

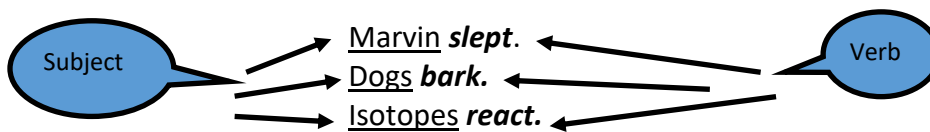


Sentence Structure

Basic Elements of an English Sentence

In its simplest form, an English sentence has two parts: a subject and a verb that express a complete thought when they are together.

- The **subject** shows **who or what** is doing the action. It is always some form of **noun or pronoun**.
- The **verb** shows **the action or the state** of being. It can be an action verb, like “run,” or a state verb, like “seem.”



Real sentences are rarely so short. We usually want to convey much more information, so we modify the main subject and verb with other words and phrases, as in the sentences below:

Unfortunately, **Marvin slept** fitfully.

Dogs bark louder after midnight.

Heavy **isotopes** react more slowly than light isotopes of the same element.

Even with the extra information, you can see that the basic structure is still there: each of these sentences has one subject and one verb. This basic subject-verb structure is known as a **clause**.

The English language uses two kinds of clauses — independent and dependent.

Independent clause: a subject and verb that make a complete thought. This type of clause is called independent because it makes sense on its own.

The U.S. entered World War I in 1917.

Dependent clause: a subject and verb that don't make a complete thought.

When the war was nearing its end.

Dependent clauses always need to be attached to an independent clause with a connector word.

The U.S. entered World War I in 1917, **when** the war was nearing its end.

Four Basic Sentence Patterns

A good way to strengthen your writing is to use a variety of sentence patterns. Every sentence pattern shown below combines clauses in a different way to combine clauses. You can see how the **subject** and **verb** remain the same, while **connectors** and **punctuation** are used to join clauses in a variety of ways.

Pattern 1. Simple Sentence: One **independent** clause.

Mr. Potato Head eats monkeys.
I refuse.

Pattern 2. Compound Sentence: Two or more **independent** clauses.

Mr. Potato Head eats them for breakfast every day, but I don't see the attraction.
Eating them makes him happy; however, he can't persuade me.

Pattern 3. Complex Sentence: One **independent clause** PLUS one or more **dependent clauses**.

He recommends them highly because they taste like chicken when they are hot.
Although chicken always appeals to me, I still feel skeptical about monkey.
Mrs. Potato Head, because she loves us so much, has offered to make her special monkey soufflé.
Although I am curious, I am still skeptical.

Pattern 4. Compound-Complex Sentence: Two or more **independent clauses** PLUS one or more **dependent clauses**.

Mr. Potato Head said that he would share the secret recipe; however, if he does, Mrs. Potato Head will feed him to the piranhas, so we are both safer and happier if I don't eat monkeys or steal recipes.

NOTE: Connectors (also called conjunctions) are always at the beginning of the **dependent clause**. They show how the **dependent clause** is related to the **independent clause**.

- **Cause/Effect:** because, since, so that
- **Comparison/Contrast:** although, even though, though, whereas, while
- **Place/Manner:** where, wherever, how, however
- **Possibility/Conditions:** I f, whether, unless
- **Relation:** that, which, who, whom
- **Time:** after, as, before, since, when, whenever, while, until

Connectors with a comma (the FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)

Connectors with a semicolon and comma: however, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, therefore