

THE SUBJECT

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

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 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.

