

### III. What is a sentence?

The sentence is a set of words that express a complete thought, typically containing a subject and predicate. It is the single most important linguistic structure of all writing.

The concept of a sentence can be very difficult to explain and to master. Hence, there are only three ‘applicable rules’, which are of limited value on their own.

- i.** All sentences must begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop.
- ii.** All sentences must express a complete thought.
- iii.** All sentences must contain a subject and a finite verb.

The first rule is simple and straightforward; however, it is not much on its own. Let us look at this example: Plant Biotechnology; it starts with a capital letter, and ends with a full stop. This alone does not qualify as a sentence, rather as a phrase. In order for it to qualify as a sentence, we need to consider the other two rules.

As for the second rule, ‘A complete thought’ is a clear and precise term; nonetheless, in this pair of examples it is obvious that the first is incomplete, making no sense whatsoever.

- The man in a yellow.
- The man in shorts.

Moreover, in what way is the second example ‘a complete thought’? It does make some sense, but it raises the question of ‘Well, so what?’ or ‘What about him?’ As these previous examples stand, all three are incomplete, thus requiring further information to make full sense.

Now, we are going to look at the importance of the last rule. Each of the following four examples obeys rules 1 and 2; only one of them follows the requirement laid down by rule 3.

- a. The mechanic in the oil-stained garage.
- b. The mountain lion of North America.
- c. The owl catches the mice.
- d. Algerian Airlines.

The example (c) represents an actual **sentence**; while the others are considered as **phrases**. In (c) an event takes place: the verb **catches** describes an action or a process. Moreover, that action or process is identified in terms of time, in this case the present tense—hence ‘finite’.

To qualify as a sentence, therefore, a verbal structure must possess three principal properties. It must describe an action or process that is located in a specific time-zone; the ‘doer’ [subject] must be identified; and the thought expressed must be complete and fully satisfying.

### **1. Sentence and clause: what is the difference?**

According to *The Shorter Oxford* dictionary a ‘sentence’ is:

**A series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought.**

Moreover, a ‘clause’ is:

**A short sentence; a distinct member of a sentence, one containing a subject and a predicate.**

In other words, all sentences are clauses, or made of multiple clauses; however, a single clause does not necessarily form a sentence.

There are two types of clauses: independent (main) clauses and dependent clauses or subordinate clauses.

Now, for a sentence in English to be a grammatically correct, it must have an independent clause. It doesn't need a dependent clause, but it could have one.

An independent (main) clause has a subject and a verb, and it can stand by itself. It can contain a complete idea by itself. Technically, the shortest sentence you can have in English will be an independent clause with a subject and verb.

What is the absolute shortest sentence that you can think of? Think of a sentence, the shortest you can possibly make it. Here is an example: "Go!" Is this a complete English sentence? Yes. Why? Because it contains an independent clause. We have the implied subject: "you" and the tense verb: "go", the imperative tense "go". So this is your basic English sentence.

## 2. Sentence patterns

We have three basic types or patterns:

- 1- Subject, verb, object. (SVO)
- 2- Subject, verb, subject complement. (SVsC)
- 3- Subject, verb, Adverbial complement. (SVC(A))

Your basic sentence can be any one of these three. Once you understand what must be contained in a sentence, you can then write correct and complete sentences.

### 1. SVO

First, what is an object? But before we talk about the object, we have to learn what is a transitive and intransitive verb?

#### ➤ Transitive and intransitive verbs

In any sentence, a verb is either transitive or intransitive. If a verb is transitive, it means that the action passes from the 'do-er' [the subject] across to something or someone else [the object].

For example:

1. The police captured the fugitive.
2. The ball smashed the window.

In each case there is a transfer of action. The fugitive and the window are on the direct receiving end of actions by the police and the ball. So the verbs are transitive.

Intransitive simply means 'not transitive': there is no 'passing across'. The action of an intransitive verb refers solely to the subject.

For example:

3. The lion roared.
4. The tide receded.

These are complete sentences making complete sense. Nothing other than the subject [lion, tide] is involved or even implied.

Identifying a verb as transitive or intransitive involves working out what is happening and whether anyone or anything else is involved. It is important to be able to do this, because many English verbs can be either transitive or intransitive, depending on how they are used.

Take the verb run, for instance. Most commonly it is a verb of motion, and as such it is intransitive.

(1) You run exceptionally fast.

(2) They ran down the street.

No 'transfer of action' occurs. In (2), down the street is a phrase telling you where the action took place: it is an adverb. But take a look at this sentence:

(3) The car ran down the pedestrian.

This is transitive. The word down 'belongs' to ran rather than to the pedestrian, forming a compound verb that means 'rammed'.

It might help you to remember that

**A.** All sentences have a subject and a verb.

**B.** Only sentences whose verb is transitive have an object.

Now, we talk about the object. The object always answers a question about the verb, it completes the meaning of the verb by asking the questions: "What?" or "Who?" about the verb.

An indirect object answers the question: "To what?" or: "For what?" or: "To whom?", "For whom?" Usually about the object, about the direct object.

- a. Look at this sentence here: "I want." Is this a complete sentence? I have a subject and verb. Right? Should be okay. "Want" is a transitive verb. There's no such thing as wanting without wanting something. So this is not a complete sentence. This sentence or this clause must take an object. "I want candy." Now it's complete because it answers the question: "What?" about the verb want.
- b. Now, here: "She gave Amine a letter." We have our subject "she", we have our verb, "gave", past tense. "Amine", She gave who? No. She gave what? "A letter". We have our direct object. To who "Amine", indirect object.

- c. She gave a letter to Amine. The position of the objects can differ. Okay? So we have: she gave what? Again, this is a transitive verb, it must take an object, a direct object. She gave a letter to who: "Amine" our indirect object.

These are complete independent clauses (b, c), a complete idea full of meaning, ready to be added on to. Now, what do you put before or what you put after, that's all complements. Basically. It's not important. You can have a lot more phrases, you can have other clauses, you can have subordinate clauses added to this. This is your main idea of the sentence, that's your independent clause.

## 2. SVsC

A subject complement completes the meaning of something (the subject). Now, we had the object before. The object answered the question about the verb. It completed the meaning of the verb. The subject complement completes the meaning or says something about the subject, not the verb (the object). It also answers the question: "What?" about the subject.

One way to think about this is think of the verb, "be" and it's always going to be a "be" verb-think of it as an (=) equal sign.

For example: "I am Algerian." So "I" equals (=) "Algerian", Algerian completes the meaning of "I", same thing. This is the completion of me.

This sentence looks a little bit more complicated, but it's the exact same thing. "The weatherman is wrong about today's forecast."

- I still have the "be" (is) verb. So the weatherman = wrong. The weatherman is wrong "about today's forecast." This is just an extra piece of information. It is a complement to "wrong". Wrong about what? "wrong about today's forecast." We're going to talk about different types of complements like this one.
- "Wrong" is a complement to "weatherman". "About today's forecast" is a complement to "wrong".
- So, the weatherman must be wrong about today's forecast. So this is your subject, verb, subject complement.

A sentence can have many complements. An independent clause can only have one object, one subject, one verb. However, you can have many clauses in a sentence, you can only have one independent clause unless, of course, you have two independent clause joined by a conjunction; "and", "but", "or", etcetera.

### 3. SVC(A)

Technically, anything that's not an object or a subject complement is just a complement. But why do we call it an "adverbial"? Because it answers the questions: "Where?", "When?", "How?" and "Why?"

We now know that the object answers: "What?" or "Who?". An adverbial answers the other questions. About what? About the subject? No. It's about the verb again.

For example: "I went." Is this a complete sentence? No, because "go" means you have to go somewhere. I need to add something to it. "I went to the store." I went where? To the store. "To the store" is a complement, but it's acting as an adverb because it answers one of these questions: "Where?", "When?", "How?" and "Why?"

A complement completes the meaning of something. In this case, it completes the meaning of the verb, but complements can also complete the meanings of something else. We had "SVsC" completes the meaning of the subject. We can also have complements that complete the meaning of an object, or a preposition, or many other things.

Now, let us look at another example: "Amine reads." Now, could this clause be a complete sentence? Sure. What does Amine do in his spare time? He reads. Now, we can add a piece of information to complete the idea, to complete the meaning of this sentence.

- "Amine reads books." (SVO); and
- "Amine reads for pleasure." (SVA)

These are two completely different sentences; they have completely different meanings. In the first example, the question asked is Amine reads what?

In the second example, I want to specify a particular meaning, I want to tell you why he reads, then I have to add this complement, I have to add this adverbial to complete the meaning of this verb.

So there you have the three types. Now, the thing to remember is that you can mix all of these. We are going to study a couple of examples here to see what and how they can be mixed. Keep in mind this is very basic stuff. You are going to see very, very complicated sentences in academic readings.

"I went to the store to buy bread for breakfast this morning." Now, this sentence only has "SV", lots of "C's".

- I went Where? "To the store". This is an adverbial.
- Why did I go to the store? "To buy bread".
- For what? "For breakfast. I bought bread for breakfast.
- When? "This morning". This goes back to "went".

All of these are complements to each other and to the verb: "went". You can have many complements. You don't want to have too, too many because then your sentence becomes long, and a little bit boring, and a little bit in danger of being run-on. But you can add as many as you want. Now, the complements could be anything; could be infinitive phrase, or participle phrase, or a clause. Anything. As long as it's grammatically correct.

#### **IV. The Paragraph**

This next part of the lesson is about the paragraph. What is a paragraph? And how to construct one, what to do, what not to do so you can write very clear, very tight paragraphs?

When writing academic essays, there are certain rules you have to follow; you have to be very careful about them.

**1-** In terms of like the actual way a paragraph looks: you have to indent or skip a line. So let me just make sure you understand what an indent is.

An indent is when the first line a little bit pushed in or you can make sure you skip a line between paragraphs. But don't do both. If you skip a line, don't indent.

**2-** In terms of content and this very important: one central idea in one paragraph.

For example: if you start a paragraph and you're talking about apples, continue to talk about apples. If you go to oranges, that's maybe okay because you're still talking about fruit. But if you start with apples, go to oranges, go to bananas, and then end up with monkeys in space there's a bit of a problem; the reader has no idea what you're talking about.

Also, make sure that you tell the reader what this central idea is. It's a very general sentence. All it does is introduce the topic of the paragraph, nothing else. All the details comes after.

**3-** So speaking of details, all your sentences with the details must directly relate back to the main idea.

**4-** How long should your paragraph be?

Technically, a paragraph could be one sentence; but in academic essays that rarely happens. But it could be any length possible, as long as it's on the same topic, as long as you still have things to write and things to say about that topic, say it.

**5-** When you have one idea in a sentence, you must connect it to the next sentence. Every sentence must have a link to the next sentence. This creates flow, which makes it much easier to read and understand, and it keeps you on the one topic.

**6-** Now, key terms can be repeated. If you are talking about something specific and you have to use a key term, use it as many times as you need to. Otherwise, avoid repetition. Try not to use the same word more than once in one paragraph.

For examples:

- You're writing an essay about parents. Not many words you can replace for "parents" so if you have to say "parents", "parents", "parents", "parents", so be it, do that. But you don't want to add like "mother and father" three words, "parents" one word. Shorter is better, so keep that in mind.
- Otherwise, if you are using the word "moreover" in the paragraph, don't use "moreover" again and again, use "in addition to" "furthermore" "another", etc. Try to avoid using one word more than once, especially in the same paragraph.

**7-** At the end of your paragraph you should leave some sort of a bridge to the next paragraph. Or if you can't do that, then just conclude the paragraph, make sure it's a very clear statement that this idea is finished: I'm done talking about this idea and then start your next paragraph with some bridge to the previous one.

So one paragraph connects to the next paragraph. Same idea with flow: sentence connects to sentence; paragraph connects to paragraph.