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# Introduction

It is possible to teach sentence structure without numbing the minds of students. It's true that prepositional phrases, adverb clauses and compound-complex sentences are not the most exciting teaching topics around. In fact, just mentioning these terms in class can cause students' heads to drop. However, teaching sentence structure with writing topics and activities that allow students to generate and share their own creative sentences can actually make the subject interesting and even fun.

Students will probably never be asked to identify an adverb clause or an appositive phrase during a job interview. However, the ability to write sentences that contain adverb clauses and appositive phrases will help every student get a job interview and succeed once they have landed the job. Writing sentences that are clear, correct and varied is a goal for which any student should strive. Knowing the different types of phrases and clauses that writers have at their disposal is a means to that goal.

Even a great writer may not be able to identify an adverb clause or an appositive phrase, but one thing is certain: competent writers use the entire contents of the English-sentence toolbox to write sentences – and this toolbox includes adverb clauses and appositive phrases. This book will help students understand the different parts of the sentence, and it will give them new tools for expanding and revising sentences to make them more elaborate, detailed and interesting.

Here's an overview of this book's contents:

## ❖ **Part I: Sentence skills**

Here you will find individual lessons and application writing assignments that are logically sequenced to build on each other.

## ❖ **Part II: Sentence styles**

These are lessons on specific word choice and parallelism.

## ❖ **Part III: Sentence games**

This section features classroom and small-group games in which students can apply their learning of the sentence skills.

## ❖ **Appendices**

This section includes skills review, a quiz, writing assignments and an answer key

# The amazing English sentence

The English sentence is an amazing thing. It has a limited set of distinct parts (phrases and clauses), but these parts can be strung together and rearranged in a seemingly endless variety of ways. Furthermore, there is an incredible volume of words from which a writer can draw. Experts estimate that there are nearly one million words in English, and this number is growing every day. This flexibility of parts and variety in vocabulary make it possible to write a sentence that no one has ever written or even spoken before. Sure there are sentences that we hear every day, such as ‘I love you’ or ‘The dog ate my homework’; but anyone using the resources of the English language can write a totally unique sentence such as, ‘The rabid chihuahua gobbled my potentially award-winning essay entitled “101 alternative uses for ear wax.”’

Here’s an illustration that shows just how much variety is possible in the English sentence. Imagine you are writing a sentence that is 10 words long. If you had only 10 possible words to choose from for each of the 10 words in the sentence, you would have 10 billion possible different combinations of words (the formula being  $10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 10$  billion). If it took you 10 seconds to write a single 10-word sentence, it would take you over 3171 years to write all 10 billion possible combinations. Try doing that for tonight’s homework!



Read the following sentences, and see if you agree that they probably have never been uttered by anyone at your school.

My English teacher made us watch MTV in class today.

Yesterday, I volunteered to clean every toilet in the school.

Tomorrow, all my friends and I are going to get together and write a musical about fish fingers.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but on Wednesday the whole school will be going rollerblading.

# The amazing English sentence *(cont.)*



## Unheard-of sentences

Try writing your own totally unique sentences. Each sentence should be at least 10 words long and each should be a complete sentence. Here are some tips that might help you come up with some ideas:

- Think of something that is so odd it would never happen.
- Think of something that is so totally out of character for you (or for someone famous) it would never happen.
- Think of an overused phrase or expression, such as ‘When the cat’s away, the mice will play’. (These are also known as clichés.) Then, rewrite the phrase so that it begins or ends in a new way, such as ‘When the cat’s away, the mice get together and sing a medley of Elvis songs’.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Simple sentence sense

Which of the following is a complete sentence?

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Book the read Sam. | C. The Sam read book. |
| B. Read book the Sam. | D. Sam read the book. |

Even if you have never had a lesson in grammar, you probably recognise that **D** is the complete sentence. You are able to recognise the correct sentence because your experience speaking, reading and writing English sentences allows you to understand how the language works. You might say you have a sixth sense that helps you make sense of sentences. Not all sentences are as clear and as short as ‘Sam read the book’; however, your ability to recognise this simple sentence is an important starting point for understanding longer, more elaborate sentences.

A simple sentence is made up of two parts: a *subject* (a noun or pronoun) and a *predicate* (a verb). The subject tells you who or what the sentence is about, and the predicate tells you what the subject is doing or what it is. These are some examples of simple sentences:

- ➔ Jeff snores.
- ➔ My textbooks are too heavy.
- ➔ John plays the guitar while standing on his head.
- ➔ Yesterday, Joe Martin became the first person ever to serve 10 straight aces.

Recognising a complete sentence is not all that difficult. Use this test: imagine someone poked their head in your classroom door and said, ‘Today, after fourth period.’ You would probably be perplexed by this statement because it is not a complete thought; therefore, it does not make sense. Now imagine another person poked their head in your classroom door and said, ‘Today, after fourth period, all students will be given a flu shot!’ This statement makes sense because it stands alone as a complete thought.

**Directions:** In the following sentences, underline the simple subjects (what/who the sentence is about) and circle the simple predicates (what the subject is doing or what it is). The first has been done for you.

1. Ben (copied) his classmate’s test paper on plagiarism.
2. Magazine readers enjoy the topics of food and sport the most.
3. Arctic ground squirrels hibernate for nine months of the year.
4. The dogs ran after the paperboy.
5. In June, we plan to celebrate Donald Duck’s birthday.
6. *Star Wars* is one of the highest grossing movies of all time.
7. In April, Jack never does homework.
8. The madman, tall and limping, walked silently through the night.

**Bonus:** Select five sentences from a book, newspaper or magazine. Write down the five sentences and underline the subjects and circle the predicates in each of the sentences. Write down the sentence, the author and title of the source from which you got it.

# Write your own simple sentences

A simple sentence is made up of two parts: a subject (a noun or pronoun) and a predicate (a verb). The subject tells who or what the sentence is about, and the predicate tells what the subject is doing or what it is.

- ➔ Russ always flosses after dinner.

Simple subject: Russ

Simple predicate: flosses

- ➔ The quicksand swallowed my homework.

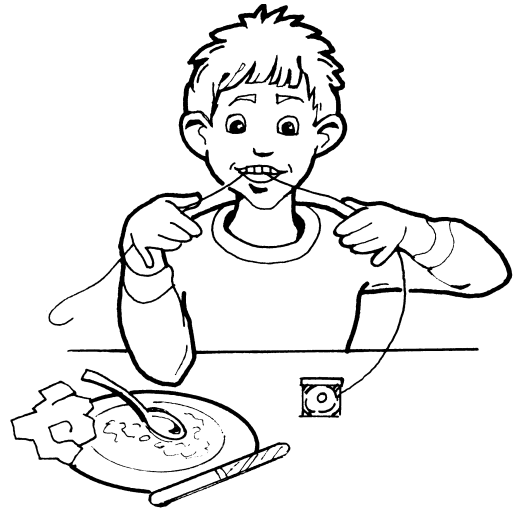
Simple subject: quicksand

Simple predicate: swallowed

- ➔ The state dance of Queensland is the square dance.

Simple subject: dance

Simple predicate: is



Select some subjects for sentences by answering the questions below:

1. Who is a famous person you admire? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your favourite hobby or sport? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your favourite place? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is something that annoys you? \_\_\_\_\_

Write four simple sentences by adding a predicate to each of the four subjects above. Underline each subject and circle each predicate.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Write your own simple sentences *(cont.)*



## Write opening lines to a children’s story

Write the opening four sentences of a children’s story. Introduce the main character, the setting of the story and a problem that the character has. Think animals, magic, silliness and simple but precise words.

Here is an example:

Rone never liked delivering the paper to Jake the Giant’s house. Jake was often mean to trespassers, even trespassers who brought him his daily newspaper, *The Wartsville Chronicle*. In fact, Rone had heard rumours that Jake had eaten the last paperboy. So, as he crept quietly up the giant’s walkway, Rone trembled with fear, hoping the enormous wooden door with menacing metal spikes would not open.

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