Recognize the subject of a sentence when you find one.

Every verb in a sentence must have a subject. If the verb expresses action—like sneeze, jump, bark, or study—the subject is who or what is doing the action.

Read this example:

During his biology lab, Tommy danced on the table.

*Danced* is an action verb. *Tommy* is *who* performed that action.

Now read this 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, become*, etc. A linking verb will connect the subject to additional information about it.

Consider this example:

Ron’s *bathroom* is a disaster.

*Bathroom* is the subject. *Is* connects that subject to additional information. The *noun disaster* lets us know that some cleaning is in order!

Here is another example:

The bathroom *tiles* are fuzzy with mold.

*Tiles* is the subject. *Are* connects this subject to more information. The phrase *fuzzy with mold* tells us a good scrubbing is necessary!

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 includes all the **modifiers** (descriptive words) that go with it.

Read the sentence below:

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

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

The simple subject, on the other hand, includes *no* description.

Read 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 noun **coin**.

Do not mistake a word in a prepositional phrase for the subject.

The subject of a verb will never be part of a **prepositional phrase**.

A prepositional phrase begins with a **preposition** (words like *in, on, at, between, among, etc.*) and ends with a **noun, pronoun, or gerund**.

Here are examples of prepositional phrases:

- in the dirty bathtub
- on the bumpy road
- at home
- between us
- among the empty pizza boxes
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 noun *boys* seems to be the subject, but *boys* is part of a prepositional phrase, *of these boys. Neither* is the actual subject.

Here is another example:

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

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.*

**Sometimes the subject comes after the verb.**

Generally, the subject comes *before* the verb, as in all the examples above. There are, however, exceptions:

*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.

Here is another example:

*Around the peach tree are several buzzing *bumblebees.*

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