

4. SUBJECTS

Read the following sentences and then answer the questions in the spaces provided:

1. Jane rode her horse every week.
Who rode the horse? _____
2. The enormous alligator ate Chicago.
What ate Chicago? _____
3. The Starskys flew to Rome yesterday.
Who flew to Rome? _____

What do the three words you wrote in the spaces have in common? If you think about the way these words are used in the above sentences, you'll see that all three are *doing* the action of the verbs.

Definition

The **subject** of a sentence is the noun or pronoun that is doing the action of the verb. To put it another way, the subject is the noun or pronoun that is being talked about in a sentence.

In the above sentences, for instance, the words *Jane*, *alligator*, and *Starskys* are doing the action of the verbs *rode*, *ate*, and *flew*. The subject is considered to be one of the **functions** of the noun or pronoun.

FINDING THE SUBJECT

Now look at the following sentences and underline the subjects:

1. The cat in the large dead tree chases birds.
2. The beginning of that book bored me.
3. The top of the building is gold.

As you can see, subjects can often be separated from verbs by several other words. If you're not sure what the subject is, just ask yourself the question, "Who or what is doing the action of the verb?"

The subject of a sentence usually comes before the verb, but it can sometimes come after it. Here are some examples of sentences in which the subjects come after the verbs:

1. There is a gorilla in the kitchen.
2. On the table stood a beautiful bowl.
3. Did Susan buy that tomato?

Notice that the word *there*, which is neither a noun nor pronoun, can never be the subject of a sentence. Also, in sentences that are questions, the subject will usually appear after the helping verb and before the main verb. If you are having trouble finding the subject of a question, changing it into a statement will sometimes help:

Susan bought that tomato.

Now underline the subjects of the following sentences:

1. Buy me a newspaper.
2. Pick up all that trash.

If you can't find the subjects in these sentences, don't worry. In sentences that express commands, the subject "you" is *implied* rather than expressed. In other words, what the person speaking the above sentences is really saying is: "You, buy me a newspaper" and "You, pick up all that trash." *You* is the subject of both sentences, which are commands.

SENTENCES

Definition

Subjects and verbs are the building blocks of sentences. A sentence is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. In its most basic form, this complete thought is called an **independent clause** or **simple sentence**.

Sentences that make statements are called **declarative sentences**; sentences that ask questions are called **interrogative sentences**; and sentences that give commands are called **imperative sentences**:

1. Josiah likes scrambled eggs. (declarative)
2. Can the gorilla stay for dinner? (interrogative)
3. Do your grammar homework. (imperative)

SUBJECT EXERCISES

A. *Directions:* Write the subject of each sentence in the space at the end.

EXAMPLE: The cat ate the mouse. *cat*

1917: A REMARKABLE YEAR

1. Many important events occurred in 1917. _____
2. The first Russian Revolution ended the rule of the tsars in February. _____
3. President Woodrow Wilson began his second term of office the following month. _____
4. The United States entered World War I that spring.

5. T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," stunned the literary world that year. _____
6. Many other brilliant young poets died on the battlefields in France.

7. John F. Kennedy was born in his family's house in Brookline, Massachusetts. _____
8. Puerto Ricans were granted United States citizenship.

9. In October, Lenin led a second revolution in Russia.

10. There are many reasons to spend time reading about that year in history books. _____

B. *Directions:* Insert subjects in the blanks in the following sentences.

EXAMPLE: *Arnie* raced Jan to the corner.

1. _____ flew to Moscow on a peace mission.
2. _____ reached out calmly and yanked me into the boat.
3. _____ followed Sally home at the end of the day.
4. _____ is the title of a famous book.
5. _____ rattled the windows at the height of the storm.
6. _____ made me jump in surprise.
7. _____ knew that I was coming to town on Thursday.
8. Did _____ write a terrifying book about vampires?

9. _____ sang a song until the baby fell asleep.
10. _____ tasted even worse than usual.

C. *Directions:* Use each of the following words as the subject of a sentence.

EXAMPLE: rat *The rat slithered down the hole.* _____

1. dentist _____
2. calendar _____
3. sunset _____
4. Argentina _____
5. honesty _____
6. photograph _____
7. president _____
8. computer _____
9. Alexis _____
10. alligator _____

D. *Directions:* Write five sentences that begin with *there*. Then write the subject at the end of each sentence.

EXAMPLE: There goes the train. *train*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____