

FINDING SUBJECTS AND VERBS

Subjects and verbs are the building blocks for all sentences; *every* sentence has at least one subject and one verb, called a **subject-verb set**. **Clause is another name for a subject-verb set**. Learning to recognize subjects-verb sets/clauses can give you greater control of your writing and help you avoid sentence errors like run-ons and fragments.

FINDING ACTION VERBS

First, we'll take a look at finding verbs because identifying the subject will be easier once you know the verb.

Like most languages, English has many words that describe physical actions, for example, *run, jump, talk, throw, play, eat, drink, visit, and write*. **Words that express actions are called *action verbs***.

Find the *action verbs* in the following sentences:

Note: It may be helpful to ask yourself, *Can I...?* to check for action verbs.

1. Josh brings lunch to school every day.
2. I caught the softball.
3. The cat climbed the tree, and its owner watched below.

FINDING SUBJECTS USING ACTION VERBS

Once you've identified the *action verb* in a sentence, you can now more easily find the *subject*. What is the *subject* of a sentence? It is the person, place, or thing that is doing the action. One way you can find the subject of a sentence is by asking yourself, "*Who or what does/did the action?*" The answer to this question will be the *subject* of the sentence.

Example: Josh brings lunch to school every day.

The action verb in the sentence above is brings. Now you can ask yourself, "*Who brings?*" The answer is Josh, so Josh is the subject of the sentence.

FINDING OTHER VERBS

In addition to action verbs, sentences can also have other types of verbs called non-action verbs. Non-action verbs can **1**) link the subject with other identifying or describing words or **2**) act as helping verbs. We will talk more about non-action verbs on page 29, but below you will find a few examples.

Look at the sentence below.

1. Jennifer is a student in Writing 90.

Another way to look at this sentence could be: Jennifer = a student in WR 90.

What verb links Jennifer with the description of her as a student in WR 90? is

Identify the verbs in sentences 2 and 3.

2. The dog was brown and white. (The verb = was)
3. The answers are here. (The verb = are)

FINDING SUBJECTS USING OTHER VERBS

Again, to find the subject for any sentence, look for the verb first. When you find the verb, ask yourself the question, *Who or what...?*

For example, in sentence 1 at the top of this page, ask yourself, “*Who or What is...?*” *Who is* a student in Writing 90? The answer to this question is the subject: Jennifer.

Now, go back to sentences 2 and 3, find the subjects, and write them on the line below.

FINDING LONGER VERBS

The verbs in the sentences we’ve looked at so far have consisted of only one word, but verbs can vary in length from one to four words. We often use longer verbs to express specific moments in time or to provide additional meaning.

We can express some verbs simply: I *go* to school.

Sometimes we want to express a variety of meanings, so we use longer verbs.

For example, I *study*. (one word)
I *will study*. (two words)
I *am taking* math and reading. (two words)
I *will have taken* 40 credits by next spring. (three words)
I *will have been studying* for three hours by the end of the day. (four words)

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION about VERBS

Not is never a verb.

S V V

Example: She does not have a ride to school.

Words that describe verbs (adverbs) like *usually, sometimes, often, never, seldom, generally,* and *frequently* **are not verbs.** These words just tell you *how often* or *when* the verb happens. They will be near the verb, but are not the verb. Skip over them.

S V

Example: Josh *usually* goes to the O.S.U. home football games.

Many words that describe verbs (adverbs) often end in *ly* and are also *not* verbs.

S V

Example: The girl moved *slowly* across the dance floor.

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION about SUBJECT-VERB SETS

Finally, we said that another name for a subject-verb set is a clause. You will soon learn that there are two kinds of clauses: independent clauses and dependent clauses. For now, let's focus on independent clauses. Whenever a subject-verb set expresses a complete thought, you have a clause that is independent.

Here is the key idea: every sentence should contain at least one independent clause: a subject-verb set that expresses a complete thought.

In the pages that follow, you will practice finding these subject-verb sets (independent clauses). Some of these independent clauses will be made with action verbs; some will be made with non-action verbs, and some will have both, but each will have a subject that goes with the verb.

What is the difference between an independent clause and a sentence? A sentence contains at least one subject-verb set that expresses a complete thought, but in order for it to be a sentence, we need to capitalize the first letter of the first word in the sentence and add ending punctuation like a period.

Independent clause: the old man jumped into the lake

Independent Clause: he was trying to cool off after a long day in the sun

Sentence with one independent clause: The old man jumped into the lake.

Sentence with one independent clause: He was trying to cool off after a long day in the sun.

Sentence with two independent clauses: The old man jumped into the lake, for he was trying to cool off after a long day in the sun.