

The Subject

Recognize a *subject* when you see one.

In a sentence, every verb must have a subject. If the verb expresses action—like **sneeze**, **jump**, **bark**, or **study**—the subject is *who* or *what* does the verb. Take a look at this example:

During his biology lab, **Tommy** danced on the table.

Danced is an action verb. **Tommy** is *who* did the dancing. Look at the next example:

The speeding **hotrod** crashed into a telephone pole.

Crashed is the action verb. The **hotrod** is *what* did the crashing.

Not all verbs are action verbs. Some verbs are linking: **am**, **is**, **are**, **was**, **were**, **seem**, and **become**, among others. Linking verbs connect the subject to something that is said about the subject. Take a look at this example:

Ron's **bathroom** is a disaster.

Bathroom is the subject. **Is** connects the subject to something that is said about it, that the bathroom is a disaster. Here is another example:

The bathroom **tiles** are fuzzy with mold.

The word **tiles** is the subject. **Are** connects **tiles** to something said about them, that they are fuzzy with mold.

Generally, but not always, the subject of a linking verb will come *before* the linking verb.

Know the difference between a *complete* subject and a *simple* subject.

The complete subject is *who* or *what* is doing the verb *plus* all of the modifiers [descriptive words] that go with it. Read the sentence below:

The big, hungry, green Martian grabbed a student from the back row.

Who did the grabbing? The Martian, of course. But this Martian wasn't petite, satisfied, and blue. No, this one was big, hungry, and green. The complete subject, then, is **the huge, hairy, hungry, green Martian**.

The simple subject, on the other hand, is the *who* or *what* that is doing the verb *without* any description. Take a look at this example:

The bright copper coin sparkled on the sidewalk.

What did the sparkling? Obviously, the bright copper coin. **The**, **bright** and **copper**, however, are just description that distinguishes this coin from one that is, let's say, tarnished and silver. The simple subject is only the word **coin**.

Remember that the subject is never part of a prepositional phrase.

The subject of a verb will never be part of a prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition [**in**, **on**, **at**, **between**, **among**, etc.] and ends with a noun, pronoun, or gerund. Look at these examples of prepositional phrases:

in the dirty bathtub

on the bumpy road

at home

between us

among the empty pizza boxes

without crying

Sometimes a prepositional phrase appears to be either the subject itself or part of the subject. Read the example that follows:

Neither of these boys wants to try a piece of pineapple pizza.

In this sentence, the **boys** seem to be the ones who do not want the pizza, but because they are part of a prepositional phrase, **of these boys**, they are not the subject. **Neither** is the actual subject. Take a look at another example:

My dog, along with her seven puppies, has chewed all of the stuffing out of the sofa cushions.

Here, both **my dog** and **her seven puppies** are chewing on the sofa, but because the puppies are part of the prepositional phrase **along with her seven puppies**, the only word that counts as the subject is **dog**.

Remember this additional point:

Generally, but not always, the subject comes *before* the verb, as in all of the examples above. There are, however, exceptions, like this one:

In a small house adjacent to our backyard lives a **family** with ten noisy children.

Lives is the action verb in this sentence, but it is not the house or the backyard that is doing the living. Instead, it is the family with ten noisy children. **Family**, then, is the

subject of this sentence, even though it comes *after* the verb. Take a look at another example:

Around the peach trees are several buzzing *bumblebees*.

Are is the linking verb in this sentence. The word **trees**, however, is not the subject because **trees** is within the prepositional phrase **around the peach trees**. The subject in this sentence, **bumblebees**, follows the verb rather than coming before it.



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