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TROUBLESHOOTING

Basic Writing Skills

Herman & Young



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PREFACE

The rules of English composition are often troublesome to students. This book is designed to help students spot their problems and go to work on them. Using the book will not turn the work into fun, but it will make it possible to do the work efficiently and effectively.

Only the most basic material is covered in grammar, usage, and mechanics; formal terminology is kept to a minimum. Each chapter begins with a brief section which suggests the practical importance of the material to be dealt with. The material itself is then broken down into a number of points, each of which is presented separately in simple language and followed by illustrations and practice exercises. Cumulative review exercises are interspersed throughout the chapter, giving the student frequent opportunity to bring together the rules and principles learned in several points. Whenever possible, the student is shown *why* a rule is needed, rather than asked merely to take it on faith. At the end of the chapter, the most essential "how to" concepts are covered in a short boxed section just before an extensive and comprehensive set of chapter review exercises. The important points are restated in summary form at the back of the book, to serve as a study aid.

Exercises of varied types have been included: choose-the-correct-answer, fill-in-the-blanks, write-your-own-sentences. The final exercise of each chapter review provides another twist. Two or three paragraphs of material similar to typical student writing are presented, and the student is asked to rewrite them, correcting the errors.

* * *

We wish to express our gratitude to Lauren Kessler and Barry Mitzman, Linfield College, for suggesting *Troubleshooting* as the title of this book. It is an apt title that well describes what we are trying to help students do.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the following, who read the manuscript and made constructive comments: Douglas Andrews, Texas Tech University; Michael Joyce, Jackson Community College; James K. Murphy, West Georgia College; Sarah Parker; Betty C. Pex, College of San Mateo; David Skwire, Cuyahoga Community College.

W. H.
J. M. Y.

TO THE STUDENT

This book contains a lot of exercises. But it also contains an answer key, so you can check your answers to the exercises. The key, which is at the back of the book, will be most helpful if you use it to check your work *as soon as you finish* each exercise. In this way you will find out right away whether you have understood the material and learned how to apply the rules correctly. If you discover that you have made mistakes, you may be able to figure out for yourself what is wrong — or at least you will be alerted to ask your instructor for help.

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Grammar Review

Pretest

Note: This test is designed to identify any problems you may have with basic grammar (subjects and verbs). All of the material tested here will be fully explained in Chapters 1 and 2, which follow.

- I. Write "S" if the sentence is missing a subject, "V" if the sentence is missing a verb, or "C" if the sentence is complete and correct as it stands.

- ✓ 1. Mike going fishing with his father.
- 2. Doris and her friends to the museum every Thursday.
- S 3. Used his father's credit card at the gas station.
- 4. I am a construction worker.
- S 5. Was ready for action.
- ✓ 6. A kiss is still a kiss.
- 7. Whenever it rains, we stay inside and television.
- 8. There were buzzing around tonight.
- C 9. Babies cry.
- 10. He planning to join the club.
- ✓ 11. Swimming great exercise.
- 12. We have registered to vote.
- S 13. Trying to improve my grades.
- 14. That is no way to treat a lady.
- S 15. Learning to write correctly. *missing I am so that*
- ✓ 16. My notes need to be re-typed.
- ✓ 17. Two pages of this book missing.
- 18. Up and down the aisles go.
- C 19. Billy, Bobby, and Lori sing.
- 20. The kids ate their dinner and ran upstairs.

II. Underline the complete subject.

1. Jamie is going out for the track team.
2. My sister and her fiancé are getting married next spring.
3. Correct grammar is an important aspect of good writing.
- X 4. In my closet are two pairs of boots. *over*
5. Jazz is my favorite kind of music.
6. Jonathan and Dave are my best friends.
7. Organic food is healthful but expensive.
8. Exercising is part of my morning routine.
9. Around the corner fled the stray dog.
10. That brass plate on the wall is from India.

III. Underline the complete verb.

1. My brother is cleaning his apartment.
2. We have always enjoyed eating out.
- X 3. She grew more and more tired. *grew alone*
4. I never promised you a rose garden.
- X 5. You should look at a map before that trip into the desert.
6. Holding down a job is never easy for Luke.
7. I have learned to play the guitar.
8. Woodworking requires skill and patience.
9. We saw that movie last month.
10. I never want him in this house again.

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SUBJECTS

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. The thought may tell something, ask a question, express a request or command, or express a strong emotion or feeling. Every sentence must contain a subject—except requests or commands, where the subject is not in the sentence but only understood (in the request, “Turn off the lights,” the subject is really *you*—the person addressed; but the word *you* is not *in* the sentence). The subject is the person or thing about which the rest of the sentence makes an assertion. In other words, any sentence must *be about* someone or something, and therefore *every sentence must have a subject*.

POINT 1: Identify the subject of the sentence by asking who or what is doing something (or being something).

Rain falls.

In this sentence, the subject is *rain*. We find the subject by asking, “Who or what falls?” The answer to that question, *rain*, is the subject.

Mario works hard.

Who or what is doing something? Or who or what works? *Mario* works. *Mario* is the subject of the sentence.

The girl sings in the choir.

Who or what sings? The *girl* sings. What, then, is the subject of this sentence?

- Subjects may be either *singular* or *plural*. A singular subject refers to *one* person or thing; a plural subject refers to *more than one*.

Singular

one { boy
girl
car
dog
pencil

Plural

more { boys
girls
cars
one { dogs
pencils

In the sentences above, the subjects were singular (rain, Mario, girl). You can find plural subjects in a sentence by asking the same “who or what” question.

The sandwiches were delicious.

Who or what were delicious? The answer to that question, *sandwiches*, is the subject, and it is plural.

My sisters are named Lynn and Karen.

Who or what are named? *Sisters* is the plural subject of this sentence.

Buses run every hour on the hour.

Who or what run? *Buses* is the plural subject of this sentence.

Exercise: Point 1

Determine the subject in each of the following sentences by answering the “who or what” question.

1. The plumber works.

Who or what works? The subject is plumber.

2. Alice answers the phone.

Who or what answers? The subject is _____.

3. Fred smokes cigars.

Who or what smokes? The subject is _____.

4. The dog barks.

Who or what barks? The subject is _____.

5. Children skip rope.

Who or what skip? The subject is _____.

6. Our family celebrates Christmas.

Who or what celebrates? The subject is _____.

7. Buildings scrape the sky.

Who or what scrapes? The subject is _____.

8. My brother plays basketball on weekends.

Who or what plays? The subject is _____.

9. Cars speed on the highway.

Who or what speed? The subject is _____.

10. The roof caved in last night.

Who or what caved in? The subject is _____.

Another Exercise: Point 1

In each of the following sentences, write "S" if the subject is singular or "P" if it is plural. Underline the simple subject.

- S 1. Sally ran after the bus.
_____ 2. My notebook dropped to the floor.
_____ 3. Ducks swim in that pond.
_____ 4. The airplane needs to be refueled.
_____ 5. Our teacher gave us an exam.
_____ 6. Sam writes extremely well.
_____ 7. The thieves looted the grocery store.
_____ 8. I sent flowers to my mother.
_____ 9. Mr. Snyder bought a new car.
_____ 10. The snowstorm lasted for hours.

POINT 2: A subject may be a *noun*.

A *noun* is a word used to name a *person, place, or thing*.

Persons	Places	Things
Ruth	Nebraska	cat
Luis	Main Street	tooth
Mrs. Maxwell	Belgium	house
man	Russia	car
teacher	Lake Erie	love

Most of the subjects we have seen are nouns. However, not every noun in a sentence is a subject. Remember, we determine a subject by asking who or what takes part in the action. Each of the following sentences contains more than one noun, but each sentence has only one subject.

Jim works in a store.

First determine the subject. Who or what works? Jim works. So *Jim* is the subject. Are there any other nouns in this sentence? That is, are any words used to name a person, place, or thing? *Store* is a thing; therefore it is a noun.

Janet mailed the letter.

Which words are nouns? How can you determine the subject of this sentence?

Exercise: Point 2

Underline all the nouns in each of the following sentences. Then circle the subject of the sentence.

1. California joined the Union in 1850.
2. Henry runs a mile every day.
3. The woman dropped her purse.
4. Exercise strengthens the body.
5. Plants grow best in sunlight.
6. My watch comes from Japan.
7. The pen ran out of ink.
8. She wrote a book about the Midwest.
9. Starvation worries people all over the world.
10. Bills are a part of life.

Review Exercise: Points 1 and 2

Fill in the blank with an appropriate subject.

1. This book is missing a page.
2. Ice cream comes in many different flavors.
3. A boat needs oars.
4. Germany fought against America in World War II.
5. The airplane has a powerful engine.
6. R. N. is a former President.
7. Leaves fall from the trees in autumn.
8. My uncle is my mother's brother.
9. Dogs make good pets.
10. I went to the ball game.

POINT 3: A subject may be an -ing word.

Fishing is my hobby.

To determine the subject of this sentence, ask who or what is my hobby. The answer to that question, *fishing*, is the subject.

Do not be confused by a sentence such as:

I enjoy fishing.

To determine the subject of this sentence, ask who or what enjoys. The answer, *I*, is the subject.

Parachuting may be dangerous.

Who or what may be dangerous? *Parachuting* is the subject of the sentence.

Tim likes to go parachuting.

Who or what likes? *Tim* is the subject.

Exercise: Point 3

Underline the subject in each of the following sentences.

1. Singing is her chief talent.
2. Driving drives me crazy.
3. Jogging is good exercise.
4. Winning is the name of the game.
5. I don't like cleaning my apartment.
6. Swimming is good exercise.
7. Sewing was never her favorite activity.
8. Advertising is a good way to get votes.
9. Hair styling requires a special talent.
10. Biking is my favorite pastime.

2 3 6

POINT 4: A subject may consist of more than one word.

So far, all the subjects have been just one word: rain, Mario, plumber, cars, jogging, biking, and so on. But a subject can be more than one word. Then it is called a complete subject.

Exercise: Point 4

Underline the complete subject in each of the following sentences.

1. Collecting stamps is my hobby.
2. His sister is an expert pianist.
3. Listening to music can be very relaxing.
4. Mary and Judy are best friends.
5. Playing poker for money is fun.
6. Using common sense is important.
7. Balancing my checkbook takes forever.
8. Clara's radio needs to be repaired.
9. Spelling and grammar are useful.
10. A green light means that we may go.

but then why listening to music instead of just listening?

Review Exercise: Points 1-4

Fill in the blank with an appropriate subject.

1. Jogging is a good way to get exercise.
2. Writing skills & grammar are two courses I am taking this semester.
3. The watch cost fifty dollars.
4. Reading is more fun than watching television.
5. The Martini is an example of a mixed drink.
6. Surfing is exciting but dangerous.
7. Spring comes once a year.
8. Reminiscing makes me remember the good old days.
9. Automobile mechanic is messy work.
10. Cosmos is my favorite television program.

Another Review Exercise: Points 1-4

Choose a subject from Column A and match it with a group of words from Column B. Write the complete sentence in the space provided. Make sure the subject answers the "who or what" question.

Column A

Practical jokes

Mrs. Murphy

Collecting coins

Robert and Richard

Shopping for shoes

Column B

are twin brothers.

can get you into trouble.

can give you tired feet.

is running for Mayor.

is my hobby.

1. Practical jokes can get you into trouble.
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

POINT 5: A subject may appear anywhere in the sentence.

So far, all the subjects have been at the beginning of the sentence. However, subjects sometimes appear elsewhere. They are still easy to find if you ask the same "who or what" question.

There were alligators in the swamp.

Who or what were in the swamp? *Alligators* were in the swamp. *Alligators* is the subject of this sentence.

All night long, James listened to records.

Who or what listened? *James* listened; therefore *James* is the subject.

Note: *There* and *here* are never subjects.

Exercise: Point 5

Underline the ^{comp}subject in each of the following sentences.

1. Around the corner went the motorcycle.
- X 2. In the seats on the platform were the guests of honor.
3. There was a long line at the ticket booth.
- a X 4. Here is my response to your question. (*It*), understood. - no
5. There is work to be done.
6. Down the ladder came a fireman with a baby in his arms.
- ? 7. There was no way out.
8. Through the garden ran three rabbits.
9. In the office were a mother and her daughter.
10. There was a sale in the department store today.

Sometimes it is possible to distinguish between a simple subject and a complete subject in the same sentence. For instance, take the sentence:

The bald man is playing a clarinet.

Here the complete subject is *the bald man*. But we could take out "the bald" and still have a subject: *man*. So *man* is the simple subject of this sentence.

This distinction leads us to the next point.

POINT 6: The simple subject is never within a phrase that begins with such words as *on, in, of, before, behind, near*.

A phrase of this sort can be *part* of a complete subject, but it cannot be the whole subject.

The man on the corner is playing a clarinet.

Who or what is playing? The answer to that question reveals the subject; clearly, it is the *man*, and not the corner, that is musical.

The jar on the shelf is filled with preserves.

Who or what is filled? The *jar*, not the shelf.

The book in the library was written by Herman Melville.

Book, not library, is the subject.

Once you spot and eliminate any confusing phrases of this sort, it is easy to recognize the subject.

The roof ~~of the house~~ collapsed.

Three members ~~of the group~~ were arrested.

Exercise: Point 6

Determine the simple subject in each of the following sentences by asking the "who or what" question.

1. A program of popular music was scheduled.

Who or what was scheduled? The subject is program.

2. The woman on the bus wore a jacket and tie.

Who or what wore? The subject is woman.

3. The clerk behind the desk counted the change.

Who or what counted? The subject is clerk.

4. The butter is melting.

Who or what is? The subject is butter.

5. That problem on the blackboard is difficult.

Who or what is? The subject is problem.

6. Dreaming of days gone by is hopeless.

Who or what is? The subject is dreaming.

7. The fishermen on the wharf are talking.

Who or what are? The subject is fishermen.

8. Teachers in nursery schools must be patient.

Who or what must be? The subject is teachers.

9. That dog near the barn is mine.

Who or what is? The subject is dog.

10. The hot dogs on the grill are cooked.

Who or what are? The subject is hot dogs.

Review Exercise: Points 1-6

Underline the subject in each of the following sentences.

1. Melvin wants to study law.

2. Racing cars is only for the brave.

3. There are two possible answers to that question.

4. The switch in the glove compartment opens the trunk.

5. Eating low-calorie foods is one way to lose weight.

6. On the beach is a lighthouse.

7. The stores on Third Street are closed today.

8. A group of campers is coming up the hill.

9. The man in the bullpen will soon come in to pitch.

10. In the refrigerator are fruits and vegetables.

To that question there are two possible answers
Two answers are possible to that question