

Sentence Structure

Sentence structure is key to effective communication. It determines how clearly and powerfully we convey our messages. This chapter explores the basics of building sentences, such as subjects, verbs, objects, and modifiers. It covers everything from simple sentences to complex ones, showing how to create clear, correct, and well-organized sentences. Improving your sentence structure will boost your writing and speaking skills and help you appreciate the beauty of language.

WHAT IS A SENTENCE?

In the world of grammar, sentences are the building blocks of communication, carrying meaning and conveying information. A **sentence** is a group of words that forms a complete thought, expressing an idea or conveying information. A sentence must have a capital letter at the start and a period, exclamation mark or question mark in the end. It consists of two essential parts: the subject and the predicate.

The happy father. (this is a phrase and not a sentence as it doesn't have a verb)

Examples of a sentence:

The girl is cooking the food.

Is it raining?

What an incredible miracle!

You must do it.

Kinds of Sentences (According to Structure)

There are four categories of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. These create variety in one's communication.

1. SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence is a basic type of sentence that contains only one independent clause. This means it has a single subject and a single predicate (verb), and it expresses a complete thought.

STRUCTURE OF A SIMPLE SENTENCE

Subject: The person or thing performing the action.

Predicate: The action or state of being.

Examples:

1. She runs.

Predicate: runs

2. The cat slept.

Subject: The cat

Predicate: slept

3. Ibrahim eats breakfast.

Subject: Ibrahim

Predicate: eats breakfast

4. It is raining.

Subject: It

Predicate: is raining

Each of these sentences is simple because it has just one subject and one predicate, and it conveys a complete idea on its own.

2. COMPOUND SENTENCE

A compound sentence is made up of two independent clause, joined by a coordinating conjunction or a semi colon (;) and has no dependent clause.

Example of Compound Sentences:

I wanted to go to the movies, but I didn't have enough money.

STRUCTURE OF A COMPOUND SENTENCE

Independent Clause: An independent clause, or main clause, is a complete thought. It can stand alone as a sentence. It has a subject and a verb and expresses a complete idea.

Independent Clause 1: "I wanted to go to the movies"

Independent Clause 2: "I didn't have enough money"

Coordinating Conjunction: "but"

Meaning: This compound sentence combines two related ideas with the coordinating conjunction "but," expressing a contrast between the desire to go to the movies and the lack of money.

He enjoys playing soccer, so he joined the local team.

Independent Clause 1: "He enjoys playing soccer"

Independent Clause 2: "he joined the local team"

Coordinating Conjunction: "so"

Meaning: This compound sentence connects two related ideas with the coordinating conjunction "so," indicating that his enjoyment of playing soccer led him to join the local team.

COMMON COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Independent clauses in a compound sentence are often connected by coordinating conjunctions, such as "and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet". These conjunctions help coordinate or link the two clauses.

3. COMPLEX SENTENCE

Complex sentences are a type of sentence structure that includes both an independent clause (a complete thought) and one or more dependent clauses (incomplete thoughts).

STRUCTURE OF A COMPLEX SENTENCE

- **Independent Clause:** An independent clause, also known as a main clause, is a complete thought that can stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete idea.
- **Dependent Clause:** A dependent clause, also known as a subordinate clause, is an incomplete thought that cannot stand alone as a sentence. It contains a subject and a verb but depends on the independent clause to form a complete idea.
- **Common Subordinating Conjunctions:** Dependent clauses are often introduced by subordinating conjunctions, such as because, although, if, when, while, since, until, etc. These conjunctions help establish the relationship between the independent and dependent clauses.

Examples of Complex Sentences:

Although I wanted to go to the party, I had too much work to finish.

Independent Clause: "I had too much work to finish"

Dependent Clause: "Although I wanted to go to the party"

Meaning: This sentence expresses a contrast between the desire to attend the party and the necessity of completing work.

She will visit her grandparents when she has a break from school.

Independent Clause: "She will visit her grandparents"

Dependent Clause: "when she has a break from school"

Meaning: This sentence shows that the visit to her grandparents will occur during her school break.

4. COMPOUND COMPLEX SENTENCE

A compound-complex sentence has two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. It combines elements of both compound and complex sentences.

STRUCTURE OF A COMPOUND-COMPLEX SENTENCE

- **Independent Clauses:** Independent clauses, also known as main clauses, are complete thoughts that can stand alone as sentences. They contain a subject and a verb and express complete ideas.
- **Dependent Clauses:** Dependent clauses, also known as subordinate clauses, are incomplete thoughts that cannot stand alone as sentences. They contain a subject and a verb but depend on the independent clauses to form complete ideas.
- **Common Conjunctions and Punctuation:** Compound-complex sentences use coordinating conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or), subordinating conjunctions (e.g., because, although, if), and punctuation marks like commas and semicolons to connect the clauses.

Examples of Compound-Complex Sentences:

Although she wanted to go to the party, she had too much work to finish, so she stayed home and studied.

Independent Clause 1: "She had too much work to finish"

Independent Clause 2: "She stayed home and studied"

Dependent Clause: "Although she wanted to go to the party"

Subordinating Conjunction: "Although"

Coordinating Conjunction: "so"

Meaning: This compound-complex sentence combines a complex idea (the desire to go to the party despite having work) with a compound idea (the decision to stay home and study). It uses both subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement is a grammatical rule that ensures the subject and verb in a sentence match in number. This means that if the subject is singular (like "he," "she," or "the cat"), the verb must also be in a singular form (like "runs" or "is"). Similarly, if the subject is plural (like "they," "the dogs"), the verb should be plural as well (like "run" or "are"). The idea is that the verb should "agree" with the subject, just like how in the sentence "She hates it," the verb "hates" matches the singular subject "she." This rule helps sentences sound correct and makes sure that the meaning is clear to the reader or listener.

The basic rule of subject-verb agreement, as explained in Garner's Modern English Usage, is that you should use a plural verb with a plural subject and a singular verb with a singular subject. For example, "The dogs bark" (plural subject and verb) and "The dog barks" (singular subject and verb). This rule applies to most situations and helps ensure that sentences are grammatically correct. However, there are some exceptions to this rule, where the usual pattern doesn't apply. These exceptions often depend on specific words or sentence structures. In the following section, you'll learn how to adjust verbs so they correctly match the subject, even in these special cases.

RULES & EXAMPLES OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subject-verb agreement is crucial in present tenses because the verb changes based on whether the subject is singular or plural. For example, "She walks" (singular) vs. "They walk" (plural). In the simple past and future tenses, the verb form remains the same, like in "She walked" or "They walked." While this simplifies past and future tenses, it's still important to follow the rules of subject-verb agreement to ensure your sentences are clear and correct. The next section will cover these rules with examples to help you apply them effectively.

RULE 1

The first rule of subject-verb agreement is simple: use a singular verb with a singular subject and a plural verb with a plural subject. The subject can be a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase. If the subject is a pronoun, the verb must agree with the pronoun's form, such as "he runs" (singular) or "they run" (plural). For example:

- Emma reads a book every evening. (Singular subject with singular verb)
- Jake and Olivia enjoy hiking on weekends. (Plural subject with plural verb)

IBEX Functional English

- He loves to drink coffee in the morning. (Third person singular pronoun with singular verb)

RULE 2

When using the "be" verb, there's an exception to the usual rules. The form of "be" changes based on the number and person of the subject. The following table shows how "be" is used with different pronouns.

Person	Pronoun	Verb	Example
First person singular	I	am	I am confident.
First person plural	We	are	We are confident.
Second person singular/plural	You	are	You are confident.
Third person singular	He	is	He is confident.
	She	is	She is confident.
	It	is	It is amazing.
Third person plural	They	are	They are confident.

The same rule applies when "be" is used with other nouns or noun phrases, even in simple past, present continuous, and past continuous tenses, whether as the main verb or a helping verb. Here are some examples:

- Sarah is a talented artist.
- The children are playing in the park.
- We were thrilled with our team's victory.
- Classical music is appreciated by many.

RULE 3

In the present perfect tense, present perfect continuous tense, and when using "have" as a main verb, the choice between "have" and "has" depends on the subject. Use "has" with singular subjects and "have" with plural subjects. For example:

- The teacher has a new book for the class.
- They have finished their homework.
- Sara has a beautiful garden.
- *Albert Einstein has* made significant contributions to science.
- *She has been* practicing the piano every day.

RULE 4

When you have a compound subject joined by "and," you use a plural verb. For example:

- Alex and Jamie are going to the movies.
- Tom, Lisa, and Sarah have finished their project.
- The cat and the dog are playing outside.

RULE 5

When more than one noun is joined by the conjunction 'or', the subject is considered to be singular and a singular verb is used. For example:

- Celery or spring onion works fine.
- Your mom or dad has to be here in an hour.
- Either the teacher or the student is responsible for the error.
- Neither the book nor the pen is on the desk.

RULE 6

Sentences with pronouns such as anybody, anyone, no one, somebody, someone, everybody, everyone, nothing and nobody are treated as singular subjects and will therefore use a singular verb. For example:

- Somebody has left their bag in the classroom.
- Anyone can join the discussion.
- Nobody knows the answer.
- Everyone is invited to the party.

RULE 7

For sentences using "either...or" and "neither...nor," the verb should match the noun or pronoun closest to it. For example:

- Neither the cat nor the dogs are outside.
- Either the manager or the employees have to decide.
- Neither the book nor the magazines were on the shelf.

RULE 8

When sentences have subjects like police, news, scissors, or mathematics (which are always considered plural), use a plural verb. For example:

- The scissors are on the table.
- The news about the storm was alarming.
- The mathematics in the problem are complex.
- The glasses are on the kitchen counter.

RULE 9

In negative sentences, use "do" or "does" to match the subject. For example:

- She does not like broccoli.
- They do not enjoy playing football.

- He does not watch TV often.
- We do not know the answer.

RULE 10

In interrogative sentences, use "do" or "does" along with the correct verb form to match the subject. For example:

- Do they play soccer on weekends?
- Does he like to cook?
- Is Sarah coming to the party?
- Were you at the store earlier?
- Has Abdullah finished his homework?

RULE 11

When a sentence starts with "here," "there," "this," "that," "those," "these," etc., the subject comes after the verb, so make sure the verb matches the subject. For example:

- Here is the key to your room.
- There are several cookies on the plate.
- This is my favorite song.
- Those are the shoes I want.

RULE 12

Abstract nouns and uncountable nouns are treated as singular subjects, so use a singular verb with them. For example:

- Happiness is important for a good life.
- Information about the event is on the website.

RULE 13

When the subject refers to a period of time, distance, or amount of money, use a singular verb. For example:

- Five miles is a long distance to run.
- A week is not enough time to complete the project.
- \$50 is too expensive for that book.

RULE 14

When using collective nouns as subjects, the verb can be singular or plural depending on the context. For example:

- The team is practicing for the big game.
(if the team is acting as a single unit)
- The team are arguing among themselves.
(if the members of the team are acting individually)

RULE 15

When sentences use adjectives like "all," "a lot of," "lots of," or "some" with nouns to form a subject, the verb should match the noun that comes right before it. For example:

- A lot of money is needed for the project.
- Some of the cookies have been eaten.
- All of the milk is gone.

RULE 16

When a sentence begins with "each" or "every," the subject is considered singular, so use a singular verb. For example:

- Each book is carefully checked for errors.
- Every child enjoys the summer camp activities.

RULE 17

When expressing a wish or making a request, verbs are used differently. For example:

- I wish I had a bigger garden.
- If she were here, we could start the meeting.

EXERCISES

Identify the subject, verb, and agreement in the following sentences. Explain whether the subject and verb agree in number (singular or plural):

- i. The dog barks loudly every morning.

Subject: The dog

Verb: barks

Agreement: Subject and verb agree (singular)

- ii. The birds sing sweetly in the trees.

Subject: The birds

Verb: sing

Agreement: Subject and verb agree (plural)

- iii. My friend and I go to the movies every weekend.

Subject: My friend and I

Verb: go

Agreement: Subject and verb agree (plural)

- iv. The cat sleeps peacefully on the windowsill.

Subject: The cat

Verb: sleeps

Agreement: Subject and verb agree (singular)

- v. Both of the cars are parked in the garage.
Subject: Both of the cars
Verb: are
Agreement: Subject and verb agree (plural)
- vi. Each book on the shelf belongs to a different genre.
Subject: Each book
Verb: belongs
Agreement: Subject and verb agree (singular)
- vii. The committee discusses the proposal at length.
Subject: The committee
Verb: discusses
Agreement: Subject and verb agree (singular)
- viii. The flowers in the garden bloom beautifully in spring.
Subject: The flowers
Verb: bloom
Agreement: Subject and verb agree (plural)

Exercise Questions on Subject-Verb Agreement (Error Correction):

1. The group of students were studying in the library.
Correction: The group of students was studying in the library.
2. Neither of the options seem suitable for me.
Correction: Neither of the options seems suitable for me.
3. The team of researchers are conducting experiments in the lab.
Correction: The team of researchers is conducting experiments in the lab.
4. My sister and her friends goes to the gym together.
Correction: My sister and her friends go to the gym together.
5. The collection of rare coins were stolen from the museum.
Correction: The collection of rare coins was stolen from the museum.
6. Each of the players were given a medal for their performance.
Correction: Each of the players was given a medal for their performance.
7. Ten dollars are too much to pay for a cup of coffee.
Correction: Ten dollars is too much to pay for a cup of coffee.
8. The committee were unable to reach a decision.
Correction: The committee was unable to reach a decision.
9. The flock of geese was flying south for the winter.
Correction: The flock of geese were flying south for the winter.
10. One of the keys to success are hard work and determination.
Correction: One of the keys to success is hard work and determination.