



Figure 1 Logos for the Academic Resource Center and The Writing Center

SENTENCE PATTERNS

A **sentence** is the smallest grammatical unit consisting of words that express a complete statement or question. A sentence always contains at least a subject and a verb.

Definitions:

A *verb* is the action that is described in the sentence (also called the predicate).

A *subject* is a noun that performs the action (verb) in a sentence.

- For a complete sentence, *the subject* and *the verb* have to agree. They should be in the same form even if there are other words in between them. Sometimes there might be more than one of these specific grammatical units in one sentence. Refer to Table 1 below for a quick guide of subject verb agreement (See Subject Verb Agreement handout for more details).

Table 1

Subject	Verb Tense		
	Present/past cont.	Present/past simple	Present/past perfect
I	am/was training	train/trained	have/had trained
You	are/were training	train/trained	have/had trained
He/She/It	is/was training	trains/trained	has/had trained
We/You/They (plural)	are/were training	train/trained	have/trained

Simple Sentence patterns

In addition to the subject and the verb, sentences may contain other parts of speech. A variety in sentence patterns ensures creative and interesting writing.

Note: It is easier to determine the specific part of speech that we are working with if we ask the appropriate question. The answer to the question should be the unknown part of speech itself.

The six major *simple sentence patterns* are as follows.

1. **To Be Pattern (type 1)** has an *adverbial phrase or word* usually following the, *to be* verb (ex. Is, are, was, were, will be, has been, and had been). An adverbial phrase or word (ADV) is a word or phrase that modifies the verb expressing a relation to place, time, manner, cause, etc. It answers the questions starting with where, when, how, why, etc.

➤ The toys are **in the box at the corner.**

In the example above, we can ask the question, “*Where* are the toys?”

Our answer will be, “in the box.” Since *where* generally describes a place, ‘in the box’ acts as an adverbial phrase.

2. **To Be Pattern (type 2)** has a *subject complement* following the, *to be* verb and starts with the *subject*. A subject complement describes the subject of the sentence and usually answers questions starting with *what*.

➤ Swimming is **my favorite activity.**

In the example above, we can ask the question, “*What* is swimming?” The answer is: “It is my favorite activity.” Since ‘swimming’ is the subject of the sentence, and ‘my favorite activity’ describes the subject, we call this phrase the subject complement.

3. **The Linking Verb Pattern** has a *subject complement* following the *linking verb*. Linking verbs always tie the subject to its adjective or phrase complement (called subject complement). The most common linking verbs are the following: appear, feel, grow, look, prove, remain smell, sound, taste and turn. To determine if a verb is linking, substitute the verb with an equal sign [=] and check if the sentence changed its meaning.

➤ John looks **exhausted.**

In the following example the linking verb is looks (‘John = exhausted’ has the same meaning as the original sentence).

4. **Intransitive Verb Pattern** consists of *a subject* and *an intransitive verb*. An intransitive verb is an action verb that requires no complement (laugh, cry, run, play, etc).

➤ Marry **was dancing.**

The question we ask is “what was Marry doing?” The answer is that “she was dancing.” Then we check and see that there is no complement following our verb and verify that it is an intransitive verb.

5. **The Basic Transitive Verb Pattern** consists of *a subject*, *transitive verb* and *direct object*. A transitive verb connects the subject and the object. Unlike an intransitive verb, a transitive verb would not make sense without the direct object. A direct object describes the verb and answers the question *what or who*.

➤ Anna **planned the party.**

In the above sentence, we ask ‘*What* did Anna plan?’ and the answer is ‘She planned the party’. Notice that the party gives more information about the verb ‘plan’. It does not describe Anna.

6. **The Transitive Verb + Two Complements Pattern** consists of *a subject*, followed by *a transitive verb*, *indirect object*, and *direct object*. An indirect object is a noun or phrase that assumes an intermediary role in the action being described in the sentence. It names the recipient of the direct object. An indirect object answers to questions containing the direct object and starting with *who or what*.

➤ Tom **gave Anna the present.**

Here the question describing the indirect object is: “Who got the present?” Notice that the indirect object is positioned between the verb and the direct object.

Keep in mind!

- These sentence patterns may also be used as substituents of complex and compound sentences.
 - Anna and her friends were very tired when they finished planning John's party.

For more information about this topic, refer to “Types of Sentences” handout.

Below is a table briefly summarizing different parts of speech.

<i>Part of speech</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Subject	S	Performs the action (verb) in a sentence.
Direct Object	DO	Describes the verb.
Indirect Object	IO	Refers to the person or a thing receiving the direct object.
Verb	V	The action that is described in the sentence (also called the predicate).
Linking verb	LV	Ties the subject to its adjective or phrase complement.
Intransitive verb	IV	An action verb that requires no complement
Transitive verb	TV	Connects the subject and the object
Adverbial phrase	ADV	Modifies a verb, expressing a relation of place, time, manner, cause etc.

Refer to Parts of Speech handout for more details.

Exercise 1:

Unscramble the words to make a complete sentence.

1. running the boy is.
2. New York how long take does to get it here from to?
3. stole someone yesterday my car.
4. late was it got when Mary home.
5. kick down but takes carpenter to build anyone a barn can a good it one.
6. to cook was learning Aunt Bette.
7. asleep closed Sally eyes fall but her couldn't.
8. have sandwich I can a jelly?
9. father later camping arrived Sally's two weeks.
10. I when my old easily arrived way home life returned to of I.

For answers to these exercises, please consult with a Writing Center tutor.

This handout is based on the following texts:

Aaron, Jane E. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. New York: HarperCollins College, 1993. 78-85.

Azar, Betty Schramper, and Donald A. Azar. *Understanding and Using English Grammar: Workbook*. Second ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1992.

Gorrell, Donna. *A Writer's Handbook from A to Z*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994. 201-205.

For further reference, see the following handouts at LAVC Writing Center:

Subject Verb Agreement, Parts of Speech, Verb Tenses, Types of Sentences, and other Writing Center handouts.

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