Building Sentences

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To the Teacher

Building Sentences was written for students with serious deficiencies in reading and writing. The text evolved from two assumptions: first, that these students need to acquire a basic sentence sense and, second, that they can do so only by constructing sentences, not by analyzing them or by correcting errors in usage. Thus the text stresses, step by step, how to build a sentence. It does not emphasize analysis, fine points of usage, or grammatical terms, although, out of necessity, it does use some grammatical terminology. Instead, the text presents manageable units of language which the students learn to synthesize into increasingly complex sentences. Each of the eighteen chapters, except the last, which is a review of punctuation, consists of explanation and examples accompanied by numerous exercises designed to move students from recognizing to combining to creating. To provide visible evidence of progress, the instructor's manual accompanying the text provides pretests and posttests as well as quizzes in alternate forms.

The order of the chapters was dictated by our experience with the capabilities and needs of students as they begin to build sentences. It does not follow a grammatical sequence of word to phrase to clause. Easier material comes early; structures that have similar uses in a sentence are in the same or adjacent chapters. Thus the more familiar prepositional phrase is presented early and the more difficult noun clause very late; a chapter on the verbal phrase and the appositive phrase follows one on the adjective clause, offering similar means of adding information about nouns.

Building Sentences was not intended to be comprehensive in its presentation of the sentence. We have tried to identify and present the essentials: the grammar of the simple sentence and the function, placement, and punctuation of single-word modifiers, phrases, and coordinate and subordinate clauses. However, the students' work in *Building Sentences* is designed to facilitate, not substitute for, the process of writing. As they work through *Building Sentences*, students also need to be writing regularly—in journals, in free-writing exercises at home or in class. Moreover, although the scope of the text is restricted to the sentence, we do—especially, of course, in later chapters—urge students to think of the sentence in a context of other sentences. Chapters 16 and 17, in particular, with their focus on consistency of tense and pronoun agreement and reference, provide a transition to the students' formal study of the paragraph.

Building Sentences arose out of desperate need for a text for students placed in the remedial program at Catonsville Community College. The program consists of a semester's work divided into three modules in writing, three in reading, and three in arithmetic. Students are placed in the writing modules when their writing has been judged by objective test and writing sample to be seriously deficient. Typically, these students are very poor readers with limited vocabulary and little ability in abstraction. As the writing modules developed, instructors were not able to find a text that presented the basics of the sentence in language that was accessible to these students. We wrote *Building Sentences* to fill this need. The original workbook prepared in 1980 was revised in 1981 and again in 1982 and 1983 after extensive classroom testing by more than a dozen full-time and part-time instructors with over 300 students each year. *Building Sentences* in its present form is the result of what we have learned from our students and our colleagues.

We wish to fully acknowledge our debt to Catonsville Community College and our colleagues for their support in the development of *Building Sentences*. We are deeply grateful to the administration and to the English Division, especially the teachers who used the workbook in its various incarnations and the secretaries and aides who prepared the early versions of the manuscript.

Finally, our personal thanks to our families:

Kraft and Kristen Rompf;
J.B., Erin, and Palmer Mackie.

To the Student

Writing is a skill. Like any other skill, it requires practice. If you want to improve your tennis game, you play regularly. If you want to improve your piano playing, you practice regularly. Similarly, if you want to improve your writing, you must write regularly.

As you work through this book, you will be completing many exercises and building sentences of many types. At the same time, you should be writing about your own experiences. Your teacher may suggest that you begin a journal in which you write about what you do or think from day to day. You may want to develop the habit of sitting down at the same place once a day and writing for five or ten minutes about anything that comes into your head. During such free-writing time, do not worry about grammar or spelling—just write. With daily practice, writing will become easier for you, and you will probably find yourself thinking of more and more topics to write about.

In the meantime, we realize that you may need some help in getting started. To give you some hints, we offer Suggested Topics for Writing at the ends of chapters. Sometimes, we also suggest the kinds of sentences you might try to write. For example, after the chapter on adjectives and adverbs, we suggest you describe someone whom you know well, using adjectives and adverbs in your sentences. Do not feel limited by any of these suggestions, however. If our topics help you think of another subject which is more interesting to you, write about it. If you are still unclear about adjectives and adverbs, do not let this confusion stop you from attempting a description. Write whatever you can. Only by practicing can you improve your writing.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Building the Sentence Base: Subjects, Verbs, and Complements

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. It is set off from other sentences by a capital letter at the beginning of the first word and end punctuation—usually a period (.) or a question mark (?)—after the last word.

In this chapter, you will learn that a sentence always has a subject and a verb and sometimes a third element called a **complement**. These two or three elements form the sentence **base**, or foundation, of the sentence. As you work through this chapter, you will learn how to recognize subjects, verbs, and complements and how to combine them to create a base for the simple sentence.

RECOGNIZING NOUNS

When we speak or write, we name persons, places, things, and ideas. The words in a sentence that name persons, places, things, and ideas are called **nouns**.

Singular and Plural Nouns

A noun can name one or more than one person, place, thing, or idea. A noun that names **one** is called a **singular** noun, and a noun that names **more than one** is called a **plural** noun.

We usually change a singular noun to a plural noun by changing its spelling. We form the plural of most nouns by adding an *–s* or *–es* at the end of the word. Some nouns, however, require different spelling changes, and a few nouns do not change at all. (If you are not sure of the rules for changing nouns from singular to plural, see Appendix B.)

The following chart presents examples of singular and plural nouns. Practice pronouncing these nouns. Be sure to pronounce the *–s* and to add a syllable for words ending in *–es*. Learn to spell any nouns you do not know.

In the following chart, the words *a*, *an*, and *the*, called articles, are used before the nouns. The articles *a* and *an* are used before singular nouns, and *the* is used before plurals. (The article *the* can, of course, also be used before a singular.) If you are not sure of the rules for using these three articles, see Appendix A.

PEOPLE		*PLACES*	
Singular	***Plural***	***Singular***	***Plural***
an artist	the artists	a camp	the camps
a student	the students	a field	the fields
a waitress	the waitresses	an alley	the alleys
a boy	the boys	a dairy	the dairies
a lady	the ladies	a campus	the campuses
a man	the men	a street	the streets
a woman	the women	a building	the buildings

LIVING THINGS		NONLIVING THINGS	
Singular	***Plural***	***Singular***	***Plural***
a cat	the cats	an ax	the axes
an apple	the apples	an answer	the answers
a fox	the foxes	an address	the addresses
a rose	the roses	a tax	the taxes
a fly	the flies	a knife	the knives
a puppy	the puppies	a step	the steps
a sheep	the sheep	an eraser	the erasers

IDEAS

Singular	***Plural***
an amount	the amounts
an argument	the arguments
a desire	the desires
a feeling	the feelings
an obstacle	the obstacles
a decision	the decisions
a joy	the joys

We can express the idea of more than one by using a plural noun or by naming two or more specifics that form a group. Study the following examples:

		General	***Specific***
1.	*Singular*:	boy	Paul
	Plural:	boys	Paul and Fred
2.	*Singular*:	girl	Thelma
	Plural:	girls	Thelma, Mary, and Gwen
3.	*Singular*:	child	Bob
	Plural:	children	Bob, Ed, Sam, and Jim

As we write sentences, we decide whether to use a plural form or to name specifics.

Examples

1. The *boys* are arriving.
   Paul and *Fred* are arriving.
2. The *judges* selected three *winners*.
   Judge Stone and *Judge Wisdom* selected *Thelma*, *Mary*, and *Gwen*.
3. The *children* played the *games*.
   Bob, *Ed*, *Sam*, and *Jim* played *soccer* and *lacrosse*.

Nouns that name specifics are called *proper nouns*. Proper nouns begin with a capital letter. If you need a review of the difference between proper nouns and common nouns, see Appendix C.

SHOWING POSSESSION OF NOUNS

Often we need to specify to whom something or someone belongs. That is, we need to use a noun to show **whose**. Nouns that tell whose are called **possessives**.

a father	Whose father?	Jack's father
a coat	Whose coat?	Jack's father's coat
the hats	Whose hats?	the cowboys' hats

In these examples, the words *Jack's* and *cowboys'* are possessives. Notice the use of the apostrophe (') and of the letter *s* to show possession:

Jack possesses the father	Jack's father
Jack's father possesses the coat	Jack's father's coat
the cowboys possess the hats	the cowboys' hats

We follow two rules to show possession:

1. If a noun does not end in *s*, we add an apostrophe **and** an *s* (*Jack's, father's*).
2. If a noun ends in *s*, as most plurals do, we add only an apostrophe (*cowboys'*).

If you need practice in forming or using possessives, turn to Appendix D.

—Do exercises 1-a and 1-b—

RECOGNIZING VERBS

In sentences, we use nouns to name subjects or objects—the persons, places, things, or ideas that we are talking or writing about. We use **verbs** to describe actions or to state existence. **Action verbs** such as *grow, learned,* and *will write* tell what someone or something does, did, or will do. **Nonaction verbs** state existence. The most commonly used nonaction verb is *be*. Other nonaction verbs include *appear, become, seem,* and *sound.*

A verb may consist of one word or more than one word. When more than one word is used, the word that pictures the action or states existence is called the **main verb**, and the other words are called **helping verbs** or **helpers.** In the following examples, the whole verbs—main verbs and their helpers—are printed in italics.

1. David *has worked* at his parents' restaurant since 1975.
2. Leslie's brother *can swim* forty laps in twenty minutes.
3. Karen *will be* a senior at Eastern High School next fall.

In these three sentences, the main verbs are *worked, swim,* and *be*. The helpers are *has, can,* and *will.*

The chart below lists some common helping verbs.

COMMON HELPING VERBS

am	has	may
is	have	might
are	had	must
was	can	shall
were	could	should
	will	do
	would	did

Like nouns, verbs can change their spelling or form. Changes in verb form show that actions take place at different times or under different conditions, or are performed

by different persons or things. Changes of time can be indicated by verb **tenses**. In the following examples, the present, future, and past are indicated by different forms of the verb *celebrate:*

1. Today, Ted *celebrates* his thirtieth birthday.
2. Next week, Ted and his wife *will celebrate* their tenth anniversary.
3. Last year, they *celebrated* their anniversary in New York City.

The spelling of the verb can also change when the performer of the action changes:

1. I *work* in the skills center three days a week.
2. Gary *works* in the skills center three days a week.

ASSEMBLING THE PARTS OF THE BASE

Just as builders construct buildings upon a solid **base**, or foundation, so writers build sentences upon the foundation of a subject and verb. As we build a sentence base, we start with the **subject**. The subject is the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. To form a complete thought, the subject needs a **verb** to tell what action the subject carries out or to state something about the subject's condition. The subject and the verb are the base of the sentence.

Recognizing Subjects and Action Verbs

The base of many simple sentences consists of a subject (a person, place, thing, or idea) and an action verb.

Examples

1. The Smiths' baby is sleeping.
2. The kitten played.
3. The athlete will exercise.

In the three sentences above, the **subjects**—*baby*, *kitten*, and *athlete*—are underlined once. The **action verbs**—*is sleeping*, *played*, and *will exercise*—are underlined twice. In these sentences the subjects are the actors; they perform, performed, or will perform the action. If we ask **who** or **what does**, **did**, or **will do** the action in each sentence, the answer is the subject of the sentence:

1. Who or what is sleeping? baby
2. Who or what played? kitten
3. Who or what will exercise? athlete

Recognizing Subjects, Action Verbs, and Complements

As we have seen, the bases of some sentences are made up of a subject and an action verb. Some action verbs, however, may require another word to complete the meaning of the verb. For example, consider the following sentences:

1. The man hit.
2. Larry ruined.

You probably feel that both thoughts are incomplete. You are probably asking yourself **what** the man hit or, "The man hit what?" Similarly, you may be wondering **what** Larry ruined or "Larry ruined what?" Both of these verbs require a word to complete

their meaning. We call such a word a **complement**. The complement of an action verb is called an **object**. The subject is the **doer** of the action, and the object is the **receiver** of the action. By adding an object to each of the incomplete foundations, we build a meaningful (complete) base:

1. The man hit the *jackpot*.
2. *Larry* ruined the *party*.

The nouns *jackpot* and *party* are the objects; they are the receivers of the action.

Study the sentences below. Each sentence has a base with three elements:

Subject	+	Verb	+	Complement
(noun—doer)		(action performed)		(object—receiver)

In the sample sentences, the subjects are underlined once and the action verbs twice; the complements (objects) are circled.

1. The policeman arrested (Jack).	Policeman arrested whom?	Jack
2. Laura finished the (assignment).	Laura finished what?	assignment
3. Richard's mother found a (job).	Mother found what?	job

Sometimes action verbs have two objects. The thought of the sentence is not complete unless two words receive the action of the verb. Here is an example of a verb with one object to which we may wish to add a second:

- Louis gave a (necklace).

Clearly, the necklace receives the action of the verb. When we ask the question "Louis gave what?" we find that *necklace* is the direct object of the action. However, we may wish to make the meaning more complete by explaining who received the necklace. We can add the name of the receiver, the person to whom the necklace was given. This second receiver of the action is called the **indirect object**.

- Louis gave (Sybil) a (necklace).

Both *Sybil* and *necklace* receive the action and complete the meaning of the verb. Other verbs that often take two objects are *send, tell, ask, buy, lend,* and *promise.*

Examples

1. Ann sent (Martin) a (valentine).
2. Joan told (Harvey) a (secret).
3. The instructor asked the (students) a (question).

—Do exercises 1-c, 1-d, 1-e, and 1-f—

Recognizing Subjects, Nonaction Verbs, and Complements

We do not always build sentences by saying that a subject **does** or **did** something. As we write, we frequently want to say something about the condition or the state of the subject. By using nonaction verbs, we can add complements (1) to describe the subject or (2) to rename the subject with a different noun.

Examples

1. Henry was friendly. — As the arrow indicates, the word *friendly* describes Henry.
2. Henry was the winner. — As the arrow indicates, the noun *winner* renames Henry. Of course, by renaming Henry, it adds information.

Notice in sentence 2 that the subject and the noun that renames it can be reversed because they mean the same person:

- The winner was Henry.

Words—such as *friendly* and *winner*—that come after nonaction verbs and describe or rename the subject are **complements**. Like objects, they complete the meaning of the sentence base. Without *friendly* and *winner* in the two examples, the subject and verb would not form a complete thought. If we wrote only

- Henry was

the reader would be left wondering **what** Henry was.

Complements that rename the subject can come after the verbs *be* or *become*:

1. The friends became enemies.
2. Mary was the lead singer.

Notice that *enemies* and *singer*—the words that rename—are both nouns.

Complements that describe the subject can come after many nonaction verbs.

Examples

1. Sally felt happy.
2. Grant appeared dizzy.
3. The student's speech seemed long.

Words that describe nouns are called **adjectives**. The words *happy*, *dizzy*, and *long* are adjectives describing the subjects.

BEGINNING SENTENCES WITH *THERE* OR *HERE*

In all the examples you have studied in this chapter, the subjects have come before the verbs. However, sentences can be constructed so that the verb comes before the subject. One way to make such a sentence is to begin a sentence with *there* or *here*. Notice the placement of the subjects in the following examples. The subjects are underlined once and the verbs twice.

Examples

1. There is a stray dog in the park.
2. There were fifteen students in my swimming class.
3. There will be a quiz on Monday.
4. Here is the receipt.
5. Here are the keys.

In sentences like these, the verb comes before the subject. Nevertheless, the subject is still easy to locate. It is the person(s), place(s), thing(s), or idea(s) that the sentence is