

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

SENTENCES

THE PARTS OF A SENTENCE

Sentence: a group of words that expresses a complete thought. Every sentence contains a subject and a predicate.

1. Subject: the noun or noun phrase that tells whom or what the sentence addresses.

- Roger* decided to save more money.
- Almost all cats* dislike water.

Full or complete subject: the subject and all the words that modify it.

- Patrick Henry's dream of freedom for all citizens* compelled him to make his famous declaration.

Simple subject: the main noun of the complete subject.

- Patrick Henry's *dream* of freedom for all citizens compelled him to make his famous declaration.

Compound subject: a complete subject with multiple simple subjects.

- Miguel and the young boy* became friends.

2. Predicate: a verb or verb phrase telling what the subject does or is.

Full or complete predicate: the verb of the sentence and all the words that modify it.

- The old dog *climbs slowly up the stairs*.

Simple predicate: the main verb in the full predicate that indicates the action or state of being of the simple subject.

- The old dog *climbs* slowly up the stairs.

Compound predicate: a complete predicate with multiple verbs.

- He *thought of his lover and missed her dearly*.
- The goose *was looking straight ahead and running for the pond*.

3. Clause: a part of a sentence that contains its own subject and predicate.

Independent clause: a clause that could function as its own sentence.

- When the Mets are playing, *the stadium is full*.

Dependent clause: a clause that cannot function as its own sentence. A dependent clause relies on an independent clause to complete its meaning.

- A dependent clause can function as a **noun**,
—I realized *that I owed Patrick fifty dollars*.

as an **adverb**,

- When the Mets are playing*, the stadium is full.

or as an **adjective**.

- The beef *that I ate for dinner* made me queasy.

Elliptical clause: a type of dependent clause with a subject and verb that are implied rather than expressed.

- Although unhappy*, she still smiled.

In the clause *Although unhappy*, the subject and verb she was are implied: Although (she was) unhappy.

4. Phrase: a group of related words without a subject or predicate.

Noun phrase: a phrase that acts as a noun.

A noun phrase can function as a **subject**,

- The snarling dog* strained against its chain.

object,

- He gave her *the book of poems*.

prepositional object,

- The acrobat fell into *the safety net*.

gerund phrase,

- Dancing the can-can* is a popular activity in Argentina.

or **infinitive phrase**.

- To dream is to be human*.

Adjective phrase: a phrase that modifies nouns or pronouns. Participial phrases and many prepositional phrases are adjective phrases.

- The actor *playing Puck* left much to be desired.

Adverb phrase: a phrase that begins with a preposition, and that functions as an adverb.

- The theater was crowded *with the actor's fans*.

Prepositional phrase: a phrase made up of a preposition, its object, and its modifiers.

- The roof *of the old theater* was leaking badly.

5. Modifier: a word or phrase that modifies or adds information to other parts of a sentence. Adjectives, adverbs, and many phrases and clauses are modifiers.

Limiting modifier: a word or phrase that limits the scope or degree of an idea. Words like *almost*, *only*, or *barely* are modifiers.

- It was *almost* time for dinner.

Restricting modifier: a phrase or clause that restricts the meaning of what it modifies and is necessary to the idea of its sentence.

- Any dog *that has not had its shots* should be taken to a veterinarian immediately.

Nonrestricting modifier: a modifier that adds information but is not necessary to the sentence. Commas, dashes, or parentheses set apart nonrestricting modifiers.

- Seventeenth-century poets, *many of whom were also devout Christians*, wrote excellent poetry.

- We could hear the singing bird—*a wren, perhaps, or a robin*—throughout the forest.

TYPES OF SENTENCES

1. Sentences can be defined according to their content or intention:

Declarative sentence: a sentence that states a fact or an idea.

- The police officer stopped the man in the red car because he was speeding.

Interrogative sentence: a sentence that asks a question and ends in a question mark.

- Where are the songs of spring?

Imperative sentence: a sentence that issues a command or makes a request.

- Please bring me the newspaper.

Exclamatory sentence: a sentence that issues a command or makes a dramatic observation. Exclamation points should not punctuate declarative sentences.

- What a tiring day!
- Get away from me!

2. Sentences also can be defined according to their structure:

Simple sentence: a sentence made up of a single independent clause.

- It is a beautiful day.

Compound sentence: a sentence made up of two independent clauses connected by a conjunction.

- It is a beautiful day, and I'm eager to go outside.

Complex sentence: a sentence made up of one or more dependent clauses connected to an independent clause.

- Because it is a beautiful day, I'm eager to go outside.

Compound-complex sentence: a sentence made up of multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

- I love sunshine, and because it is a beautiful day, I'm eager to go outside.

COMMON GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES

1. Dangling modifier: a modifying word or phrase that is not properly matched with the word it modifies. Dangling modifiers often occur at the beginnings of sentences.

- Traveling north*, the trees get smaller.

In this sentence, *traveling north* is meant to describe the person who travels, but instead it describes *trees*, which don't travel at all. One correct version would be:

- Traveling north*, I notice that the trees get smaller.

2. Squinting modifier: a modifier that is placed ambiguously, so that it is unclear whether it modifies the word before it or the word after it.

- People who travel in Europe often prefer to stay in affordable hotels*.

This could mean either "People who travel often in Europe prefer to stay in affordable hotels" or "Often, people who travel in Europe prefer to stay in affordable hotels."

3. Pronoun confusion: pronouns that do not have clear antecedents make sentences confusing.

- Jacob called a neighbor to ask about his car*.

His could refer to Jacob or the neighbor. A correct version would be:

- Jacob called a neighbor to ask about the neighbor's car*.

4. Split infinitives: when possible, no words should come between *to* and the main verb in an infinitive.

- Incorrect:* He decided *to boldly go* where no man had gone before.
- Correct:* He decided *to go boldly* where no man had gone before.

5. Comma splicing: Joining two independent clauses with a comma rather than a semicolon or period creates a run-on sentence.

- Incorrect:* Many people think I'm tall, they don't realize I wear platform shoes.
- Correct:* Many people think I'm tall; they don't realize I wear platform shoes.

6. Double negatives: When applied to the same word or phrase, two negative modifiers confuse the meaning of the sentence.

- Incorrect:* I *haven't hardly* begun to think of my plans for next year.
- Correct:* I *have hardly* begun to think of my plans for next year.

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

PARTS OF SPEECH

NOUNS

Noun: a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Types of nouns

Abstract noun: names an idea or concept.

—*Beauty* is in the eye of the beholder.

Concrete noun: names a physical object.

—The *brick* landed on my *head*.

Common noun: refers to a person, place, or thing without giving it a specific, capitalized name.

—The *man* drove the *car* down the *street*.

Proper noun: gives the specific, capitalized name of person, place, or thing.

—*John* was proud to be from *Iowa*, which he considered the best place in the *United States*.

Countable noun: has both a singular and plural form, and refers to people or objects that can be counted.

—The *geese* were excited because the *boy* continued to throw them *crumbs*.

Uncountable noun: does not have a plural form, and refers to something that cannot be counted.

—Nothing made Curtis happier than bad *poetry*.

Collective noun: names a group of people or things. A collective noun takes a singular verb even though it names a group of people or things.

—**Correct:** The *class* was happy that the test was postponed.

—**Incorrect:** The *class* were happy that the test was postponed.

Gendered noun: takes a different form depending on the gender of the person to whom it refers. Gendered nouns usually refer to particular occupations.

—Their usual *waiter* was sick, but the *waitress* who replaced him was efficient and friendly.

Appositive: explains the noun or noun phrase that directly precedes it. In the following sentence, *the grouch* is an appositive describing *my father*.

—*My father the grouch* hated to be hugged.

Gerund: a noun formed by adding *-ing* to a verb.

—I love *dancing*.

Infinitive: a noun formed by a verb and the word *to*.

—*To vote* is the best way to effect social change.

NOUN & PRONOUN CASES

The case of a noun or pronoun is the form it uses to relate to other words in a sentence. There are three cases.

Subject case: the form that nouns or pronouns take when they act as subjects.

—I threw the ball. **You** love asparagus. **It** fell off the cliff.

Ernie loves his cat.

Object case: the form that nouns or pronouns take when they are objects of verbs or prepositions.

—The ball hit **me**. Does asparagus make **you** sick? A rock landed on **it**. The cat loves **Ernie**.

Direct object: a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that receives the action of a verb. The direct object can be found by asking "Who or what was affected by the verb's action?"

—I gave **the book** to my cousin. I gave **it** to the boss.

Indirect object: a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase indirectly affected by the action of a verb. The indirect object can be found by asking "To or for whom or what was the verb's action carried out?"

—I gave **my cousin** the book. I handed **him** my application.

Prepositional object: a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that ends a phrase begun by a preposition.

—I gave the book to **my cousin**. **To whom** should I submit my application?

Possessive case: the form that nouns or pronouns take when they act as adjectives.

—The ball is **mine**. Eat **your** asparagus. **Its** motor is now broken. That is **Ernie's** cat.

PRONOUNS

Pronoun: a word that replaces a noun without specifying a name.

—**He** was tired.

In this sentence, **he** is the pronoun, replacing the name of the person who was tired ("Jack was tired") or some other identifier ("The boy was tired").

Antecedent: the word to which a pronoun refers.

—Because **Jack** left in a hurry, he forgot his lunch.

In this sentence, **Jack** is the antecedent and **he** is the pronoun.

Types of pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns: the words *this*, *these*, *that*, and *those*, which replace a noun.

—**This** is unacceptable.

Indefinite pronoun: a pronoun that indicates unspecified quantities or degrees.

—**Most** were appalled by the prime minister's lies.

Intensive pronoun: a pronoun that emphasizes the word to which it refers.

—The stars **themselves** use this skin cream.

Interrogative pronoun: a pronoun that initiates a question.

—**Who** called this afternoon?

Objective personal pronouns: the words *me*, *you*, *her*, *him*, *it*, *us*, and *them*, used to indicate that the pronoun is functioning as an object.

—She was glad that he gave **her** his trust.

Personal pronoun: personal pronouns all fall into one of three persons, which indicate to whom the pronoun refers.

First person: expresses the identity of the speaker.

—I was driving **my** car.

Second person: addresses the speaker's listener.

—**You** were driving **your** car.

Third person: refers to someone who is neither the speaker nor the listener.

—**They** were riding in **her** car.

Possessive personal pronoun: a pronoun that indicates possession or ownership.

—She was glad that he gave her **its** key.

Reflexive pronoun: a pronoun that refers to the subject of the sentence.

—The cat keeps **itself** clean.

Relative pronoun: a pronoun that links one phrase or clause to another.

—He would speak to **whoever** had answers.

Subjective personal pronoun: a pronoun that acts as a subject rather than as an object.

—**She** was glad that **he** gave her its key.

VERBS

Verb: a word that indicates action or a state of being. The predicates of sentences contain verbs. All verbs have five properties: person, number, mood, voice, and tense.

1. Types of verbs

Regular verb: a verb whose past tense form is made by the addition of *-d* or *-ed*.

—*walk/walked, jump/jumped, try/tried*

Irregular verb: a verb whose past tense form cannot be made with *-d* or *-ed*.

—*cling/clung, bring/brought, choose/chose/chosen, speak/spoke/spoken*

Transitive verb: a verb that requires an object to complete its meaning.

—The carpenter **makes** shelves.

In this sentence, **shelves** is the object of the verb **makes**.

Intransitive verb: a verb that cannot take an object.

—She **stayed** at the bar long after closing time.

Linking verb: a verb that connects a subject to a predicate noun or adjective.

—The young man **felt** nervous about his credit card payments.

Auxiliary or helping verb: a word such as *be*, *can*, *have*, *do*, or *will* that combines with a verb to modify its meaning.

—Randall **can** run to the store.

In this sentence, **can** is the auxiliary verb; **run** is the main verb. The two together are a compound verb.

Compound verb: the combination of an auxiliary verb and another verb. Compound verbs are used to create verb tenses that cannot be made from single verbs.

—I **will come** to the party if you **are planning** to invite me.

Modal auxiliary verb: an auxiliary verb that expresses necessity, obligation, potential, or possibility.

—She **would** go if she were given the chance.

Infinitive: a compound verb made with *to* and the basic form of the verb.

—Matt likes **to spend** a great deal of money.

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

PARTS OF SPEECH (continued)

VERBS (continued)

2. Person: verbs must match the person of the subject.

First person: expresses identity of the writer/speaker.

—I **am** tired.

Second person: addresses reader/listener directly.

—You **are** tired.

Third person: refers to a subject that is neither the writer nor the reader.

—He **is** tired.

3. Number: the form of a verb always matches the number of the subject. Verbs may be singular, usually ending in **-s** or **-es**, or plural, without a modified ending.

Verbs take a **singular form** when:

A subject is singular.

—The cow **jumps** over the moon.

Two singular subjects are joined by **or**, **either/or**, or **neither/nor**.

—Either the cow or the rabbit **jumps** over the moon.

The verb is nearer the singular subject in a compound sentence that has both a singular and plural subject joined by **or** or **nor**.

—Either the rabbits or the cow **is** jumping next.

The subject is preceded by **every** or **each**.

—Every cow **wishes** it could jump over the moon.

Verbs take a **plural form** when:

A subject is plural.

—The wedding guests **dance** to the music.

Two singular subjects are joined by **and**.

—The photographer and the priest **dance** vigorously.

Two plural subjects are joined by **or**, **either/or**, or **neither/nor**.

—Either the bride's cousins or the groom's friends **are** the best dancers.

The verb is nearer the plural subject in a compound subject that has both a singular and plural subject joined by **or** or **nor**.

—Either the bride's sister or the groom's friends **are** buying the bride a houseboat.

4. Mood: verbs may be used in one of three moods, which indicate the attitude of the speaker toward the action of the verb.

Indicative mood: used in declarative sentences to express facts, ideas, opinions, and questions directly.

—Wallace **writes** beautifully for an insurance executive.

Imperative mood: used in imperative sentences to issue commands.

—**Bring** me my violin.

Subjunctive mood: used in dependent clauses to indicate unreal or counterfactual conditions. The subjunctive is typically formed by using the past tense plural form of the verb, even if the subject is singular.

—If I **were** with you, I would be happy.

The subjunctive mood also follows verbs of wishing or requesting:

—I wish that I **were** with you.

and follows independent clauses that use adjectives indicating urgency:

—It seemed crucial that he **go** to the meeting on time.

5. Voice: indicates the relationship between the subject and the action of a verb. Verbs may be in one of two voices, active or passive.

Active voice: the subject performs the action.

—Gretchen **sweeps** the floor.

Passive voice: the subject receives the action.

—The floor **was swept** by Gretchen.

6. Verb tenses: indicate the time in which the action is performed. English has three tenses: past, present, and future. Each tense has four forms: simple, perfect, progressive, and perfect progressive.

Simple tenses: indicate past, present, or future action.

Perfect tenses: indicate a completed action at some point in time.

Progressive tenses: indicate action that continues for a period of time.

	Simple	Perfect	Progressive	Perfect Progressive
Past	played	had played	were playing	had been playing
Present	play	have played	are playing	have been playing
Future	will play	will have played	will be playing	will have been playing

ADJECTIVES

Adjective: a word that describes or modifies nouns and pronouns.

1. Types of adjectives

Demonstrative adjectives: the words **this**, **that**, **these**, and **those**, which specify nouns. Demonstrative adjectives are similar to demonstrative pronouns, but indicate particular nouns rather than replace them.

—**This** chair is more comfortable than **that** chair.

Indefinite adjectives: adjectives that refer to unspecified quantities. Similar to indefinite pronouns, but used in relation to particular nouns.

—**Most** people would rather have a **few** close friends than **many** shallow acquaintances.

Interrogative adjectives: adjectives that initiate questions by requesting specification.

—**Which** car do you want to take?

—**What** movie did you see?

Possessive adjectives: adjectives that indicate ownership or possession.

—**His** t-shirt was stained with blood.

—Julianne was frustrated; no one was sympathetic to **her** idea.

2. Degrees of adjectives: in comparing nouns, adjectives change by degree depending on the number of objects being compared.

Positive degree: an adjective modifying a single object.

—**happy**

Comparative degree: an adjective implying a comparison between two objects.

—**happier**

Superlative degree: an adjective implying a comparison among three or more objects.

—**happiest**

3. Participle: an adjective formed from a verb.

Present participle: describes action in the present; made by adding **-ing** to a verb and using it as an adjective.

—The **running** man was slower than the **galloping** horse.

Past participle: describes action in the past; takes an irregular form.

—**Grown** men should know better than to throw temper tantrums.

ADVERBS

Adverb: a word that modifies a verb, adjective, phrase, or clause by indicating how, where, when, or how much. Adverbs often end in the suffix **-ly**.

1. Conjunctive adverb: an adverb that joins two clauses together.

Words such as **therefore**, **consequently**, and **thus** are conjunctive adverbs.

—The basketball game was tied; **consequently**, it went into overtime.

2. Degrees of adverbs: when they compare elements, adverbs change in degree.

Positive degree: describes a single element. **fast**

Comparative degree: compares two elements. **faster**

Superlative degree: implies a comparison between three or more elements. **fastest**

OTHER PARTS OF SPEECH

1. Conjunction: a word that links other words, phrases, or clauses together. Common conjunctions include **and**, **if**, **or**, and **but**.

Coordinating conjunction: a conjunction that joins words, phrases, or independent clauses without indicating relationship.

—I was hungry, **so** I wanted to eat.

—Lawyers **and** doctors traditionally are well paid.

Correlative conjunction: a conjunction that links, equates, or opposes ideas. Correlative conjunctions are always used in pairs.

—He wanted **either** pizza **or** a hamburger.

—**Both** Democrats **and** Republicans are optimistic about the future.

PARTS OF SPEECH (continued)

OTHER PARTS OF SPEECH (continued)

Subordinating conjunction: a conjunction that introduces a dependent clause and indicates the relationship of the dependent clause to the independent clause.

—If you are good, you can have ice cream.

—After she learned to ski, Angelica decided to learn to snowboard.

2. Interjection: a word that is not related grammatically to the rest of the sentence but that conveys emotion or surprise.

—Wow, that was a good game!

3. Article: a word (**the**, **a**, or **an**) that specifies a noun. Some people define articles as adjectives.

—The bus turned into **a** dark alley.

4. Preposition: a word used to indicate physical or conceptual relationships between other words.

—The squirrel sat **under** the tree.

Prepositional phrase: the combination of a preposition, its object, and the words between them.

—The squirrel sat **under the tree**.

Common prepositions:

about	behind	down	like	since	up
above	below	during	near	through	upon
across	beneath	except	of	throughout	with
after	beside	for	off	till	without
against	besides	from	on	to	
around	between	in	out	toward	
at	beyond	inside	outside	under	
before	by	into	over	until	

according to because of by way of in addition to in front of in place of
in regard to in spite of instead of on account of out of

PUNCTUATION MARKS



1. Apostrophe: indicates possession when added to a noun. An apostrophe also indicates that one or more letters have been left out in a contraction.

—Philippa Foot's mid-century philosophy is influential in certain academic corners.

—I don't speak French.



2. Brackets: indicate words, punctuation, and formatting inserted into a quote but not present in the original source.

—“Fourscore and seven [eighty-seven] years ago...”



3. Colon: introduces a list, summary, or important conclusion. A colon must follow an independent clause and may not come between a verb and its object.

—**Incorrect:** John gave his mother: a quilt, a book, and a bouquet of lilies.

—**Correct:** John gave his mother three things: a quilt, a book, and a bouquet of lilies.



4. Comma: indicates slight pauses in reading, and differentiates sentence parts. Commas are used in the following situations.

Before a **coordinating conjunction** that connects two independent clauses

—I thought it would rain, and it did.

After an **introductory phrase**

—After the rainfall, the sun came out.

To separate items in a **series**

—I like rock, pop, jazz, blues, country, and hip-hop.

To set off a **parenthetical or nonrestrictive phrase**

—Amateur salsa dancers, many of whom have little familiarity with traditional Spanish music, often mistake very different dances such as the mambo and the samba.

Between the day and year of a **date**

—On August 8, 1976, the world of music changed forever.

To set off **quotations** that occur within a sentence

—Sarah said, “I love you,” and she meant it.

—“It always happens this way,” he replied, “and I never know what to say.”

To subdivide **numbers** into groups of three digits

—9,023
—4,251,730

To indicate **direct address**

—“Greg, give me the remote control.”

To separate **noncumulative adjectives**

—The hot, humid, nasty day made Alison irritable.

To indicate **omissions of verbs** in parallel clauses:

—Jenny likes the Mets; Pedro, the Angels; and Frank, the Marlins.



5. Dash: sets off a parenthetical phrase or points attention to a summary conclusion.

—The new fabric—introduced at the fashion show two years ago—has become extremely popular.

—Her lips, her eyes, her taste in poetry—they all were perfect.



6. Ellipsis: three periods separated by two spaces that indicate omissions in quoted material.

—“And so, my fellow Americans, ... ask what you can do for your country.”



7. Exclamation mark: ends declarative and imperative sentences with a sense of excitement or urgency.

—Get out of here!



8. Hyphen: joins linked words together, especially if they are being used together as an adjective.

—That kind of devil-may-care attitude will get you nowhere.



9. Parentheses: set off a loosely related phrase.

—His idea (formed during long hours of driving in heavy traffic) was to begin riding the train.



10. Period: ends sentences that are not questions.

—It was a cloudy day.



11. Question mark: ends sentences that are questions; indicates a query.

—Was the house haunted?



12. Quotation marks: serve several purposes. They can: represent text as speech:

—“I would have been great,” he insisted.

indicate material excerpted from another writer's work:

—Not every love affair is “star-cross'd.”

indicate titles of poems and short stories:

—Shelley's “Ode to a Skylark” is an extended meditation on spontaneous artistic creation.

Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks. Question marks, exclamation marks, semicolons, colons, and dashes go outside quotation marks unless they are part of the quotation.



13. Semicolon: used to join independent clauses by taking the place of a conjunction. Semicolons are also used to separate items in series that contain commas within single-item descriptions.

—Betsy liked to sew; it was her passion.

—He had an old, unraveling sweater; a newer sweater; and a faded, torn pair of jeans.



14. Slash: used to indicate multiple possibilities:

—Speak to the senator and/or the president.



15. Solidus: same symbol as the slash; indicates line breaks in quotations of multiple lines of poetry

—“Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath, / And so live ever, or else swoon to death.”