**Avoiding Fragments**

The sentence, like many other things, is a ***large item*** composed of ***smaller items***. Considered as a large item, it is sometimes difficult to understand.  Therefore, we will begin with the ***smallest***, simplest elements that make up a sentence, gradually moving toward the large, more complicated ones.

 **WORDS**

A ***word*** is the smallest part of speech and the easiest element of speech to recognize.

             EACH GROUP OF LETTERS IN THIS SENTENCE IS A **WORD**.

There are different kinds of words, according to the particular part a given word plays when it is used in speech (writing or speaking).  To each kind of word we assign a label that shows which ***part of speech*** that word is.

As you may already know, there are eight ***parts of speech***.

             ***noun                          verb                            adverb                       conjunction***

***pronoun                    preposition               adjective                    interjection***

We will consider three of them in this unit: ***noun, pronoun,*** and ***verb***.

  **NOUNS**

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

A noun may name a ***type*** of person, place, thing, or idea.

  Nouns that name ***particular***persons, places, things, or ideas are ***proper nouns***.  Proper nouns are capitalized.

**\*\*NOTE:** Words that name ideas are sometimes hard to recognize as nouns because they name***abstract*** ideas that we cannot see.  These are ***abstract nouns*** (e.g. time, imagination, judgment, October, Saturday).

Even though these words name things we cannot see, they are still nouns because they***name*** something.

***PRONOUNS***

A ***pronoun*** is a word that may ***substitute*** for a noun.

**VERBS**

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

 ***Action verbs*** are easy to recognize.

 Some examples

            

This sentence uses an ***action verb***.

            

                                          *drew* = ***action verb***

Verbs that show ***state of being*** indicate that something or someone exists.

Some examples

            

These sentences use ***verbs of being***.

                

        *is*  = ***verb of being****will be* = ***verb of being***

Parts of speech do not just sit idly about without any purpose.  They have specific tasks to perform when they are put together in a sentence.

Look at this sentence.

             

There are three ***nouns*** in this sentence: *philanthropists, millions, and charity*.

The ***action*** in this sentence is expressed by the verb – *donated*.

Although there are three nouns in this sentence, only one of them is actually DOING the action of ***donating***: *philanthropists*.

                                                *Philanthropists donated…*

We could also express this same idea with a ***pronoun***.

             

Here the ***pronoun****they* is DOING the action of donating.

                                                 *They donated…*

The two sentences above illustrate a rule of sentence structure:

**When a noun or pronoun is partnered with a verb so that the noun or pronoun is doing the action expressed by that verb, we call that noun or pronoun the verb’s SUBJECT.**

Sometimes a verb will express ***being*** or ***existence*** instead of action.

Look at this sentence.

             

The verb in this sentence  -- *are* – does **not** express **action**.

Instead, it expresses ***being*** or ***existence*** – tells us that something is alive.

Still, as in the earlier sentences, there is a noun paired with this verb.  That noun is the one DOING the ***existing*** or ***being***: *friends*.

                                                            *Good friends are…*

This noun – *friends* – is the ***subject*** of the verb  are  in this sentence.

As we did with the action verb example, we could substitute a ***pronoun*** for the noun, friends, in this sentence.

Knowing that verbs can express either action or being, we can now expand our rule.

**When a NOUN or PRONOUN is paired with a verb so that the noun or pronoun is doing the action or the being expressed by the verb, we call that noun or pronoun the verb’s SUBJECT.**

 **\*\*SPECIAL NOTE:** Sometimes we use sentences in which a subject is *not actually****stated***, but***is***, nevertheless, ***understood*** in the meaning.

 Example

             

 A sentence like this gives an order or a request to someone.

 What we really mean when we make such requests is shown in the sentence below.

         

***You***, as the DOER of the action verb, call, is the SUBJECT here.

Because we use such statements when we are talking directly to someone, we usually omit the word *you*.  We consider it unnecessary –***understood*** in the sentence.

Therefore, in statements such as -- *Call the plumber, please --* we say that the subject is

                    ***you (understood)***

                 *you* (understood) = ***subject***

This kind of sentence is called an ***imperative sentence***.

**Exercise 1**

**Directions:** Pick out the **subject** in each of the sentences below and write the word on the given line.

1. After the dance, Cinderella ran home as quickly as possible.

2. At night, I am a very poor driver.

3. Many residents lost their homes during the hurricane.

4. Every Monday he drives his children to school.

5. They found the correct answers.

**PART 2**

Now you know how to locate the subject in a noun-verb partnership: look for the noun (or pronoun) that is DOING the ***action*** or the ***being*** expressed by the verb.

The verb in this noun-verb partnership also has a job to do.  It functions as the ***action*** or as the ***being*** that the subject is DOING.

Look at these examples.

1.                

2.                

We already know that the noun *philanthropists*, the DOER of the action, donated, is the ***subject*** of the noun-verb partnership, philanthropists donated (example #1).

We also know that the noun friends is the ***subject*** of the noun-verb partnership, friends are (example #2).

These verbs – *donated* and *are* – also perform a specific task in this noun-verb partnership: they express the subject’s action or state of being.

We call a verb that performs this function a ***predicate***.

    *Philanthropists* = **subject**

*donated* = **predicate**

                      *friends* = **subject**

                                                                                   *are* = **predicate**

           *you*(understood) = **subject**

                                                                                   *call* = **predicate**

The verbs in the sentences below are also doing the job of a ***predicate***.

                *they* = **subject**

*donated* = **predicate**

                                  *they* = **subject**

*are* = **predicate**

This information leads us to a rule:

**The VERB in a noun/pronoun – verb partnership expressing the *action* or *being*of the subject is a PREDICATE.**

Sometimes the predicate will be composed of *two or three verbs that fit together*  -- the ***main verb*** preceded by one of more ***helping verbs***.

***Helping verbs*** (also called ***auxiliary verbs***) help the main verb to form its *tense* (time) or to emphasize its action.  They always come BEFORE the main verb.

Note how helping verbs change the *tense*(time) of each main verb below.

             

IMPORTANT NOTE: To be a ***predicate***, a verb that ends in –*ing* must **ALWAYS** have a helping verb with it.  An –*ing* verb **WITHOUT**a helping verb **cannot**  be a ***predicate***in a sentence.

**More About Predicates**

A predicate usually *follows* the subject, but it may be *separated* from the subject by one or more words.

Look at this sentence.

        

Even though hillsideis next to the verb howled, it is not the subject here because it is **not** DOING the howling.  The **dog** is.

Sometimes the ***verbs*** in the predicate may be *separated* from one another.

Look at these sentences.

1.

          

The word *often* is an ***adverb***, not a helping verb.  The ***predicate*** is *has howled*.

2.

        

Example #2 illustrates that when we form **questions**, we sometimes make the subject *separate* the ***helping verbs*** from the ***main verb***.

When separations like #1 and #2 occur, don’t be alarmed or confused.  Just remember the rules for finding the subject and predicate.  You should have no difficulty at all.

In some cases as well, the subject may NOT DO the ***action*** of the predicate, but may, instead, be ***acted upon*** by the predicate.

Example

                 *office* = **subject**

*was destroyed* = **predicate**

NOTE that the noun, office, is NOT the DOER of the action (*was destroyed*).

Instead, office is being ***acted upon*** (is being *destroyed*) by some unknown DOER.

In such a case, office is still the ***subject*** of the predicate was destroyed.

Even when the DOER of the action is **known**, it is not the subject unless it is working in a ***partnership*** with the ***verb***.

Example

                *office* = **subject**

                                                                                         *was destroyed* = **predicate**

Vandals is NOT the sentence’s subject because *vandals* is not working in a ***partnership*** with the verb was destroyed.

We use the term ***passive voice*** to refer to the predicate in this kind of subject-verb partnership.

**SOME FINAL WORDS . . .**

The terms ***subject*** and ***predicate*** can be applied ONLY where there is a noun-verb partnership, where the noun and verb interact with one another to create the topic of the sentence.

You will **NEVER** see a subject sitting alone without a predicate (although you may see a noun sitting alone without a verb.)

You **WILL** see a predicate sitting alone without a subject **ONLY** when the subject is ***you*** (understood).

In order to be a predicate, a verb ending in  –*ing*  **MUST HAVE** a helping verb.

**REVIEW OF SUBJECT – PREDICATE TRICKY SPOTS:**

1.  ***You* (understood) subject**

                

2.  **Subject separated from predicate**

                

3.  **Parts of predicate (helping verb / main verb) separated by adverb**

                

4.  **Subject – predicate order changed in a question**

               

5.  **Subject – predicate pair in passive voice**

              

**Exercise 2**

 **Directions:** Nouns (or pronouns) and verbs have been underlined in the sentences below. For each underlined word, choose if it is a subject or predicate. If it is not a subject or predicate, choose neither.
1. Deep, heavy snows cover these mountains in winter.

2. Expeditions to the Southwest challenged his ideas about the location of minerals.

3. Knowing that information, you should not have any trouble.

4. Will you be arriving on the 10:20 train?
 will be arriving (is one)

5. Please eat your spinach.

**Part 3**

Now that you understand nouns/pronouns, verbs, subjects, and predicates (WORDS), you are ready to move up to a larger segment: ***phrases***.

A ***phrase***is a group of words which may contain noun/pronouns or verb forms, but does **NOT** contain a *subject* or a *predicate*.

**\*\*REMEMBER**: Every subject has a predicate, and every predicate has a subject.  These two functions never appear without each other.  They form a partnership, a team.

Some examples of ***PHRASES***:

        

Even though these phrases contain nouns (pronouns) *or* verb forms, or both nouns (or pronouns) *and* verb forms, **none** of the nouns/pronouns/verbs have the qualifications needed to be **subjects** or ***predicates***.  None of them work as a *partnership* – as a *team*.

Also, these ***phrases*** do NOT seem to say anything **complete** either.

These findings lead to a definition of the ***phrase***:

            A ***phrase*** is a group of related words that

1.  does *not* express a complete thought

2.   does *not* have a subject and predicate pair

**Exercise 3**

 Directions: For each sentence below, tell whether the underlined group of words contains a subject and predicate, or whether it is just a phrase. Indicate your answers by selecting  S and P for subject and predicate, or by writing phrase.

1. Looking around the room, Marcia shouted out the good news about the treaty.

S and P -- Phrase
2. Free tickets were given to every person in line by 6:00 a.m.

S and P -- Phrase

3. Occasionally Marion prefers cigars to cigarettes.

S and P -- Phrase

4. Instead of relying on the draft, some countries use a lottery system for determining military service.

S and P -- Phrase

5. After all those hours of hard work, will you finally be finished?

S and P -- Phrase

**Part 4**

We can now look at a more complicated concept: ***clauses***.

*Words* and *phrases* can be put together to make ***clauses***.

***Like a phrase,*** a clause is a group of related words.

***Unlike a phrase,*** a clause DOES contain a subject and predicate.

Note the difference between phrases and clauses in the following examples:

    

The words below are a *phrase*, NOT a ***clause***.  This means that the noun, *Smith*, is NOT a ***subject*** and that the verb form, *eating*, is NOT a***predicate***.  Why can’t these two words possibly be subject and predicate?

You probably noticed that, of the five ***clause*** examples given earlier in *Section 5*, only three were sentences (#**1, 3, 4**).

Look back at all five ***clause*** examples.  Read each one to yourself.

Did you notice any difference in the *meaning* between the three clauses that ARE sentences (#**1, 3, 4)**and the two clauses (#**2, 5**) that are NOT sentences?

Yes, there is a difference!

Clauses #1, 3, and 4 give a thought or an idea that is COMPLETE, that can stand by itself, **independent** of other words.

However, clauses #2 and 5 give only an INCOMPLETE thought or idea, one that **cannot** stand independent by itself, one that needs some more words to make it whole.

To see the difference, look at clauses #1 and 2 copied below for you.

1.

            

This clause tells us what happened and who made it happen.  Its thought is COMPLETE and finished.  We are not left “hanging” or asking questions after a clause like this one

2.

            

This clause tells us what happened and who made it happen, BUT its thought is NOT complete.

The word ***after*** changes the clause meaning, making it INCOMPLETE.

After reading this clause, we are left “hanging” – left waiting for it to be finished.  This clause raises a question: What happened after Webster took the train?

These two clauses illustrate the two kinds of clauses we use in the English language:

                        ***independent clauses***    and   ***dependent clauses***

**Clause #1**

            

**Clause #1** has these three characteristics:

            1.  *subject*      2.  *predicate*    3.  *complete thought*

This kind of clause is called an ***independent clause*** or a ***main clause***.  It is a complete unit by itself and does NOT need or depend upon any other words for its completeness.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .**

AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE AND A SIMPLE SENTENCE ARE THE SAME THING.

**Clause #2**

             

**Clause #2** has these three characteristics:

              1.  *subject*      2.  *predicate*    3.  ***incomplete****thought*

This kind of clause is called a ***dependent clause*** or a ***subordinate clause***.  It is an incomplete unit on its own, leaving its reader asking questions.  It needs or depends on additional words to be a complete thought.

We can now formulate a **definition** for each type of clause:

An ***independent clause*** is a group of words that contains a subject, a predicate, and a complete thought.

A ***dependent clause***is a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate, but does NOT express a complete thought.

**Exercise 4**

 Directions: Identify each clause below as independent (I) or dependent (D).

1. after you feed the dog

independent -- dependent

2. the instructor showed me some slides

independent -- dependent

3. when the instructor showed me some slides

independent -- dependent

4. when will the instructor show me some slides

independent -- dependent

5. she showed some slides

independent -- dependent

**Part 5**

You have now reached the main focus of this unit: ***writing complete sentences***.

You will be happy to know that while you have been progressing from *word* to *phrase* to *clause*, you have actually already been teaching yourself about sentence structure!

Here’s the good news.  In order to have a ***sentence***, you need only TWO elements:

           1.  a subject-predicate unit               AND            2.  a complete thought

                       *citizens* = **subject**

                                                                                     *protested* = **predicate**

                                                                                     complete thought?  **yes**

In other words, a ***simple sentence*** is actually the SAME thing as an ***independent clause***.  Since you already know what an independent clause is, you can also understand immediately what a simple sentence is.

            **SIMPLE SENTENCE                             =                    INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**

         = 

Therefore, as long as you remember what constitutes an independent clause, you will automatically recognize what constitutes a simple sentence.

**REMEMBER: subject -- predicate pair + complete thought = simple sentence**

BACK TO **DEPENDENT CLAUSES** AND **PHRASES** FOR A MOMENT . . .

Dependent clauses and phrases are called sentence ***fragments*** because they are *missing* one or more parts needed to make a sentence (subject/predicate pair & complete thought) and are, therefore, only *pieces* or *fragments* of complete sentences.

Look at these examples

1.

   =     

2.

            =    

3.

   =   

4.

    =    

Examples 2, 3, and 4 are ***fragments***, not complete sentences, because they are missing at least one element needed to construct a complete sentence.

Except in rare instances, ***fragments*** are MAJOR WRITING ERRORS.  Try not to use fragments in your writing.  Use complete sentences instead.

**Exercise 5**

Directions: Some of the following groups of words are only fragments (phrases or dependent clauses) while others are simple sentences (independent clauses). For each item, indicate whether it is a fragment or a sentence.

NOTE: No capital letters or end punctuation marks have been used here to indicate whether a particular item is a sentence or a fragment. Use the subject – predicate units and complete thoughts to determine your answers.

1. since she is an intelligent person

fragment -- sentence

2. he often puts colorful advertisements on my desk

fragment -- sentence

3. when afternoon arrives, at about 1:00 p.m.

fragment -- sentence

4. the psychology instructor giving an exam

fragment -- sentence

5. whether Smith witnessed the accident or not

fragment -- sentence

6. as we were driving to Washington

fragment -- sentence

7. for example, a novel by Anne Tyler

fragment -- sentence

8. you shouldn’t read without your glasses

fragment -- sentence