Subjects and Verbs

Basics about Subjects and Verbs

Every complete sentence contains a subject and a verb.

SUBJECTS

The subject of a sentence is the person, place, thing, or idea that the sentence is about. The subject can be called the “who or what” word. To find the subject, ask yourself, “Who or what is this sentence about?” or “Who or what is doing something in this sentence?”

For example, look at the following two sentences:

- People applauded.
- Gloria wrote the answers on the board.

People is what the first sentence is about; they are the ones who applauded. So people is the subject of the first sentence.

The second sentence answers the question, “Who is doing something in the sentence?” The answer is Gloria. She is the person who wrote the answers on the board. So Gloria is the subject of the second sentence.

A subject will always be either a noun or a pronoun. A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. A pronoun is a word—such as I, you, he, she, it, we, or they—that stands for a noun.

VERBS

Many verbs express action; they tell what the subject is doing. You can find an action verb by asking, “What does the subject do?” Look again at these sentences:

- People applauded.
- Gloria wrote the answers on the board.

You remember that people is the subject of the first sentence. What did they do? They applauded. Applauded is the verb in the first sentence.

Gloria is the subject in the second sentence. What did Gloria do? She wrote, so wrote is the verb in the second sentence.

Some verbs do not show action; they are called linking verbs. Linking verbs like is, are, was, and were join (or link) the subject to something that is said about the subject. For example, in the sentence Gloria is a teacher, the linking verb is connects the subject Gloria with what is said about her—that she is a teacher.

Notes

1. Some verbs consist of more than one word—a helping verb plus the main verb. Here are some examples of verbs containing more than one word:

- Gloria has written the answer on the board.
  The verb is has written.
- The balloons were drifting slowly to earth.
  The verb is were drifting.

2. The verb of a sentence never begins with to. For example:

- Gloria is going to write the answer on the board.
  The verb of the sentence is is going. It is not write or to write.
- The balloons seemed to hang in the air.
  The verb of the sentence is seemed. It is not hang or to hang.
Understanding Subjects and Verbs
In each sentence, underline the subject once and the verb twice. Then check your answers below.

1. Daisy Russell lives in Missouri.
2. Her dog's name is Happy.
3. Daisy is happy now, too, after an unhappy past.
4. Daisy experienced a difficult childhood.
5. Her father beat her.
6. He called her worthless.
7. He even tried to sell her to another couple.
8. Her family moved constantly.
9. Unable to read, Daisy felt stupid and ashamed.
10. Now things are different.
11. Daisy has learned to read.
12. Moreover, she teaches other adults to read.
13. Today, Daisy has a lot to smile about.

ANSWERS
1. Daisy Russell, lives; 2. name, is; 3. Daisy, is; 4. Daisy, experienced; 5. father, beat; 6. He, called; 7. He, tried; 8. family, moved; 9. Daisy, felt; 10. things, are; 11. Daisy, has learned; 12. she, teaches; 13. Daisy, has

Check Your Understanding
Underline each subject once and each verb twice.

1. Daisy often baby-sits her grandchildren.
2. Their childhood is very different from hers.
3. She was often lonely and afraid.
4. They live without fear.
5. In the photo to the left, Daisy appears with her granddaughter Tiffany.
6. Daisy taught Tiffany to read.
7. The two visit the library in their town often.
8. Daisy's grandchildren both enjoy reading.
9. They have no need to feel ashamed.
10. Their grandmother feels great about that.
A Note on Prepositional Phrases

The subject of a sentence is never part of a prepositional phrase. A prepositional phrase is a group of words that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun. Common prepositions are about, after, as, at, before, between, by, during, for, from, in, into, like, of, on, outside, over, through, to, toward, with, and without. As you look for the subject of a sentence, it may help to cross out any prepositional phrases that you find. Here are examples:

- The coffee from the leaking pot stained the carpet.
- One of my classmates fell asleep during class.
- The woman on that motorcycle has no helmet.
- The cracks and booms during the thunderstorm were terrifying.

Subjects and Verbs: PRACTICE 1

In each sentence below, cross out the prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject of each sentence once and the verb of each sentence twice.

1. Daisy is looking through her “brag book.”
2. She keeps special papers in it.
3. One letter in the book is especially important to her.
4. She had entered a scholarship contest for college students.
5. Her entry was an essay about her life.
6. The letter from the contest officials awarded her first prize.
7. The eagle on the front of her brag book has a special meaning.
8. It tells her to “fly” over any obstacle to her success.

9. Daisy used the scholarship money for a computer.
10. On the computer she writes more essays, poems, and stories.
11. Daisy’s life has changed a great deal during the last few years.
12. She learned to read as an adult.
13. She earned her high-school diploma at age 44.
14. She has told her life story on radio and TV.
15. Daisy truly has taken charge of her own life.
A Note on Helping Verbs

As already mentioned, many verbs consist of a main verb plus one or more helping verbs. Helping verbs are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of be:</th>
<th>be, am, is, are, was, were, being, been</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forms of have:</td>
<td>have, has, had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of do:</td>
<td>do, does, did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special verbs:</td>
<td>can, could, may, might, must, ought (to), shall, should, will, would</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subjects and Verbs: PRACTICE 2

In each sentence below, cross out the prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject of each sentence once and the verb of each sentence twice.

1. Dogs at the animal shelter wait for a good home.
2. The frozen fish on the counter defrosted quickly.
3. My computer’s screen went blank without warning.
4. The kitchen in my parents’ house smells like vanilla and cinnamon.
5. A very large truck stalled on the bridge.
6. The orange in the refrigerator has purple spots.
7. Everyone cried at one point during the movie.
8. Several sad-looking puppies huddled in the small cage.
9. Two young boys from the neighborhood were playing catch in the alley.
10. By the end of the day, we had sold between 350 and 400 tickets.
Subjects and Verbs: PRACTICE 3

In each sentence below, cross out the prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject of each sentence once and the verb of each sentence twice.

1. Today, Daisy is surrounded by people.
2. All of them care about her.
3. Her husband Don has encouraged her over the years to pursue her dreams.
4. Daisy calls their neighbor Shorty by the name of “Dad.”
5. “I was without a loving dad of my own.”
6. “So I adopted Shorty as my father.”
7. Little Bradley has no knowledge of Daisy’s story.
8. He just loves to be with his Grandma.
9. As a child, Daisy had an unhappy family life.
10. But, through her own efforts, she is creating a happy present and future.
Subjects and Verbs: TEST 1

For each sentence, cross out any prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject once and the verb twice. Remember to include any helping verb(s).

NOTE To help in your review of subjects and verbs, explanations are given for three of the sentences.

1. A family of ducks waddled toward the pond.
   Of ducks and toward the pond are prepositional phrases. The sentence is about a family (of ducks); what they did was waddled.

2. Ramona loves to exchange e-mails with her friends.
   Since exchange has a to in front of it, it cannot be the verb of the sentence.

3. Many park visitors have complained about the new regulations.
   Have complained (complained plus the helping verb have) is what the sentence says the park visitors did.

4. The pot of vegetable soup simmered gently on the stove.

5. Your digital camera takes very clear pictures in all kinds of locations.

6. After the party, we went to a diner for coffee.

7. The summer concert was canceled with only one day's notice.

8. The coffee from the leaking pot left a stain on the white carpet.

9. A German shepherd waited patiently outside the drugstore.

10. The curious child stared silently at the man in the Santa Claus suit.
Subjects and Verbs: TEST 2

For each sentence, cross out any prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject once and the verb twice. Remember to include any helping verb(s).

1. The candles on the table smell like vanilla.

2. The people in my family speak two languages.

3. Clean clothes on the line fluttered in the breeze.

4. Without a word, Hugh raced out of the house and into the front yard.

5. Teams of cheerleaders yelled on opposite sides of the gym.

6. Sofia's boyfriend is good with cars.

7. I work at the computer lab between classes.

8. Huge mounds of dirt surround the construction site.


10. Movies about dinosaurs always seem popular with audiences.
In each sentence below, cross out the prepositional phrases. Then underline the subject of each sentence once and the verb of each sentence twice.

1. In present-day America, with all its wealth and resources, many adults read poorly.
2. Many, in fact, are unable to read at all.
3. Some, like Daisy Russell, never had a chance to learn during childhood.
4. In other cases, people struggle with learning disabilities.
5. Adults without the ability to read often feel hopeless about their situation.
6. In addition, they may feel ashamed about their lack of this skill.
7. It took a number of years for Daisy Russell to find the courage to ask for help.
8. Then she began to work with a tutor.
9. She learned quickly about “sounding out” words and how to understand written language.
10. Now she is happy to work with other nonreaders.
Subjects and Verbs: **TEST 4**

Read the sentences below. Then, in the space provided, write the letter of the correct answer to each question.

1. The movie audience shrieked in terror and glee at the sight of the seven-headed monster.
   - In the sentence above, the subject is
     a. audience.  
     b. terror.  
     c. monster.

2. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. shrieked.  
   b. glee.  
   c. sight.

3. A solution to the problem suddenly popped into my head.
   - In the sentence above, the subject is
     a. problem.  
     b. head.  
     c. solution.

4. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. popped.  
   b. suddenly.  
   c. head.

5. During the long bus trip from Baltimore to Florida, many passengers slept.
   - In the sentence above, the subject is
     a. bus.  
     b. many.  
     c. passengers.

6. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. During.  
   b. many.  
   c. slept.

7. For his birthday dinner, Will had a pizza with pepperoni, mushrooms, and onions.
   - In the sentence above, the subject is
     a. dinner.  
     b. birthday.  
     c. Will.

8. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. dinner.  
   b. had.  
   c. with.

9. After my final exam, I can forget about school for a week.
   - In the sentence above, the subject is
     a. exam.  
     b. I.  
     c. school.

10. In the sentence above, the verb is
    a. can.  
    b. can forget.  
    c. forget.
Subjects and Verbs: TEST 5

Read the sentences below. Then, in the space provided, write the letter of the correct answer to each question.

- During the hot, dry summer, the farmers worried about their crops.

1. In the sentence above, the subject is
   a. summer.  
   b. crops.  
   c. farmers.

2. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. During.  
   b. about.  
   c. worried.

- Drops of icy rain began to fall on the basketball players.

3. In the sentence above, the subject is
   a. Drops.  
   b. rain.  
   c. players.

4. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. icy.  
   b. began.  
   c. fall.

- As a result of my father’s illness, my family in the past two months has lived a nightmare.

5. In the sentence above, the subject is
   a. illness.  
   b. result.  
   c. family.

6. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. lived.  
   b. has lived.  
   c. has.

- To catch the bus to school, Stacy awakens before sunrise.

7. In the sentence above, the subject is
   a. Stacy.  
   b. bus.  
   c. sunrise.

8. In the sentence above, the verb is
   a. catch.  
   b. to catch.  
   c. awakens.

- Tracy has been sending romantic e-mails to her boyfriend during computer lab.

9. In the sentence above, the subject is
   a. Tracy.  
   b. boyfriend.  
   c. e-mails.

10. In the sentence above, the verb is
    a. has.  
    b. has been sending.  
    c. during.