

Grammar Crash Course

Knowing grammar is effective for both writing a sentence and identifying errors. There are many grammar style books referenced in formal writing: MLA Style, AP Style, Chicago Style. While each one has its own set of rules and changes in communication necessitate grammatical adjustment, basic sentence structure in formal writing remains essentially unchanged.

Parts of Speech

Verb: Action word, but it can also describe a state/condition (i.e. walk, have, be).

Noun: Person, place, thing or feeling that is either acting or being acted upon (i.e. John Doe, sidewalk, time, love).

Pronoun: Stands in place of a noun or noun phrase (i.e. I, he, we, it, me, herself, one another, anybody, who).

Adjective: Modifies a noun to provide more detail, such as specifying color, age, beauty, size and quantity. Titles (i.e. Mrs., Dr., Sgt.) and determiners (i.e. the, a lot, my, only, both) are a subsets.

Adverb: Modifies a verb to provide more detail. Traditionally ends in *-ly* and typically answer the questions *how?*, *in what way?*, *when?*, *where?* and *to what extent?* (i.e. obviously, quickly, shortly, well).

Preposition: Introduces a modifying phrase that indicates a relationship or direction (i.e. with, on, for, after, at, against, instead of, near, towards, through, over, according to).

Conjunction: Connects nouns, phrases or clauses. Coordinating (i.e. and, but, or), correlative (i.e. either [or], not [only], but [also]) and subordinating (i.e. however, as much as) are all subsets.

Interjection: Also called an exclamation or filler phrase, indicates emotion without the assistance of a noun and are followed by either an exclamation point or comma (i.e. sorry, um, hi, well, wow). Interjections should be avoided in formal writing.

Parts of a Sentence

Subject: Initiates the action, causes the action or carries attributes. More than just a noun, a subject can be a phrase (noun plus modifiers), a gerund (verb ending in *-ing*), infinitive (*to* plus verb), an implied (*you* or *it*, often confused for a fragment) or an entire quotation.

Predicate: The action itself and all of its modifiers. More than just a verb, a predicate can include a direct object, a preposition, an object compliment or adverbials.

Object: Receives the action and can be direct (the action is specifically being done to the object), indirect (the object is receiving the action) or prepositional (the object is a prepositional phrase).

Modifier: Clarifies what is being done, how it is being done or who is doing it. Modifiers can be either adjective (relating to a noun) or adverbial (relating to the verb).

Phrase: Grouping of words that act as a complex modifier. Phrases include noun phrases (noun plus modifiers), verb phrases (verb plus modifiers), prepositional phrases (preposition plus modifiers), appositives (follows the noun and set apart by commas) or absolutes (modifies the entire sentence, both subject and predicate).

Clause: Grouping of words that have both a subject and predicate. Clauses can be dependent (indicated by a subordinate conjunction), relative clause (indicated by *which* or *what* and are always preceded by a comma), content clause (indicated by *that*), interrogative clause (indicated by question words). Independent clauses could stand alone as their own sentences and are linked by coordinating conjunctions or hard punctuation (i.e. semicolon, colon, em dash).

Punctuation

Period . : Can either indicate the end of a sentence or an abbreviation. Use a single space after a period.

Comma , : Used to separate and clarify clauses, phrases, conjunctions or lists.

Colon : : Indicates that the following proves, explains or provides detailed elements of what is referred to before. Often used when indicating a definition, a consequence, a set, a cause and action, direct speech, dialogue, scripture reference, time reference or a subtitle.

Semicolon ; : Connects two related ideas, often used in place of a period or conjunction but also as with a listing where a comma is not a clear enough indicator. Semicolons are becoming an antiquated form of a conjunction and should be used sparingly if at all.

Dash: Three types of dashes vary in length. Hyphen (-), or figure dash, joins words or separates syllables. En dash (–) indicates a range or a connecting relationship. Em dash (—) indicates an interruption, such as a parenthetical thought or sentence cut short.

Slash / : Used to emphasize a connecting relationship in place of an en dash.

Parenthesis () : Indicates an interruption in the flow of a sentence. This is also becoming an antiquated punctuation as em dashes or commas are more often used.

Quotation Mark “ ” : Sets apart a grouping of words that does not belong to the narrator. A period should be placed inside the quotation mark when it is located at the end of a sentence.

Apostrophe ‘ ’ : Used to set apart a quotation within a quotation. Though most commonly used in contractions, contractions should be avoided in formal writing.

Question Mark ? : Used instead of a period in cases of an interrogative. Because all questions within formal writing are rhetorical (cannot be answered directly), interrogatives should be used sparingly or not at all.

Exclamation Mark ! : Used instead of a period in cases of an exclamatory remark. Because word-choice should carry the power in formal writing, exclamations should be used sparingly.

Symbols: All other symbols (i.e. \$ % & *) should only be used with a specific purpose in mind, such as indicating a footnote or citing the name of a company. When in doubt, spell out what the symbol represents rather than using the symbol itself, including numbers less than 1,000, fractions, dollar signs and percentages.

Conjugation

Infinitive: The root of the verb (i.e. walk, be)

I (walk, am)	We (walk, are)
You (walk, are)	You (walk, are)
He/She/It/One (walks, is)	They (walk, are)

Tense

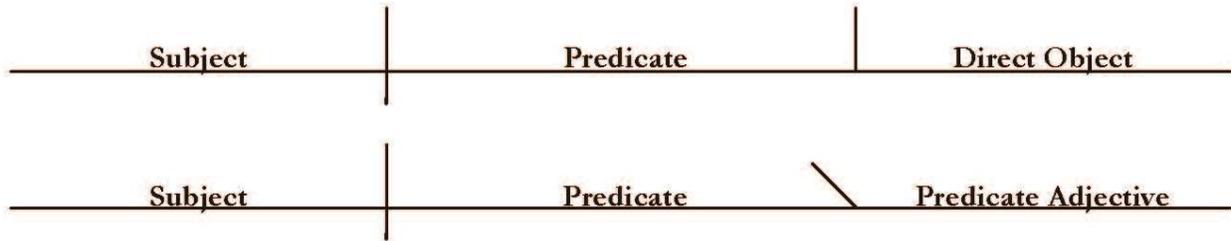
Simple Present (I walk.) (I am.)	Simple Past (I walked.) (I was.)	Simple Future (I will walk.) (I will be.)
Present Continuous (I am walking.) (I am being.)	Past Continuous (I was walking.) (I was being.)	Future Continuous (I will be walking.) (I will be being.)
Present Perfect (I have walked.) (I have been.)	Past Perfect (I had walked.) (I had been.)	Future Perfect (I will have walked.) (I will have been.)
Present Perfect Continuous (I have been walking.) (I have been being.)	Past Perfect Continuous (I had been walking.) (I had been being.)	Future Perfect Continuous (I will have been walking.) (I will have been being.)

Diagramming Sentences

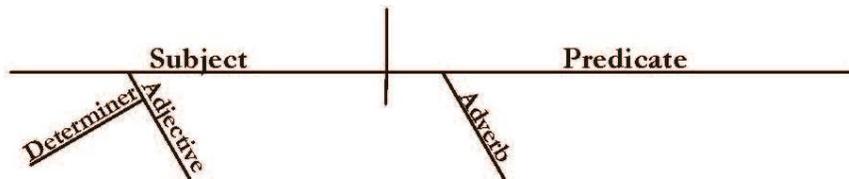
Practice identifying the parts of speech by diagramming sentences. Being able to do this quickly and correctly will make it easier for you to identify fragments, misused punctuation, subject/verb agreement or misplaced modifiers. You can also do this with your own writing to increase clarity and avoid simple mistakes.

Basic Structure

Basic Sentence Structure:



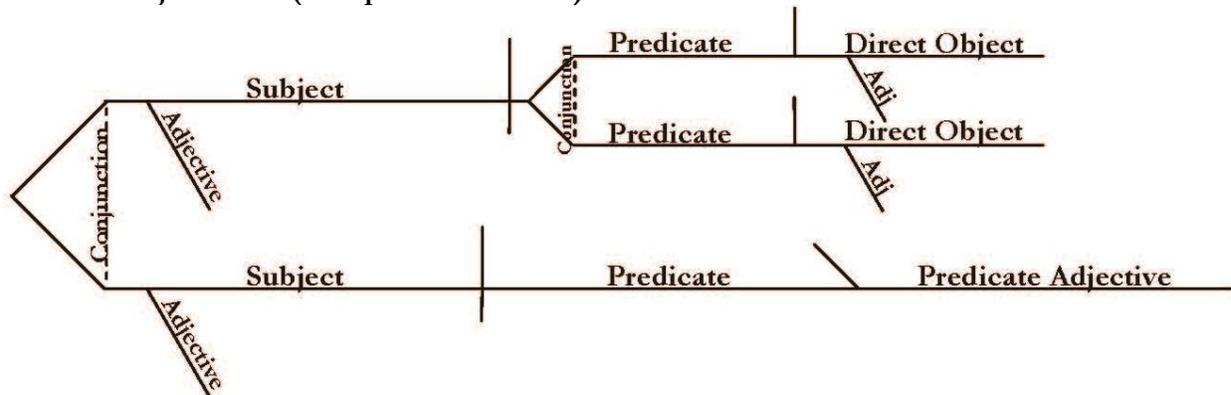
Modifiers:



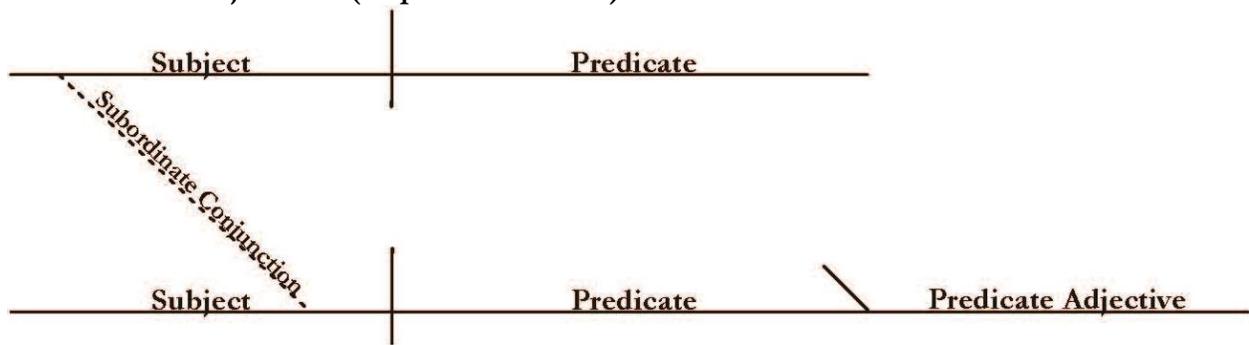
Direct Object Clause:



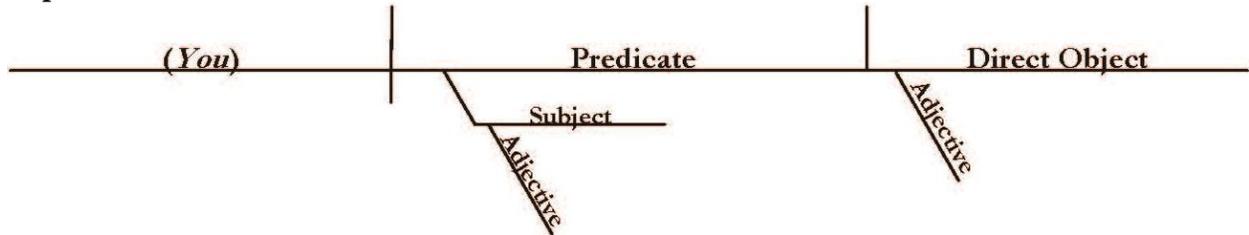
Parallel Conjunctions (Independent Clause):



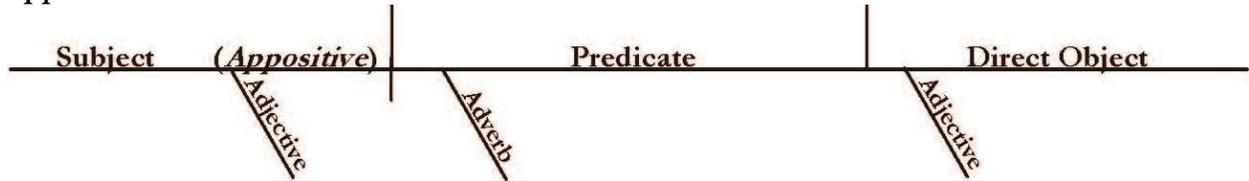
Subordinate Conjunction (Dependent Clause):



Implied *You*:



Appositive:



Interjection:



Diagram This

Diagram the following sentences in the structures provided.

Students read books.

She is beautiful.

Those red balloons flew overhead.

I heard you were leaving.

The students read their assignment and brought their textbooks, so their teacher was happy.

I laughed when he got stuck.

Give the man your wallet.

Gigantic Fluffy, my cat, ate her food greedily.

Wow! He is amazing!