

# Unit One The Basic Sentence

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Throughout this book, you will be combining sentences to practice ways to show logical relationships or to modify, or describe, words in sentences. This practice will help you to express your ideas in clear, concise, and varied sentences when you write college-level essays. But first it helps to know what makes a sentence a sentence. Look at the following groups of words; which do you think are complete sentences?

- (a) Teenagers work.
- (b) Many teenagers work after school.
- (c) Many teenagers work after school to earn spending money.

If you thought that all three are sentences, you are correct, because all three contain a subject-verb unit—a subject and verb working together. Sentence (a) has a verb, the word *work*; it's a verb because it can change form to show the time or tense of an action. So we can say:

Teenagers worked.  
Teenagers will work.

Sentence (a) also has a subject, *teenagers*, a word that does the action in the verb. Because sentence (a) has a subject-verb unit, *teenagers work*, it is a complete sentence. Sentences (b) and (c) are also complete sentences; they have the same subject-verb unit as sentence (a) in addition to sentence modifiers that tell more about the subject and verb.

Take a look at the following groups of words; which do you think are complete sentences?

- (a) They are.
- (b) They are students.
- (c) They are students hoping to succeed in college.

Again, all three are complete sentences because they each contain a subject-verb unit—*they are*. But in these sentences, the verb doesn't name an action; the verb is a form of *be*. The common forms of *be* are *am, is, are, was, were, has been, have been, and will be*.

To write well, you don't need to know how to identify all of the parts of speech. But if you know how verbs and subjects work together in sentences, you'll find the upcoming work in this book easier, which in turn should help you grow as a writer as you work on focusing, joining, and developing your sentences. In some of the later units, you'll see references to "subjects," "verbs," and "verb forms," so you will benefit in a practical way from the overview of subjects and verbs in this unit.

## Recognizing Verbs

You probably know the common definition of verbs—*words that show action or existence*—but that definition is not always helpful when you need to find the subject-verb unit that makes a group of words a sentence. The most reliable way to identify subject-verb units in sentences is to find the verb first and then the subject. To locate the verbs in sentences, you must find the action words or forms of *be* that you can change the tense (time) of.

## *Exercise One* On the Campaign Trail

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From each pair of sentences below, you can create one sentence by joining the verbs (with *and* or *or*) and eliminating any repeated words.

EXAMPLE:     The presidential candidate travels around the United States.     The  
                  presidential candidate makes public appearances.

SOLUTION:    The presidential candidate travels around the United States and makes  
                  public appearances.

1.     The presidential candidate speaks.  
       The presidential candidate makes promises.
  
  2.     Some of the people cheer.  
       Some of the people clap.
  
  3.     Others in the crowd groan.  
       Others in the crowd hiss.
  
  4.     Secret Service agents watch the candidate.  
       Secret Service agents worry about the crowd.
  
  5.     The candidate finishes her speech.  
       The candidate runs to her limo.
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## Exercise Two The Last Campaign Trail

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Now go back to the sentences in Exercise 1 and rewrite your combined sentences to show that the actions happened in a *past* election campaign. (You can begin the sentences with *last year*.) Then underline the words you changed to show past time, or tense.

EXAMPLE:       The presidential candidate travels around the world and makes public appearances.

SOLUTION:       (Last year) The presidential candidate traveled around the world and made public appearances.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

The words you changed and underlined are verbs—words that show the time or tense of an action or form of be in a sentence. Finding verbs can sometimes be difficult because we often use verb forms as other parts of speech. For example, one form of the word swim can be used as a verb, but with an -ing ending, it can also be used as a noun (a word naming a person, place, or thing) or an adjective (a word describing a noun).

Alicia swims a mile every lunch hour.                   (*swims* = verb)

Swimming is Alicia's favorite way to relax.           (*swimming* = noun)

Alicia would like nothing better than to  
have her own swimming pool.                           (*swimming* = adjective)

The noun *swimming* and the adjective *swimming* do not change to show the time or tense of the sentence. If Alicia decided to give up swimming and start meditating for relaxation, we might write:

Swimming was Alicia's favorite way to relax.

The verb is changes to was to show past time, but the word *swimming* doesn't change because it isn't acting as a verb here. An *-ing* word can only be part of a verb if it follows a form of the verb *be*:

In her dreams, Alicia is swimming in her own pool.

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## *Exercise Three* Take Me Out to the Ball Game

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In each sentence, change each main verb to past time or tense. Underline the verb; then put in parentheses any verb forms that *don't* change to show time.

EXAMPLE: Listening to the Giants game relaxes me.

SOLUTION: (Listening) to the Giants game relaxed me yesterday.

1. I listen to the Giants games on the radio.
  2. The announcer bores me by reading so many baseball statistics.
  3. His boring voice puts me to sleep.
  4. I follow the accomplishments of my favorite players.
  5. Barry Bonds is very good at hitting home runs.
  6. I often dream of eating hot dogs and peanuts while I listen to the games.
  7. But going to the ballpark costs more money than listening to the radio.
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## Using a Dictionary to Choose the Correct Verb Form

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To change verb tense, we change the form of the verb, which simply means we add something on the end of the base form (*walk* becomes *walked* to show past tense) or change its spelling (*bring* becomes *brought* to show past tense).

You can find the correct forms of verbs in a dictionary. Look up the base form. Often you know the base form (the form you use with *to*—*to walk*, *to sing*, *to swim*).

If you don't know the base form, you can find it by looking up any form other than the base form. For instance, if you look up the word *sank* in the dictionary, it will direct you to the *to* form of the verb—*sink*.

Once you find the base form, dictionaries list the other verb forms in the same order:

1. <b>base form</b>	2. <b>past</b>	3. <b>past participle</b> (follows <i>has</i> or <i>have</i> )	4. <b>present participle</b> (follows a <i>be</i> form)
walk	walked	walked	walking
scare	scared	scared	scaring

Like many languages English has regular and irregular verbs. Regular verbs all show the tense or time the same way; for instance, we add an -ed or a -d to the end of regular verbs to indicate past tense. If a verb is regular, the past and past participle forms are the same, so the dictionary will only list the base and the past forms. To make the past participle forms (forms after *have* or *had*) or the present participle forms (-ing forms), you just add the -ed or -ing ending to the base form.

Verbs that don't follow this predictable pattern are called irregular verbs.

<b>Base</b>	<b>Past</b>	<b>Past Participle</b>	<b>Present Participle</b>
be	was/were	been	being
eat	ate	eaten	eating
meet	met	met	meeting

Many of our verbs are irregular, and you may not know all of the past and past participle forms. Sometimes the past and past participle forms of irregular verbs are the same, but sometimes they are not. Any time you aren't sure what a verb's past or past participle form is, you must look it up.

## Exercise Four Write/Wrote/Written

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To review some commonly confused irregular verbs, use a dictionary to find the past tense and the past participle forms of the base form verbs listed below.

Base	Past Tense	Past Participle
1. begin		
2. choose		
3. draw		
4. grow		
5. hold		
6. lose		
7. rise		
8. spend		
9. tear		
10. wear		

## Exercise Five Getting a Record

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In the following sentences, you are given the past tense of verbs. Change each sentence from past tense to past perfect (with *have* or *has*) by putting the correct past participle in each blank space.

- Mark and his friends drove to the record store.  
Mark and his friends have \_\_\_\_\_ to the record store many times.
  - They got into an accident on the freeway.  
They have \_\_\_\_\_ into accidents on the freeway before.
  - The police led them to the station to file a report.  
The police have \_\_\_\_\_ many drivers there.
  - Now Mark has a bad driving record.  
He has \_\_\_\_\_ a bad driving record since he was 16.
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## Exercise Six Onion Cure

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Choose the correct past tense or past participle verb form for the verbs given in their base forms. Those in parentheses should be put in past tense form; those in brackets should be put in the past participle form after *have* or *has*.

Not many people \_\_\_\_\_ of an unpopular but infallible cold remedy that a friend recently  
(hear)

\_\_\_\_\_ me about. A woman he knows \_\_\_\_\_ a large, raw onion and \_\_\_\_\_ that it  
(tell) (eat) (swear)

\_\_\_\_\_ the best cold remedy she \_\_\_\_\_. She \_\_\_\_\_ into it like an apple, and though it  
(be) (know) (bite)

\_\_\_\_\_ her eyes water, she \_\_\_\_\_ the potency of the onion \_\_\_\_\_ all the germs in her  
(make) (think) (kill)

body. I \_\_\_\_\_ many times if I could \_\_\_\_\_ this cure, but I \_\_\_\_\_ the  
[wonder] [survive] [have + not]

courage to try her method.

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# Recognizing Subjects

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Once you have located the verbs in sentences, it's easier to find the subjects—the words that tell who or what does the action or the form of *be* in the verbs.

To locate verbs and subjects, follow this two-step process:

1. Use the time test to find the verb; change the sentence to another time.

Alicia swims a mile every lunch hour.  
(lastyear) Alicia swam a mile every lunch hour.

To show the time or tense change, we changed *swims* to *swam*, so *swims* is the verb.

2. Once you have found the verb, you can locate the subject of the verb by asking yourself:

*Who or what* \_\_\_\_\_?  
verb

*Who or what* swims a mile every lunch hour?  
verb

The answer is Alicia, so Alicia is the subject of the verb swims.

Our example sentence has one subject-verb unit—Alicia swims. Often though, verbs can have more than one subject:

Alicia and Tieu swim a mile every lunch hour.

Or subjects can have more than one verb:

Alicia swims a mile and lifts weights every lunch hour.

Or sentences can have more than one subject-verb unit:

Alicia swims a mile every lunch hour, but then her boss treats her to a cheese steak for lunch.

Be sure to look at the whole sentence when you follow the two-step process for finding verbs and subjects so that you are sure to locate all of the subject-verb units.

## Exercise Seven Mind Your Manners

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The following groups of words are not complete sentences because they don't have subjects—words that work together with verbs. In the blanks provided, supply a subject to complete each sentence. (It helps to skim the whole story first.)

EXAMPLE: \_\_\_\_\_ have terrible manners.

SOLUTION: Many people have terrible manners.

1. On the freeway, \_\_\_\_\_ make you tense by tailgating or blasting their horns.
  2. In department stores, \_\_\_\_\_ follow you around, suspecting you of shoplifting.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ crowd behind you in line for the ATM, trying to see your bank balance.
  4. On the bus, \_\_\_\_\_ won't give up their seats for elderly people or students laden down with books.
  5. In a concert hall, \_\_\_\_\_ wear intense cologne spiked with gardenias, vanilla, and cloves.
  6. And sometimes in a theater, \_\_\_\_\_ loudly analyze the plot all through the movie.
  7. In restaurants, \_\_\_\_\_ throw tantrums over fifteen-minute waits for their check.
  8. At baseball games, \_\_\_\_\_ jump up in front of you right in the middle of a double play.
  9. Of all these rude people, \_\_\_\_\_ bug me the most.
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ should take a course on etiquette.
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## Exercise Eight Get a job

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In this exercise, follow the two steps for identifying verbs and their subjects. Underline the verbs once and the subjects twice.

EXAMPLE: Most people work in conventional occupations like accounting, teaching, or retail sales.

SOLUTION:

Step 1: To find the verb change the time or tense of the sentence:

(5 years ago) Most people worked in conventional occupations like accounting, teaching, or retail sales.

To change the time, we have to change *work* to *worked*, so *work* is the verb.

Step 2: To find the subject, ask yourself *Who or what works?* The answer is *people*, so *people* is the subject.

1. Some people have more interesting careers.
  2. They become Guillotine Operators, White Kid Buffers, or Liquid Runners.
  3. A Guillotine Operator cuts pencils, not necks.
  4. A White-Kid Buffer operates a leather buffer machine, not white kids.
  5. A Liquid Runner in a candy factory regulates the flow of syrup.
  6. Some people become Gizzard-Skin Removers in a poultry plant.
  7. A close friend working as a Bosom Presser irons blouses in a laundry.
  8. Her husband, a Top Screw, is the boss of a bunch of cowpunchers.
  9. Working in one of these occupations teaches young people about life in the real world.
  10. But after reading about these jobs, most people want to get a college degree.
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