Success Center
Directed Learning Activity (DLA)

Basic Sentence Structure

G001.1
Directed Learning Activity – Basic Sentence Structure

Description: This activity will help you to identify the basic parts of a simple sentence and apply what you learn by writing your own sentences. It is important to understand the basic sentence structure to speak and write correctly and effectively. By understanding the basic structure of simple sentences, you will also be better able to construct other types of sentences, such as compound and complex sentences.

Prior Knowledge: It would be helpful to have an understanding of the following parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Step One: Assessing Prior Knowledge

On the lines below, explain what you already know about these topics. Please do not look ahead or look for a definition in a book or on the Internet. If you are unsure of the answers, simply write that you do not know.

What is a sentence?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is a subject of a sentence?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is a verb?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Definitions

A sentence is a group of words that usually contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A sentence begins with a capital letter. A sentence can be a statement, a question, a command, or an exclamation.

The subject of a sentence tells who or what the sentence is about. It can also name the person or thing doing an action.

The verb of a sentence expresses the action, experience, or state of being of the subject.

Step Two: Identifying Subjects

The subject can be any of the following structures:

- A noun phrase
  - All babies cry.
- A pronoun
  - They cry.
- An infinitive phrase
  - To teach takes practice.
- An -ing phrase
  - Teaching takes practice.
- A noun clause
  - What you said made everyone happy.

Only an imperative, or command, will not have a stated subject. The subject you is understood.

- Sit down.
- Turn off your cell phone.

Circle the subject in the sentence. Then identify what type of subject it is: noun phrase, pronoun, infinitive phrase, -ing phrase, or noun clause.

1. The beautiful boy smiled for the camera.  ____________________________

2. He blew out all of the candles on his cake.  ____________________________

3. Reading helps you learn English.  ____________________________

4. What you told him is a lie.  ____________________________

5. To learn is important.  ____________________________
Step Three: Identifying Verbs

Verbs tell us what the subject does or express the subject’s state of being.

Verbs can be transitive or intransitive. If you look up a verb in a dictionary, you can usually find out if the verb is transitive or intransitive. A [T] next to a verb indicates that is transitive. An [I] indicates that it is intransitive. Sometimes a verb can be either transitive or intransitive, depending on the context of the sentence.

Transitive verbs are followed by an object. An object can be a noun, noun phrase, or pronoun.

The lady kissed the dog.

        S       V         O

Intransitive verbs do not need to be followed by an object.

They arrived.

        S       V

Circle the subject and underline the verb in each sentence. Then identify if the verb is transitive (T) or intransitive (I).

1. Students study.
   ____________________________________________

2. The students need a textbook.
   ____________________________________________

3. My cousin enjoyed the movie.
   ____________________________________________

   ____________________________________________

5. A student studies books.
   ____________________________________________
Step Four: Completing a Sentence

The standard word order of a sentence is **S-V-O**. There are five basic patterns around which most English sentences are constructed. They are as follows:

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| **S-V** | Subject-Verb | Charlie sleeps.  
|       |              | Jack is studying.  
| **S-V-O** | Subject-Verb-Object | I like rice.  
|       |              | She loves her job.  
| **S-V-Adj.** | Subject-Verb-Adjective | He is funny.  
|       |              | The students are motivated.  
| **S-V-Adv.** | Subject-Verb-Adverb | My friend is here.  
|       |              | No one was there.  
| **S-V-Noun** | Subject-Verb-Noun | She is my mom.  
|       |              | A Chihuahua is a dog.  

(Adapted from the *ESL Gold* website)

**Identify the sentence pattern: S-V, S-V-O, S-V-Adj., S-V-Adv., or S-V-Noun.**

1. The students are actors.  

2. Your mom seems happy.  

3. Cockroaches are everywhere.  


5. She likes math.
Now, it’s your turn to try. Complete each sentence using the given pattern.

1. (S-V) Students ____________________________.

2. (S-V-O) The man kissed ____________________________.

3. (S-V-Adj.) Brad Pitt is ____________________________.

4. (S-V-Adv.) I am ____________________________.

5. (S-V-Noun) A guitar is an ____________________________.

Step Five: Identifying and Writing Simple Sentence Formulas
A simple sentence can have one of several formulas.

Sentence Formulas

**SV**
- **Titanic** *was* an international hit.

**SSV**
- Young **people** and **adults** *enjoyed* it.

**SVV**
- The **film** *entertained* and **thrilled** audiences everywhere.

**SSVV**
- **Leonardo DiCaprio** and **Kate Winslet** *captured* audiences and **made** people want to see the movie over and over.

Circle the subjects and underline the verb. Then identify the sentence formula: **SV, SSV, SVV, or SSVV**.

1. My cousin lives in Washington. ____________________________

2. My sister and I are going to a restaurant tonight. ____________________________

3. The dog ran and jumped for the ball. ____________________________

4. The boy and his friend walked and talked. ____________________________
Step Six: Analyzing Simple Sentences

Read the sentences below. If the sentence is correct, write C. If the sentence is incorrect, correct it. Be ready to explain to a tutor why the sentence is incorrect. What is missing from the sentence? Or, what is wrong with the sentence? Why does it need to be corrected?

1. Is a beautiful day. ________________________________

2. My House special for me. ________________________________

3. mary very busy now. ________________________________

4. I like. ________________________________

5. Birds fly ________________________________
Tutor Feedback:

_____ The student can define the following terms: sentence, subject, and verb.

_____ In Step Two, the student correctly identified the subject of the sentences.

_____ In Step Three, the student correctly identified the verb as transitive or intransitive.

_____ In Step Four, the student correctly identified and constructed different sentence patterns.

_____ In Step Five, the student correctly identified the subject, verb, and sentence formula.

_____ In Step Six, the student correctly fixes the simple sentence and can explain what is incorrect, missing, and/or what needs to be added.

For Further Practice:

To practice identifying simple and compound subjects, go to The Guide to Grammar and Writing website at: http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/subjects.htm