

Subjects and Verbs

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the special relationship between subjects and verbs. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Identifying Subjects
2. Identifying Verbs
3. Subjects and Verbs in Sentences

1. Identifying Subjects

In any correct sentence in English, you'll find at least two things: a **subject** and a **verb**. Those elements make up a **sentence**, which is defined as a group of words that expresses a complete thought and includes a subject and a verb.

A subject is who or what the sentence is about— a noun, pronoun, or sometimes multiple nouns or pronouns. In a sentence, the subject is directly connected to the verb, which is a word that defines actions or indicates a state of being.

Some subjects are physical things that a reader might be able to picture concretely.

➞ EXAMPLE *The dog is small.*

But some subjects are less concrete, and an undefined idea might very well be the subject of a sentence.

➞ EXAMPLE *Happiness is an important part of psychological well-being.*

Just about anything can end up as the subject of a sentence. You can even have a compound subject, which is when more than one noun or pronoun serves as a subject.

➞ EXAMPLE In the sentence "The dog and cat are friends," both the dog and cat are the subjects. You might even have a sentence where the subject is a singular indefinite pronoun.

➞ EXAMPLE In the sentence "Nobody knows how the dog and cat became friends," "nobody" is the subject.

You can also have a sentence with plural indefinite pronouns.

➞ EXAMPLE *Both of them like to nap.*

When you have a singular indefinite pronoun as the sentence subject, the verb will also always be in the singular form, such as "knows" in the second sentence above. Likewise, plural indefinite pronouns will have plural verbs, such as "like" in the third sentence above.



TERMS TO KNOW

Subject

Who or what a sentence is about.

Verb

A word that defines an action or indicates a state of being.

Sentence

A group of words that expresses a complete thought and includes a subject and a verb.

2. Identifying Verbs

When you're looking for the verb in a sentence, you'll find that it's often right after the noun. But this isn't true all the time, so you'll have to get familiar with verbs in order to spot them.

You've already learned about **action verbs**, or words that describe movement and physical being. You probably know tons of these, such as "run" and "dance."

But verbs can also be linking words, and those kinds of verbs don't describe movement in the same way.

Linking verbs connect the subject to information about the subject, and do not convey action.

➞ EXAMPLE In the sentence "Jonah is happy about his birthday present," "Jonah" is the subject, and "is" is the linking verb connecting Jonah to further information about him.



DID YOU KNOW

All of the "be" verbs are linking verbs, but there are others. Words such as "seems" and even "tastes" can be linking verbs.



TERMS TO KNOW

Action Verb

A verb that conveys a physical action, typically involving movement.

Linking Verb

A verb that connects the subject to information about the subject, and does not convey action.

3. Subjects and Verbs in Sentences

What about the relationship between these two parts of a sentence? You know that the verb is the word that describes an action or a state of being, and you know that the subject is the actor of that verb, or the thing doing the action or existing in the state of being.

Now think about how these actors and actions come together in sentences. There are a few general patterns of sentences that you're likely to see and use:

- Subject plus verb
- Subject plus verb plus complement
- Subject plus verb plus object

A **complement** is any word, phrase, or clause that is required to make a sentence complete. You will learn more about phrases and clauses in a later lesson. An **object** is the item acted upon by the subject in the sentence. In these sentences, as in most sentences, the subject comes before the verb.

But this isn't always the way sentences look. Sometimes, the verb comes first.

➞ EXAMPLE *On the boy's plate **were** (verb) **the pancakes** (subject).*

Also, sometimes the subject or verb will be compound, which means that there will be more than one subject or more than one verb in their own clause together.

➞ EXAMPLE ***My mom and I** (subject) **are going** (verb) to the store.*

Even if the order isn't what you expect, remember that to define a subject or subjects, always ask who or what is doing the action.

Now you can apply this to some more complicated sentences.

The boy and Susan were both excited to eat the pancakes. The pancakes that Susan and the boy ate at the restaurant were delicious. Susan and the boy, when they thought about it later in the day, were glad they had eaten breakfast together.

In the first sentence, the boy and Susan are both doing the action— eating pancakes. Thus, the first sentence is an example of a compound subject. The more complicated a sentence, the further apart the verb and subject might be, like in the second sentence. There might even be a dependent clause between the subject and verb, like in the third sentence.



TERMS TO KNOW

Complement

A word, phrase, or clause that is required to make a sentence complete.

Object

The item acted upon by the subject in a sentence.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how to **identify subjects** by looking for who or what the sentence is about. You can then **identify verbs** by looking for the action the subject is performing or any words connecting the subject to information about the subject. You also looked at how **subjects and verbs in sentences** work together. Some sentences may have multiple subjects performing an action together, and some sentences include objects, which are items acted upon by subjects.

Best of luck in your learning!



TERMS TO KNOW

Action Verb

A verb that conveys a physical action, typically involving movement.

Complement

A word, phrase, or clause that is required to make a sentence complete.

Linking Verb

A verb that connects the subject to information about the subject, and does not convey action.

Object

The item acted upon by the subject in a sentence.

Sentence

A group of words that expresses a complete thought and includes a subject and a verb.

Subject

Who or what a sentence is about.

Verb

A word that defines an action or indicates a state of being.