

# Subject

A subject in grammar is the first part in a [sentence](#) about which the second part, the predicate, tells something. The subject performs an action, or indicates what or whom the sentence is about.

In a declarative sentence, the subject comes before verbs such as in the [phrase](#), “The bell rings,” in which the subject “bell” comes before the verb “rings.” However, in interrogative sentences, a subject follows the auxiliary verb, such as “Does bell ever ring?” In fact, the subject functions as a noun or a [pronoun](#). For example, in the sentence, “Momma was preparing our evening meal, and Uncle Willie leaned on the door sill” (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou), “Momma” and “Uncle Willie” are both subjects.

## Types of Subject

**Simple Subject** – In a simple subject, either a noun or a pronoun does the action. Unlike a complete subject, it does not need descriptive words or modifiers, but only the main noun or pronoun. For example, “Superman saved the people.”

Here, “Superman” is a simple subject.

**Complete Subject** – A complete subject is the main word in the sentence, along with the modifiers (often adjectives) that describe it. To determine a complete subject, see all the words modifying it in this example: “The wise and beautiful woman fell into cold water.”

In this sentence, “the wise and beautiful woman” is a complete subject because “woman” did an action, “fell.” The words coming before “woman” are modifiers, which have described the woman.

**Compound Subject** – A compound subject is a combination of two or more subjects within a sentence. For example, “The girl and her mother are planning holidays.”

The underlined part is a compound subject containing two nouns “girl” and “mother,” and includes the connector “and.” This is a compound subject because the girl and her mother are doing the action together.

## Examples of Subjects in Literature

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### Example #1: *The Mudcrusts: Sabre-Toothed Terrors* (by Damian Harvey)

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“The sabre-toothed tiger was prowling around the bottom of the tree, growling, as *it* looked for an easier way up. Then *something* caught its attention.”

This excerpt presents a good example of complete subject. In the phrase, “The sabre-toothed tiger,” “tiger” is the main subject, and “sabre-toothed” is describing and modifying the “tiger.”

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### Example #2: *Shooting an Elephant* (by George Orwell)

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“The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away.”

In this sentence, Orwell has used the simple subjects “orderly,” “Burmans,” and “elephant.” All of these subjects are performing actions as given.

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### Example #3: *Master of the Game* (by Sidney Sheldon)

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“He had traveled almost eight thousand miles from his father’s farm in the Highlands of Scotland to Edinburgh, London, Cape Town and now Klipdrift ... He knew he was going to be rewarded ten thousand times over.”

This is another good example of a simple subject, serving as the pronoun “he,” which performs several actions in this scene.

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#### **Example #4: *The Canterbury Tales* (by Geoffrey Chaucer)**

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“In Oxford there once lived a rich old lout  
Who had some guest rooms that he rented out,  
And carpentry was this old fellow’s trade.  
A poor young scholar boarded who had made  
His studies in the liberal arts...”

In this piece, Chaucer has twice used a complete subject. First complete subject is “rich old lout,” and the modifiers “rich, old” describe the main subject “lout.” Likewise, “scholar” is a main subject, and is modified by “poor, young.”

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#### **Example #5: *Gulliver’s Travels* (by Jonathan Swift)**

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“The king and queen make a progress to the frontiers. The author attends them. The manner in which he leaves the country very particularly related. He returns to England.”

In this example, Swift has used a compound subject appearing at the beginning of the sentence. This compound subject is a combination of two nouns “king” and “queen,” which are connected by “and.”

### **Function of Subject**

A subject is an important part of a sentence, which indicates an action, and shows who is performing that action. A good understanding of how a subject is used is necessary to write a cohesive and interesting literary piece. Without a subject, a clause or a sentence does not make sense regarding who is performing the given action. This is because either a main noun, or a pronoun, is needed to indicate the “doer” of the action. The use of a subject gives the readers a complete idea of what the fictional work is about, or about whom the author is writing.

