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Sentence Structure Summary Sheet

What follows is an overview of the entire unit:

Definition: A sentence contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a complete thought.

Independent clause is a synonym for **sentence**.

A sentence stripped down to its essential subject and verb can be referred to as a **base sentence**. To this foundational base sentence, other phrases, clauses, and modifiers can be added.

A sentence can be viewed as a **subject** and a **predicate**:

- A girl / flings her hair down.

Or we can focus on the **simple subject** and the **verb**:

- A girl / flings her hair down.

There are a number of steps we can take in order to help us determine the **simple subject** . . .

—Cross out all phrases, including prepositional phrases:

- Engines of war / move toward certain houses.

—Eliminate articles (a, an, the):

- ~~The~~ journey / requires more preparation.

—Eliminate relative clauses (focus on **who** and **that**):

- Journeys ~~that go against the prevailing current~~ / require more preparation.

—Place parentheses around noun clusters; the noun to the right will be the subject:

- (This new self) / walks away from the world.

Verbs take tense; therefore, we can use this sentence frame to help us determine main verbs:

- Today I BLANK; yesterday I BLANKED.
- Today I *conform*; yesterday I *conformed*.

If we add **helping verbs** to **main verbs**, we can create verb phrases ranging from two to four words long:

- The bees / will be making sweet honey.

In the absence of a true **main verb**, a **helping verb** will become the **main verb**.

An **infinitive** is the word **to** plus a verb. Infinitives are never *the* verb in a sentence; they should be crossed out:

- She / rose one morning and went ~~to live~~ in America.

Adverbs like *not* do not qualify as **main verbs** and are not found on the list of **helping verbs**; therefore, such words are not part of the verb:

- This new self / did not walk into the world.

Contractions must be **unpacked**:

- This new self / didn't walk into the world.
- This new self / did not walk into the world.

Often (but not always), **active verbs** are preferred over **passive verbs**:

- **passive:** The field rat was startled by the scythe.
- **active:** The scythe startled the field rat.

Both subjects and verbs can be **compound**:

- Stanford and Crocker stole our pensions and poured their smoke into our lungs.

Subjects usually appear to the left of **verbs**, but there are some exceptions:

- Upon his western wing leaned the starling.
- There was (a sudden break) ~~in the subject matter~~.

Commands and questions also create nonstandard subject/verb arrangements:

- (You) Ask the questions that have no answers.
- Has Thad been sleeping all day?

In **compound sentences**, subjects and verbs appear on both sides of the coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb, or semicolon:

- She saw nothing else saw all day long, for she would bend sidelong and sing a faery's song.
- Jacob sold his house and his library, his love of twelve years; finally, he parted.
- (A swift carriage) flashed before them; snow and mud flew everywhere, splashing the girls.

Complex sentences also contain two sets of subjects and verbs. In **compound sentences** the two subject/verb combos carry equal weight; in **complex sentences** the subject/verb in the **independent** clause is primary while the subject/verb in the **subordinate** clause is secondary:

- We sojourn here though the sedge has withered from the lake.
- Though the sedge has withered from the lake, we sojourn here.
- They know that the hand of God is the elderhand of their own.

Adverbial subordinate clauses begin with **subordinating conjunctions**; among the words that begin noun clauses, the most common is the word *that*.

Both sentence **fragments** and **run-on** sentences are *sentence boundary* errors. Both are considered to be serious errors.

A **fragment** can be a part of a sentence:

- Flings her hair down.

A **fragment** can also be a **subordinate** clause with no **independent** clause to attach to:

- Although a carriage flashed before them.

Normally we expect to see a period (or a semicolon) between two sentences. When that period is not there, a **run-on** is created:

- Two roads diverged in a wood, she took the one less traveled by.

- Two roads diverged in a wood she took the one less traveled by.

However, there are a couple exceptions.

Intentional fragments may be appear when they are consciously used so as to achieve a stylistic effect. Three or more sentences can be linked together without periods if they are short and arranged in *items-in-a-series* fashion.

Subjects and **verbs** must *agree* in number. This means that **plural** subjects must be matched up with **plural** verbs and that **singular** subjects must be matched up with **singular** verbs. Normally writers have little trouble with subject/verb agreement, but situations such as intervening prepositional phrases, compound subjects, and *there*-expletives must be given extra attention.

WORD LISTS

Common Prepositions: above, across, against, at, before, behind, below, between, by, down, except, for, from, in, into, like, of, on, past, since, to, under, until, with

23 Helping Verbs: is, am, are, was, were; be, being, been; has, have, had; do, does, did; may, might, must; can, could; shall, should; will, would

Coordinating Conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

Common Conjunctive Adverbs: consequently, finally, for example, furthermore, however, later, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, next, otherwise, subsequently, then, therefore

Common Subordinating Conjunctions: after, although, as, because, before, if, since, so that, though, till, unless, until, when, whenever, wherever, while