Sentences: Kinds and Parts

A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought. Sentences can be classified in two different ways: by function and by structure.

FUNCTION: FOUR KINDS OF SENTENCES

1. The **declarative** sentence makes a statement or conveys information.

George Clooney starred in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, a Coen brothers’ film.

He played a character named Ulysses Everett McGill.

2. The **interrogative** sentence asks a question.

Did George Clooney do his own singing in *O Brother, Where Art Thou*?

Was Pete really turned into a frog, or was he turned in to the police?
3. The **imperative** (command) sentence gives an order or a directive.

Stop talking! I’m trying to listen!

The **request** is a modified form of imperative sentence. Its tone is softer:

Let’s rent a DVD of *O Brother* and watch it tonight.

4. The **exclamatory** sentence is a strong statement of opinion or warning.

The scene in which Clooney insists on wearing a hair net to bed is hilarious!

Don’t answer the phone! This is my favourite part of the movie!

**STRUCTURE: BASIC SENTENCE PATTERNS**

Every sentence can be classified into one of four patterns, depending on the number and kind of clauses the sentence contains. (In the examples below, **subjects** are underlined with one line, **verbs** with two.)

1. A **simple** sentence consists of one independent clause. It has one subject and one verb, either or both of which may be compound (multiple).

   a. **Matt** **plays** hockey for McGill. (single subject, single verb)

   b. **Matt** and **Caro** **play** hockey with their friends on weekends. (compound subject, one plural verb)
c. Matt and Caro play hockey and drink beer with their friends on weekends. (compound subject, compound verb)

2. A **compound** sentence is made up of two or more independent clauses. The clauses may be joined by a *coordinating conjunction* or by a semicolon.

   Geoff paid for the flight to Cuba, and Kendra paid for their accommodation.

Either or both clauses in a compound sentence may contain a compound subject and/or a compound verb:

   Geoff and Kendra flew to Cuba, but Matt and Caro stayed home and sulked.

3. A **complex** sentence has one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses introduced by *subordinate conjunctions* (dependent clause cues).

   We flew to Cuba for our vacation while my brother stayed home to take care of our dogs.

   Geoff and Kendra flew to Cuba, but Matt and Caro stayed home because they couldn’t afford the trip.

4. The **compound-complex** sentence combines the features of sentence patterns 2 and 3 above. That is, it contains two (or more) independent clauses, together with one or more dependent clauses.

   Geoff and Kendra flew to Cuba, but Matt and Caro stayed home because they couldn’t afford the trip and because someone had to care for the dogs.
PARTS OF A SENTENCE

Every sentence or independent clause can be divided into two parts: subject and predicate. The subject half contains the **subject** (simple or compound), together with its modifiers. The predicate half contains the **verb** (simple or compound), with its modifiers and any other words or phrases that complete the sentence’s meaning. These predicate completers may be **direct objects**, **indirect objects**, or **complements**. (In the examples below, **direct objects** are indicated by a triple underline; indirect objects by a dotted underline; and complements by a broken underline.)

1. The **subject** of a sentence is a noun/pronoun (or phrase or clause used as a noun).

   
   ```
   subject      |    predicate
   -------------------------------
   Every English sentence has a subject and a predicate. (noun as subject)
   
   subject      |    predicate
   -------------------------------
   The subject usually appears before the verb. (noun as subject)
   
   subject      |    predicate
   -------------------------------
   It answers the question Who? or What? (pronoun as subject)
   
   subject      |    predicate
   -------------------------------
   To find the verb in a sentence is fairly easy. (phrase as subject)
   ```

2. The **verb** is the word or phrase that tells the reader what the subject is or does.

   ```
   subject      |    predicate
   -------------------------------
   The answer was on the tip of my tongue.
   ```
subject  
\[ \downarrow \]  
Harriet                   
\[ \downarrow \]  
won the essay prize.

subject  
\[ \downarrow \]  
Who                   
\[ \downarrow \]  
can find the verb?

3. The **direct object** is the noun or pronoun that names the receiver of the action of the verb.

subject  
\[ \downarrow \]  
Matt                   
\[ \downarrow \]  
passed the puck.

4. The **indirect object** is a noun or pronoun that tells to whom something is (was/will be) done. The indirect object normally comes before the direct object.

subject  
\[ \downarrow \]  
Matt                   
\[ \downarrow \]  
passed Caro the puck.

5. An **object of a preposition** is a noun or pronoun that follows the preposition in a prepositional phrase.
6. A **complement** is a noun, pronoun, or modifier that explains, renames, or describes the subject of a linking verb (e.g., *is, seems, appears, smells, tastes*, etc.).

*Caro* is the captain of the team. (noun complement)

The **goal** and the **game are ours**! (pronoun complement)

The **crowd went wild**. (adjective complement)