

Proofreading Skills Tutorial:

**Introductory Tutorial:
Recognizing Verbs and Subjects**

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Writing Center
English 800 Center

All notes and exercises should be done on separate sheets of paper, which you will bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.

As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.

Recognizing Verbs and Subjects

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. To improve your writing, you must understand the sentence and its two main parts, **the verb and the subject**.

Recognizing Verbs

The verb of the sentence tells what the subject **does** or **is**. It changes when the time of the sentence changes.

Verbs can also describe a state of being. Common verbs that describe the state of being are forms of **to be (am, is, are, was, were)**, **to seem**, **to appear**, and **to become**.

How to Find the Verb:

A useful way to find the verb(s) is to read the sentence three times:

- The first time, add the word **today** to the beginning of the sentence.
- The second time, add **yesterday** to the beginning of the sentence.
- Finally, add the word **tomorrow** to the beginning of the sentence.

Depending on what tense the sentence is written in, words in two of the three sentences will change. The words that change are the verbs.

Look at this sentence: **Hiking is my favorite summertime activity.**

Follow the steps to find the verb listed above.

Yesterday hiking was my favorite summertime activity. (past)

Today hiking is my favorite summertime activity. (present)

Tomorrow hiking will be my favorite summertime activity. (future)

Although “hiking” is an action word, “hiking” does not change if you add the words, *yesterday*, *today*, and *tomorrow*. “Is” is the verb since it changed in each sentence.

Tips:

1. The main verb of a sentence will not have “to” before it.
Example: Jamal **rented** a stretch limo to impress his girlfriend. (“**rented**” is the main verb.)
2. Any verb ending in “ing” will only be the verb of that sentence if it follows a “to be” verb (**is, am, are, was, and were**).
Example: Carmen **is helping** her mother with the grocery shopping. (“**is helping**” is the main verb.)

Exercise 1

Instructions: Find the verbs in the sentences below. Rewrite each sentence twice using the past (yesterday), and the future (tomorrow). Underline the verbs in your rewritten sentences. Some sentences may have more than one subject or more than one verb. All the verbs are in the present tense (today).

Example:

Today Michael loves pizza
Yesterday Michael loved pizza.
Tomorrow Michael will love pizza.

1. Hannah's auto mechanic gives her an estimate for the cost of repairs to her VW.
2. Hannah stares at the total of the estimate for a full minute.
3. Hannah takes a deep breath and asks the mechanic to double-check his math.
4. The amount, \$1,346.00, seems high to Hannah.
5. Hannah knows her car is in need of major work, but this is shocking.
6. She does a little figuring; then she looks at the mechanic and tries not to weep.
7. Hannah drives a loaner car to work, parks it where none of her co-workers can see it, and plans to ask her boss for overtime.

Exercise 2

Instructions: Change the verbs in the following paragraph from present tense into past tense. Begin the first sentence with a term that indicates a time in the past such as **yesterday** or **last year**. Then underline the verbs you have changed.

"Last year (or Yesterday), hiking... _____."

Hiking is my favorite thing to do. As the road beside my house turns and heads into the fields behind it, everything changes. The city sounds fade away and are soon replaced with birdsong and the rustle of wind in the trees. In the scrub and low branches off the path, reptiles and small animals dart and slither, and sometimes I see a deer running across a field in front of me. I am lucky to have such an adventure available to me every day.

Past Tense

Recognizing Subjects

The subject of the sentence usually refers to something or someone.

Once you have identified the verb, form a question using *who* or *what* to find the subject.

Examples:

- The wave crashes on the beach. **What** crashes? The **wave** crashes. (**wave** = subject)
- Linda is slicing the mango. **Who** is slicing? **Linda** is slicing. (**Linda** = subject)
- The cat in the tree is mine. **What** is mine? The **cat** is mine. (**Cat** = subject)
- Frank and Jack are no longer friends. **Who** are no longer friends? **Frank and Jack** are no longer friends. (**Frank and Jack** = subjects)

Exercise 3

Instructions: In the paragraph below, underline each of the **verbs** once and the **subjects** twice.

Hiking is my favorite thing to do on weekends. As the road beside my house turns and heads into the fields behind it, everything changes. The city sounds fade away and are soon replaced with birdsong and the rustle of wind in the trees. In the scrub and low branches off the path, reptiles and small animals dart and slither, and sometimes I see a deer running across a field in front of me. I am lucky to have such an adventure available to me every day.

Subjects may be more difficult to identify when there is more than one noun before the verb.

- **The shoes on my feet are made of leather.**

Usually the “who or what” question will solve the problem. *Who* or *what* is made of leather—the *shoes* or the *feet*? In this case it is obvious, but sometimes the question can be misleading.

- **The hole in my shoes will have to be fixed.**

1. *Who* or *what* will have to be fixed-- *hole* or *shoes*?
2. In this situation, the noun nearer the front of the sentence—*hole*—is the subject, not *shoes*.
3. *Shoes* is part of a group of words that tells what kind of hole.
4. These special groups of words like "on my feet" and "in my shoes" are called **prepositional phrases**.

Identifying Prepositional Phrases:

The first word of a prepositional phrase is the preposition. The prepositions are boldfaced.

about the book	below the belt	of his class
above the building	beside the desk	on the building
according to my mother	beyond the hill	outside the classroom
across the street	by the classroom	over the building
after spring break	during his class	through the country
against the war	for my teacher	to my teacher
among my friends	from my teacher	toward the city
around the corner	in the classroom	under the desk
at the store	inside the desk	until spring break
before this class	into the classroom	upon the table
behind closed doors	near the building	with his sister

Prepositional phrases usually come in between the subject and the verb. In the following sentence, the prepositional phrases are underlined.

During spring break, ^{subject} one of my classmates ^{verb} flew in a jet over the city with the Blue Angels.

One method to find the subject and verb is to cross out the prepositional phrase in this sentence. You will end up with a shorter sentence, in this case with only the subject and the verb.

~~During spring break~~, one ~~of my classmates~~ flew ~~in a jet over the city with the Blue Angels~~.

Subject: One
Verb: Flew

Note: The noun *after* a preposition cannot be the subject of a sentence or clause. That is, no word in a prepositional phrase can be the subject or the verb.

Exercise 4

Instructions: Cross out all the prepositional phrases in the following sentences. Then locate the subjects and verbs of each sentence. Underline the verb once, and the subject twice.

Example: The children in the sixth grade at her school are restless.

The children ~~in the sixth grade at her school~~ are restless.

1. The schools in this country will adjourn for the summer.
2. My son and his friends in the neighborhood are counting the days before summer vacation.
3. On the playground at school, groups of children gather, looking for trouble.
4. Every season, several students on the football team at my son's school are injured.
5. Some of them require the medical attention of a sports doctor.
6. This year one of the boys broke his arm in three places for the second time.
7. At my daughter's school, a child in her class required stitches from a collision during a game of tag.
8. The children in the school will be happy when summer finally arrives, but the teachers with so little free time during the semester will be even happier.

Exercise 5

Instructions: Cross out all the prepositional phrases to locate the verbs and subjects in the following sentences. Underline the verb once, and underline the subject twice.

1. The dry brush on the hill exploded instantly into flames.
2. Surfing and rock climbing are great sports for both men and women.
3. Jobs in technology are becoming plentiful in many parts of the country.
4. The tadpoles in the pond lost their tails and grew legs.
5. My sister in Oregon was selling her house to her best friend.
6. The rain and the wind of winter demolished many houses on hillsides in the Berkeley hills.
7. Everyone will learn about the different skills required for college writing in this composition class.

Exercise 6

Instructions: In the passage, underline the verb of each sentence once and its subject twice.

Jamie and I wanted to go out and have fun for once, so last Friday we went into the city to see a play. Leaving Half Moon Bay, we talked excitedly about being out in the city at night with the bright lights and high energy. We were hoping for a night to remember, and we were not disappointed. Highway One was beautiful with the sun setting in the west and a glimpse of the Farrallon Islands; the traffic was very light for a Friday night. We found a parking place right behind Le Central, the restaurant where we had reservations. Hungry and thirsty, we enjoyed everything that we ordered, from the wine and appetizers to the after-dinner espresso. Wanting to be sure to make the first act of the play, we took our dessert to go. But one of the parking gods was with us, and we found parking for FREE near the theater. We easily found our seats and sat transfixed for two hours as the delightful play took us from laughing to crying and back again. Our exciting time in the city gave us a night that we will always remember.

Exercise 7

Instructions:

1. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions you might have, and review your answers to these exercises.

Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- Any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- Your completed tutorial exercises