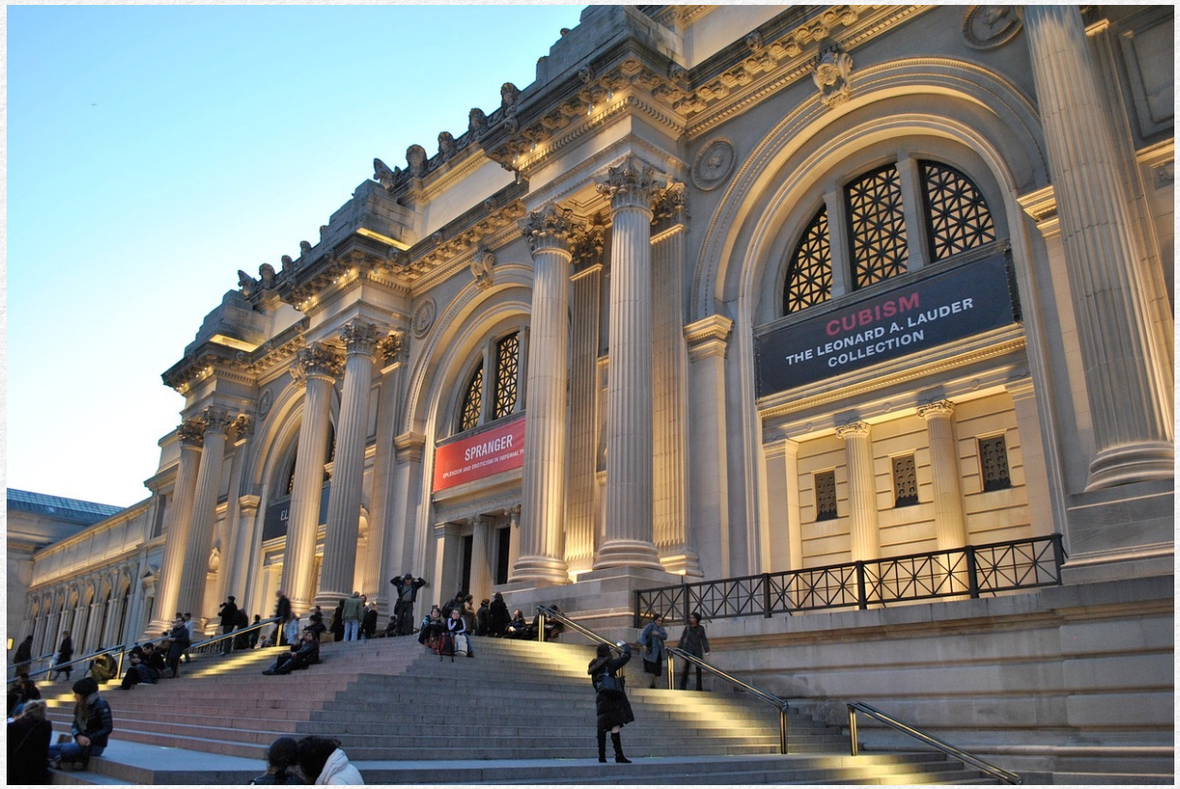
The Correct Use of Pronouns

7

There is something in the New York air that makes sleep useless.

Simone de Beauvoir

Overview



A pronoun changes form or **case** based on its use in the sentence. English distinguishes a **nominative**, **objective**, and **possessive case**.

Certain pronouns pose particular problems, such as **who** and **whom**. Pronouns can also be tricky in **incomplete constructions**.

Case

A pronoun's **case** reflects the role it plays in a sentence.

A pronoun in **nominative case** is used as a subject or a predicate nominative.

Nominative Case Pronouns		
	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I	we
2nd Person	you	you
3rd Person	he, she, it	they

*John and **she** were the first to arrive in class.*

*The winners of the contest were **they**.*

Though the second example may sound odd, nominative case pronouns are correct after linking verbs. Be sure to follow the rule and not your ear in formal writing situations.

A pronoun in **objective case** is used as some kind of object: a direct object, indirect object, or object of a preposition.

Objective Case Pronouns		
	Singular	**Plural**
1st Person	me	us
2nd Person	you	you
3rd Person	him, her, it	them

*His singing impressed **me** the first time I heard it.*

*The postcard from **her** arrived in the mail on Tuesday.*

*She passed **him** a note during study hall.*

Pronouns in **possessive case** indicate ownership.

Possessive Case Pronouns		
	Singular	**Plural**
1st Person	my, mine	our, ours
2nd Person	your, yours	your, yours
3rd Person	his, her, hers, its	their, theirs

***Your** support and generosity made this concert possible.*

*I left **my** book in the classroom.*

*That book is **mine**, and I can prove it.*

Note that the second example uses *my* as a possessive pronoun in front of a noun (considered a possessive adjective), while, in the third example, *mine* stands on its own as a pronoun. Many possessives have two forms in this way.

Who and Whom

Many writers frequently confuse the usage of ***who*** and ***whom***. The difference between them is simply one of case. *Who* is a nominative case pronoun, used for subject or predicate nominatives. *Whom* is an objective case pronoun, used for direct objects, indirect objects, or objects of prepositions.

> *To **whom** should I address this letter?*
>
> *The man **whom** I met last night wore a black overcoat.*
>
> *I didn't know **who** the new president would be.*
>
> ***Who** left the coffee maker on this morning?*

When trying to determine the use of *who* or *whom* in a subordinate clause, first isolate the clause and disregard any other words groups.

> *The teacher **whom we had for European History** also taught Latin.*
>
> *whom we had for European History.*

Then, reorder the clause into "natural order" (subject - verb - complements).

> *we had whom for European History.*

Then, determine the function of *who* or *whom* in the clause.

whom is the direct object.

Incomplete Constructions

An **incomplete construction** refers to a sentence that leaves out words that would logically complete the thought. These frequently involve personal pronouns and can cause confusion to the writer.

I'm a much better driver than you.

I'm a much better driver than you are.

These two ideas express the same concept, but the first leaves our the verb *are*. When dealing with incomplete constructions, be sure to understand the complete thought and choose the pronoun accordingly.

She lives closer to the park than I.

She lives closer to the park than I live.

She lives closer to the park than me.

She lives closer to the park than she lives to me.

Both ideas above are possible. Be sure to choose the correct version based on the context and intended meaning.

Punctuation

I knew I couldn't live in America and I wasn't ready to move to Europe so I moved to an island off the coast of America - New York City .

Spalding Gray

Overview

Punctuation marks serve as visual separations between individual words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Just as a speaker pauses at certain intervals (and an audience understands the logic of these pauses), so a writer uses punctuation to create distinction between words and word groups.

An astute writer will master the clear use of punctuation to aid his or her reader in understanding written text.

Commas

The **comma** has several useful functions. While the use of some commas is a matter of style, most follow clear usage guidelines.

Items in a Series or List

Use commas to separate three or more items in a series or list.

> *The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker were characters in a nursery rhyme.*
>
> *She brought her garment bag, suitcase, backpack, and laptop bag on the trip.*

Please note that the last comma before the conjunction (sometimes called the serial comma, Oxford comma, or Harvard comma) is technically optional. Its use is encouraged in almost all writing situations. Please be consistent throughout your text in its use.

Introductory Elements

A writer may choose to set off an introductory word or phrase with a comma.

> *By tomorrow, we should be halfway to London.*
>
> *Suddenly, I forgot why I called you.*

These uses of the comma are at the discretion of the writer to aid in clarity. However, any introductory element of four or more words must be set off with a comma.

By this time next year, you will have a new job.

Before he could turn around, I was back in my seat.

Nouns of Direct Address

When addressing a person or group directly, their name or names are set off with commas.

James, would you come here please?

The question, gentlemen, is too important not to answer.

Nonessential or Parenthetical Information

Information that is not restrictive or necessary to the understanding of the sentence is set off with commas. While a writer may be tempted to use parentheses for such remarks, commas should be used instead in formal writing situations.

Martial law, which had lasted only a few months, was repealed and peace reigned once again.

Aunt Cecilia, Jim's favorite family member, couldn't come to the wedding.

Separating Independent Clauses

As noted in the **Clauses** chapter, commas are used along with coordinating conjunctions to join independent clauses in compound or compound-complex sentences.

I wanted to stop and eat, but he insisted that we keep driving.

This is difficult, so you will need to help me.

Additional Standard Uses

Commas are also used to separate the name of a city from its state or country.

Dallas, Texas

Bogota, Colombia

Commas separate dates from the year in which they occurred.

March 18, 1987

Commas also separate names from certain titles.

Thurgood Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

James Wilson, Secretary and Treasurer

Semicolons

The **semicolon** is another, more specific means of separating words groups.

It serves two primary functions

Semicolons with Independent Clauses

A semicolon may separate two independent clauses in the same sentence without the aid of a conjunction.

> *The day dragged on for what seemed like years; he had nothing at all to do.*

> *Most people loved the performance; Carl was unimpressed.*

Semicolons with Lists

While items in a series are traditionally separated by commas, the items themselves may sometimes already contain commas. In these cases, semicolons are used to separate the items in a list or series.

> *The train stopped at New Haven, Connecticut; Boston, Massachusetts; and Bangor, Maine.*

This use of the semicolon is rare.

Colons

The **colon** is primarily a mark of introduction.

Signalling a List of Particulars

Most frequently, a colon introduces a list of particulars.

> *He bought the essentials at the store: notebooks, looseleaf, pencils, and pens.*
>
> *My mother developed several symptoms: fever, swelling, and nausea.*

Please note that a colon should never separate a word from another word that completes its meaning. Therefore, colons should never follow verbs or prepositions.

Incorrect: *He wanted: a hamburger, a milkshake, and fries.*
Correct: *He wanted a hamburger, a milkshake, and fries.*
He wanted three things: a hamburger, a milkshake, and fries.

Incorrect: *Please listen for: your name and the time of your appointment.*
Correct: *Please listen for your name and the time of your appointment.*
Please listen for the following: your name and the time of your appointment.

Illustration or Amplification

A colon is also used to introduce a point that illustrates, explains, or answers a previous statement.

> *This required one thing: extreme patience.*
>
> *He was excited: he had never been to the opera before.*

Appendix

There are roughly three New Yorks. There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born here, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter — the city that is devoured by locusts each day and spat out each night. Third, there is the New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something. Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness; natives give it solidity and continuity; but the settlers give it passion.

E. B. White

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