

**BASIC**  
**GRAMMAR**  
**and**  
**USAGE**

Penelope Choy

# **BASIC GRAMMAR and USAGE**

**Penelope Choy**

*Los Angeles City College*

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## Preface

*Basic Grammar and Usage* was originally written for students in a special admissions program at the University of California, Los Angeles. As part of their participation in the program, the students were enrolled in a composition and grammar course designed to prepare them for the university's freshman English courses. When the program began in 1971, none of the grammar textbooks then on the market seemed suitable for the students, whose previous exposure to grammar had been cursory or, in some cases, nonexistent. As the director of the program's English classes, I decided to write a book of my own that would cover the most important areas of grammar and usage in a way that would be easily understood by my students.

The original version of *Basic Grammar and Usage* received an enthusiastic response from the students and was used successfully throughout the three-year duration of the program. After the program ended in 1974, many of the instructors asked permission to reproduce the book for use in their new teaching positions. By the time copies of *Basic Grammar and Usage* reached Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1975, the text had already been used by more than 1,500 students in nearly a dozen schools.

*Basic Grammar and Usage* presents material in small segments so that students can master a particular topic one step at a time. The lessons within each unit are cumulative. For example, students doing the pronoun exercises for Lesson 11 will find that those exercises include a review of the constructions treated in Lessons 8 to 10. This approach reinforces the students' grasp of the material and helps them develop the skills they need for the writing of compositions. To make them more interesting to students, the exercises in four of the six units are presented as short narratives rather than as lists of unrelated sentences. Each lesson concludes with two exercises, which may be either used in class or assigned as homework. In addition, each unit ends with a composition that the students must proofread for errors and then correct to demonstrate mastery of the material.

Students who have never before studied grammar systematically will find that working through the text from beginning to end provides an insight into the basic patterns of English grammar. As one student commented on an end-of-course evaluation, "The most important thing I learned from *Basic Grammar and Usage* is that if you learn what an independent clause is, half of your grammar problems are over." On the other hand, students who do not need a total review of grammar can concentrate on the specific areas in which they have weaknesses. To help the instructor evaluate both types of student, the Instructor's Manual accompanying the text includes a diagnostic test and a post-test divided into sections corresponding to the units in the book. There are also separate achievement tests for each unit, as well as answer keys to the exercises presented in the text.

Although *Basic Grammar and Usage* is designed for students whose native language is English, it has been used successfully by students learning English as a second language. In addition to being a classroom text, *Basic Grammar and Usage* can be used in writing labs and for individual tutoring.

Many people have shared in the preparation of *Basic Grammar and Usage*. I wish in particular to thank the instructors and administrators of UCLA's Academic Advancement Program, where this book originated. In revising the text for publication, I have been greatly helped by the suggestions of Regina Sackmary of Queensborough Community College of the City University of New York and by Elizabeth Gavin, formerly of California State University, Long Beach, who reviewed the manuscript for me. Sue Houchins of the Black Studies Center of the Claremont Colleges contributed many ideas and reference materials for the exercises. An author could not ask for more supportive people to work with than the staff of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Raoul Savoie, who first brought the UCLA version of the text to the attention of his company. I also wish to thank Lauren Procton, who was responsible for the editing, and Eben W. Ludlow, who has provided guidance and encouragement throughout all the stages of this book's development.

*Penelope Choy*

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## UNIT ONE

# Identifying Subjects and Verbs

## 1 Sentences with One Subject and One Verb

The most important grammatical skill you can learn is how to identify subjects and verbs. Just as solving arithmetic problems requires you to know the multiplication tables perfectly, solving grammatical problems requires you to identify subjects and verbs with perfect accuracy. This is not as difficult as it sounds. With practice, recognizing subjects and verbs will become as automatic as knowing that  $2 \times 2 = 4$ .

Although in conversation people often speak in short word groups which may not be complete sentences, in written English people usually use complete sentences.

**A complete sentence contains at least one subject and one verb.**

A sentence can be thought of as a statement describing an *actor* performing a particular *action*. For example, in the sentence "The man fell," the *actor* or person performing the action is the *man*. What *action* did the man perform? He *fell*. This *actor-action* pattern can be found in most sentences. Can you identify the actor and the action in each of the sentences below?

The Dodgers won.

I sold my car.

The *actor* in a sentence is called the **subject**. The *action* word in a sentence is called the **verb**. Together, the subject and verb form the core of the sentence. Notice that even if extra words are added to the two sentences above, the subject-verb core in each sentence remains unchanged.

The *Dodgers* won their fifth game in a row last night.

*I* sold my old car for three hundred dollars.

You can see that in order to identify subjects and verbs, you must be able to separate these core words from the rest of the words in the sentence.

Here are some suggestions to help you to identify subjects.

1. The subject of a sentence is usually a **noun** or a **subject pronoun**. A **noun** is the name of a person, place, or thing, such as *man* or *Dodgers*. A **subject pronoun** is a word used in place of a noun, such as *he* (= *man*) and *they* (= *Dodgers*). The words *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, and *they* are subject pronouns. Underline the subjects in the following sentences:

Linda visited Europe last summer.

We like Italian food.

The party began at nine o'clock.

Los Angeles has many freeways.

2. **Adjectives**—words which describe a noun—are *not* part of the subject. For example, in the sentence “The blue Volkswagen belongs to me,” the subject is “Volkswagen,” *not* “blue Volkswagen,” because “blue” is an adjective describing “Volkswagen.” In the sentence “The largest university in California has 30,000 students,” the subject is “university,” *not* “largest university.” Underline the subjects of the following sentences:

The English language has many irregular spellings.

The famous singer cut another recording.

3. Words that show **possession**, or ownership, are *never* part of the subject. Words that show possession include nouns ending in an apostrophe combined with "s," such as *Adam's* or *car's*. They also include **possessive pronouns**, words that replace nouns showing ownership, such as *his* (= *Adam's*) or *its* (= *car's*). The words *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *our*, and *their* are possessive pronouns. Thus, in the sentence "My father retired last year," the subject is "father," *not* "my father." In the sentence "John's friend prepared the meal," the subject is "friend," *not* "John's friend." Underline the subjects of the following sentences:

Mary's sister works for Hughes Aircraft.

Their dog barked all night long.

His car's motor runs better than mine.

4. In commands, such as "Shut the door!" the subject is understood to be the subject pronoun *you* even though the word *you* is almost never included in the command. *You* is understood to be the subject of the following commands:

Get out of here this minute!

Please be quiet.

Underline the subjects of the following sentences. If the sentence is a command, write the subject *you* in parentheses at the beginning of the sentence.

Eggs cost eighty cents a dozen.

She admires you.

My neighbor owes me ten dollars.

The union's strike lasted six weeks.

Please pay attention.

Now that you can identify subjects, here are some suggestions to help you to identify verbs.

- links*
1. Verbs include action words, such as *hate*, *hit*, or *drive*. They also include all the forms of the verb *be*—*am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, and *been*—and other verbs, such as *seem*, *feel*, *become*, and *appear*, which can be used as substitutes for forms of *be*. These verbs are called **linking verbs**. Underline the subject in each of the following sentences *once*, and underline the verb *twice*.

*Joan*  
I was ill yesterday.

Joan feels ill today.

The guests became ill shortly after dinner.

2. Verbs are the only words which change their spelling to show **tense**. Tense is the time—past, present, or future—at which the verb's action occurs. For example, the sentence "They *walk* to school" has a present tense verb. In the sentence "They *walked* to school," the verb is in the past tense. Underline the subject in each of the following sentences *once* and the verb *twice*.

The reporter writes an article every week.

I wrote a long letter last week.

The Smiths buy a new car every two years.

Last year they bought a compact model.

This store opens at ten o'clock.

We opened all the windows.

3. An **infinitive**—the combination of the word *to* plus a verb, such as *to walk* or *to study*—is *not* considered part of the verb in a sentence. Read the following sentences.

We wanted to see the movie.

Ted hoped to get a new job.

The verbs in these two sentences are *wanted* and *hoped*. The infinitives *to see* and *to get* are *not* included. In the following sentences, underline the subjects *once* and the verbs *twice*.

*Tell me cheerfully.*

I ran to catch the bus.

The actor tried to remember his next line.

4. Just as adjectives are not part of the subject, **adverbs**—words which describe a verb—are not part of the verb. Many commonly used adverbs are formed by adding the ending *-ly* to adjectives.

**Adjectives**

slow  
quiet  
cheerful  
simple

**Adverbs**

slowly  
quietly  
cheerfully  
simply

*cheerful*

*cheerfully*

The words *not*, *never*, and *very* are also adverbs. Like other adverbs, these words are *not* part of the verb. In the following sentences, underline the subjects *once* and the verbs *twice*.

She never has enough money.

Your car really needs new tires.

The librarians talked very quietly.

The fire alarm suddenly started to ring.

He is not here.

Here is a final suggestion for identifying subjects and verbs.

**It is always a good practice to identify the verb in a sentence before you try to identify the subject.**

A sentence may have many nouns and pronouns, any of which might be the subject, but it will usually have only one or two verbs. For example:

The best student in my journalism class last year now works for a newspaper in Chicago.

There are five nouns in the above sentence (*student*, *class*, *year*, *newspaper*, *Chicago*), any of which might be the subject. However, there is

only one verb—*works*. Once you have identified the verb as *works*, all you have to ask yourself is, “Who or what *works*?” The answer is *student*, which is the subject of the sentence.

In the following sentences, underline the subjects *once* and the verbs *twice*, remembering to locate the verb before you look for the subject.

Every year my parents spend a week in Texas with my aunt and uncle.

He paid eighty dollars for that jacket.

Last Monday the group left for a three-week tour of Europe.

Remember these basic rules:

1. The person or thing performing the action in a sentence is the **subject**.
2. The action which is being performed is the **verb**.
3. A complete sentence consists of an *actor* performing an *action* or, in other words, a **subject** plus a **verb**.

In the following sentences, underline the subjects *once* and the verbs *twice*. Apply the rules which you have learned in this lesson. Do not make random guesses.

The hotel's coffee shop opens promptly at seven o'clock.

You seem to be very quiet today.

We need to buy a new air conditioner for our living room.

Read the recipe carefully.

My sister never remembers my birthday.

## EXERCISE 1A

Underline the subject of each sentence *once* and the verb *twice*. Each sentence has one subject and one verb. *Remember to look for the verb first* before you try to locate the subject.

1. Most freshman English courses emphasize composition.
2. Students usually write one or more essays each week.
3. The first assignment is often a diagnostic essay.
4. This essay reveals a student's strengths and weaknesses.
5. It tells the instructor a great deal about a student's ability to write.
6. The instructor reads each essay very carefully.
7. He identifies the student's major writing problems.
8. These problems often include errors in grammar.
9. Grammatical errors reduce the effectiveness of an essay.
10. They often make sentences difficult to understand.
11. Fortunately, correct grammar is easy to learn.
12. This textbook covers the most important aspects of grammar and usage.
13. It explains basic rules and constructions.

14. Each lesson contains exercises for you to do.

15. The exercises give you a chance to measure your progress.

## EXERCISE 1B

Underline the subject of each sentence *once* and the verb *twice*. Each sentence has one subject and one verb. *Remember to look for the verb first* before you try to locate the subject.

1. Writing developed much later than spoken language.
2. Written language began as a set of pictures.
3. Each picture represented a particular object.
4. Later, people combined pictures to produce more complicated words.
5. For example, the Chinese had separate pictures for the words *eye* and *water*.
6. They joined these two pictures to form the word *tear*.
7. Alphabets differ from pictorial writing.
8. An alphabet's symbols represent the sounds of a language, not individual words.
9. Alphabets originated in the Middle East in about 1500 B.C.
10. They eventually spread to other parts of the world.
11. The Greek alphabet began with the letters *alpha* and *beta*.
12. These two letters gave us the word *alphabet*.

