# BOOKLET ONE:
## Basic Sentence Skills

***Print this booklet and bring it to every class session.***

## Contents

# Parts of Speech

English words can be classified according to their function—what they actually do in a given sentence.  For example, *nouns* usually function as the subjects of sentences, and *adjectives* modify (or change) the function of a noun.  Even though the parts of speech are interrelated, it's helpful to sort them out to begin with.  Here is a list of the eight basic parts of speech that will inform our study of English this quarter.

(1)  **(v.)** *verbs*—a verb shows action or essence.  In the following two sentences the verb is underlined:
> Joseph <u>wrote</u> a research paper for history class.
> Linh <u>is</u> a tall man with thin hair.

(2)  **(n.)** *nouns*—a noun is a person, place, thing, or idea.  In the following two sentences the noun is underlined:
> <u>McKinney</u> drives a truck for the Salvation Army.
> <u>Justice</u> must be tempered by mercy.

(3)  **(pro.)** *pronouns*—a pronoun can substitute for a noun.  In the following two sentences the pronoun  is underlined:
> Ricky stole the loaf of bread; <u>he</u> was hungry.
> <u>I</u> don't care for any more rice, thank you.

(4)  **(adj)** *adjectives*—an adjective modifies or qualifies nouns or pronouns.  In the following two sentences the adjective is underlined:
> This book is <u>long</u> and <u>difficult</u>.
> <u>Competitive</u> gymnasts look strong.

(5)  **(adv)** *adverbs*—an adverb can modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.  In the following two sentences the adverb is underlined:
> <u>Honestly</u>, Jo wasn't speeding.
> She sends me <u>daily</u> emails about her struggles.

(6)  **(prep)** *prepositions*—a preposition establishes a relationship to time, space, cause, or manner.  The preposition with its subject is called a prepositional phrase.  In the following two sentences the prepositions are underlined:
> <u>With</u> great feeling, Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed his dream <u>of</u>
>         freedom and equality.
> The reference book is <u>on</u> the shelf.

(7)  **(conj)** *conjunctions*—a conjunction is a connector that joins sentence elements and shows the relationship between ideas.  In the following two sentences the conjunctions are underlined:
> Marta took the exam, <u>and</u> then she went home to sleep.
> The Giants are in first place, <u>but</u> the Rockies are in last.

(8)  **(art.)** *articles*—words such as *a* or *the* are used to signal nouns and to specify their application.  In the following two sentences the articles are underlined:
> <u>An</u> eyewitness testified in the trial.
> Eduardo borrowed <u>a</u> cup of sugar from his neighbor.

# Phrases & Clauses

Sentences in English consist of the parts of speech grouped together into two kinds of sense units. It's useful to learn what these units are before we begin looking at whole sentences.

The first kind of sense unit is called a **phrase**. A phrase is a group of related words that functions as a single part of speech. A phrase is *not* a complete sentence because it does not contain both a subject and a verb (the defining grammatical elements of a basic sentence). A phrase contains one of these but not both. Here are a few different kinds of phrases (in bold print) nestled within complete sentences:

> The flowers **have wilted**. (verb phrase)
> The **heavy freeze** killed the fruit trees. (noun phrase)
> Parking **on campus** is prohibited. (prepositional phrase)
> **Exploring the beach**, we found many treasures. (participial phrase)
> **Swimming across the lake** is fun. (gerund phrase)
> He wanted **to go to the movie.** (infinitive phrase)
> **The lunch having been packed**, we were ready to go. (absolute phrase)
> John, **my brother**, is here today. (appositive phrase)

The second kind of sense unit is called a **clause**. A clause is a group of related words that contains both a subject (a noun) and a verb. Because of this, a clause is (or can be) a complete sentence. An **independent clause** has the same grammatical structure as a sentence—in other words, it contains a subject and a verb. Here are a few examples of clauses (in bold print):

> **The boy chased** the dog all the way home.
> **Carla stopped** by the library before going to work.
> **Nobody knew** who the young man was until the next day.

As you can see, most sentences in English are made by successfully grouping together phrases and clauses into complete statements. Can you separate the phrases from the clauses in the following sentences? Put parentheses ( ) around the phrases that you find. Underline the clauses.

> **"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."**

# The Simple Sentence

There are four basic sentence types in English: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. Each sentence type has a shape and a form that is suited to its function. We use the **simple sentence** when we want to express an idea that is simple and direct.

The simple sentence consists of an **independent clause**. Remember, an independent clause is a group of related words that contains both a subject and a verb. A simple sentence may also contain a phrase or two in order to help communicate a complete unit of thought. The following are some basic patterns of simple sentences:

**S/V** Pattern: One subject + one verb

**The quaking Aspen trees / quivered in the wind.**


**SS/V** Pattern: Two subjects + one verb

**Nina and Teresita / graduated from Officer Training School.**


**S/VV** Pattern: One subject + two verbs

**Armadillos / can walk under water and float across streams.**


**SS/VV** Pattern Two subjects + two verbs

**Daryl and Delcia / left Arizona and moved to Paris.**


**S/VVV** Pattern: One subject + three verbs

**The river / broke through the levee, flooded the farms, and closed the highway.**


**VS or VSV** Pattern: The verb comes before the subject

**There are / cockroaches in the cabinets.**

**Why is / the wolf / being reintroduced to Arizona?**


Exercise: On a fresh Journal page, write the title "Simple Sentences" at the top. Then write one original sentence in each of these basic patterns on the topic of J. R. R. Tolkien's story *The Hobbit*. Place a slash (/) between the subject and verb of each sentence.

# The Compound Sentence

There are four basic sentence types in English: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.  Each sentence type has a shape and a form that is suited to its function.  We use the **simple sentence** when we want to express a single idea that is simple and direct, and <mark>we use the **compound sentence** when we want to express two related ideas</mark>.  In a compound sentence the independent clauses are basically <mark>equal in importance</mark>.  This act of combining two complete thoughts or ideas is called **coordination**.

A compound sentence consists of two **independent clauses** that are joined in one of two ways.  The *first way* is to join them with *a comma and a coordinating conjunction*.  The coordinating conjunctions are easily remembered by memorizing the word *fanboys*.

> **F**or    (meaning "because")
>
> **A**nd    (meaning "in addition")
>
> **N**or    (meaning "and not" or "not either")
>
> **B**ut    (meaning "on the contrary")
>
> **O**r    (meaning "an alternative")
>
> **Y**et    (meaning "at this time" or "nevertheless")
>
> **S**o    (meaning "therefore")

Thus, two simple sentences can become one compound sentence:

**The moviegoers / complained loudly about the long lines.**
**They / threatened to leave.**

**The moviegoers / complained loudly about the long lines, and they / threatened to leave.**

When a compound sentence follows this form we record it as <mark>**SV, conjunction SV**</mark>.

The *second way* to join to independent clauses is with a *semicolon*.  When you use a semicolon, no conjunction is necessary between the clauses.

**The moviegoers / complained loudly about the long lines; they / threatened to leave.**

When a compound sentence follows this form we record it as <mark>**SV; SV**</mark>.

Exercise: Combine each of these pairs of simple sentences into single compound sentences. Write out your answers in the space provided.

1.1    I was afraid of lightening storms.
1.2    That night I found the storm very beautiful.

_____

_____

2.1    The chemistry experiment failed.
2.2    The students were confused.

_____

_____

3.1    Alejandro wrote down the unfamiliar word.
3.2    Later, he looked it up in the dictionary.

_____

_____

4.1    My dad cautioned me not to buy that car.
4.2    I was too excited to take his advice.

_____

_____

5.1    The library book was overdue.
5.2    Lil had to pay a fine.

_____

_____

Exercise: Write an original compound sentence on the topic of J. R. R. Tolkien's book, *The Hobbit*. Place a slash (/) between the subject and verb in each clause.

_____

_____

# The Complex Sentence

There are four basic sentence types in English: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. Each sentence type has a shape and a form that is suited to its function. To review, we use the **simple sentence** when we want to express a single idea that is simple and direct; we use the **compound sentence** when we want to express two related ideas that are of equal importance.

The third type of sentence is called a **complex sentence**; we use the complex sentence when we want to emphasize the importance of one idea over another. The way we do this is by using **subordination**. By attaching a *subordinator* to a clause, we create a **dependent clause** (one that *depends* on the **independent clause** for its meaning). Thus, a complex sentence consists of an independent clause and a dependent clause.

Here is a list of the most common subordinators:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| after | because | if | unless | whenever | which |
| although | before | since | until | where | while |
| as | how | that | when | whereas | who |

When a subordinator is attached to a clause, that clause is known as a dependent clause.

Example:
[*Because the fire / was so intense], the setting sun / appeared red-orange.

Notice that the dependent clauses cannot stand alone as sentences. They are *dependent* on independent clauses to complete their meaning.

Exercise One: Using the following subordinators, write five dependent clauses. Draw a slash (/) between the subject and the verb.

After _____

Because _____

If _____

Unless _____

When _____

Exercise Two: Now add an independent clause to each of the above to create a complex sentence. Draw brackets [ ] around the dependent clause and put an asterisk (*) next to the subordinator.

Exercise:  Using the list of common subordinators, join the following pairs of simple sentences, turning them into complex sentences.  Complete the following steps for each sentence:

1. Add an appropriate subordinator, marking each one with an asterisk (*).
2. Draw a slash mark ( / ) between each subject and verb.
3. Place brackets [ ] around the dependent clause.
4. Use a comma if necessary.

1.1  South American killer bees began their trek north several years ago.
1.2  People in the United States started to panic.

_____

_____

2.1  You suffer from wintertime depression.
2.2  You should increase your intake of peas, beans, and grains.

_____

_____

3.1  Small children have wild imaginations and deep-seated fears.
3.2  They should be reassured, not humiliated.

_____

_____

4.1  Natural herb dietary supplements are often declared "safe" by health experts.
4.2  They still have their dangers.

_____

_____

5.1  Hay fever season is in full swing in the summer.
5.2  Sufferers everywhere have to cope with watery eyes and runny noses.

_____

_____

**Relative Pronouns** (who, which, that) also function as subordinators to create complex sentences.

Note:   *Who* refers to people or animals with names.
        *Which* and *That* usually refer to objects, events, or animals.

Example:  The thoroughbred, [*which / was raised on a farm in Ireland,] / won the Kentucky Derby.

Exercise:  Write five complex sentences with the dependent clause in the middle of the sentence or at the end.  Complete the following steps for each sentence:

1.  Mark each subordinator with an asterisk (*).
2.  Draw a slash mark ( / ) between each subject and verb.
3.  Place brackets around each dependent clause.

1.  _____

_____

2.  _____

_____

3.  _____

_____

4.  _____

_____

5.  _____

_____

Exercise: Write an original complex sentence on the subject of J. R. R. Tolkien's book *The Hobbit*.

# Sentence Variety

The whole point of mastering the sentence types is so that we may use them in our writing according to our needs.  When we need to say something simply and directly, we use a **simple sentence**; when we have two ideas of equal importance, we *coordinate* them, creating a **compound** sentence; when we have a judgment to make, or a complex turn of thought to express, we *subordinate* one idea to another, creating a **complex** sentence.  When we write a continuous paragraph, then, we tend to <mark>mix</mark> these <mark>sentence types as needed</mark>.  For example, we might use a couple of simple sentences to begin, throw in a compound sentence, another simple, and a complex sentence or two.  This shifting between types of sentences creates **variety**—the hallmark of an effective writing style.

Exercise: Examine the paragraph below, identifying the sentence types: simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.  Chart each sentence by marking the main subjects (S) and verbs (V), putting a slash ( / ) between them, and putting an asterisk (*) next to the subordinators and brackets [ ] around the dependent clauses.

**Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small slimy creature. I don't know where he came from, nor who or what he was.  He was Gollum—as dark as darkness, except for two big round eyes in his thin face.  He had a little boat, and he rowed about quite nicely on the lake; for lake it was, wide and deep and deadly cold.  He paddled it with large feet dangling over the side, but never a ripple did he make.  Not he.  He was looking out of his pale lamp-like eyes for blind fish, which he grabbed with his long fingers as quick as thinking.  He liked meat too. Goblin he thought good, when he could get it; but he took care they never found him out.  He just throttled them from behind, if they ever came down alone anywhere near the edge of the water, while he was prowling about.**

# Sentence Errors

If we were to list the most common errors that inexperienced writers make, three would stand out: sentence fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences. Perhaps by examining each mistake one at a time, we might learn to eliminate them from our writing.

A **sentence fragment** is merely a *piece* of a sentence; it doesn't pass the test for a whole sentence—that is, it doesn't contain both a subject and a verb, and it doesn't communicate a complete idea.

Example: He enjoys flowers and shrubs. Which help screen him from the street.

This mistake can be corrected by adding a proper subject to the second clause, making two sentences: **He enjoys flowers and shrubs. They help screen him from the street**. Or it can be corrected by attaching the dependent clause to the independent clause: **He enjoys flowers and shrubs, which help screen him from the street.**

A **comma splice** consists of two independent clauses (simple sentences) joined simply by a comma.

Example: The current was swift, he swam to shore.

The mistake can be corrected by separating the clauses into two complete sentences: **The current was swift. He swam to shore.** Or it can be corrected by adding a coordinating conjunction (fanboy): **The current was swift, so he swam to shore**. Or it can be corrected by adding a semicolon: **The current was swift; he swam to shore**.

Another mistake that can be corrected in the same way is called a **run-on** sentence. In a run-on, two separate ideas are presented as one sentence by forgetting to punctuate.

Example: The current was swift he swam to shore.
See the corrections above for comma splice. We fix a run-on the same way.

Exercise: Read through your most recent chapter summary of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* to see if you've created any sentence fragments, comma splices, or run-on sentences. If so, correct them using the methods above. By so doing, you will begin to train yourself to edit your own writing.