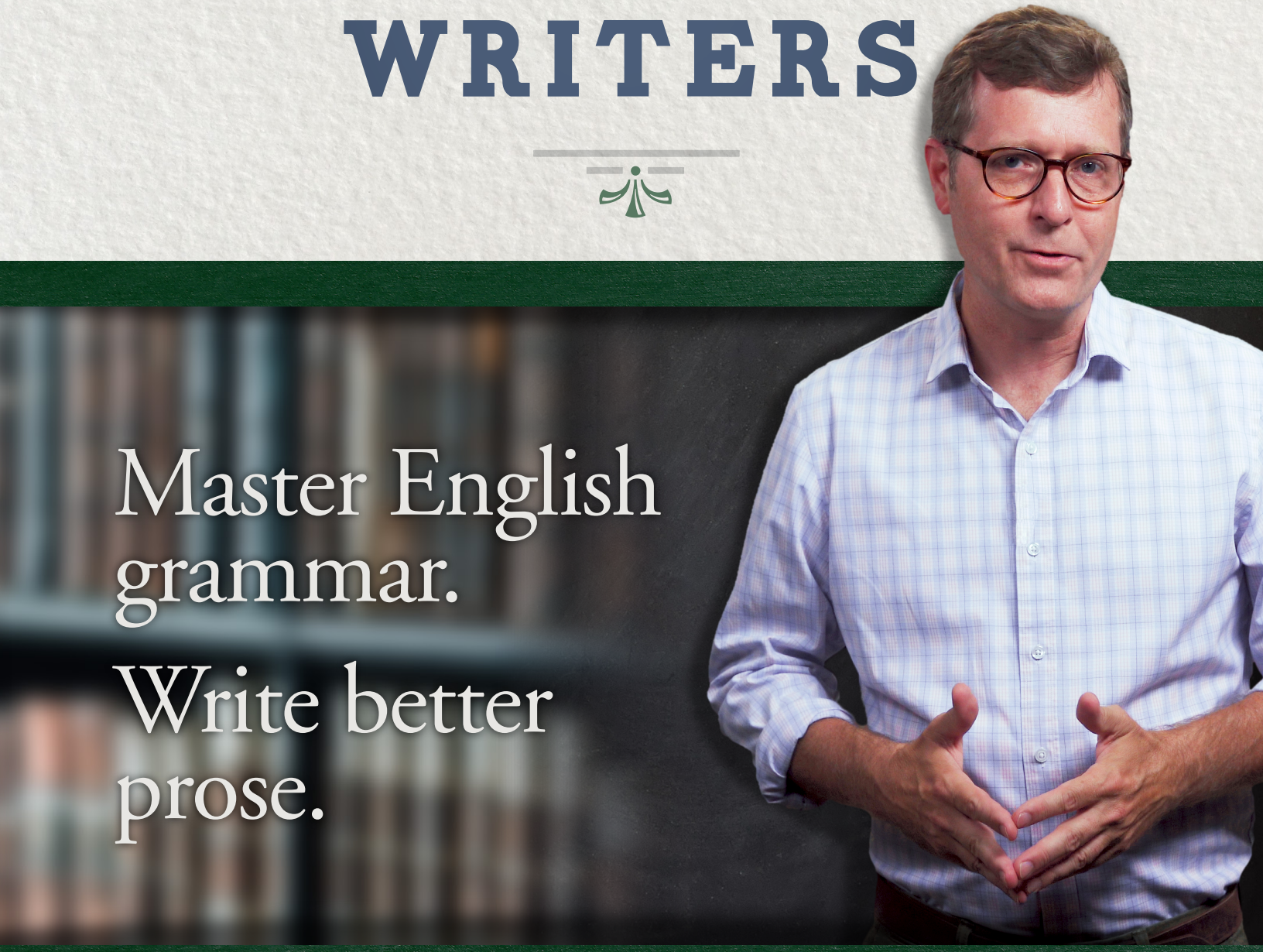
LESSONS & QUIZZES

GRAMMAR FOR WRITERS



Master English grammar.

Write better prose.

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GRAMMAR FOR WRITERS

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Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 1: Introduction

For many writers, the key to better writing isn't new skills so much as clearing away the clutter of bad habits to get back to fundamental skills that have been there all along.

Human language gives you countless ways to insert more and more information into a sentence—nominative absolute, noun clauses, adjective clauses, participial phrases. Subordinating conjunctions convey all kinds of logical relationships between ideas.

If you're older than about seven years old, you can already use all of these grammatical constructions. You are probably quite good at cramming lots of information into a sentence.

However, at its heart, good, vivid language—whether written or spoken—isn't just about conveying information. It isn't about weeding out the grammar and style errors from your prose. It's about **rendering experience**. That is something that you understood when you were a toddler, even if you have since forgotten it.

When you learn to talk, you start with concrete nouns—things you can see and hear and touch: *Mama, Daddy, kitty, milk, car.*

Pretty soon you add verbs: *Kitty says meow. Milk spilled. Daddy is funny. Car goes fast.*

As you grow, you learn to use increasingly complicated grammatical structures. Through most of your education, your parents and teachers encourage you to express more and more complex ideas with more and more complex grammatical structures. You get rewarded for showing that you can think in abstract terms.

You DO need to be able to think abstractly, and you need to master the grammatical complexities that allow you to communicate abstract ideas. Abstract thinking is an important part of the educational process.

In this course, however, I am going to work from the assumption that you are already fully capable of abstract thought—that you have nothing to prove in that regard. Good, vivid writing tends to move **toward the concrete**, pulling big ideas and concepts down from the realm of the abstract and into the world where we live and move and have our being.

So in this first module of *Grammar for Writers*, we're going to go all the way back to the simplest, most straightforward ways of rendering experience: **Subjects. Verbs. Objects. Complements.**
WHO DID WHAT? Or, WHO DID WHAT TO WHOM? Writing that connects with a reader has to be solid at that level. That's the way information comes to us in the real world. We see who did what to whom. Writing that is strong at the very simple level of subject, verb, object, and complement feels true to your reader.

So here in this first module, we're stripping away all the modifiers, all the subordinate clauses, everything but the main action that a sentence depicts: who did what? We're going to build back all those other constructions in the subsequent modules, but for now, we're going all the way back to some of the first things you learned to do with language when you were a toddler.

There are thirteen lessons remaining in this first module. Here is what you can expect to get from those lessons:

- Tools for identifying the verb and the subject of a clause.
- Tools for finding direct objects and indirect objects.
- Tools for identifying predicate complements and seeing the difference between action verbs and linking verbs.
- The five possible patterns for the structure of a clause.
- Passive voice—how to identify it, why to avoid it, and when it's good to use it.
- Nominalization—the practice of turning verbs into abstract nouns (and why it is a dangerous practice).
- Strong verbs—and why that advice "USE STRONG VERBS" can be misleading.

We will devote a lot of attention to aligning the action of a sentence with the grammar of the sentence by making sure that **actions get expressed as verbs, and the actors are the subjects of those verbs**. That, really, is the central idea of this whole module. Everything else in this module is just a specific and/or technical outworking of that idea of turning actors and actions into subjects and verbs. Once you grasp and apply that idea, your writing will be transformed immediately.

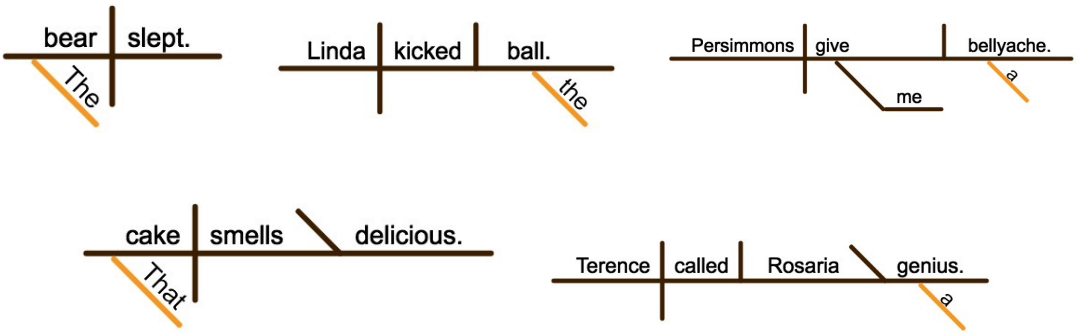
Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 2: Understanding the Main Line

Every sentence has a main clause. It may have a lot of other things too, but it always has a main clause. The main clause answers the question, WHO DID WHAT?

Each of these sentences consists of one main clause.

- The bear slept.
- Linda kicked a ball.
- Persimmons give me a bellyache.
- That cake smells delicious.
- Terence called Rosaria a genius.

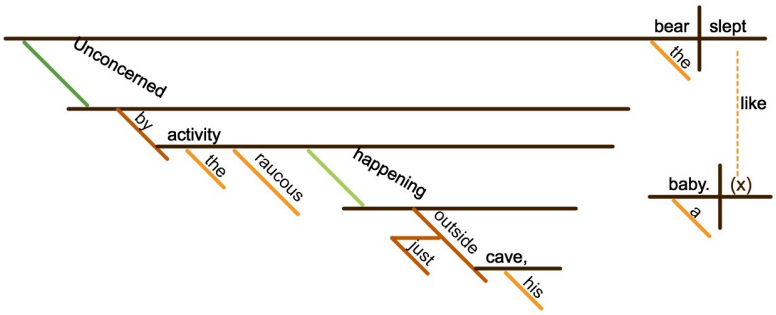
In sentence diagramming, the main clause is represented on the main line. In each of these diagrams, there is only a main line, with nothing (except one article per sentence) branching from the line.



The five patterns represented in these five diagrams are the only possible clause patterns in the English language. We will look much more closely at these patterns in Lesson 5 of this module.

Many (if not most) sentences you write will be considerably more complicated than the sample sentences above. The diagrams for those sentences will have lines sprouting off the main line and branching in different directions, as in this sentence:

Unconcerned by the raucous activity just outside his cave, the bear slept like a baby.



Everything that branches off the main line is a modifier. Modifiers include (but are not limited to) adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, participles, infinitives, and adverbial and adjectival clauses.

Adverbial modifiers answer questions about the action:

- How?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?

Adjectival modifiers answer questions about nouns:

- What kind?
- Which one?
- How many?

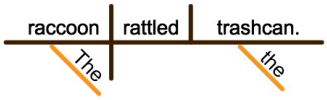
This module of the course is all about the main line—the main clause, that main question: WHO DID WHAT? Most of the rest of the course is about everything that branches off the main line.

Skills to work on in this lesson are identifying that main line and SEPARATING it from all the modifiers.

Consider this sentence:

The raccoon rattled the trashcan.

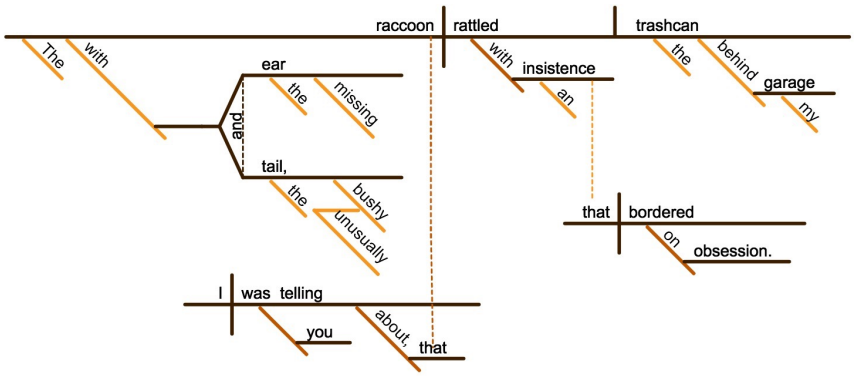
This is a straightforward clause with a subject (raccoon), a verb (rattled), and a direct object (trashcan). Who did what to whom? The raccoon rattled the trashcan. Here's the diagram:



Now, consider this sentence:

> *The raccoon that I was telling you about, with the missing ear and the unusually bushy tail, rattled the trashcan behind my garage with an insistence that bordered on obsession.*

If we were to diagram this sentence, it would look like this:



Compared to the first raccoon sentence, this one is impressively complicated. But perhaps the most impressive thing about these two diagrams is the realization that the main line is exactly the same.

Who did what? *The racoon rattled the trashcan*. This is true for the first, simple raccoon sentence, and it is true for the second, complicated raccoon sentence. The main line is five words (if you count the two the's). In the second sentence, the other 25 words sprouting off the main line are all modifiers. They tell us which raccoon. They tell which trashcan. Notice also that some parts of the modifiers have their own modifiers.

Once you get off the main line, language allows for infinite complexity. But on the main line, the options are NOT infinite. In fact, there are only five patterns, and they are easy to memorize, and with a little practice, you can get good at recognizing them.

Quiz 1.2: Understanding the Main Line

I. **I once worked at a plumbing company.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

II. **I have great admiration for plumbers.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

III. **Plumbers confront problems that most of us run away from.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

IV. **I cannot imagine a civil society without indoor plumbing.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

V. **Nevertheless, my plumber friends were not always so civil.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

VI. **Plumbers conduct an ongoing, often bitter feud with roofers.**
What is the main line of this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

VII. **If you see a plumber, you should hug his or her neck.**
What is the main line of the main clause in this sentence? In other words, who did what, without any modifiers?

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 3: Subjects and Verbs

A clause is a unit of grammar that describes a bit of action. **A clause ALWAYS includes a subject and a verb.** It may also include other things, like a direct object, an indirect object, a predicate nominative, a predicate adjective, or an objective complement. This is true of every clause, whether it's a main clause (independent clause) or a subordinate clause (dependent clause).

When you analyze the grammar of a sentence, start by finding the verb (or verbs). **Verbs express action or a state of being**.

The Verb Finder provides a rule of thumb that will help you find the verb(s) in any clause. The verb of any clause will fit into one or more of these blanks and form a grammatically correct sentence:

I _____.
YOU _____.
HE/SHE/IT _____.

In the sentence, *Linda kicked the ball*, only one word fits in the Verb Finder:

I <u>Linda</u>.
I <u>kicked</u>.
I <u>the</u>.
I <u>ball</u>.

I kicked is a sentence. The other three combinations are nonsensical.

Note that if I _____ doesn't yield a verb, YOU _____ or HE/SHE/IT _____ should, as in this example:

The cake smells delicious.

I the.	YOU the.	HE/SHE/IT the.
I cake.	YOU cake.	HE/SHE/IT cake.
I smells.	YOU smells.	**HE/SHE/IT smells**.
I delicious.	YOU delicious.	HE/SHE/IT delicious.

The Verb Finder works for all tenses, including the more complex tenses, like past-, present-, and future-progressive and past-, present-, and future-perfect.

The Verb Finder, however, is not fool-proof if you don't apply some common sense. Every verb will fit in the blank of the Verb Finder, but sometimes non-verbs will also fit in the blank. Consider our sentence from the last lesson:

The racoon rattled the trash can.

When you apply the Verb Finder, you quickly see that *rattled* is a verb:

I rattled.
YOU rattled.
HE/SHE/IT rattled.

But the word *can* also fits in the verb finder:

I can.
YOU can.
HE/SHE/IT can.

It only takes a little common sense to see that, although *can sometimes* serves as a verb, it is not serving as a verb in this sentence.

Here's a somewhat harder example:

Rattled by my experience with the alligator, I gave up waterskiing.

Rattled looks very much like a verb (indeed, it *was* our verb in the previous example), and it fits in the Verb Finder, but here it's actually a participle, a verb that has been turned into a modifier. The actual verb here is *gave up*, which, of course, also fits in the Verb Finder.

A Word About the *To Be* Verb
The most common verb in any language is the *to be* verb. It's a good idea to memorize the forms of *to be*:

AM	WAS	BE
ARE	WERE	BEING
IS		BEEN

Any time you see one of these words, you have found the verb. It may be the whole verb, as in

Fernando is a deep sea diver.

Or a *to be* verb may be a helping verb, as in

Fernando was swimming with the sharks (part of the past present form *was swimming*).

Or,

Fernando was stung by jellyfish (part of the passive verb *was stung*).

Identifying Subjects
Once you have used the Verb Finder to identify the verbs, you can use the Subject Finder to identify the subject. The Subject Finder is a simple question. Having used the Verb Finder to identify the verb, drop the verb into the blank of this question:

WHO OR WHAT _____?

The answer to that question is your subject. Consider the following sentence:

Linda kicked the ball.

The verb is *kicked,* so the Subject Finder is the question "Who <u>kicked</u>?" **Linda** kicked. *Linda* is the subject.

That cake smells delicious.
What <u>smells</u>? C**ake** smells.

You are a sweetheart.
Who <u>are</u>? **You** are.

One of the bonus features of the Subject Finder is that it can help you discover if you have mistakenly identified a verb. If, in the sentence *The raccoon rattled the trash can* you were to mistakenly say that *can* is a verb, you will see your problem once you apply the Subject Finder. Who <u>can</u>? Well, nobody <u>can</u>. That's not what the sentence is about.

To review:

- Every clause has BOTH a subject and a verb.
- You can identify the verb using the Verb Finder:

  I _____.

  You _____.

  He/She/It _____.
- The verb of a clause will *always* fit in that blank.
- Unfortunately, some other words may fit in the blank too, so you have to be careful.
- Once you've found your verb, you can plug that verb into the Subject Finder to identify the subject:

  Who or what _____.
- A clause *always* has a verb and subject, and it may have an object or a complement. Identifying these elements will be the subject of our next lesson.

Quiz 1.3: Subjects and Verbs

I. **The angry mob chased the pirate.**
What is the VERB in this sentence?

A. angry
B. mob
C. chased
D. pirate

II. **Many years' rough wisdom shone from his one good eye.**
What is the VERB in this sentence?

A. years'
B. rough
C. wisdom
D. shone
E. good
F. eye

III. **Many years' rough wisdom shone from his one good eye.**
What is the SUBJECT in this sentence?

A. many
B. years'
C. rough
D. wisdom
E. shone
F. good
G. eye

IV. **John Barber, frightened by the possum in his driveway, cried like a small child.**
What is the VERB in this sentence?

A. frightened
B. possum
C. cried

V. **The pirate was chased by the angry mob.**
What is the VERB in this sentence?

A. pirate
B. was
C. chased
D. was chased
E. angry
F. mob

VI. **The pirate was chased by the angry mob.**
What is the SUBJECT in this sentence?

A. pirate
B. angry
C. mob

VII. **Chasing cars is my dog's favorite activity.**
What is the VERB in this sentence?

A. chasing
B. cars
C. is
D. dog's
E. favorite
F. activity

VIII. **Chasing cars is my dog's favorite activity.**
What is the SUBJECT in this sentence?

A. chasing
B. cars
C. is
D. dog's
E. favorite
F. activity

IX. **I arrange my mashed potatoes just so, and you destroy it all with your spoon.**
A compound sentence will have at least two main subjects and two main verbs. What are the two main subject/verb combinations in the sentence above?

A. I mashed, you destroy
B. I arrange, you destroy
C. I arrange, destroy it all
D. mashed potatoes, with your spoon

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 4: Objects and Complements

Grammar is about relatively simple units organized in infinitely complex ways. A clause is one of those relatively simple units. (I am speaking here of the main line of a clause, not its modifiers.)

A clause tells who did what. It has a subject and a verb. And it may have TWO (and only two) other things: OBJECTS and COMPLEMENTS.

An OBJECT is a NOUN—a person, place or thing that RECEIVES the action of a verb. **The subject PERFORMS the action, the object RECEIVES the action** (at least in an active construction; passive constructions, as we will see, are a different matter).

Linda kicked the ball.

Linda is the subject—she did the kicking. The ball is the object. It got kicked. It RECEIVED the kick.

Finding Direct Objects
Just as we had a Verb Finder and a Subject Finder, there is also a Direct Object Finder. Once you have found your verb and your subject, you plug them into this question:

SUBJECT VERB <u>who or what</u>?

If that question has an answer, the answer is your direct object. In the case of LINDA KICKED THE BALL, the Direct Object Finder is the question,

Linda kicked <u>what</u>? **The ball**.

Ball is the direct object.

In the case of *A goat ate my cell phone*, the Direct Object Finder is the question,

Goat ate <u>what</u>? **My cell phone.**

Cell phone is the direct object.

Finding Indirect Objects
IF you have a direct object, you may ALSO have an **indirect object**—another noun that doesn't directly receive the action, but FOR WHOM or TO WHOM the action is performed. This indirect object always appears immediately before the direct object.

So let's look at this sentence: *I will pour you a glass of water*.

First, use the Direct Object Finder: *I will pour* <u>what</u>? Be careful here: don't say YOU. I'm not pouring YOU. I will pour a **glass of water**.
Now that we've found the Direct Object, we can apply the Indirect Object Finder.

The Indirect Object Finder, like the Subject Finder and the Direct Object Finder, is a fill-in-the-blank question:

> SUBJECT VERB DIRECT OBJECT <u>to or for whom</u>?
>
> *I will pour a glass of water* <u>to or for whom</u>? **You**.

You is the indirect object.

> *Grandpa read Cindy a book.*
>
> *Grandpa read a book* <u>to or for whom</u>? **Cindy**.

Cindy is the indirect object.

Direct and Indirect Object Review

- An object is always a noun or a noun equivalent.
- You can't have an indirect object without a direct object.
- The indirect object, if you have one, always comes immediately before the direct object.
- An indirect can always be rephrased as a prepositional phrase beginning with *to* or *for*.

  Ken gave Barbie flowers = *Ken gave flowers to Barbie*.
  Grandpa read Cindy a book = *Grandpa read a book to Cindy*.

Predicate Complements
A complement either renames the subject, or describes the subject. The following sentences contain predicate complements:

- *My heroes have always been cowboys*. (*Heroes* renames *cowboys*.)
- *You are a sweetheart*. (*Sweetheart* renames *you*.)
- *My dog is lazy*. (*Lazy* describes *my dog*.)
- *My dog smells funny*. (*Funny* describes *my dog*.)

A **predicate nominative** is a **noun** that **renames** the subject.
A **predicate adjective** is an **adjective** that **describes** the subject.

The verb that connects or links the subject and the complement is called a **linking verb**. Think of a linking verb as an 'equal sign':

- My heroes = cowboys
- You = sweetheart
- My dog = lazy
- My dog = funny (as regards her odor)

The most common linking verb (by far) is *to be*: AM, IS, ARE, WAS, WERE, BE, BEING, BEEN

There are other linking verbs:

- *You LOOK lovely.*
- *Luther SMELLS strange.*
- *That test PROVED difficult.*

There is no reason to try to memorize all the linking verbs. If the noun after a verb renames the subject, or if an adjective after a verb describes the subject, that verb is serving as a linking verb.

Distinguishing Objects from Complements
What's the difference between an OBJECT and a COMPLEMENT? An object is a noun that is separate from the subject. The subject does something to or for the object.

A complement IS the subject (or, rather, it IS the subject if it's a noun, it DESCRIBES the subject if it's an adjective).

Consider these two sentences:

- *My dog smells funny.*
- *My dog smells a hamburger*.

These sentences look a lot alike, but one of them has a direct object, and one of them has a complement. To put it another way, in one of these sentences, SMELLS is an action verb, and in one of these sentences, *smells* is a linking verb.

In the first sentence, *funny* is a complement. It describes the dog. So *smells* is operating as a linking verb. In the second sentence, *hamburger* is a DIRECT OBJECT. The dog is not a hamburger. In this case, *smells* is an action verb; it tells something that the dog is doing TO the hamburger.

To review:

- On the main line of a clause, you MUST have a subject and a verb, and you MAY have an object (possibly two—direct and indirect) or a complement.
- There are two kinds of objects. The direct object receives the action. The indirect object is the entity to whom or for whom the action is performed.
- There are two types of complements: predicate nominatives (nouns that rename a subject) and predicate adjectives(adjectives that describe a subject).
- A complement renames or describes the subject, but an object is a noun that is separate from the subject.
- A less common type of complement, the objective complement, renames or describes a direct object, just as a predicate complement renames or describes the subject. We will see examples of objective complements in the next lesson.

Incredibly, we have now looked at everything that can happen on the main line of a clause: subjects, verbs, objects, complements. These elements can only occur in certain combinations and in certain orders. There are only five such combinations—the five clause patterns of the next lesson.

Quiz 1.4 A: Identifying Subjects, Verbs, Objects, and Complements

I. **The most fascinating year of Vincent's career was the last year of his life.**
Identify the subject, verb, and predicate complement for this sentence.

II. **An important step toward recovery of healthy self-esteem is deeper self-awareness.**
This question has two parts:
a) What is the grammatical subject?
b) Is self-awareness a direct object or a predicate complement?

III. **I wondered if they were talking about me.**
Does this sentence have a direct object? If so, what is it? (Hint: You're probably going to need to use the Direct Object Finder for this one.)

IV**. In front of her was an old man who turned out to be George Jones.**
What are the subject and verb of this sentence? (You're going to need to use your Subject Finder on this one.)

Quiz 1.4 B: Objects and Complements (Challenge)

I. **Mike leaned forward on the rail that separated the porch from the descending hillside.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

II. **He makes his slow, gloating trot around the misshapen diamond squeezed into the backyard.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

III. **My family moved to Phoenix from Chicago when I was seven.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

IV. **The truck has been sitting in my driveway for months.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

V. **Going west, my family traded tornados for tumbleweeds and the occasional aftershock of an earthquake.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

VI. **They had not touched the bird feeder I hung two weeks ago.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

VII. **As the mists of my dullness gradually cleared, the truth broke with a light that pierces to this day.**
What is the "main line" of this sentence? In other words, what is the main action, without any modifiers? Who did what?

VIII. **The worst water was in the middle of the channel, but that was also the safest place.**
This sentence is a compound sentence. It has two independent (main) clauses. Identify the subject and verb for each of the two independent clauses.

IX. **It was our third day out, and we had camped nearby, several miles from where our trip began.**
This sentence is a compound sentence. It has two independent (main) clauses. Identify the subject and verb for each of the two independent clauses.

X. **Five of them bound together at their base where the stem holds them together, overlapping. An upside-down cup. Like the back of my grandmother's hands, the delicate veins are visible. One thick purple line extending from base to tip with dozens of thinner ones stretching out from center to edges.**
In that group of four "sentences," only one is actually a sentence, with a subject and a verb. Which one is it?

XI. **The two of us standing in her tiny kitchen with the avocado and pumpkin hued accents and stained Tupperware cups that made me squeamish every time I had to drink from one.**
What is the main line (subject, verb, and object(s) or complement) of this sentence?

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 5: The Five Clause Patterns

As we saw with the trash-can-rattling raccoon from a few lessons ago, once you start adding modifiers to the main clause of a sentence and modifiers within modifiers, you can quickly have a very complicated sentence. The possible variations for the structure of an English sentence are effectively infinite.

However, the possible variations for the structure of a clause are actually VERY limited. There are only five possible patterns for a clause. Learning these five patterns will get you a LONG way toward mastery of English grammar. You can't begin to master English grammar without them.

These five clause patterns are worth the trouble to memorize:

- SUBJECT-VERB
- SUBJECT-VERB-DIRECT OBJECT
- SUBJECT-VERB-INDIRECT OBJECT-DIRECT OBJECT
- SUBJECT-VERB-DIRECT OBJECT-OBJECTIVE COMPLEMENT
- SUBJECT-LINKING VERB-PREDICATE COMPLEMENT

The elements of these sentence patterns always appear in the order above (with a few exceptions mentioned below).

Word order is extremely important in English. English is an SVO language. SVO stands for subject-verb-object. In a given clause, the subject comes before the verb, and the verb comes before the object. The meaning of the sentence depends on the order of the words. *The hunter stalked the panther* means something very different from *The panther stalked the hunter*.

As always, there are exceptions to the SVO rule. Here are the two biggest:

- Exception 1: When you form a question, you move part of the verb in front of the subject. Instead of *I do want ice cream*, you say, *Do I want ice cream?*

- Exception 2: Certain kinds of dependent clauses monkey with the word order. We will get to those in subsequent modules.

The Five Clause Patterns

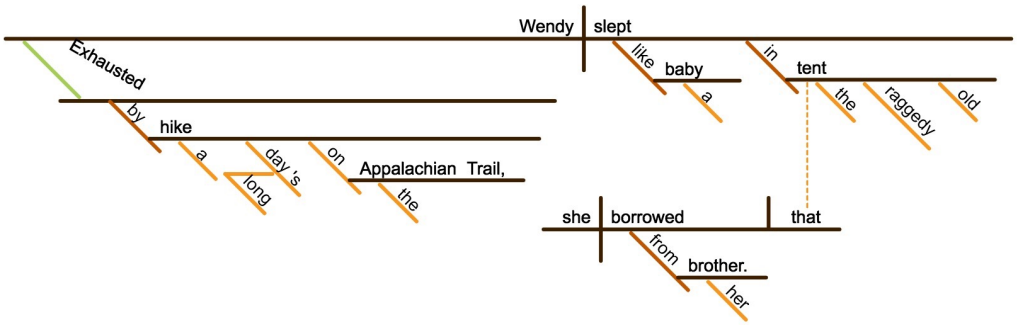
Pattern 1: S-V. Subject-Verb, NO objects or complements.

- *Charles is eating.*
- *Wendy slept.*
- *The squirrel was climbing.*
- *The car died.*
- *My dog smells.*

You can attach modifiers to any item on the main line, so a sentence can be quite long and still be an S-V sentence—that is, have nothing more than a subject and verb on the main line. This sentence is actually an S-V sentence:

> *Exhausted by a long day's hike on the Appalachian Trail, Wendy slept like a baby in the raggedy old tent that she borrowed from her brother.*

When you apply the Verb Finder, you see that the only verbs in this long sentence are *slept* and *borrowed*. *Borrowed* is part of an adjective clause (that will make sense in a few lessons if it doesn't right now). So the main line of that sentence is simply *Wendy slept*. And *slept* does not have a direct object. So this is an S-V sentence. Here is the diagram:



You can add this kind of complexity to any of the five clause patterns. (I'm not going to keep doing it for the other four patterns in this lesson, but bear in mind that you could.)

Pattern 2: S-V-DO. Subject-Verb-Direct Object.

- *The hunter stalked the panther*.
- *The panther stalked the hunter*.
- *The squirrel climbed the tree*.
- *Charles is eating boiled peanuts*.

In each of these examples, the subject is doing something to something else.

PATTERN 3: S-V-IO-DO Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object.

- *Ken gave Barbie flowers*.
- *Please pour me a glass of water.*

If you have TWO nouns after the verb, you may have an indirect object as well as a direct object. There is no such thing as a sentence that has an indirect object but no direct object. There's no such thing as a sentence in which an indirect object comes after the direct object. (There are, however, sentences in which a prepositional phrase identifies the entity for whom or two whom the action is performed. *Please pour me a glass of water* can be phrased as *Please pour a glass of water for me*. Logically speaking, there is no difference between the two sentences. Grammatically, however, in the first sentence *me* is an indirect object appearing before the direct object, and in the second sentence *me* is the object of the preposition FOR and appears after the direct object.)

Pattern 4: S-V-DO-OC. Subject-Verb-Direct Object-Objective Complement.
This pattern is a little less common than the others. Remember from the last lesson how a predicate complement renames or describes the subject? An objective complement renames or describes the direct object. It might be a noun renaming the direct object, or it might be an adjective describing the direct object.

Consider the sentence, *We painted the town red*. Using the Direct Object Finder—*We painted* who or what?—it is easy to see that *town* is the direct object. But what do we to with *red*? *Red* describes town. It's an objective complement.

- *We elected Miriam class president*. (*Class president* = *Miriam*)
- *We judged John a Grade-A-Rat*. (*Grade-A-Rat* = *John*)

A few things to know about objective complements:

- They may be nouns, or they may be adjectives.
- They always come immediately AFTER the direct object.
- You can't have an objective complement without a direct object

So if you've found your direct object and there's another noun or adjective lurking around after it, ask whether that noun or adjective renames or describes your direct object. If so, you have found an objective complement.

Pattern 5: S-V-PC. Subject-Verb-Predicate Complement.
The predicate complement comes AFTER the verb, and it renames or describes the subject. This is probably the most common of the five clause types. We think of verbs as being words that describe actions, but just as importantly, verbs describe states of being.

- *Roslyn is a mail-carrier*. (*Roslyn* = *mail-carrier*)
- *This popsicle tastes funny*. (*Popsicle* ['*s flavor*] = *funny*)
- *Allen has been kind*. (*Allen* = *kind*)

The verb in this sentence pattern is called a linking verb because it LINKS the subject to the predicate complement.

These five patterns account for EVERY grammatically correct clause in the English language. Four elements—subjects, verbs, objects complements—can appear in five combinations, and each of those five combinations has to be in a specific order.

Soon we will start combining clauses and modifiers in ways that will get very complex. But for now, celebrate the truth that the grammatical pieces themselves are shockingly simple. The rigidity of only four elements arranged in only five combinations, each with a very specific order, is a huge gift. Language is complicated and flexible enough. We can make sense of that complexity and flexibility ONLY because here at this level, language is simple and rigid.

Quiz 1.5 A: The Five Clause Patterns

I. **John Barber is my nemesis.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

II. **John Barber sold me a fake elevator pass.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

III. **I called John Barber a sneaky monkey.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

IV. **John Barber slapped me with a glove.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

V. **I could not ignore the insult.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

VI. **We fought in the vestibule.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

VII. **I vanquished John Barber easily.**
To which pattern does this clause conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

Quiz 1.5 B: The Five Clause Patterns (Challenge)

I. **Mickey Mantle just hit another home run in the bottom of the ninth in the Sunday afternoon game.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

II. **She is twenty-nine-years old with box blonde hair pulled into a side braid.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

III. **Running bears are an odd sight, but they are fast.**
This sentence consists of two independent clauses. These two clauses happen to conform to the same clause pattern. Which clause pattern is that?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

IV. **One caretaker with a very kind face and shoulder-length black hair showed me how to change the bedsheets and cloth diapers of the children, many of whom were disabled or disfigured.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

V. **When he reached the trail, he turned up and away from me.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

VI. **Their home quickly became the gathering place for dozens of nephews and nieces every summer.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

VII. **Uncle Jim laughed more than any adult in my life.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

VIII. **My Aunt Nancy told me a secret that I have never forgotten.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

IX. **The pirate called the ship-captain a blackguard.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

X. **Wendell built his daughter a house.**
To which of the five patterns does the main clause of this sentence conform?

A. S-V
B. S-V-DO
C. S-V-IO-DO
D. S-V-DO-OC
E. S-V-PC

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 6: Actors and Actions, Subjects and Verbs

We got pretty technical in those last few lessons, and we have a few technical lessons ahead of us, so in this lesson we are taking a step back to talk about one or two big-picture principles that inform everything we are doing in this unit.

These principles cover a multitude of sins. Even if you don't get some of the technicalities, or you forget some of the technicalities, you'll be fine if you remember a couple of principles.

The big one is this:

> **Every time you write a sentence, think about where the action is in that sentence. What is the action, and who is the actor? WHO DID WHAT?**

Once you have determined the action and the actor (or actions and actors) your default setting—your habit—should be to **express each action as a verb, with the actor as the subject of that verb.**

I say DEFAULT and HABIT because there are plenty of situations in which it makes sense to express action in other ways. But your first go-to should be to express action as verbs and actors as subjects.

In this lesson I want to apply this principle in a few examples using as little technical language as possible. In subsequent lessons, we'll put the technical terms to these ideas, but for now, I'm going to try to stick to common-sense layman's terms.

EXAMPLE 1
This comes from a story about siblings riding in the back seat on a long car ride:

Any aimless wandering past the center line of the back seat was grounds for an elbow to the chest or a kick to the leg.

What are the three actions in this sentence?

- One kid wanders past the center line of the back seat.
- One kid elbows another kid in the chest.
- One kid kicks another kid.

But what are the verbs? (Remember, an action isn't the same things as a verb.)

- The only verb is "was."

You can see the mismatch here between the action of the sentence and the grammar of the sentence.

- There are three actions.
- There is one verb, and that verb has nothing to do with any of the three actions.

How do you begin to align the grammar with the action? There is more than one correct answer, but I want you to see what happens when you start thinking in terms of actors and actions and subjects and verbs.

- *Aimless wandering* is a verb that has been turned into an abstract noun. It's not too hard to turn it back into a verb: *wandered*.

- Now that you have a verb, you need a subject. WHO wandered? We can't actually know, though the writer would know. For the purposes of the example, we will say, **I wandered.** (As you can see, thinking in terms of verbs and subjects forces the issue; it makes you consider WHO is doing what.)

- In the same way, changing "*elbow*" and "*kick*" back into verbs forces the writer to think about WHO is elbowing and kicking.

Obviously, only the writer can get this right. Since none of us was in the car with these unruly children, we don't know who was doing what. But a version that aligns actors and actions with subjects and verbs might look more like this:

Any time I wandered over the center line of the seat, my sister put an elbow in my chest. And every time my sister put an elbow in my chest, I kicked her.

There are times, of course, when that "abstractified" version of things—*Any aimless wandering past the center line of the back seat was grounds for an elbow to the chest or a kick to the leg*—might be a good way to express the idea. It needs to be your DEFAULT, your HABIT, to align actors and actions with subjects and verbs. If you try that aligned version and choose instead to do something else, that's fine.

EXAMPLE 2

I was six, and this was the beginning of questioning the existence of Santa Claus.

What are the actions here?

- Somebody is six. (This is not technically an action so much as a state of being.)
- This six-year-old person begins to question something.
- Santa Claus exists (or fails to exist as the case may be).

What are the verbs?
- was (I was six.)
- was (This was the beginning)

These are not very interesting verbs. Actually, there is nothing wrong with the first *was*. There's no better way to express *I was six.* But what about that second clause?

…this was the beginning of questioning the existence of Santa Claus.

In that one clause there are three abstract nouns—*beginning, questioning, existence.* All three of these abstract nouns started out life as verbs.

There is no good reason to turn these three actions into abstract nouns and use the anemic "was" as the one verb.

How could you make this clause more "verbish"? Here's one way:

When I was six, I began to question the existence of Santa Claus.

or, if you really want to be strict about being as "verbish" as possible, with no abstract nouns:

When I was six, I began to wonder whether Santa Clause really existed.

Over the next few lessons, we're going to put some technical language to some of these ideas, but the big, non-technical picture is this:

Every single time you compose a sentence, think about where the action is—WHO DID WHAT?—and make it your habit to express that action in the form of a verb, and make the actor the subject of that verb.

There are plenty of reasons to break that rule, to stray from that habit. But be conscious when you break the rule, and have a good reason for doing so.

Quiz 1.6: Actors and Actions, Subjects and Verbs

I. **If you played on the floor near him, he would reach his foot over and pinch you with his long toes, then laugh when you yelped. Irene would call out "Jimmy, stop it!" which just triggered more laughter.**
How is the grammar in the second sentence out of alignment with the action it depicts? How might you bring the subjects and verbs in line with the action?

II. **Fine furniture, quality clothing, private education made her willing to stretch our limited means so thin they sometimes disappeared altogether.**
The sentence is about a mother who sometimes spent too much money on her children. How might you rework the sentence to bring the grammar of the sentence into alignment with the action the sentence depicts?

III. **Stabbed through both front paws are wooden ski poles. One ski pole is still firmly gripped in the bear's left paw. The right ski pole snapped off at some point and never reattached is now presumed lost to the tundra.**
In the passage above, the writer depicts a figurine of a snow-skiing bear with a broken ski pole. Have a look at that last sentence. What are the actions? What is (are) the verb(s)? How might you bring subjects and verbs in line with actors and actions?

IV. **The moment preceding every sneeze filled with the dread of the surge of pain that was about to ensue.**
What are the subjects and verbs? What are the actions and actors? Rewrite this sentence so that the grammar aligns more closely with the action.

V. **But there was a scarcity of these events and venues in our town, so the cost of a road trip to the city was a price my mother gladly paid.**
What are the actors and actions (or states of being, as the case may be)? What are the subjects and verbs? Rework this sentence so that the subjects and verbs align more closely with the actors and actions.

VI. **Her immediate and enthusiastic, "Yes!" wasn't surprising when as a 7th grader I begged to go see a play at the Tivoli Theatre.**
This is the same mother and daughter from the previous sentence. Again, what are the actions and actors, what are the subjects and verbs, and how can you bring the grammar of the sentence into closer alignment with the action of the sentence?

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 7: What Is the Passive Voice?

I've been talking about making it a habit, or a default, to line up the grammar of a sentence with the action it depicts by expressing that action as a verb and making the actor or agent the grammatical subject of that verb.

One sentence structure that deviates from this default is the passive voice. And the particular way that it deviates is by moving the actor of an action out of the subject position and moving a direct object (or perhaps an indirect object) into the subject position.

Technically speaking, you do this by way of these steps:

- Move an object (either direct or indirect) into the subject slot.
- Change the verb to the fourth principal part (*ate, eat,* or *will eat* → *eaten*; *wanted, want,* or *will want* → *wanted*)
- Stick a tense-appropriate form of *to-be* in front of the fourth principal part (*was eaten, is eaten, will be eaten, had been eaten, is being eaten, about to be eaten, will have been eaten,* etc.)
- Make the actor the object of a "by" phrase (or, if you prefer, lose the actor altogether).

If there is a second object, there are rules for what to do with that, but I'm not going to get into it because you have known how to form the passive voice since you were a child. Even if you don't know what a fourth principal part is, even if you don't even know what a direct object is, you don't have any problem getting from *I broke the lamp* to *The lamp was broken*.

To return to a sentence you have seen before:

Ken gave Barbie flowers.

This sentence is in active voice. Ken is the actor—the one giving the flowers—and Ken is the grammatical subject of the sentence.

- Subject = KEN
- Verb = GAVE
- Direct Object = FLOWERS
- Indirect Object = BARBIE.

In the active form of this sentence (*Ken gave Barbie flowers*), the subject is performing an action (*giving*) and the objects (*flowers*, *Barbie*) are receiving that action.

But English grammar doesn't REQUIRE that the actor be the grammatical subject. If you want, you can move *Barbie* to the subject position:

Barbie was given flowers by Ken.

You can even make the flowers the grammatical subject if you want to:

Flowers were given to Barbie by Ken.

You can do this with any sentence that has a direct or indirect object.

I took the bull by the horns. → *The bull was taken by the horns by me*.
Martha ate the cake. → *The cake was eaten by Martha*.

You don't have any trouble making this switch from active to passive. You don't have to think about to-be verbs or fourth principal parts. If you get in the habit of thinking in terms of actions and actors, and if you clearly distinguish between the actor and the grammatical subject (which may or may not be the same), it's relatively easy to move back and forth between active and passive voice.

THE PROBLEMS WITH PASSIVE VOICE

Good writing is largely a matter of managing your reader's expectations. That doesn't mean you always have to *meet* those expectations; in fact, good writing requires that you often surprise your reader. But you need to be aware that any word, phrase, or clause that doesn't meet your reader's expectations (including unconscious expectations), attracts her attention.

PROBLEM 1: EXTRA WORK FOR THE READER

When you don't meet your reader's expectations, you cause extra work for the reader. Our brains are wired to expect the actor to sit in the subject position of a sentence. When the actor is the subject, we feel that things are moving right along. We feel that the grammar is guiding us toward that burning question, "Who did what?"

The reader, of course, is fully capable of mentally flipping a passive sentence back to active and knowing who did what. In spite of the grammar differences, everybody knows that the

following three sentences all describe the same action, the same actor, and the same recipients of the action:

(A) *Ken gave Barbie flowers.*
(B) *Barbie was given flowers by Ken.*
(C) *Flowers were given to Barbie by Ken.*

But you need to be aware that if you phrase that sentence as either (B) or (C), your reader has to translate it back to (A) in order to decode the sentence. If you ask your reader to go to that extra trouble, she is going to want to know why (if only at subconscious level). Granted, it's a tiny amount of extra trouble you're requiring of your reader, and there can be good reasons to ask it of her, as we'll see in the next lesson. But unless you have a specific reason to use the passive voice, stay in the active voice. Save the reader's energy and attention for those moments when you really need it.

PROBLEM 2: FUZZY AGENCY
Let us return to that passive sentence, *Barbie was given flowers by Ken.* As I mentioned above, Ken is still the actor. But where is Ken in this sentence? He's tucked away in that prepositional phrase at the end of the sentence. The actor is now a lowly object of the preposition *by*. Or what about this version?

Barbie was given flowers.

Who is the actor here? Presumably Ken. But maybe not. We have no way of knowing from the sentence. Ken went to all the effort here. He spent his hard-earned money. He drove to the florist. He walked up Barbie's driveway and handed over the flowers. And yet the passive voice relegates him to a prepositional phrase, or perhaps even erases him completely. This is what I mean by "fuzzy agency."

PROBLEM 3: EXTRA WORDS
Generally speaking, you don't want to add word-count without adding additional meaning. It takes more words to describe an action in passive voice than in active voice.
The active sentence, *Ken gave Barbie flowers,* is four words long. The passive sentence *Barbie was given flowers by Ken* is six words long. That's 50% more words for 0% more meaning. Or consider the passive sentence *Barbie was given flowers*. At four words, it's the same length as the active sentence, but it conveys significantly less information (specifically, it doesn't identify the person whom Barbie has to thank for her flowers).

IF YOU ASK MORE OF THE READER, YOU HAVE TO GIVE MORE
Remember, every time you use the passive voice, you're asking something of your reader. You're asking her to take an extra step of decoding. Do you have a good reason for asking your reader to go to that extra trouble? If so, by all means use the passive voice. But if you don't, stick with the active.

Quiz 1.7: What is Passive Voice?

I. **The large bear enjoying his breakfast of blackberries twenty feet away had beaten us here.**
Does this sentence contain a passive construction? (Circle one.)

Yes
No

II. **The pool was in sight.**
Does this sentence contain a passive construction? (Circle one.)

Yes
No

III. **When all else fails, a dog can be counted on.**
Does this sentence contain a passive construction? (Circle one.)

Yes
No

IV. **A swimming creature is sighted—a beaver?**
Does this sentence contain a passive construction? (Circle one.)

Yes
No

V. **He was studying for his counseling degree.**
Does this sentence contain a passive construction? (Circle one.)

Yes
No

VI. **Which is true of the following sentences:**

Sentence 1: **John Barber was raised by wolves.**
Sentence 2: **John Barber was raised in a barn.**

A. Sentence 1 and Sentence 2 are both passive.
B. Sentence 1 is active and Sentence 2 is passive.
C. Sentence 1 is passive and Sentence 2 is active.
D. Sentence 1 and Sentence 2 are both active.

V. **This handkerchief was used by Elvis.**
Turn this passive sentence into an active sentence.

VI. **Uncle Thurston gave Linda a glass of water.**
Rewrite this sentence so that that the direct object becomes the subject of a passive sentence.

VII. **Uncle Thurston gave Linda a glass of water.**
Rewrite this sentence as a passive sentence in which the indirect object becomes the grammatical subject of the sentence.

VIII. **Two hours later, after the sandwiches had been eaten, the thunder came.**
This sentence comes from a description of a picnic. Revise the sentence without the passive construction.

IX. **Curtis carried me in his arms toward the pool. He knew I would have relief if the water could wash over me. I was tossed into the pool and surrounded by friends within seconds.**

In this scene, the narrator remembers a time when she got attacked by wasps, and an older boy named Curtis heroically scooped her up and threw her in the pool to get the wasps off. This question has three parts:

- Identify the sentence that is in passive voice.
- Explain why the passive voice is an unfortunate choice here.
- Rewrite the passive sentence as an active sentence.

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 8: When Is the Passive Useful?

Every problematic construction in the English language exists because there are times when it's not problematic, but exactly what a writer needs. So while I encourage you to treat the active voice as your default mode, there are plenty of situations in which you'll find it best to switch from default mode into the passive voice.

In this lesson we will look at four of those situations.

1. PASSIVE VOICE IS PERFECT FOR EXPRESSING PASSIVITY.

Maybe this one is self-evident. Consider this sentence:

> *Andrew was bullied as a child.*

To be a victim of bullying is to be in a posture of passivity. In this case, it doesn't matter who the bullies were, even if the writer happens to know the bullies' names. The important figure here is Andrew. The passive voice allows the writer to put Andrew in that important subject slot, even though he is not the agent in this situation.

A sentence like *Pete was convicted of perjury* works in much the same way. It was a jury that convicted Pete of perjury (or was it a judge? or the state?). What matters is that Pete was convicted, not who convicted him.

Here the passive voice has the added bonus of saving the writer from having to figure out exactly who convicts people of perjury. I call that a bonus, but there are certainly situations in which this "bonus" leads to laziness on the part of the writer, who is able to get away with not quite knowing what he is talking about.

A subcategory of this "passivity" use of the passive is the self-pitying use. A deliciously self-pitying old Linda Ronstadt song said,

> "I've been cheated, been mistreated. When will I be loved?"

It's interesting that in this sentence, the problem is framed passively ("I've been cheated, been mistreated"), but so is the solution ("When will I be loved?")!

2. THE PASSIVE VOICE IS HELPFUL WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE ACTOR.

Consider this passive sentence:

> *My bike was stolen yesterday.*

This is an entirely appropriate use of the passive voice. I don't know who stole my bike. If I did, I'd be reporting them to the police instead of writing sentences about them. If I am really being a stickler for the active voice, I suppose I could say, *Some jerk stole my bike yesterday.*

3. THE PASSIVE VOICE IS A WAY TO CONCEAL OR DENY AGENCY.

This is where the passive voice can get nefarious. When I've broken a lamp, I can say *The lamp was broken.* That's not a lie. It's just that the passive voice allows me to leave out one of the most important bits of information.

I call this the "Mistakes were made" use of the passive voice. It is the refuge of obfuscators, politicians, deadbeats, self-pitiers, and the passive aggressive. This application largely accounts for the passive voice's bad reputation.

4. PASSIVE VOICE IS A WAY TO DIRECT YOUR READER'S ATTENTION.

The subject of sentence enjoys a place of privilege in the reader's mind. The reader pays extra attention to whatever noun is in that slot. The passive voice allows you to bring some noun besides the actor into that place of prominence. We have already looked at the sentence *Andrew was bullied as a child*, in which Andrew, not the bullies, is the focus of the sentence.

Here are two sentences that describe the same action, the first in the active voice, the second in the passive:

> Active*: An unusually large piano player ejected Clarence from the saloon.*
> Passive*: Clarence was ejected from the saloon by an unusually large piano player.*

There's not a huge difference between those sentences. But you can feel a difference, can't you? The first sentence asks you to give a little more attention to the piano player. The second sentence asks you to give a little more attention to Clarence. By changing the grammatical subject, the passive voice allows you to change the emphasis.

This is just nuance. But the difference between good writing and great writing is largely nuance.

Quiz 1.8 A: Uses of the Passive Voice

I. **In the passive voice, the actor is moved OUT of the _____ position.**
Circle all that apply.

A. subject
B. verb
C. direct object
D. indirect object
E. predicate complement

II. **In the passive voice, the _____ is moved into the subject position.**
Circle all that apply.

A. subject
B. verb
C. direct object
D. indirect object
E. predicate complement

III. **What are some problems with the passive voice?**
Circle all that apply.

A. More work for the reader
B. Fuzzy agency
C. Extra words
D. Too many prepositions

IV. **List two to four occasions in which the passive voice is useful.**

Quiz 1.8 B: Uses of the Passive Voice (Challenge)

I. **He holds a long paint brush in his hands, dabbles it in the paint on his palette, and brushes one slow stroke at a time until a masterpiece is rendered.**
Assess that passive clause at the end—*until a masterpiece is rendered*. Is this a useful passive construction? Why or why not?

II. **The catalogs were delivered in the same truck that brought the bills.**
This sentence comes from a passage in which the writer was talking about a family who had a habit of overspending. Every day the mail brought unpaid bills, but also opportunities to rack up more bills.

This writer chose to use the passive voice to express this idea. He could have easily used an all active voice: *The same truck brought the bills and the catalogs.*
Why do you think this writer chose to use the passive voice instead? Do you think it was a good choice?

III. **Citrus trees, almond trees, cotton, and grapes are successfully grown thanks to irrigation. The water is brought down from the mountains through an aqueduct and distributed by a canal system.**

These sentences contain three passive verb forms:

- [crops] are grown
- water is brought
- [water is] distributed

If you were revising these sentences, which of these three passive constructions would you keep and which of them would you turn into active constructions? Show your revision.

IV. **He is glued to thick skis that sit atop a wooden plank. The wooden plank is a canvas on which the artist set his cedar scene. Into cedar wood he carved a tiny fir tree stunted at half the bear's height.**

This is from a description of a bear figurine that has appeared in an earlier quiz. The first sentence is in passive voice (*He is glued...*), and after that the writer shifts to active voice (*the artist set his scene... he carved a tiny fir tree...*)

If you were revising this passage, would you make it all passive? All active? Would you keep the mix of active and passive as-is? Would you keep it mixed but change the mix? Revise the sentence.

V. **Pedro and I have little contact these days, but when I think back on our friendship I'm transported back to that red brick house on Spruce Street where creativity was fostered and explored.**

This sentence has two passive constructions:

- I'm transported
- creativity was fostered and explored

If you were revising this sentence, which of those passive constructions would you keep, and which would you change to active constructions? Revise the sentence.

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 9: Nominalization

I've marked a lot of student papers. I've asked for a lot of revisions. I have noticed that a lot of writing students view revision largely as a matter of replacing words: *Since the teacher didn't like these words, let me go find some different words to plug into those spots.*

More often, however, what writers really need to do is to rethink sentence structure—to get into the deeper logic and ask, *How do I make my phrasing match the deeper logic of a sentence?*

I mentioned a couple of lessons ago that there are two big ways that writers violate the actor-action/subject-verb principle. Passive voice was the first of those two ways. The second is **nominalization**.

Nominalization is the practice of turning verbs into nouns. To wit:

- Defy – defiance
- Discover – discovery

By turning actions into abstract nouns, a writer creates a mismatch between the grammar of a sentence and the action it describes.

Here's a straightforward sentence in which the grammar aligns with the action.

> *When Bronson discovered that Cindy had defied the school bully, he congratulated her.*

In this sentence, the three actions are expressed by three verbs and three subjects:

- Bronson discovered something.
- Cindy defied the bully.
- Bronson congratulated Cindy.

Here's what this sentence looks like when we change those actions from verbs into nominalizations:

When Bronson made the discovery of Cindy's defiance of the school bully, congratulations ensued.

The actions of discovering, defying, and congratulation instead of being verbs, are turned into abstract nouns. They are nominalized.

What are the verbs in that sentence? The verbs are *made* and *ensued*. *Discovery* becomes a direct object, *defiance* gets tucked away as the object of the preposition *of*. *Congratulations* is actually the subject of the main clause. Notice the two prepositional phrases that worm their way in: *of Cindy's defiance*, and *of the school bully*.

Let's put the two sentences next to each other.

When Bronson discovered that Cindy had defied the school bully, he congratulated her.

When Bronson made the discovery of Cindy's defiance of the school bully, congratulations ensued.

You can feel the difference between those two sentences, can't you? The sentences describe the same action. They describe the exact same information. But in the first, the information and action come at the reader the same way they do in real life. WHO DID WHAT? The actions are verbs. The actors are subjects.

If I were ask the difference between these two sentences, you might say the second one is too wordy. You wouldn't be wrong. It definitely feels wordy. But if you actually count the words, you see that the second sentence, the nominalized one, is only ONE word longer than the first. Sentence 1 is 13 words long. Sentence 2 is 14 words.

It's hard to believe isn't it? The difference is that in sentence 2, your brain has to engage more than your senses. It seems odd to say it, but you don't want your readers to have to think too much. Rather, you want your readers to save their mental energy for when you really need them to think. You don't want to waste it.

Sentence 2 is so odd that your reader asks (maybe subconsciously), "Why did you phrase it that way?" Your reader starts thinking about your grammar in Sentence 2. That is not something you want!

Here is a 3-Step process for finding and fixing nominalization:

- STEP 1: Identify the action in the sentence.
- STEP 2: Identify the verbs in the sentence.
- STEP 3: Align the actions and the verbs.

That is how you get rid of nominalization. But, as I have said before, every problematic grammatical structure exists because sometimes it's not problematic; sometimes it is exactly what you need.

Let's look at another nominalized sentence—one that isn't nearly so egregious as that last one:

> *Mark's failure to stop at the intersection was the cause of the car crash.*

In this sentence, the subjects and verbs are not at all aligned with the action. There's a lot of action in this sentence: It's a car crash! Mark is running a red light. Mark is careening into another car. Metal is crumpling. Glass is flying. Babies are crying. Dogs are barking.

But what is the verb in this sentence? There's only one. It's WAS.

How might you align the main-line grammar—subjects, verbs, and objects—with the action? We have a few options. Here are two:

> *Mark failed to stop at the intersection and crashed into another car.*

> *Mark ran through a red light and crashed into another car.*

Are those better sentences than the original? It depends on the context. Is a screwdriver a better tool than a wrench? It depends on the context.

It's not at all hard to imagine a situation in which the best sentence is the one we started with: *Mark's failure to stop at the intersection was the cause of the car crash*. Maybe one of Mark's defenders has said, "Foggy conditions were the cause of the car crash," and you say, "Hardly! Mark's failure to stop at the intersection was the cause of the car crash."

Think of it this way: I keep saying that your reader always wants to know who did what. But who did what isn't the only important question you're answering when you write. Sometimes other questions come to the foreground—WHY did something happen? In this case, WHO is to blame.

So let me return to something I said at the beginning of this lesson. When you compose a sentence, you are trying to make the structure of the sentence match up with the deeper logic of that sentence. Straightforward action is a great place to start because in the real world, information TENDS to come to us as action. We see a car run a red light. We see that car crash into another car. THEN our judgment kicks in. We say, "Hey, that jerk just caused an accident by running that red light."

To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor, "The eye is an organ of judgment." Data comes to us through our eyes or our other senses, and we make judgments based on that data. We don't have a narrator in our head telling us what to think about what we see.

Nominalization TENDS to move things out of the realm of actors and actions and into the realm of more abstract relationships. Let's look one more time at our first, nominalized sentence about Mark's car crash:

> *Mark's failure to stop at the intersection was the cause of the car crash.*

The main line of that sentence is FAILURE WAS CAUSE. Cause and effect. That's a logical relationship. The sentence structure foregrounds the logical, cause-and-effect relationship at play here.

The more "verbish" version—*Mark ran through the intersection and hit another car* (or something similar)—lets the reader make the cause-and-effect connection for himself. Maybe it lets the reader pass judgment on Mark as a driver—which, again, is how our experience of the world usually works.

However, that nominalized version—*Mark's failure was the cause*—that version says to the reader, "Here's the conclusion I want you to reach here." Sometimes that's a good thing—telling your reader what conclusion you want him to reach—and sometimes that's a bad thing.

I do think writers tend to err on the side of telling readers what to think rather than inviting them into a scene and pointing them in the right direction. That's why I persist in my campaign to get you to treat the actor-action-subject-verb model as your default. That's why I encourage you to have a good reason if you are going to use nominalization. But as we have seen with Mark and his horrible driving record, there are certainly situations when it's appropriate to use nominalization to direct your reader to a specific conclusion.

Grammar isn't just grammar. Sentence structure speaks to deeper logical structures.

Quiz 1.9: Nominalization

I. **Nominalization TENDS to move things out of the realm of actors and actions and into the realm of _____.**

II. ***Compliance* is a nominalization of what verb? _____**

III. ***Revelation* is a nominalization of what verb? _____**

IV. **A lack of attentiveness on Leonard's part led to a collision with a telephone pole.**
Revise this sentence by changing nominalizations back into verbs so as to align the grammar of the sentence with the action the sentence describes.

V. **Maria made the argument that the expiration of the policy would result directly in her exposure to new risk.**
Revise this sentence by changing nominalizations back into verbs so as to align the grammar of the sentence with the action the sentence describes.

VI. **I originally wasn't interested in knowing her, but only wanted her acceptance of me.**
Revise this sentence by getting rid of the nominalization (acceptance) in order to align the grammar of the sentence with the action it describes.

VII. **A fall from a ladder at a warehouse job and a shoulder injury from janitorial work at the county jail meant Dale is none too steady on his feet these days.**
The abstract nouns *fall* and *injury* make up the compound subject of this sentence. Turn both of those nouns back into verbs, the better to align the grammar of the sentence with the action it describes.

VIII. **Some of my favorites were books and baseball cards, but in general I was under the impression that the bigger the gift the better, and there was little respect for birthday cards.**
Look at that phrase *there was little respect.*.. Notice how the speaker disappears from the sentence with that nominalization. Revise this sentence without using the phrase *there was...* (Your answer, by the way, might still have the abstract noun *respect*, and that will be ok).

IX. **The occasional removal of his shades revealed glassy, bloodshot eyes.**
Revise this sentence by changing nominalizations back into verbs so as to align the grammar of the sentence with the action the sentence describes.

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 10: Strong Verbs, Precise Verbs, To-Be Verbs

No doubt you have heard the writing advice, "Use strong verbs."

If you Google that phrase, “use strong verbs,” you’re going to see lists like 100 STRONG VERBS TO ADD POWER AND PIZZAZZ TO YOUR WRITING or STOP USING WEAK VERBS AND START USING THESE STRONG VERBS.

It would be great if a list of "better verbs" existed, but the right verb, like the right note on a piano, is a matter of context. You can’t make a list of the best verbs any more than you could make a list of the best musical notes.

It’s not that “Use strong verbs” is terrible advice. But it’s the kind of advice that can help you go from being a bad writer to being a mediocre writer. It’s not going to move you from being a pretty good writer to being a very good writer.

“Use strong verbs” is just an oversimplification of better advice:

For every sentence you write, figure out where the action is—if possible, ENVISION that action—and THEN find the verb or verbs that most PRECISELY depict that action.

Good writing is always about precision, not embellishment. The more precise a bit of writing is, the more likely it is that your reader will be able to see what you’re trying to show him.

Consider this sentence:

Terence went away.

There are lots of ways to go away. The idea of going away is broad—so broad, in fact, that the phrase *went away* doesn't give your reader much to look at. A more precise verb narrows things down and creates a visual image for your reader.

- Terence left.
- Terence vamoosed.
- Terence split.
- Terence hightailed it.
- Terence snuck off.
- Terence absconded.
- Terence vanished.
- Terence was called away.

Which of those verbs is the strongest? That's not an especially helpful question. The question is, **which of those verbs most precisely depicts what Terence did?**

Writing doesn't start with words. Writing starts with vision. If you don't see what you're trying to write, you can't make your reader see it.

So throw away your lists of strong verbs. The lists suggest that better writing is simply a matter of finding better words and plugging them in where the less-good words were.

There aren't better words and worse words, any more than there are right notes and wrong notes on a piano.

Say and said

Something that sometimes gets rolled into "strong verb" discussions is the verb *say* or *said.* Writing teachers sometimes tell their students to find more interesting (or stronger) verbs than *say* and *said* in dialogue. They offer advice like, "Don't say *say*," or "*Said* is dead."

Please ignore that advice. When you are describing people who are saying things, *say* is a perfectly respectable verb.

On one writing-advice website I ran across the example, "Heidi said she was tired of hiking." The website advised finding a stronger verb than *said*—maybe something like "Heidi contended that she was tired of hiking."

Is *contend* a stronger verb than *said*? Is *contend* a more interesting verb than *said*? Maybe so. But that's not the question. The question is, which verb more precisely depicts what Heidi was doing?

To contend is to argue, to struggle. Why would Heidi have to *contend* what she is feeling about hiking? Is there somebody getting in Heidi's face and telling her that she's not tired of hiking? Is Heidi having to make a case that she is indeed tired of hiking? If so, *contended* might be a better verb than *said*. Otherwise, *said* will work just fine here. Don't let anybody

bully you into throwing out the perfectly serviceable and perfectly respectable verb *said*. *Said* is not dead. It's very much alive.

The To-Be Verb
Another verb with a bad reputation is the *to-be* verb:

- am
- are
- is
- was
- were
- be
- being
- been

The *to-be* verb has a bad reputation because it is often mixed up with other, more serious writing problems. The passive voice always involves a *to-be* verb: "The bull *was* taken by the horns by me." Nominalization usually involves a *to-be* verb: "Leonard *was* conscious of the fact that..."

Therefore, it is a good practice to go back through your writing and circle *to-be* verbs as a way of finding nominalizations and passive constructions.

But where *to-be* verbs communicate a state of being, or where *to-be* verbs are linking verbs (as in "we *were* walking" or "I *have been* telling you that all along") there's nothing to be ashamed of. Don't feel the need to eradicate to-be verbs and plug in "action" verbs or "strong" verbs.

Verbs can do two things: they can communicate action, or they can communicate states of being. Verbs that communicate states of being are called linking verbs (I *feel* pretty. Clarence *is* the mayor. Martha *was* suspiciously happy.) The most common linking verb (by far) is the *to-be* verb.

Communicating action isn't more respectable than communicating states of being.

One last thing about communicating states of being: there are other ways to communicate states of being besides using a linking verb.

- You can use an adjective. *(My mailman is handsome* becomes *My handsome mailman*.)
- You can use an appositive. (*Clarence is the mayor* becomes *Clarence, the mayor...*)
- You can use a prepositional phrase. (*Angus is five feet tall* becomes *At five feet tall, Angus towers over his fellow cub scouts*.)

We will discuss all those options in future lessons.

Summary
Take the advice "use strong verbs" with a grain of salt. Use precise verbs—the verbs that most precisely depict the actions you want to depict.

There aren't strong verbs and weak verbs, just as there aren't right notes on the piano keyboard and wrong notes. It all depends on the context: every note is right sometimes, and every note is wrong sometimes. Every verb is right sometimes and wrong sometimes. So a list of "strong verbs" is of limited help.

Quiz 1.10: Strong Verbs, Precise Verbs

I. **What are the verbs of being?**

II. **True or false: Verbs should communicate action, not states of being.**

III. **Her hair, once exploding over her shoulders in tight, brown ringlets, is graying.**
What's wrong with that participial phrase, *exploding over her shoulders in tight, brown ringlets*?

IV. **I jumped off a cliff hovering high above the Pacific Ocean, harnessed to my hang-glider.**
Consider that participle *hovering*. Why is it not the best choice here?

V. **His bewildered face melted into defiance.**
Make the main verb of this sentence more precise.

VI. **The rectangular studio held polished wood floors, two walls of barre, ample floor space for the ten little dancers in my class, and one entire wall of flawless mirror.**
What do you think about that main verb *held*?

VII. **She paints eye shadow in pumpkin orange, brushes mascara in lines as thick as calligraphy ink, and pats on layers of rogue, all of which chisel an expression of permanent exhilaration onto her creased face.**
Which verb is misleading? Why? Correct it.

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 11: Keeping Verbs Close to Subjects

English grammar gives you plenty of technically correct ways to cram information into a single sentence. But connecting with your reader is more important than being impressively complex.

Remember, your reader always wants to know WHO DID WHAT? Subject, Verb, Object. Whatever else happens in your sentence, your reader should be able to get from subject to verb to object with relative ease. Usually, this means getting to your subject early in the sentence, and not having too many words between the subject and the verb.

Let's look at a few sentences that violate these principles, and consider how they could be better.

> *The processes involved in shaping the channel in places where the turns swung from side to side, as the water flowed across the floodplain, mesmerized me.*

A. What is the main verb? _____.

B. Who or what mesmerized (i.e. what is the subject)? _____.

C. What is the whole main clause? _____.

[A. mesmerized. B. the processes. C. The processes mesmerized me.]

There are 22 words between the subject and the verb of the main clause. The comma before the verb is also a major red flag.

There are a lot of options for fixing this sentence, but I think the most elegant solution uses the passive voice:

I was mesmerized by the processes that shaped the channel as it swung from side to side and flowed across the floodplain.

Here's another:

The feeling, familiar in those years, that I was of a different species than the people around me surged up again.

A. What is the main verb? _____.

B. What is the subject? _____.

[A. surged. B. feeling.]

There are 16 words between the subject and the verb. One possible fix uses an appositive (which we'll talk about in a later module):

A familiar feeling surged up in me—a feeling that I was of a different species from the people around me. I had that feeling a lot in those days.

Notice that you do have the option of splitting a sentence in two. Sometimes two short sentences are better than one unwieldy one.

On the far edge of the town where I grew up, sat the aluminum factory.

A. What is the main verb? _____.

B. What is the subject? _____.

[A. sat. B. the aluminum factory.]

This sentence has twelve words before we get the subject-verb nexus. Again, the comma before the main verb should clue you in that this sentence will be difficult for your reader to comprehend.

It's more simple to write this: *An aluminum factory sat at the far edge of town.*

Maybe you think the original is more interesting than the straightforward version. Is it interesting enough to be worth the extra work you're asking of your reader? That's a real question. Different writers will answer it differently. The important thing is that you consider the difference and make a conscious decision. Don't just cause extra work for your reader without thinking through it.

Quiz 1.11: Keeping Verbs Close to Subjects

I. **Liquid pain so intense that it stole my breath, would surge through my back with every attempt.**
This is a sentence about a person with back pain trying to get out of bed. What is the subject of this sentence? What is the main verb? Edit the sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb.

II. **An eerie empty darkness she had never experienced before whenever she visited her father at his big, glassed in office enveloped the three story foyer.**
Edit this sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb.

III. **His ponytail comes loose, and his three feet of graying brown hair, typically only observed by immediate family or anyone lucky enough to catch him sipping coffee on a day off, drapes his shoulders.**
Edit this sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb.

IV. **A few years after my great, great uncle Marion—an eccentric artist who framed his watercolors with planks from the porch and wore his teeth only for important events—had died, The Vase appeared, and we joked that his son Bert had put his ashes in it and placed it on his mantel.**
Edit this sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb. You may need to use multiple sentences.

V. **A weekly rhythm band for the neighborhood children, in the red brick home of the woman next door, put the delight to music.**
Edit this sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb.

VI. **Thirty feet from the water, a fringe of gnarled pine roots reaching out into empty air marks the border from bare rubble to stubborn forest.**
Edit this sentence to keep the subject close to the main verb.

VII. **Three sweaty kids and their mother with loaded purse, emptied picnic basket, and tissue-filled gift bag trudged up the back steps ready to escape the July sun.**
Edit this sentence to make it clearer, keeping the subject close to the verb.

VIII. **The sheer exhilaration mixed with the utter terror of launching into the air, that moment when you feel weightless, suspended midair, and then the pull of the earth downward as I raced to the ever growing puddle below me, combined to make the journey astonishing.**
This is a tough one. It's a sentence about jumping out of a swing. How would you rework it to make it clearer and keep the subject close the main verb? You may need to use multiple sentences.

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 12: Compounds on the Main Line

In 1990, Michael Jordan scored a career-high 69 points. Rookie Stacey King made one free throw. In an interview after the game he said, "I'll always remember this as the night when Michael Jordan and I combined to score 70 points."

This is a brilliant and hilarious use of the compound subject. The verb *scored* has two subjects: *Michael Jordan and I*.

Any spot on the main line—Subject, Verb, Object, or Complement—can be compounded.

> *The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat.*
> Two subjects share one verb.
>
> *I sang and danced.*
> One subject shares two verbs.
>
> *Gabriela ate lobster and pork rinds.*
> Two objects share one verb.
>
> *You are beautiful but mean.*
> Two predicate nominatives share one linking verb.

You can combine compounds in any combination. So you could have: *The owl and the pussycat ate rodents and cat food.* (Compound subject and compound direct objects.)

Compound elements are joined together by a conjunction (usually and, occasionally but) and no comma.

A comma with a conjunction indicates a compound sentence. A compound sentence is two separate main clauses joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

There are only seven coordinating conjunctions:

- For
- And
- Nor
- But
- Or
- Yet
- So

You can remember them by using the acronym FANBOYS.

A compound sentence that has a conjunction but no comma is a **run-on sentence.**
A compound sentence that has a comma but no conjunction is called a **comma splice.**

A compound sentence links one independent Subject-Verb nexus to another independent Subject-Verb nexus to form a single sentence.

> *I sang. I danced.* Two separate sentences.
> *I sang, and I danced.* Compound sentence.
> *I sang and danced.* Compound verb.

While all of these are grammatically correct, the first two feel redundant. It makes the most sense to use a compound verb.

What about these?

> *The owl hooted. The pussycat meowed.* Two separate sentences.
> *The owl hooted, and the pussycat meowed.* Compound sentence.
> *The owl and the pussycat hooted and meowed.* Compound subject and compound verb.

Those two actions don't feel closely enough related to be a compound subject and compound verb. The first or second options make more sense.

Here's another example:

> *I had never been struck in the face before and sat stunned for several seconds.*

These two verbs do have the same subject (*I*), but the don't combine very well for a couple of reasons:

1. The first verb is passive and the second is active.
2. The two actions are nearly as closely related as "I sang and danced."

We could correct this by saying, *I had never been struck in the face before, so I sat there stunned for several seconds.* (Compound Sentence)
Or even, *I had never been struck in the face before. I sat there stunned.*

Grammar isn't just about grammar. Grammar reflects a deeper logic. Stacey King's joke about combining for 70 points with Michael Jordan is in part a grammar joke. The compound subject—Michael Jordan and I—is technically correct. They DID combine for 70 points. But that compound subject also implies an equality that is ridiculous and funny.

Grammar is a kind of logic. Stacey King was misusing that logic to be funny. Most of the time, you're not trying to be funny with your grammar, so you want your grammar to actually reflect your logic, not undermine it.

Quiz 1.12: Compounds on the Main Line

I. **What spots on the main line can be compounded?**
Circle all that apply.

A. Subject
B. Verb
C. Object
D. Complement

II. **List the seven coordinating conjunctions.**
(Remember the acronym FANBOYS.)

III. **A compound sentence that has a conjunction but no comma is called a**

_____.

A compound sentence that has a comma but no conjunction is called a

_____.

IV. **Maybe that day it was green plaid bell-bottoms a year or two past their height of coolness and a pilled tan sweater.**
1. Identify the compound complement.
2. Why is this compound complement confusing to the reader?
3. Edit the sentence for clarity.

V. **The room was furnished with pieces that could easily have been from a 1960s catalog and smelt musty.**
1. Identify the compound verb.
2. Edit the sentence for clarity.

VI. **I finished playing and the hiss of the respirator once again filled the room like incense.**
1. Why is this sentence grammatically incorrect?
2. How would you correct it?

VII. **My sister had asked for a dozen dolls and my brother's wish list had a front and back.**
Correct this run-on sentence to make it a compound sentence.

VIII. **Brian came home with my doll and a repentant heart.**
1. Identify the compound object of the preposition *with*.
2. Why is this sentence unusual?

Lecture Notes
Module 1, Lesson 13: Verb Tenses

As we wrap up this module about subjects and verbs, let's talk about verb tenses.

Simple past:

I ate, you ate, he/she/it ate.

Simple present:

I eat, you eat, he/she/it eats.

Simple future:

I will eat, you will eat, he/she/it will eat.

These are so familiar that there is really no need to talk about them. However, sometimes we need more precision and nuance than just these simple tenses. That's where progressive and perfect verb tenses come in, and even native English speakers have a lot of trouble with them.

Past progressive tense, ends in -ing. Indicates that at a given point in time, a person was or is or will be **in the middle** of some action.

Past Perfect Tense. Indicates that at a given point in time, a person has completed or will have completed an action.

> *I ran at 6:00 this morning.* Simple past tense.
>
> *I was running at 6:00 this morning.* Past progressive tense.
>
> *I had run at 6:00 this morning.* Past perfect tense.

The progressive tense (whether past, present, or future) is formed by adding -ing to the end of the verb. **This is the 2nd principal part.**

Past progressive: I was running, you were running, he/she/it was running.

Present progressive: I am running, you are running, he/she/it is running.

Future progressive: I will be running, you will be running, he/she/it will be running.

The perfect tense is formed by combining the 4th principal part (ends in -d, -t, or -en) with the helping verb *have* or *had*.

Past perfect: I had run, you had run, he/she/it had run.

Present Perfect: I have run, you have run, he/she/it has run.

Future Perfect: I will have run, you will have run, he/she/it will have run.

Using these verb forms requires that you plant a flag on the timeline, and then set your verb tense with respect to that flag. You are saying, in effect, at this specific point in time the subject of the sentence is either in the middle of an action or has completed the action.

For simple tense, the time-flag is optional. I can say, *I stole some leftovers from out of the office refrigerator*. Or, *I stole from leftovers out of the office refrigerator yesterday*. Either one is fine because the simple past doesn't care whether I include that time marker *yesterday* or not.

However, if I'm going to say *I HAD STOLEN leftovers* (perfect past tense), or *I WILL HAVE STOLEN leftovers* (future perfect), or *I WAS STEALING leftovers* (past progressive), or *I WILL BE STEALING leftovers* (future progressive), I need to provide a time-flag.

> *I will be stealing leftovers from the office refrigerator* ***tomorrow*** *if I forget my lunch again.*
>
> *I had stolen leftovers out of the office refrigerator* ***before I realized that they belonged to the CEO.***

Planting a time flag doesn't necessarily mean naming a time (6am or October 12th). You can also do it by placing one action relative to another action.

> *I was running this morning while you were still sawing logs.* Past progressive.
>
> *I was thinking about you when you came through the door.* Past progressive.
>
> *Martha will be singing opera while you tend to the cash register.* Future progressive.

When you have finished your broccoli, you can have some pie. Future perfect.

I have eaten my broccoli, and now I want some pie. Perfect.

When you rolled out of bed at 6:00 this morning, I had already run, showered, and dressed. Past perfect.

When you use these tenses, you signal to your readers that they need to pay attention to some nuance of time. They need to understand that this action was COMPLETE at some specific time, or it was ONGOING at some specific time. Ask yourself how precise you need to be. If you aren't communicating some nuance of time, don't ask your reader to decode a complex verb form.

Here's a final example:

If we turned around, we would have to travel back across a narrow bridge that had no railings and was made of loose planks that HAD MOVED as we HAD GONE across them the first time. I was pretty sure I HAD SEEN the tail end of a car that HAD PLUNGED off the bridge into the ravine nose first.

All of these verb forms are grammatically correct, but they're confusing. In this case, it may be worth trading precision for simplicity:

If we turned around, we would have to travel back across a narrow bridge that had no railings and was made of loose planks that MOVED when we WENT across them the first time. I was pretty sure I SAW the tail of a car that HAD PLUNGED off the bridge into the ravine nose first.

The original construction is more precise, but the grammar draws attention to itself. You don't want your readers to be thinking about grammar. Correct grammar is better than incorrect grammar. But what you really want is grammar that is invisible to the reader.

Quiz 1.13: Verb Tenses

I. **This time tomorrow, John Barber will be wishing he had chosen a different nemesis.**
What is the time flag in this sentence?

II. **I realized after a few minutes that my dad did not drive away but was sitting in the car watching.**
Edit this sentence so that the verb tenses make sense together. Where is the flag on the timeline?

III. **This time tomorrow, John Barber will be wishing he chose a different nemesis.**
What is the verb tense in this sentence?

A. Past
B. Past perfect
C. Past progressive
D. Present
E. Present perfect
F. Present progressive
G. Future
H. Future perfect
I. Future progressive

IV. **By December 11, 1941, just four days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States had declared war on both Japan and Germany.**
What is the verb tense of this sentence?

A. Past
B. Past perfect
C. Past progressive
D. Present
E. Present perfect
F. Present progressive
G. Future
H. Future perfect
I. Future progressive

V. **I hadn't ridden more than a mile before the downpour started. I felt bad for my wife; she was hanging laundry outside when I left the house.**

A. I hadn't ridden more than a mile before the downpour HAD STARTED. I felt bad for my wife; she was hanging laundry outside when I left the house.

B. I hadn't ridden more than a mile before the downpour started. I felt bad for my wife; she HAD BEEN hanging laundry outside when I left the house.

C. I hadn't ridden more than a mile before the downpour started. I felt bad for my wife; she was hanging laundry outside when I HAD LEFT the house**.**

D. No change is necessary.

VI. **Normally, I enjoyed gardening, but this summer a colony of hornets took ownership of our yard, and they did not take kindly to trespassers.**
This sentence contains three verbs, all in simple past tense. Which of these three verbs would you change to past perfect so as to clarify the meaning? Check all that apply.

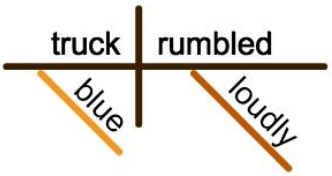
A. Change *I enjoyed gardening* to *I had enjoyed gardening*.
B. Change *took ownership* to *had taken ownership*.
C. Change *did not take kindly* to *had not taken kindly*.
D. It's better as-is than with a change.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 1: Introduction

We are finally ready to leave the main line of the sentence and move on to modifiers. Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that describe other words or phrases. Modifiers tell what *kind* of person or thing is acting or being acted upon, and how they're acting.

Adjectives and adverbs are obvious examples of modifiers.

Consider this sentence: *The blue truck rumbled loudly*.



The main clause is *The truck rumbled. Blue* is an adjective modifying truck, narrowing the subject. Which truck rumbled? The blue truck. *Loudly* is an adverb modifying rumbled. How did the truck rumble? Loudly.

Adverbial modifiers answer these questions about verbs (and sometimes adjectives or other adverbs):

- HOW?
- WHERE?
- WHY?
- TO WHAT EXTENT?

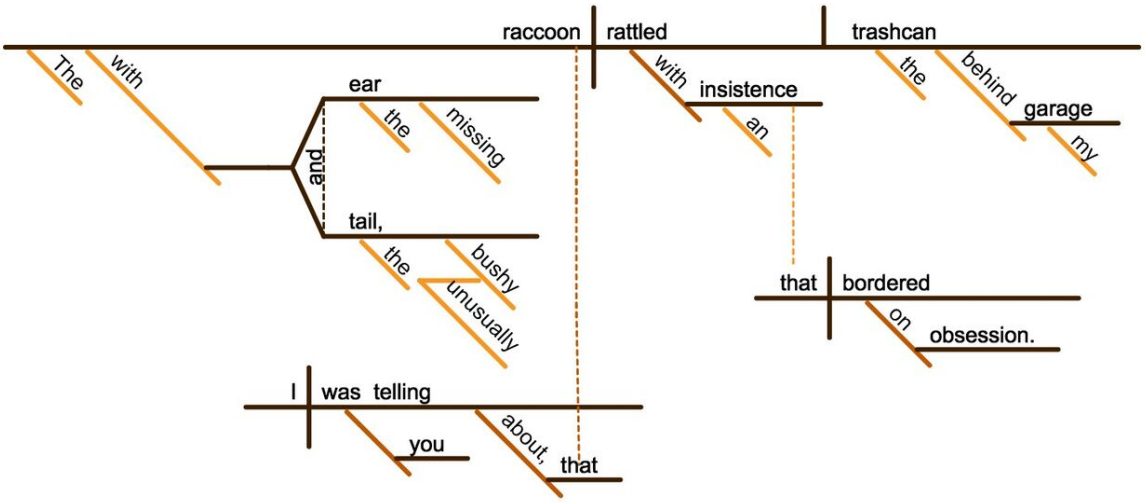
Adjectival modifiers answer these questions about nouns:

- WHICH ONE?
- WHAT KIND?
- HOW MANY?

A lot of interest in a sentence derives from the modifiers. Rather than thinking of adverbs and adjectives as ornamentation in a sentence, think of them as a way of narrowing meaning. Modifiers help your writing be more precise. Describing a truck as a *blue* truck narrows down the broad category of truck considerably, but saying "blue Ford truck" narrows it even more.

Look at this sentence:

The raccoon that I was telling you about, with the missing ear and the unusually bushy tail, rattled the trashcan behind my garage with an insistence that bordered on obsession.



The main clause is: *Raccoon rattled trashcan.* All the other words are modifiers.

That I was telling you about is a clause. It has a verb (was telling) and a subject (I). It modifies a noun (it tells *which* raccoon), so it is an adjectival clause.

With the missing ear and the unusually bushy tail is a phrase, because it doesn't have a verb. It has a preposition (with) and a compound object (ear and tail), so it's a prepositional phrase modifying *raccoon (*again, it tells *which* raccoon*)*. Within the prepositional phrase, the adjective *missing* modifies *ear*. *Bushy* tells us what kind of tail.

Behind my garage is another prepositional phrase. You could say it's adjectival (telling us which trashcan) or maybe adverbial (telling us where the raccoon was rattling).

With an insistence is another adverbial prepositional phrase (*how* did he rattle?).

That bordered is an adjectival clause modifying *insistence (what kind* of insistence?)*.*

An obsession is an adverbial prepositional phrase (*how* did it border?).

The important skill is to be able to identify what a particular phrase or clause is modifying. What question is it answering?

Let Nouns and Verbs Carry the Freight

While adjectives, adverbs, and other modifiers are an important way to add description, there is a more powerful way. Nouns and verbs should carry the freight of your writing.

Here is an example:

My brother Tim was the only boy and a revelation to all of us. He ate tempera paint, sucking it straight from the brush. He climbed onto the dining room table and jumped off of it, as high as he could, over and over and over, while our middle sister Rachel and I tried to do schoolwork. He fell into the water fountain at the Botanical Gardens. He sometimes played so hard that he threw up in the grass, and then went right back to playing.

Tim is sucking paint, jumping off the dining room table, falling into the water fountain, throwing up, going right back to playing. The relentless movement in this short passage mimics the relentless movement of the little boy. But if you look closely, you'll notice there aren't a lot of adjectives and adverbs. The writer is successful in this passage because she has taken the time to envision what it looks like when her little brother Tim plays. After she had that vision fixed, she went looking for the best verbs to describe that vision.

This is just straight-ahead, workmanlike writing, and the result is fantastic.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 2: Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and Adjectivals
An adjective is a word that modifies a noun.

Adjectives (and adjectival phrases and clauses) answer three questions: WHAT KIND? WHICH ONE? HOW MANY?

In English, an adjective appears immediately before the noun it modifies as in, *The yellow flower.* As an English speaker, you already know this. No one accidentally says, "The flower yellow," or "Yellow the flower."

A predicate adjective comes after the linking verb: *My cat is enthusiastic*. Enthusiastic is an adjective being used as predicate complement.

The only thing that may come between a noun and its adjective is another adjective modifying the same noun. For example: *My enthusiastic, playful cat pounces.*

Commas Between Adjectives in a Series
How do you punctuate multiple adjectives? When you have two or more adjectives in a row, you might need to separate them with commas. If it would make sense to put the word "and" between the adjectives, then you should put a comma between them.

My enthusiastic and playful cat could work, so you need a comma between the adjectives.

But you wouldn't say *My enthusiastic and Siamese* cat, so you don't need a comma between enthusiastic and Siamese even though they are both adjectives.

Another rule of thumb: if you can reverse the order of the adjectives, separate them with a comma. (You could say *playful, enthusiastic cat* just as easily as you could say *enthusiastic, playful cat*, so you need the comma there.) If you can't reverse the order of the adjectives,

don't separate them with a comma. (You couldn't say *my Siamese enthusiastic cat*, so you don't need a comma.)

Other Adjectivals
Other adjectivals (prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases, participial phrases, adjective clauses) come *after* the nouns they modify.

The flowers that Ken gave to Barbie made her sneeze.
My desire to win a hot-dog-eating contest got the better of my desire to stay thin.
The dog with the diamond collar still drinks from the toilet.

Ultimately, ALL adjectivals need to be as close as possible to the nouns they modify.

Adverbs and Adverbials
An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

Adverbs often end in –ly, but not always. You can usually change an adjective into an adverb by adding –ly: *glad* becomes *gladly. Glum* becomes *glumly.* However, for the rest of this lesson we will be looking at the adverbs that DON'T end in –ly. The next lesson addresses -ly adverbs.

Adverbs answer one of five questions: HOW? WHY? WHEN? WHERE? TO WHAT EXTENT?

In general, adverbs ending in –ly answer the HOW question:

The bird sang gloomily.
I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today.

There are some other adverbs that answer HOW (such as *sideways*. How was the car turned? *The car was turned sideways*).

The WHY question tends to be answered by adverbial phrases and clauses. So, we're going to mainly look at the WHEN, WHERE, and TO WHAT EXTENT adverbs for now.

Adverbs answering WHEN?
Now, tomorrow, yesterday, soon, never, late, early, often, seldom, always, usually, are all adverbs that answer the question WHEN?

I'm done talking to you now.
When am I done talking to you? *Now.*

Adverbs answering WHERE?
Here, there, everywhere, anywhere are all adverbs that tell WHERE an action happened.

Squirrels were running everywhere.
Where were squirrels running? *Everywhere*.

Inside, outside, uphill, downhill, upriver, downriver, left, right: this sort of adverb also answers the question WHERE?

Adverbs answering TO WHAT EXTENT?
In answering the question TO WHAT EXTENT?, adverbs can either intensify or dial down an action. *A lot, completely, heartily,* and *absolutely* all intensify an action. *Kind of, only, just, almost, somewhat,* and *sort of* all minimize an action.

Most adverbs that modify adjectives or other adverbs are answering the TO WHAT EXTENT question. For example, *You look very pretty tonight,* or *You look kind of handsome.*

Words like these are useful and necessary, and you probably don't need to worry about over-using them in your writing. The -ly adverbs require more caution. They will be the subject of the next lesson.

Quiz 2.2: Adjectives and Adverbs

I. **In the highlighted adjective pairs below, circle the ones that need commas.**

A. the **plain gold** band

B. **ripe sweet** berries

C. **long tedious** planning meeting

D. long **tedious planning** meeting

E. **basic human** decency

F. The **fat soft** sheep nibbled sweet spring grass.

G. The fat soft sheep nibbled **sweet spring** grass.

II. **In the highlighted word groups below, circle the ones that need hyphens.**

A. An ambulance drove on the shoulder of the **traffic clogged** road.

B. My **two year old** nephew is still unemployed.

C. My nephew is **two years old** and still lives with his parents.

D. He **scratched up** his loafers walking through the forest.

E. Except for his **scratched up** loafers, he seemed none the worse for his experience.

F. The clown's **heavily painted** face loomed into my nightmare.

G. The clown's heavily **made up** face loomed into my nightmare.

H. The clown's **hand painted** face loomed into my nightmare.

I. The couple had **made up** before I even realized they were fighting.

J. These are my **fox hunting** pants.

K. Do you expect me to believe this **clearly impossible** story?

III. **Which questions do adjectives answer about the nouns they modify?**

A. How?

B. How many?

C. To what extent?

D. What kind?

E. When?

F. Where?

G. Which one?

H. Why?

IV. **John Barber cried *sloppily*.**

1. Is the italic word an adjective or an adverb?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer about the word it modifies? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

V. **The *lazy* goat ate whatever was closest to it.**

1. Is the italic word an adjective or an adverb?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer about the word it modifies? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VI. **I will call you *tomorrow*.**

1. Is the italic word an adjective or an adverb?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer about the word it modifies? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 3: What's So Bad About Adverbs?

We've seen that not all adverbs end in -ly. However, many adverbs are formed by adding -ly to the end of an adjective. I could say *The **sullen** cashier handed over my happy meal.* In that case, *sullen* is an adjective describing the cashier. Or I could add an -ly to *sullen* to make it an adverb. *The cashier sullenly handed over my happy meal*. That adverb *sullenly* describes *how* the cashier performed the action of handing over my happy meal.

When adverbs and adverbials are modifying a verb, they are highly moveable. They could be at the beginning of the clauses, right before the verb, or at the end of the clause.

- ***Sullenly**, the cashier handed me my happy meal.*
- *The cashier **sullenly** handed me my happy meal.*
- *The cashier handed me my happy meal **sullenly**.*

Writers are often told not to use too many adverbs. This is good advice in principle, but I use adverbs all the time. So why do writing teachers discourage the use of adverbs?

1. Adverbs can breed laziness on the part of the writer.

We've already talked a lot about using precise verbs. Sometimes writers use an adverb instead of looking for the most precise verb. For example: *"Achmed walked into the room loudly,"* instead of, *"Achmed stormed into the room,"* or *"Achmed stomped into the room."*

2. Grammatical and other writing mistakes tend to happen around adverbs.

My practice is to seek out the most precise verbs and resort to adverbs only when the best verbs need a little extra help.

Remember: **Let nouns and verbs carry the freight**. Start with the main line—subjects, verbs, and objects.

Also bear in mind that adjectives and adverbs aren't your only option for description. In the rest of this unit we'll look at prepositional phrases, participial phrases, infinitive phrases and clauses, etc.

Quiz 2.3: What's So Bad About Adverbs?

I. **They may be digitally connected to the Internet, but relationally they are disconnected from one another.**
Consider those adverbs *digitally* and *relationally*. Do you find them helpful? Why or why not?

II. **A moment later his door opened, then shut loudly**.
Consider the adverb *loudly*. Does it contribute to the sentence or detract from it?

III. **She quickly half-ran to the phone.**
Consider the adverb *quickly*. How necessary is it?

IV. **I don't believe the connection between art and life can ever be finally or even very satisfactorily resolved**.
Consider the adverbs *finally* and *satisfactorily*. Are they helpful here?

V. **He bounced in a frantic manner, yipping and barking**.
Rework this sentence, using an adverb in place of the prepositional phrase, *in a frantic manner*.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 4: Prepositional Phrases

"In our world," said Eustace, "a star is a huge ball of flaming gas."
"Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of."
-*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

There is a great moment from C.S. Lewis's *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when Lucy and Eustace meet an old man named Ramandu, who turns out to be a retired star. He explains to Eustace that a flaming ball of gas is only what a star is made of, not what it *is*.

In this unit, we've talked a lot about what different modifiers are made of, but not really what they *are*. What they are has more to do with how they function, how they make connections in the mind of a reader.

With each type of modifier, we will talk about their construction/form, but then we will move on to how they function.

What is a prepositional phrase made of? Preposition + Noun

There are about a hundred prepositions in the English language, but here are the top 50:

About	Beyond	Into	To
Above	By	Like	Towards
Across	Concerning	Near	Under
After	Despite	Of	Until
Against	Down	Off	Up
Along	During	On	Upon
Among	Except	Out	With
Around	Following	Over	Within
At	For	Plus	Without
Before	From	Since	
Behind	In	Through	
Between	Including	Throughout	

If you're not sure if a word is functioning as a preposition, you can use this Preposition Finder:

The rabbit ran _____ the woodpile.

Any word that fits in that blank is a preposition. There are also a few prepositions that *don't* fit in the Preposition Finder, but any word that does fit in the blank is a preposition.

The prepositions that don't fit in the Preposition Finder are time-related prepositions (*before, during, after, since*), and prepositions describing logical relationships (*except, concerning, including, plus, minus*).

There is one more preposition that does not fit in the Preposition Finder, and it is the most common preposition of all: OF. The word *of* does not fit into the preposition finder, so you just have to remember it.

So then, if you can remember Preposition Finder plus *of,* you can account for about 98% of the occurrences of prepositions.

A preposition is ALWAYS followed by a noun or pronoun.

- Preposition + Noun = Prepositional Phrase (inside the wardrobe, after the concert, with fortitude)

That noun in the Prepositional Phrase is known as the Object of the Preposition.

The Object of the Preposition may have modifiers. (inside the *big* wardrobe, inside the *big* wardrobe *in the spare room*). These modifiers are considered to be part of the prepositional phrase.

If you see a "preposition" that is not followed by a noun or pronoun, it is not serving as a preposition; it is probably serving as an adverb.

- The squirrel ran *around the tree.* (In this sentence, *around* serves as a preposition, the head of the prepositional phrase, *around the tree*.)
- The squirrel ran *around*. (In this sentence, *around* serves as an adverb because it is not followed by a noun.)

The word *preposition* = *pre (before)* + *position*. It's sitting in the pre-position, before a noun.

A preposition always puts a noun in relationship with another noun, verb, adjective, or adverb.

The prepositions we listed earlier all describe relationships:

Spatial Relationships	Above, Below, Behind, Between, Among, etc.
Time Relationships	Before, During, After, Since, etc.
Logical Relationships	Except, Despite, Concerning, etc.
Relationship of owning/belonging/attachment	Of

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 5: Prepositional Phrases Part II

Prepositional phrases have two functions:

1. **Adjectival function**: telling us WHICH ONE, WHAT KIND, or HOW MANY about a noun.
2. **Adverbial function**: telling us HOW, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, or TO WHAT EXTENT, about a verb (or an adjective or another adverb).

Anytime you see a prepositional phrase, you know it will answer one of those questions.

A. *Edmund stepped* ***inside the wardrobe****.*

The phrase *inside the wardrobe* is _____, answering the question

_____ did Edmund step?

B. *The furs* ***inside the wardrobe*** *were soft to the touch.*

The phrase *inside the wardrobe* is _____, answering the question

_____ furs?

[Answers: A. adverbial; where. B. adjectival, which.]

Movability Is a Clue to the Function of a Prepositional Phrase
Remember, adverbials modifying verbs are free to move about the cabin, but adjectivals and adverbials modifying adjectives or adverbs must come immediately after the words they modify. So when you are trying to figure out what function a modifier serves, it's a good idea to start by looking at what is immediately before it.

In your own sentences, when you realize that you meant for an adjectival to modify a given noun, and it's not right next to that noun, you've probably got some work to do.

Let's look at another example, this one from Groucho Marx:

> *Last night I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas, I'll never know.*

A. What is the prepositional phrase in the first sentence? _____.

B. What function does the prepositional phrase serve? _____.

[Answers: A. *in my pajamas*. B. you might have answered adverbial or adjectival.]

The logic suggests that the phrase is adverbial, describing HOW Grouch Marx shot the elephant. But grammatically speaking, *in my pajamas* could be adjectival, telling us WHICH elephant. And it comes immediately after *elephant*, the proper location for an adjective phrase modifying *elephant*. On the other hand, if the phrase is adverbial, it can easily be at the end of the sentence, far from the verb it modifies. Only when you read the second sentence do you realize that the phrase *in my pajamas* is indeed adjectival, telling us how the elephant was dressed.

Humor is all about goofy logic. Grammar reflects logic. So it should be no surprise that goofy grammar is often the basis of jokes.

Why do prepositional phrases have a bad reputation?
Writers are often told to get rid of prepositional phrases, just as they are often told to get rid of to-be verbs. However, this is treating a symptom as if it were the problem. Consider this example:

> *I am aware of your need for transportation.*

This not-so-great sentence has two prepositional phrases (*of your need*, and *for transportation*) that account for more than half of the words in the sentence. But the real problem here isn't the prepositional phrases or even the to-be verb (*am).* The problem the nominalization. Get rid of the nominalization and the to-be verb and prepositional phrases go with it.

> *I know you need transportation.*
>
> Or,
>
> *I know you need a car.*

Here is another example: *Barbie was given flowers by Ken.*

What's our prepositional phrase? It's *by Ken*. Ken is the actor; yet he is tucked away as the object of the preposition at the very end of the sentence. That's a problem. But the prepositional phrase is a symptom, not the problem. Fix the passive voice, and both the prepositional phrase and the to-be verb go away:

Ken gave Barbie flowers.

In both of those cases, nominalization and passive voice, the prepositional phrase is TECHNICALLY a modifier, but only technically. It's not actually adding to the sentence. It's making things less concrete, harder to envision.

As a real modifier, a prepositional phrase can be a very powerful and useful construction. There is no shame in a prepositional phrase, but don't go crazy. You don't want to nest prepositional phrase inside prepositional phrase inside prepositional phrase, even though English grammar allows for that.

But remember: English grammar always gives you another way to skin a cat. We're looking at all these different kinds of modifiers so you will have more options for expressing yourself with clarity and style.

Quiz 2.5: Prepositional Phrases Part II

I. **You can have a turn after me.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

II. **After me, you can have a turn**.

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

III. **John Barber ran into the burning building to save his Beanie Baby collection.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

IV. **A cacophony of birdsong greeted us.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

V. **The money under the mattress is my life savings.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VI. **I hid the money under the mattress.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VII. **A buzzing box fan sat on the floor nearby.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VIII. **Helen looked at Sadie with a straight face.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

IX. **Helen looked at the girl with the mermaid tattoo.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

X. **Helen looked at the girl with binoculars.**

1. Is the prepositional phrase adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 6: Participles

What do you call it when you change a verb to a noun? _____.

What do you call it when you change a verb to a modifier? _____.

[A. Nominalization. B. A participle.]

I've said some pretty nasty things about nominalization over the past lessons, but the ability to change words from one part of speech to another is one of the things that gives language its tremendous flexibility.

Let's look at how two examples improve when you change the verb into a participle:

> *A dog was barking. He woke me up.* --> *A barking dog woke me up.*
>
> *The fireman is running. He needs to grab the hose.* --> *The running fireman needs to grab the hose.*

Like every other adjectival, participles answer the questions WHICH ONE? WHAT KIND?

- Which dog? *The barking dog*.
- Which fireman? *The running fireman.*

These kinds of participles that end in -ing are **present participles**.

Let's consider some **past participles**: *Mashed* potatoes*. Split* peas*. Broken* promises*. Enraged* llamas*. Raised* hands*. Torn* paper*.*

A past participle looks like the past tense form of the verb. It's technically the fourth principal part of a verb.

The fourth principal part is the form a verb takes if you put the helping verb "have" or "had" in front of it: *I talked/I have talked. I walked/I have walked. I spent/I have spent.* For irregular verbs, the past tense and fourth principal part are different: *I gave/I have given. I sang/I have sung. I went/I have gone.*

Past participles have a lot in common with passive verbs:

- *The potatoes were mashed. (passive) mashed potatoes (past participle)*
- *The paper got torn. (passive) torn paper (past participle)*

By the same token, present participles (the ones that end in -ing) are being performed by their subject, so they are active:

- *The barking dog*
- *The running man*

Though they are modifiers, participles retain some of the properties of verbs. Most importantly, they can be modified by adverbs and adverbials, and they can take direct objects. A participle together with a modifier and/or an object constitutes a participial phrase. Participial phrases will be the subject of the next lesson.

A. Participles modify _____.

B. A participle goes _____.

[Answers: A. Nouns and only nouns. B. Immediately before the noun it modifies.(There are exceptions, such as *I heard a dog barking*. But they're uncommon.]

Any time you use two words as a participle they should be hyphenated.

Dog-eared page
Well-loved grammar instructor
Oft-repeated writing advice

How can you tell a past participle apart from other uses of the 4th principle part?

1. There won't be a helping verb (had, has, will have)
2. A participle can't have a subject

You can tell a present participle apart from other -ing verbs (2nd principle part verbs) in the same way:

1. No to-be/helping verb
2. No subject

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 7: Participial Phrases

Because they started out life as verbs, participles retain many of the properties of verbs. They can take direct and indirect objects. They can be modified by adverbials. When you add an object or an adverbial to a participle, it becomes a participial phrase.

Just like a simple participle, the participial phrase only has one job: it modifies a noun.

However, whereas a simple participle almost always appears before the noun it modifies (as in *mashed* potatoes), a participial phrase usually appears after:

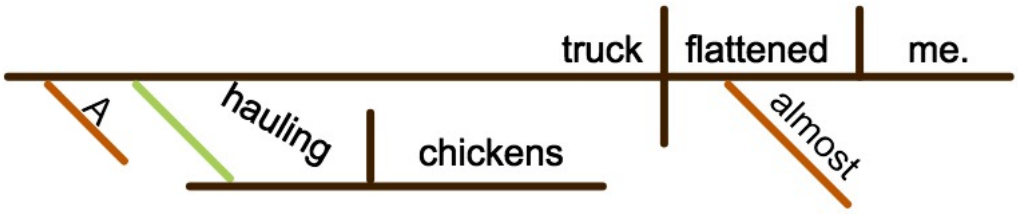
> Potatoes *mashed with my bare hands*.

The participial phrase *mashed with my bare hands* is adjectival, telling us what kind of potatoes. But WITHIN that adjectival phrase, the prepositional phrase *with my bare hands* is adverbial, modifying *mashed.*

Consider this sentence:

> *A truck hauling chickens almost flattened me.*

Here's the diagram:



A. What is the participial phrase? _____.

B. What is the main verb of the sentence? _____.

C. What is the subject of the sentence? _____.

D. What is the direct object of the sentence? _____.

E. What is the direct object of the participle, "hauling"? _____.

[Answers: A. *hauling chickens.* B. *flattened.* C. *truck.* D. *me.* E. *chickens.*]

Notice that the Direct Object of the participle (in the above instance, *chickens)* has no relation to the Direct Object of the main clause (in the above instance, *me*).

The Importance of Proximity
When you add objects and/or adverbials, the participle—now a participial phrase—moves from the spot immediately in front of the noun to the spot immediately after the noun. But still, it's immediately adjacent. If the participial phrase starts drifting away from the noun it modifies, bad things start happening. **Adjectivals, remember, aren't very movable. They need to be very close to the nouns they modify.**

It is not unusual for a participial phrase to move to the beginning of a clause. But if it does, it has to modify the subject of the clause. Why? Because the subject is the first noun, right there after the opening phrase:

- *Convinced that her friends were out to get her,* Margaret wore a disguise to Sunday school.
- *Screaming like a banshee,* the jeweler ran from the room.

In both of the above examples, the opening participial phrase modifies the subject (Margaret is convinced that her friends are out to get her, and the jeweler is screaming like a banshee).

Dangling Modifiers
You may have heard of dangling modifiers. When a sentence begins with an adjectival phrase, and that phrase doesn't modify the subject, the modifier dangles.

Consider this example:

Turning off the main drag and onto one of the side streets, the ocean came into view.

A. Why is *turning* a dangling participle? _____

_____.

B. How could we fix it? _____

_____.

[Answers: A. Look for the subject: *ocean*. But the ocean didn't turn off the main drag onto a side street. B. Change the modifier so that it's not a participial phrase. *As we turned off the main drag and onto a side street, the ocean came into view.*]

Dangling modifiers are often funny:

> *Locked in a vault for fifty years, the owner of the jewels decided to sell them.*
> [Possible edit*: The jeweler decided to sell the jewels that had been locked in a vault for fifty years.*]

Or,

> *Plunging 1,000 feet into the gorge, we saw Yosemite Falls.*
> [Possible edit*: We saw Yosemite Falls plunging 1,000 feet into the gorge.*]

In review,

- A participle is a verb that has been turned into an **adjective**.
- A participial phrase is a participle plus **a direct object (rarely an indirect object) and/or adverbial modifiers.**
- If a participial phrase is at the beginning of the sentence, it must modify the **subject of that sentence**.
- If the participial phrase at the beginning of the sentence doesn't modify the grammatical subject, it's called a **dangling modifier.**

Quiz 2.7: Participial Phrases

I. **Wiping the tea from his handlebar mustache, the smile of this husband is wide enough to drive a tractor through.**
Wiping the tea from his handlebar mustache is a dangling participle. Why? How would you fix it?

II**. On a warm October morning, still breakfasting on the patio, a bird swooped down and landed on their table.**
Still breakfasting on the patio is a dangling modifier. Explain why. How would you fix it?

III**. After five hours of answering all the ER nurses' questions but not getting clarity on any of mine, the doctor finally entered the room.**
This is not, technically speaking, a dangling modifier, but it is a similar problem: it's not the doctor who has been answering the nurses' questions, but the patient. How would you fix it?

IV**. All of our tempera-painting was done in the back yard, half-clothed.**
The participle *half-clothed* dangles. Explain how the passive voice contributes to the problem. How would you fix this sentence?

V**. The forest dampening the insects' chorus like stage curtains deadening an orchestra's tuning before a concert.**
Explain why the above "sentence" is a fragment rather than a sentence. Turn it into a sentence.

VI**. The dog followed him everywhere he went, alternating between a set of growls, yips, and barks.**
That phrase *alternating between a set of growls, yips, and barks* gets a little awkward. Try reworking this sentence by turning the nouns *growls, yips,* and *barks*, into participles.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 8: Infinitive Phrases

We've been talking about how the different forms of a verb serve different functions in a sentence. Those different forms are called verbals. There are three kinds of verbals:

PARTICIPLES
- Present (active) participles end in -ing.
- Past (passive) participles end in -ed, -t, or -en. (4th principle part).

GERUNDS
- We'll talk about gerunds in the next module. They look exactly like present participles, but function as nouns.

INFINITIVES
- **An infinitive is a verb that has the word 'to' in front of it. *To drive. To think. To be. To smell.***

To + verb is the form of an infinitive, but what is its function? A participle is always adjectival, and a gerund is always a noun equivalent. Infinitives, however, can be adjectival, adverbial, or a noun equivalent.

Think about the song from Mary Poppins, "I Love to Laugh."

To laugh is an infinitive serving as a direct object. I love what? To laugh. So there the infinitive is a noun equivalent.

How about these examples:

> *I brought some popcorn to share.*
> What function does *to share* serve? It's a modifier telling us WHAT KIND of popcorn. It is adjectival.

Doug McKelvey is a writer to watch.
To watch is an adjective. What kind of writer? A writer to watch.

I bought the garlic to ward off vampires.
To ward off is functioning adverbially. It tells WHY I bought the garlic.

Another way to distinguish adjectival infinitives from adverbial infinitives is to see whether or not the infinitive is moveable.

You can say, *To ward off vampires, I bought this garlic.* (Adverbial)
But you can't say, *To share I brought this popcorn.* (Adjectival)

A. Adjectival infinitives always appear _____ _____ the nouns they modify.

B. Participles usually appear _____ the nouns they modify.

C. Participial phrases usually appear _____ the nouns they modify.

[Answers: A. immediately after B. before C. after (though it is not unusual to see them at the beginning of a clause).]

One last note on the subject of split infinitives: The rule against splitting infinitives was made up in the 18th century. You can split an infinitive with an adverb (ie: *to secretly eat some cookies* or, *to entirely disregard this arbitrary rule*) if you want to. I generally avoid split infinitives so as not to draw attention to a possible grammar error.

To fix a split infinitive, simply move the adverb, as in feel free *to disregard entirely this arbitrary rule.*

Quiz 2.8: Infinitive Phrases

I. **Every spring, blackbirds come to the marsh beside our house to nest.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

II. **My attempts to win her love with tuba solos only annoyed her.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

III**. Richie turned to leave quickly as his mom pulled into the driveway.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

IV**. The best mushrooms to eat are the non-poisonous ones.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

V**. The towering canopy blocked enough sunlight to make the undergrowth sparse.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VI**. A little soy and rice vinegar is all you need to season your broth.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

VII**. I'd trade it all to sit at the bench at the bend in the trail.**
Identify the infinitive or infinitive phrase, and answer these three questions about it:

1. Is it adjectival or adverbial?
2. What word does it modify?
3. What question does it answer? (Which one? What kind? How many? How? When? Where? Why? To what extent?)

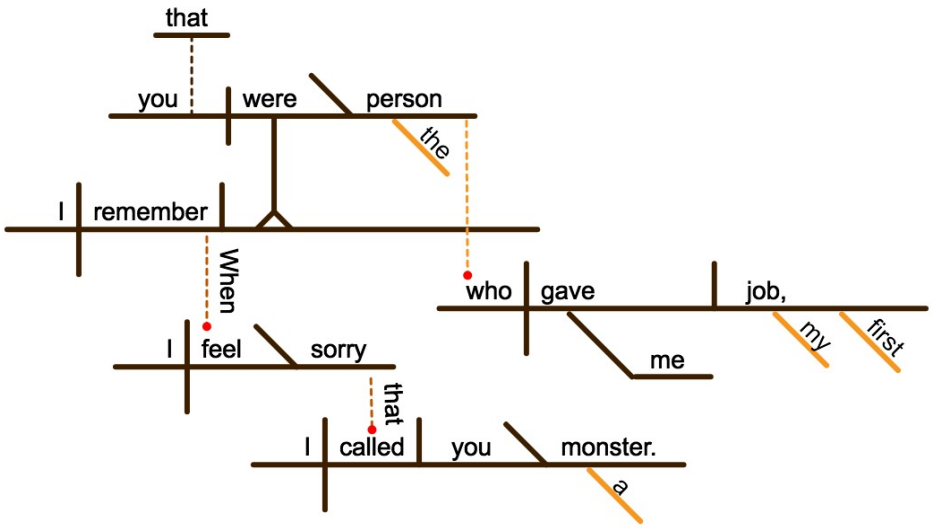
Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 9: Subordinate Clauses

It is finally time to turn our attention to subordinate (also known as dependent) clauses.

Remember, every clause has a SUBJECT and a VERB. It may have other parts, but to be a clause it must have those two parts.

> *When I remember that you were the person who gave me my first job, I feel sorry that I called you a monster.*

What is the main line of this sentence? *I feel sorry.* (Subject, Verb, Predicate Complement.) Everything else in the sentence modifies this main clause. Here's a diagram:



Everything before the comma in this sentence is part of an adverbial clause, telling us WHEN the subject felt sorry. There are two more subordinate clauses within it: *that you were the person* and *who gave me my first job.*

That you were the person is serving as a direct object for *remember,* so it is a noun clause. This is the S-V-Predicate Complement clause pattern.

Who gave me my first job is an adjectival clause answering the question WHICH person. This is the S-V-IO-DO clause pattern. What is the direct object? *Job.* Indirect Object? *Me.*

There is one more subordinate clause in the sentence. Go looking for another verb and you will find it.

That I called you a monster. This is an adverbial clause, modifying *sorry.* It tells WHY the subject is sorry.

So in this one sentence, we've seen subordinate clauses function as an adverb (HOW, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, TO WHAT EXTENT), adjective (WHICH ONE, WHAT KIND, HOW MANY), and as a noun (as a subject, direct object, or object of the preposition.)

We've also seen that a subordinate clause can conform to any of the five clause patterns.

How Subordinate Clauses and Main Clauses Differ
A main clause can stand alone, and a subordinate clause can't. The easiest way to tell the difference is to say you know it when you see it.

I feel sorry is a whole sentence. W*hen I remember, That you were a person, Who gave me my first job,* and *That I called you a monster* are all clauses, but none of them can stand alone.

Usually, a clause can't stand alone because it starts with either a relative pronoun (such as WHO) or a subordinating conjunction (such as THAT).

Subordinate clauses help you include a lot of additional information about the main action of the sentence and can give you options for expressing ideas with different shades of meaning.

Subordination is one way of signaling to your reader which ideas or actions are primary, and which ones are a little less important—or, literally, which ideas are dependent on other ideas. One idea is the independent clause. It could stand alone without those other clauses. But the other clauses—the dependent clauses—all depend on that main clause.

However, subordinate clauses come with two potential dangers:

1. They can tempt you to stick too much information into once sentence.
2. You can accidentally tuck away important information into a subordinate clause that maybe deserves to be a sentence all its own.

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Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 10: Adjective Clauses

A few years ago I wrote a book called *The Charlatan's Boy.* For the chapter titles I went back to a very old tradition. Every chapter title was a clause beginning with the phrase "in which."

- *Chapter 2: In which I get out of the feechie trade and begin my formal education.*
- *Chapter 4: In which I find a mama.*
- *Chapter 6: In which I ruin a feller's hairdo and nearbout get smashed for it.*

A. How do we know these chapter titles are clauses?

_____.

B. Are they adjectival or adverbial clauses?

_____.

[Answers: A. They each have a subject and a verb. B. Adjectival. They tell us WHICH chapter.]

An adjective clause always sits as close as possible AFTER the noun it modifies. Look for the adjectival clause in these next examples:

> *The man who repaired my tricycle turned out to be a state-champion juggler.*
> **who repaired my tricycle**
>
> *The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*
> **that the builders rejected**
>
> *The person to whom I give this scepter shall be my successor.*
> **to whom I give this scepter**

The town where I grew up is the pork rind capital of the world.
where I grew up

The giant whose cheese you just ate is going to wake up any minute now.
whose cheese you just ate

The years when the Summer Olympics are held are also presidential election years.
when the Summer Olympics are held

What patterns did you notice in those examples?

- the adjective clause comes immediately after the noun it modifies
- they start with relative pronouns ("W" words)

Relative Pronouns
The relative pronouns used by adjective clauses are:

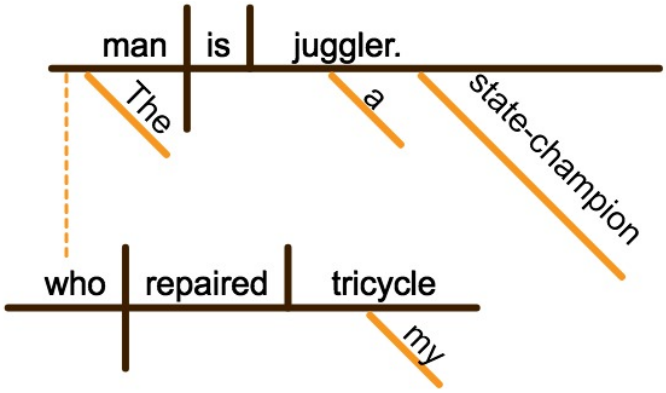
- WHO
- WHOM
- WHOSE
- WHICH
- THAT
- WHERE
- WHEN

Relative pronouns connect the adjective clause to the main clause. The antecedent of the relative pronoun is the noun in the main clause that the adjective clause is modifying. (Antecedent = the noun renamed by a pronoun)

In this sentence, the relative pronoun WHO renames the noun MAN, and the clause introduced by WHO modifies the noun MAN:

*The man **who** repaired my tricycle was a state-champion juggler.*

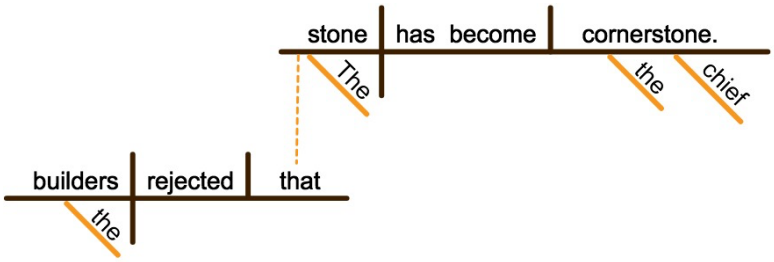
In this sentence diagram, the dotted line makes clear the relationship between the noun MAN in the main clause and the relative pronoun WHO in the adjective clause. You can also see that the relative pronoun WHO is the subject of the adjective clause.



Or consider this sentence:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

The relative pronoun in this sentence is THAT.



In the subordinate clause, what is the verb? *Rejected*. Who rejected? *The builders*. So *builders* is the subject of the subordinate clause. The builders rejected what? They rejected the stone, which in the subordinate clause has been renamed *that*. So *that* is the direct object of the adjective clause.

The strange thing here is that normally the direct object comes after the verb: Subject-Verb-Object. But in an adjective clause the relative pronoun comes first, whether it is the subject, object, or something else.

The relative pronoun can also serve as the object of the preposition:

The person to whom I give my scepter shall be my successor.

Whom is the object of the preposition *to*. This is the one case, by the way, where the relative pronoun is NOT the first word of an adjective clause. If it is the object of the preposition, the preposition has to come first (pre+position).
Here are a few more examples:

The giant whose cheese you just ate will wake up soon.

The relative pronoun WHOSE is an adjective modifying CHEESE.

Which cheese? The giant's cheese.
The relative pronoun *whose* is an adjective modifying *cheese*. Which cheese? The giant's cheese.

The town where I grew up is the pork rind capital of the world.

The relative pronoun WHERE serves as an adverb, telling (obviously) WHERE. Nevertheless, the whole clause is adjectival, telling WHICH town.

The years when the Summer Olympics are held are also presidential election years.

This sentence is very similar to the previous sentence: WHEN, the relative pronoun introducing the adjective clause, serves an adverbial function within its clause.

Quiz 2.10: Adjective Clauses

I. **I will point to the goat that I like best.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

II. **The post office where I got my start is just around the corner from here.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

III. **The alligator about which I told you is back again.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

IV. **The alligator I told you about is back again.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

V. **You would like the plumber who installed our ice machine.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

VI. **The guy whose car I totaled seems annoyed with me.**
Identify the adjective clause and answer two questions:

1. What noun does the adjective clause modify?
2. What grammatical function (subject, direct object, object of preposition, adjective, adverb, etc.) does the relative pronoun serve within the adjective clause?

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 11: Adverb Clauses

Adverbial clauses start with subordinating conjunctions. These conjunctions are called *subordinating* because when they sit in front of a clause that is otherwise independent, the clause, as if by magic, is rendered dependent or subordinate. The main clause is transformed into an adverbial clause. Here's a main clause:

Antonio eats sushi.

This clause can stand alone. It is a perfectly good sentence. But if you put the subordinating conjunction *when* in front of it, it suddenly becomes a subordinate (or dependent) clause:

When Antonio eats sushi

This clause cannot stand alone as a sentence. You need to attach it to an independent clause before you turn it loose in the wild:

When Antonio eats sushi, he feels sophisticated.

Here is a partial list of subordinating clauses in English:

After	Than
Although	That
As	Though
As if	Unless
Because	Until
Before	When
If	Whenever
In order that	Where
Lest	Wherever
Since	Whether
So that	While

You don't need to bother with memorizing this list. Even if you did, you would only be memorizing a partial list. But grasp this idea: You can take any independent clause that has ever been written, stick one of these words in front of it, and that independent clause is now an adverbial clause telling HOW, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, or TO WHAT EXTENT. It used to function as a sentence, but now it is an adverb.

Coordination and Subordination
Remember the coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

When you use a coordinating conjunction to connect two clauses into a compound sentence, you communicate to your reader that the two clauses are of equal weight and importance.

> *I wanted Vietnamese food,* ***but*** *Chucky wanted a hotdog.*
>
> *The dog swam in the canal,* ***and*** *the alligator lurked nearby.*
>
> *You can clean up your room,* ***or*** *you can forget about going to the movies tonight.*

The **coordinating conjunctions balance** two actions or ideas, creating a compound sentence.

Subordinating conjunctions create more complex relationships between actions or ideas—a hierarchy, a cause-and-effect, a time sequence, a spatial relationship, a contrast.

> ***While*** *the dog swam in the canal, an alligator lurked nearby.*
>
> ***Because*** *the dog swam in canal, the alligator lurked nearby.*
>
> ***Whenever*** *the dog swam in the canal, the alligator lurked nearby.*

Each of those examples give more weight to the second idea, making it the main clause of the sentence. But maybe we want to make the first clause the independent one:

> *The dog swam in the canal* ***though*** *the alligator lurked nearby.*
>
> *The dog swam in the canal* ***unless*** *the alligator lurked nearby.*

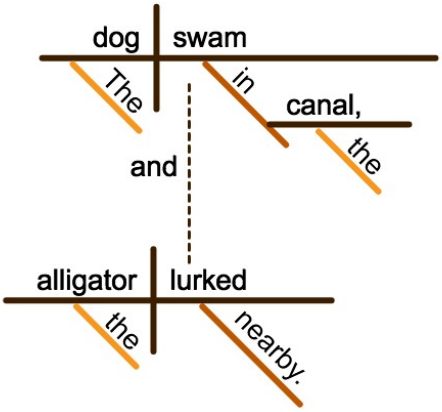
Those adverbial clauses nuance to what was a balanced compound sentence.

In the last lesson you saw that the relative pronoun at the beginning of an adjective clause has a grammatical function within the subordinate clause AND it has a pronoun-antecedent relationship with a noun in the main clause. That relative pronoun straddles both clauses. The subordinate conjunction has a grammatical function in NEITHER the subordinate clause nor the main clause. Like a coordinating conjunction, a subordinating conjunction connects two clauses without participating in the grammar of either one.

- When you diagram a compound sentence (two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction), the coordinating conjunction sits on a dotted line between the two independent clauses.
- When you diagram a complex sentence with an adverbial clause, the subordinating conjunction *also* sits on a dotted line between the two clauses.
- In a complex sentence with an adjectival clause, the relative pronoun, you'll remember, has to have an antecedent on the main clause AND it plays a grammatical role in the subordinate clause.

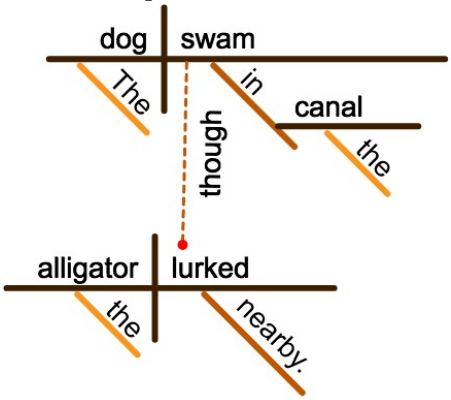
As you can see from the diagrams below, in significant ways a complex sentence with an adverbial clause has more in common with a compound sentence than with a complex sentence with an adjective clause.

This is a compound sentence:



The dog swam in the canal, and the alligator swam nearby.

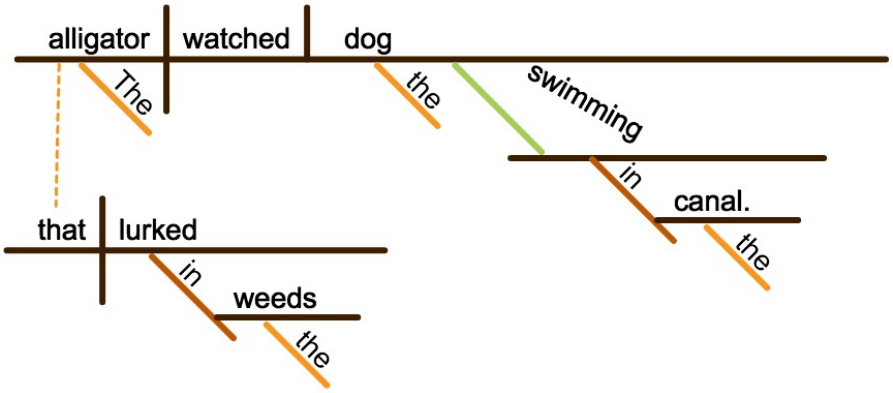
This is a complex sentence with an adverbial phrase:



The dog swam in the canal though the alligator lurked nearby.

Notice how similar this diagram looks to the diagram of the compound sentence; the only difference is the different conjunction.

This is a complex sentence with an adjective clause:



The alligator that lurked in the weeds watched the dog swimming in the canal.

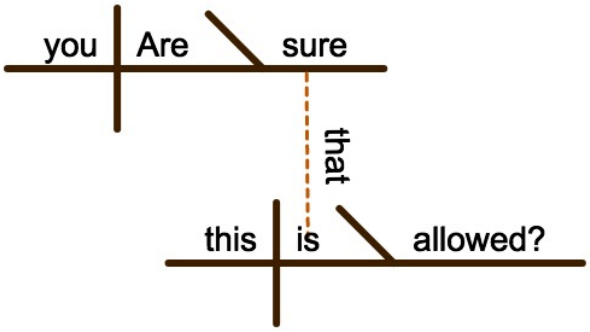
The relative pronoun in this sentence functions very differently from the subordinating conjunction in the sentence before it.

Like all adverbs, adverbial clauses are **moveable when they modify a verb**. If you put your adverbial clause at the beginning of the sentence, you need a comma before the main clause starts.

Also, an adverbial clause **can** modify an adjective or an adverb, though, as with other adverbials modifying adjectives and adverbs, it is not moveable.

Consider the sentence *Are you sure that this is allowed?*

The clause *that this is allowed* is adverbial, modifying *sure.*



Let's review.

A. An adverbial clause looks just like an independent clause, except that it has a

_____ _____ at the beginning.

B. Unlike the relative pronoun in an adjective clause, this subordinating conjunction

_____ _____ serve a grammatical function within the clause.

C. The adverbial clause always answers one of the adverb questions: _____

_____.

D. If your adverbial clause modifies a verb, it is _____.

[Answers: A. Subordinating conjunction. B. does not. C. HOW, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, TO WHAT EXTENT. D. moveable.]

Quiz 2.11: Adverb Clauses

I. **After John Barber showed up, the party was pretty lame.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

II. **The party wasn't the same after John Barber showed up.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

III. **After that point, I didn't offer any information unless someone asked for it.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

IV. **He was closer to victory than he could have known.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

V. **Slugs leave a trail of slime everywhere they go.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

VI. **Linda's eyes burned with tears of gratitude as Antonio brought the banana pudding into the dining room.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

VII. **As the cashier took her place behind the counter.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

VIII. **I am as angry as I have ever been.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

IX. **When I was fourteen, after my mother died and my father ran off, my grandmother sent me to live in a group home near Tallahassee.**

1. Identify the adverbial clause (there could be more than one).
2. Tell what question the clause answers (how, when, where, why, to what extent)
3. Tell what the clause modifies.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 12: More on Subordinate Clauses

There are still a few topics related to subordinate clauses that we have not covered. We will gather them into this lesson, grab-bag style.

That v. Who and Whom
Be aware of the antecedent of your relative pronoun. (Remember, the antecedent is the noun OUTSIDE the subordinate clause that the relative pronoun renames.)

If the antecedent is a human being, use WHO or WHOM, not THAT.
If the antecedent is NOT a human being, use THAT.

> *The book THAT was on the top shelf fell on my head.*

You would NOT say

> *Martha is the woman that I love.*

You WOULD say

> *Martha is the woman whom I love.*

Omitting the Relative Pronoun
When the relative pronoun serves as the Direct Object in the subordinate clause it introduces, it is very common and very acceptable to OMIT it.

You can say

> *The stone THAT the builders rejected*,

or you can omit the relative pronoun and say

The stone the builders rejected.

Either is acceptable.

By the same token, you can either say

Martha is the woman whom I love,

or you can say

Martha is the woman I love.

This technique of omitting the relative pronoun has the added benefit of keeping you from having to decide whether THAT, WHO, or WHOM is right.

Who and Whom

When do you say WHO, and when do you say WHOM? This is a point of grammar that a lot of people have trouble with. To understand this issue, we have to start with the nominative and objective cases of pronouns.

Every personal pronoun has a nominative and an objective case:

Nominative Case:	**Objective Case**
I	Me
You	You
He/She/It	Him/Her/It
We	Us
You	You
They	Them

When a pronoun is used as a subject or a predicate nominative, you use the nominative case.

He *called the police.* ***We*** *called the police.* ***They*** *called the police. (Subject)*

When a pronoun is used as an object (direct object, indirect object, or object of preposition), you use the objective case.

The police called ***him****. The police called* ***us****. The police called* ***them****. (Direct Object)*
The police gave ***him*** *a call. The police gave* ***them*** *a call. (Indirect Object)*
The police had no business with ***him****. The police had no business with* ***us****. (Object of Preposition)*

People almost never get this wrong on the main line, except for two situations:

1. It is common for people to use the objective case for predicate nominatives—that is, to say *This is **him*** (objective case) instead of *This is **he*** (nominative case).
2. It is also common for people to use the wrong case in compounds. They often say things like *Cindy and **me** are coming* (the objective case used in the subject spot) when they should use the nominative case, *Cindy and **I** are coming*. Or they might say *Wendy invited Cindy and **I*** (nominative case in an object spot) when they should say *Wendy invited Cindy and **me**.*

There's an easy rule of thumb here. Before you settle on a pronoun in this kind of compound construction, try the pronoun without the other noun. You would never say *Me am coming,* so you know not to say *Cindy and me are coming.* By the same token, you would never say *Wendy invited I,* so you know not to say *Wendy invited Cindy and I.*

The relative pronoun *who/whom* also has a nominative and objective case.

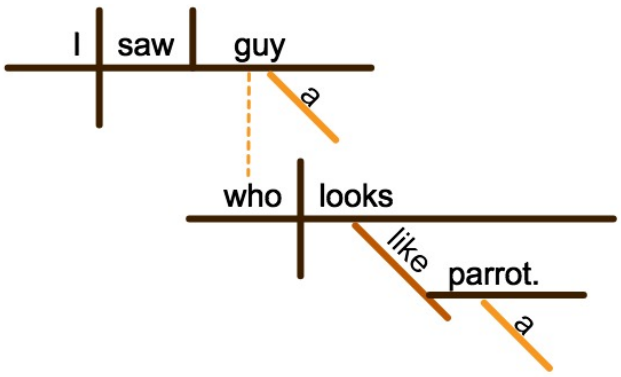
Nominative	**Objective Case**
Who	Whom

To use the right form of the relative pronoun, figure out what grammatical function it serves within the subordinate clause and choose accordingly. If it is the subject or predicate nominative within the subordinate clause, use the nominative-case **who**. If it is an object within the subordinate clause, use the objective-case **whom**.

Consider this sentence:

- *I saw a guy who/whom looks like a parrot.*

Which is correct? *Who* or *whom*? Since the relative pronoun is the subject of the adjective clause, *who* is correct. Here is a diagram:

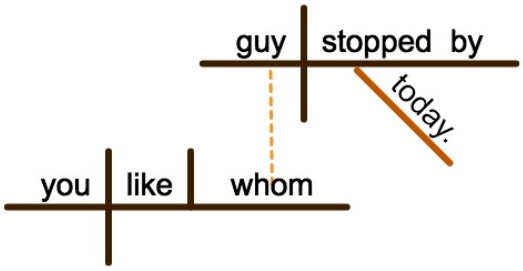


You may notice that *guy*, the antecedent of *who,* is the direct object of the main clause. That has nothing to do with the case of *who/whom*. All you care about is the pronoun's function in the subordinate clause.

Or consider this sentence:

- *That guy who/whom you like stopped by today.*

Who or *whom?* Within the subordinate clause, the relative pronoun is the direct object. So *whom* is the correct choice.



Again, ignore the main clause when deciding which relative pronoun to use. The *who/whom* pronoun renames *guy*, the subject of the main clause. But within its own clause it's a direct object.

If it's so easy to get the case right for personal pronouns in the main clause, why is it hard to get the case right for a relative pronoun in a subordinate clause? Because English is an SVO language: we rely heavily on word order to know whether a word is a subject or an object. But in a subordinate clause, word order is no help. No matter what grammatical function it serves, the relative pronoun always comes at the beginning of its subordinate clause.

Elliptical Clauses

An elliptical clause is a clause in which words are missing. An ellipsis is the three-dot punctuation mark (...) that shows when words have been omitted, so that should help you remember what an elliptical clause is.

Look at this sentence with an adverbial clause modifying the adjective *faster*:

Wendell ran faster than I did.

Than I did is an adverbial clause modifying *faster* (it tells *to what extent*). This is what we call an elliptical clause. It is missing part of the verb: it is a shortened version of the more complete clause *Wendell ran faster than I did run.*

Often, however, an elliptical clause will leave out the WHOLE verb:

Wendell ran faster than I.

The verb is omitted, but the pronoun *I* is still a subject. This explains why people who are being extra-proper say *You are uglier than I* instead of *You are uglier than me.* Or *Linda is*

taller than she instead of *Linda is taller than her*. Those final pronouns (*I, she*) are the subjects of elliptical clauses, so they are in the nominative case.

Why, then, does it feel more natural to use the objective forms, *me* and *her*? I think it's because without the verb, *than* feels like a preposition, so the pronoun feels more like the object of a preposition than the subject of a clause. And you already know that the object of a preposition should be in the objective case.

So, *Linda is taller than her* is incorrect usage. But it is not illogical. People make this mistake because they are relying on logic. Indeed, most grammar errors are the result of a person being TOO logical: they are applying logic instead of applying the exception to the logic in one particular case.

A toddler says "mouses" instead of "mice" because he fully understands and applies the logic by which we normally form the plural in English. He just hasn't learned that in the case of mouse and mice, you have to throw out logic and do something else.

Why do people make the mistake of using the apostrophe to form the possessive its? Because for every other word in the English language, you use an apostrophe to form the possessive. It is a perfectly logical mistake.

So, if you are one of those people who takes pleasure in beating up on other people when they write *it's* when they mean *its*, be sure you understand that you are beating them up for being too logical. True, it's a usage error. And yes, the person who makes that error isn't in the grammar club. But not being in the club isn't the same thing as being stupid.

Quiz 2:12: More on Subordinate Clauses

I. **He showed his card to anyone (who/whom/that) asked.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. who
B. whom
C. that

II. **Peanut Montgomery, the friend (who/whom/that) George Jones had insulted, was willing to forgive.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. who
B. whom
C. that

III. **People (who/whom/that) knew Jim Carroll often remarked on his generosity.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. who
B. whom
C. that

IV. **People (who/whom/that) John Barber knows often try to avoid him.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. who
B. whom
C. that

V. **I am he of (who/whom) you speak.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. who
B. whom

VI. **Cindy and (I/me) chased a panther.**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. I
B. me

VII. **A panther chased Cindy and (I/me).**
Choose the correct pronoun.

A. I
B. me

VIII. **Why is it technically proper to say, "I am taller than he?"**

IX. **Why are people likely to say, "I am taller than him?"**

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 13: Misplaced Modifiers

We looked at dangling modifiers a few lessons ago. We should probably look at misplaced modifiers before we wrap up our unit on modifiers.

A **misplaced modifier** is simply **a modifier that has drifted too far from the word it modifies**. The consequence is that it usually ends up looking like it modifies some other word.

> *Two cars were reported stolen by the Macon Police yesterday.*

Context tells us that the Macon police probably haven't become a ring of car thieves. But the grammar allows for that possibility. The phrase *by the Macon Police* is an adverbial prepositional phrase. It answers the question HOW about a verb. But there are two verbals in this sentence (*were reported* and *stolen).* Your reading brain expect the adverbial phrase to modify the nearest verb.

Even though adverbials are moveable, you can't move them to a spot where they're closer to another verb than the one you intended them to modify.

The real problem here is the passive voice. Fix the passive voices and the modifier is fixed too.

> *The Macon Police reported two cars stolen yesterday.*

Here is an example I've seen on a couple of grammar websites:

> *Yoko Ono will talk about her husband, John Lennon, who was killed in an interview with Barbara Walters.*

John Lennon, of course, was not killed in an interview with Barbara Walters. In this sentence, two adverbial prepositional phrases are supposed to modify the same verb:

- Yoko Ono will talk about her husband John Lennon.
- Yoko Ono will talk in an interview the Barbara Walters.

But in the middle of that the writer has added an adjectival clause, *who was killed*, to modify John Lennon. The second adverbial (*in an interview with Barbara Walters*) is closer to the verb *was killed* than to the verb *will talk*.

You could fix the sentence this way:

> *In an interview with Barbara Walters, Yoko Ono will talk about her husband, John Lennon, who was killed.*

But now the sentence falls a little flat, doesn't it? Grammar is never just grammar. Clear grammar helps you see more clearly what is happening in your sentence. The corrected sentence above might make you say, "Wait a minute, that's not as interesting as I thought it would be." Now you have a chance to correct it again.

> *In an interview with Barbara Walters, Yoko Ono will talk about her husband, John Lennon, who was killed by a mentally unstable fan.*

or

> *In an interview with Barbara Walters, Yoko Ono will talk about her husband, John Lennon. John Lennon was only forty years old when he was assassinated outside his New York City home by a mentally unstable fan.*

Clear grammar, good verbs, and concrete nouns expose you and hold you accountable. It takes courage to write clearly.

Quiz 2.13: Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

I. **I put up with a coach who yells at me because he knows how to train champions.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity. Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

II. **From the ages of twelve to eighteen, half of my weekends were spent at Randall's house making movies.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity. Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

III. **Near weightless, you cannot feel the microchip resting in your palm if you close your eyes.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity. Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

IV. **Mike looked at his eldest son with a hard face.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity.
Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

V. **We cleared away webs dripping with the morning mist from the log bridges we crossed.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity.
Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

VI. **Born with German bones and raised alongside a puppy frolicking in an overgrown pasture, often crawling along a creek bed to catch tadpoles, ballet made me feel more lovely and dainty than anything.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity.
Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

VII. **My favorite project was a shadowbox I made in 2004 of her old jewelry to hang in her bathroom.**
This sentence has at least one misplaced or dangling modifier. Rewrite for clarity.
Remember, you always have the option of splitting a sentence into more than one sentence.

Lecture Notes
Module 2, Lesson 14: Conclusion

We've been pretty technical in the module and spent a lot of time correcting other people's sentences. But this isn't a pure grammar class. This is a *Grammar for Writers* class. I'm not trying to make you a better grammar Nazi. All of this grammar talk is intended to make you a better writer.

Writing is problem-solving. The more tools you have in your toolbox, the better you're equipped to solve a given problem.

The head-spinning complexity of prepositional phrases and participles and infinitives and adjective clauses and so forth is what makes language so flexible.

Look at this sentence:

> *Please take time to look over the brochure that is enclosed with your family.*

Now that you're a grammar genius, you know that the adverbial prepositional phrase *with your family* is a misplaced modifier. It should modify the verb *look over*, but it's closer to *is enclosed. Is enclosed* is an adjective clause, but you could fix the sentence by making it a participle.

> *Please take time to look over the enclosed brochure with your family.*

Of course, you could probably feel your way to many of these solutions without knowing the technical names for them. But knowing the terminology and understanding the relationships gives me a lot of confidence as I approach a writing problem.

The biggest take-away from Module 1 was: Every time you write a sentence, know where the real action is. Write in such a way that the action is expressed as a verb and the actor is the subject of the verb.

The biggest take-away from Module 2 is: Know what is supposed to modify what in your sentences and be sure that it's obvious to your reader as well.

For **adjectivals**, that means the adjectival needs to be as close as possible to the noun it modifies.

For **adverbials**, though they are moveable and don't have to be right next to the verb they modify, do make sure there isn't another verb sneaking between them and intercepting the modifier.

Modification makes it easy to cram a lot of information into one sentence. This can be a good thing, and it can be a bad thing.

You'll see writing advice saying, "cut down on subordinate clauses and prepositional phrases" or "simplify!" Cutting down will simplify your prose, but here's the secret about simplicity and complexity:

Your reader isn't asking for simplistic writing. Your reader doesn't always need short sentences. Your reader can handle complexity.

What your reader really wants is to feel confident that he can get from subject to verb to object. He wants to know WHO DID WHAT.

So add all the modification you want. A lot of color and life comes to your story through modifiers. But make sure your modifiers don't impede your reader's progress from subject to verb to object.

In the next module, we'll tackle noun equivalents: noun clauses, gerunds, and infinitives serving as nouns.

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 1: Introduction

In our examples so far, we've talked almost exclusively about concrete nouns: *raccoon, tricycle, Cindy, Wendell, etc.*

Concrete nouns describe things you can see with your eyeballs, hear with your ears, and touch with your hands.

Abstract nouns describe ideas: *liberty, equality, fraternity, sanctification, justification, anger, love, etc.*

Using fewer abstract nouns and more concrete nouns gives your reader something to look at. Instead of telling your reader that the dishwasher repair man was full of anger, picture an angry dishwasher repairman. Give your reader the experience of seeing and listening to him. The reader can come to the conclusion that he's angry on his own. "Hmm, that dishwasher repair man turned red in the face and dumped all his appliance repair tools on the ground and cussed a blue streak... he must be angry."

Remember, your reader is always looking to know WHO DID WHAT, and that story is easier to grasp when the WHO is something he can perceive with his senses.

Sometimes, abstraction is exactly what you need.

But, **every problematic construction in the English language exists because there are situations in which it's not a problem. It's exactly what you need.**

Sometimes we're not talking about raccoons and tricycles. Sometimes we're talking about abstract ideas and concepts.

For example, you've been listening to me talk for hours about clauses and phrases, subjects, verbs, and direct objects. So be as concrete as you can, but sometimes you can't be concrete. One of the things that sets human beings apart from animals and grown-ups apart

from toddlers is that we are able to handle abstract thought. *Democracy. Supply-side economics. Faith, hope, and love.*
Here's something really interesting about abstract nouns: Whenever you change another part of speech into a noun, that noun will always be an abstraction.

To fertilize becomes *fertilization.*
React becomes *reaction.*
Blue becomes *blueness.*
Decrepit becomes *decrepitude.*

Now, English grammar doesn't care whether your nouns are abstract or concrete. Grammatically, *I am afraid of bears* is exactly the same as *I am afraid of decrepitude*. *The raccoon rattled the trash can* and *Democracy rattled the trash can* are both correct. (Though that second one doesn't make a whole lot of sense.)

Grammar doesn't care what noun goes in the subject spot, it just has to be a noun or a noun equivalent.

Noun equivalents are the subject of this short module. We are going to be looking at phrases and clauses that function as nouns in other phrases and clauses.

Look at the similarities in these examples:

> *I am afraid of bears*.
> *Bears* = concrete noun
>
> *I am afraid of decrepitude.*
> *Decrepitude* = abstract noun
>
> *I am afraid of whoever has been breaking into cars at night.*
> *Whoever has been breaking into cars* = noun clause

In the above examples, *bears, decrepitude,* and *whoever has been breaking into cars at night* all fit equally well into that Object of the Preposition (of) spot. Grammar doesn't care. If it's a noun or a noun equivalent, it's welcome to do any noun job it wants to volunteer for:

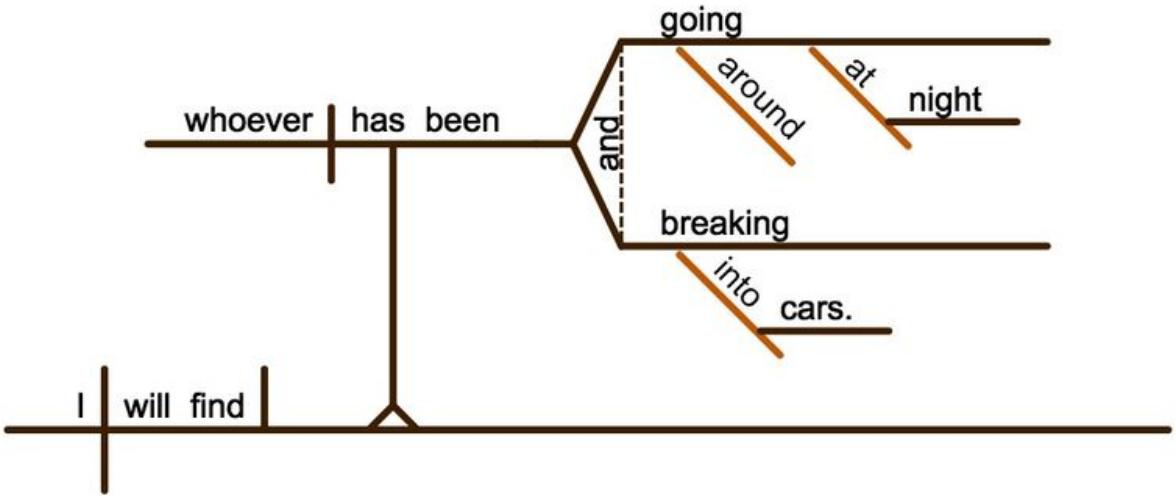
Subject
Direct Object
Indirect Object
Predicate Complement
Objective Complement
Object of the Preposition
Appositive

So while noun clauses and gerunds and infinitives make for more complicated sentences, there are still only five clause patterns:

1. Subject-Verb
2. Subject-Verb-Direct Object
3. Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object
4. Subject-Verb-Direct Object-Objective Complement
5. Subject-Linking Verb-Predicate Complement

Your old Subject Finder, Direct Object Finder, and Indirect Object Finder still work the same way as well.

For instance: *I will find whoever has been going around at night and breaking into cars.*
I will find what? *Whoever has been going around at night and breaking into cars.*



All of the noun equivalents we're discussing in this unit are represented by that little stand you see there in the Direct Object spot.

As we launch into noun equivalents, things will get pretty complicated. English grammar allows for tremendous complexity. The only reason we can make sense of that complexity is that certain structures are simple and rigid. Nothing has changed about prepositional phrases or participial phrases. If you find yourself scratching your head, remember that there are still **only five clause patterns.**

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 2: Noun Clauses

When we approach a grammatical construction, we always have to pay attention to what it's made of (form) and what it does (function.)

In *form*, a noun clause looks like an adjective clause.

Consider the subordinate clause, *Whose woods these are.* Is this an adjective clause or a noun clause? It can't stand on its own, so we have to attach it to a main clause to find out:

> *The farmer whose woods these are probably wouldn't mind if we camped here.*

The relative pronoun *whose* refers to the farmer in the main clause, so this is an adjective clause.

But what about in another, very famous, sentence from Robert Frost?

> *Whose woods these are I think I know.*

For clarity's sake, let's put this sentence in a more normal order: *I think I know whose woods these are.*

What is the clause doing? It's not referring back to anything. It's serving as the direct object. I know what? *I know whose woods these are.*

Whose is still an adjective modifying woods, but it doesn't reach out to the main clause because it's PART of the main clause.

1. Just like an adjective clause, a noun clause always starts with a _____

_____.

2. These six relative pronouns signal adjective clauses: _____, _____,

_____, _____, _____, _____.

[Answers: 1. Relative pronoun 2. WHO, WHOM, WHICH, WHEN, WHERE, THAT]

A noun clause can be introduced by those plus a few more:

WHAT, WHATEVER, WHOEVER, WHOMEVER, WHICHEVER

So any time you see one of those five relative pronouns at the beginning of a clause, you know you are looking at a noun clause.

Noun clauses can do anything regular nouns can do, but they are usually subjects, direct objects, predicate complements, and objects of prepositions.

Consider the noun clause *whoever brought this pie* in the following four examples:

A. *WHOEVER BROUGHT THIS PIE is my new best friend.* **SUBJECT**
B. *My new best friend is WHOEVER BROUGHT THIS PIE.* **PREDICATE COMPLEMENT**
C. *I want to hug WHOEVER BROUGHT THIS PIE.* **DIRECT OBJECT**
D. *I want to give a hug to WHOEVER BROUGHT THIS PIE.* **OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION**

Notice that in those last two examples—in which the noun clause serves as a direct object and as an object of a preposition—we use *whoever*, not *whomever*. That is, we use the nominative case, not the objective case.

Why is that? Because within the clause where *whoever* lives, it's the subject. So it doesn't matter that the noun clause serves as an object.

By the same token, in the sentence *WHOMEVER YOU CHOOSE is fine with me*, we say *whomever* because the relative pronoun is the direct object of the noun clause. It makes no difference that the noun clause is the subject of the sentence.

Remember, in a noun clause the relative pronoun doesn't have an antecedent. It's not modifying anything.

One quick thing about the word THAT: sometimes THAT doesn't serve a grammatical purpose.

> *Martha said that she was terrified of lemurs.*
> *Martha said she was terrified of lemurs.*

The noun clause *that she was terrified of lemurs* serves as the direct object. But *that* plays no role in the clause. It simply alerts the reader, "Hey, you're about to see a noun clause." The sentence is fine without it. Keeping it is really a matter of preference and rhythm.

Spend some time on the quiz for this lesson. It covers a few variations I couldn't get to in the lesson.

Quiz 3.2 A: Noun Clauses

Note: Some of these sentences have other subordinate clauses in addition to the noun clause. You've been warned!

I. **Whichever table you pick is fine with me.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

II. **I am fine with whichever table you pick.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

III. **I quickly learned that George had his own agenda.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

IV. **I thought I was being generous when I offered my half-eaten hot dog.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

V. **You should send a thank-you note to whoever interviewed you.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

VI. **You should send whoever interviewed you a thank-you note.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

VII. **Whomever they appoint will only serve until the special election in August.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

VIII. **Whoever is appointed will only serve until the special election in August.**

A. What is the noun clause?

B. What function does the noun clause serve in the sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, predicate complement, objective complement, or object of the preposition)?

Quiz 3.2 B: Noun Clauses

You have now studied all the varieties of dependent clauses: adjective clauses, adverb clauses, and noun clauses. This quiz will put them all together. For each of the following sentences, identify the highlighted clause as an adjective clause, an adverb clause, a noun clause, or a main clause.

I. ***As she walks up to the counter*, Martha pats her hair net, which still covers her tightly-wound bun of gray hair.**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

II. **As she walks up to the counter, *Martha pats her hair net*, which still covers her tightly-wound bun of gray hair.**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

III. **As she walks up to the counter, Martha pats her hair net, *which still covers her tightly-wound bun of gray hair*.**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

IV. **The traveler sees *what he sees*; the tourist sees what he has come to see. (G.K. Chesterton)**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

V. **God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, *because it is not there*. There is no such thing. (C.S. Lewis)**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

VI. **There's many a bestseller *that could have been prevented by a good teacher*. (Flannery O'Connor)**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

VII. **The last time *I encountered such a smell* was when I toured a coleslaw factory.**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

VIII. **The last time I encountered such a smell was *when I toured a coleslaw factory*.**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

IX. ***She looked at nice young men* as if she could smell their stupidity. (Flannery O'Connor)**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

X. **She looked at nice young men *as if she could smell their stupidity.* (Flannery O'Connor)**

A. Adjective Clause
B. Adverb Clause
C. Noun Clause
D. Main Clause

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 3: Gerunds and Infinitives

Infinitives and Gerunds are both verbals—verb forms that function as something besides verbs. Every verb you can think of has both a gerund form and an infinitive form.

Gerunds function as nouns.
Infinitives CAN function as nouns. (We already covered adverbial and adjectival infinitives in Module 2.)

The **gerund** form = the Second Principal Part (the -ing form)
The **infinitive** form = the word *to* + the verb

1. The gerund form of *swim* is _____.

2. The infinitive form of *swim* is _____.

3. The gerund form of *snorkel* is _____.

4. The infinitive form of *shuttle* is _____.

[1. *Swimming*, 2. *To swim*, 3. *Snorkeling*, 4. *To shuttle*]

You'll notice that the gerund form looks just like a present participle, which also looks just like the form of the verb used in the progressive tenses (*was swimming, is swimming, will be swimming*).

You'll also notice that the infinitive functioning as a noun looks exactly like the infinitive functioning as an adjective or adverb.

So how do you tell them all apart? You recognize its **function**.

If it answers WHICH ONE or WHAT KIND about a noun, it's an **adjectival** modifier.

If it answers HOW, WHEN, WHERE, WHY or TO WHAT EXTENT about a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, it is an **adverbial** modifier.

Otherwise, start looking to see if it serves one of the functions that a noun serves: Subject, Direct Object, Predicate Complement, or Object of a Preposition.

By the way, we are doing gerunds and infinitives together in one lesson because in many cases they are basically interchangeable. *I love swimming* isn't very different from *I love to swim*.

You can also add objects and adverbials to form gerund phrases and infinitive phrases. For example:

> *I love* ***swimming in the Okefenokee Swamp when the moon is full and the water moccasins are asleep.*** (Everything in bold type is one gerund phrase; everything after *love* is serving as the Direct Object.)
>
> *I love* ***to swim in the Okefenokee swamp when the moon is full and the water moccasins are asleep.*** (Everything in bold type is one long infinitive phrase serving as the Direct Object.)

1. *Swimming in the Okefenokee swamp is my passion.*

The gerund *swimming* is functioning as the _____.

2. *Swimming in the Okefenokee swamp is my passion.*

The gerund *swimming* is functioning as the _____.

3. *My passion is to swim in the Okefenokee swamp*.

The infinitive *to swim* is functioning as the _____.

4*. To swim in the Okefenokee swamp is my passion.*

The infinitive *to swim* is functioning as the _____.

5. *I'm a big fan of swimming in the Okefenokee swamp*.

The gerund swimming is functioning as the _____.

6. *I have no choice except to expel you*.

The infinitive phrase *to expel you* is functioning as the _____.

[1. Subject, 2. Predicate Complement, 3. Predicate Complement, 4. Subject, 5. Object of the Preposition 6. Object of the Preposition]

There are times when gerunds and infinitives aren't interchangeable, but as a native English speaker you're never going to make that mistake. You'll never accidentally say, *I'm a big fan of to swim.*

A few idiosyncrasies of gerunds and infinitives

1. Like participles, a gerund cannot take a subject. It takes the possessive form of a noun instead. So you don't say, *I appreciate you stopping by.* You say, *I appreciate* ***your*** *stopping by.* (Sometimes, rather than saying that participles can't have a subject, people say that the subject of a gerund takes the possessive case.)

2. An infinitive phrase CAN have a subject in some situations—specifically, when the infinitive phrase is being used as an object. *He doesn't want me to come along.* That rolls off the tongue naturally enough, but do you notice how strange it is? A subject is usually in the nominative case (*I* instead of *me*). But you wouldn't ever say, *He doesn't want I to come along.* Again, this isn't something you're going to get wrong as a native English speaker.

Quiz 3.3: Gerunds and Infinitives

I. **The act of *defending any of the cardinal virtues* has today all the exhilaration of a vice. (G.K. Chesterton)**

1. Is the italicized phrase a gerund phrase or a participial phrase?
2. What function does the italicized phrase serve? (If it is a gerund phrase, is it a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or predicate nominative? If it is a participle, what does it modify?)

II. **Tradition means *giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors*. (G.K. Chesterton)**

1. Is the italicized phrase a gerund phrase or a participial phrase?
2. What function does the italicized phrase serve? (If it is a gerund phrase, is it a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or predicate nominative? If it is a participle, what does it modify?)

III. **A detective story generally describes six living men *discussing how it is that a man is dead*. A modern philosophic story generally describes six dead men *discussing how any man can possibly be alive*. (G.K. Chesterton)**

1. Are the italicized phrases gerund phrases or participial phrases?
2. What function do the italicized phrases serve? (If it is a gerund phrase, is it a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or predicate nominative? If it is a participle, what does it modify?)

IV. ***Accepting oneself* does not preclude an attempt to become better. (Flannery O'Connor)**

1. Are the italicized phrases gerund phrases or participial phrases?
2. What function do the italicized phrases serve? (If it is a gerund phrase, is it a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or predicate nominative? If it is a participle, what does it modify?)

V. **According to C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* began with the mental image of a faun *carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood.***

1. Are the italicized phrases gerund phrases or participial phrases?
2. What function do the italicized phrases serve? (If it is a gerund phrase, is it a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or predicate nominative? If it is a participle, what does it modify?)

The next three questions refer to this sentence:

Head and shoulders above most people from his early teens, spending almost six decades at almost seven feet has left him with a stoop that becomes more pronounced as he grows older.

VI. **What is the grammatical subject of this sentence?**

VII. **That opening phrase*, Head and shoulders above most people from his early teens*, is a dangling modifier. Explain why this phrase dangles. (Hint: the answer is related to the gerund that immediately follows the comma.)**

VIII. **Rework the sentence without the gerund (and without the dangling modifier).**

The next four questions all refer back to this sentence:

Riding the now-drenched scooter back home would soak my backside, forcing a change into dry pants.

IX. **What are the grammatical subject and verb of this sentence?**

X. **What is that phrase *forcing a change into dry pants*? A gerund or a present participle? What function does it serve? (In other words, if it's a gerund, is it a subject, object, or complement, and if it's a participle, what noun does it modify?)**

XI. **What three actions are described in this sentence?**

XII. **Rewrite the sentence using clauses in place of gerunds and participles so that the subjects and verbs align more closely with the actors and actions.**

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 4: Appositives

It's a little misleading to put appositives in the noun equivalents module, but they didn't seem to fit well anywhere else. They could have been in with the modifiers, but that lesson just kept getting longer. So here it is, in Module 3 about noun equivalents, which seemed a little sad and lonely without it.

An appositive is a noun (or noun equivalent) that renames another noun (or noun equivalent). It sits right next to the noun or noun equivalent that it renames (usually right after, sometimes right before):

> *Zorba the Greek.*
> *My dog, a poodle.*
> *My dog Roxy.*

Greek is an appositive renaming *Zorba*. *Poodle* is an appositive renaming *dog*. *Roxy* is an appositive renaming *dog*.

An appositive is right up against the noun it names. If you get much space between a noun and its appositive, things start not working.

You especially can't have a verb between a noun and an appositive. If you do that, you've got a predicate complement:

> *Zorba is a Greek.*
> *My dog is a poodle.*

There's nothing wrong with a predicate complement, but it's not the same thing as an appositive.

An **appositive phrase = the appositive + any modifiers attached to it**
See if you can identify the appositives (or appositive phrases) in these examples:

1. *The oak-leaf hydrangea, a species native to Tennessee, makes me sneeze.*
2. *"STAR WARS," the best movie in the history of the world, made me what I am today: a nerd.*

[1. Appositive: *species*. Appositive phrase: *a species native to Tennessee.* 2. First appositive phrase: *the best movie in the history of the world*. Second appositive phrase: *a nerd*.]

That second example is actually more interesting than I realized when I first wrote it. I initially thought that *a nerd* renamed *I*, making it an exception to the rule about the appositive staying next to its noun. But it isn't renaming *I*; it's renaming the whole phrase: *what I am today.* So it obeys the rule after all.

That was an example of a one-word appositive renaming a noun clause. It often happens the other way, with a noun clause renaming a simple noun:

This play is by William Shakespeare, WHOEVER THAT IS.

Our city council members seem to suffer from insanity, DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS.

(In that last example, the appositive phrase is also a gerund phrase.)

Erroneous Appositives
Finally, here is an example of what happens when the appositive DOESN'T rename the noun it's next to:

A glutton for punishment, that trail run was too much even for me.

A glutton for punishment sits in an appositive spot. But what noun could it be renaming? It's right next to the noun *trail run*. But the trail run isn't a glutton for punishment. The writer was trying to rename *me*. You could correct this by saying:

That trail run was too much even for me, a glutton for punishment.

Or,

Even I, a glutton for punishment, found that trail run to be too much.

The best solution, however, probably doesn't use an appositive at all:

I can be a glutton for punishment, but that trail run was too much.

Quiz 3.4: Appositives

I. **My cousin Leonard stopped by with his iguana.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. cousin
B. Leonard
C. iguana
D. none of the above

II. **I am expecting a visit from John Barber, my nemesis.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. I
B. visit
C. John Barber
D. nemesis
E. none of the above

III. **I am expecting a visit from my nemesis John Barber.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. I
B. visit
C. John Barber
D. nemesis
E. none of the above

IV. **The opossum, the only marsupial native to North America, is also the only non-primate with opposable thumbs.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. opossum
B. marsupial
C. North America
D. non-primate
E. thumbs
F. none of the above

V. **Somebody released raccoons in Finland, where they thrived like a native species.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. Somebody
B. raccoons
C. Finland
D. species
E. none of the above

VI. **A hockey player since childhood, I love being on the ice.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. hockey player
B. childhood
C. I
D. ice
E. none of the above

VII. **Vanderbilt's football team went undefeated in 1922, the same year the Soviet Union was formed.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. Vanderbilt
B. team
C. 1922
D. year
E. Soviet Union
F. none of the above

VIII. **Obviously food snobs, they turned up their noses at my pickle stew.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. snobs
B. they
C. noses
D. pickle
E. stew
F. none of the above

IX. **Johnny Cash, "the Man in Black," had hits in many musical genres.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. Johnny Cash
B. Man
C. hits
D. genres
E. none of the above

X. **Johnny Cash, who was known as "the Man in Black," had hits in many musical genres.**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. Johnny Cash
B. Man
C. hits
D. genres
E. none of the above

XI. **In which of the following sentences is "Taylor" used as an appositive?**
Choose the word that serves as the appositive (not the appositive phrase).

A. *My friend Taylor is a firefighter.*
B. *Taylor, a firefighter, is a friend of mine.*
C. *The firefighter, named Taylor, is a friend of mine.*
D. *The firefighter, a friend of mine, is named Taylor.*
E. none of the above

XII. **The following sentence contains more than one appositive. Put a check beside each word that serves as an appositive:**
Later that day I reflected on my actions—the yelling, the crying, the banging of my sippie cup—and I realized it was time to grow up.

A. day
B. I
C. actions
D. yelling
E. crying
F. banging
G. sippie cup
H. time

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 5: Essential and Non-Essential Elements

One of the uses of the comma is to set off so-called "non-essential" words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence. But what makes an element "essential" or "non-essential"?

"Non-essential" doesn't mean "unimportant" or "not adding meaning." If an element doesn't add meaning, you shouldn't add it to your sentence in the first place.

Does the element change the essential meaning of the sentence?
The difference between "essential" and "non-essential" elements is often explained in terms of whether or not the element changes the essential meaning of the sentence. Look at these two sentences (which tell a mostly true story):

1. *The playwright Samuel Beckett gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.*
2. *Samuel Beckett, the playwright, gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.*

In the first sentence, *Samuel Beckett* is an appositive renaming *playwright*. In the second, *playwright* is an appositive renaming *Samuel Beckett*. Why does the second have commas but not the first?

In the first sentence, *Samuel Beckett* is considered essential, because to leave it out would change the meaning of the sentence: *The playwright gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.* That's a very different sentence from *The playwright Samuel Beckett gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school*. Playwrights are a dime a dozen. But that image of the black-turtleneck-clad Samuel Beckett, icon of the Theater of the Absurd, trundling Andre the Giant to school is pretty irresistible.

In the second sentence—*Samuel Beckett, the playwright, gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school*—the commas around *the playwright* show the reader that this is bonus information. In this case, the appositive may help a reader who can't immediately put her

finger on who Samuel Beckett is, but it doesn't change the essential meaning of the sentence.

Narrowing and Expanding
However, sometimes it feels like a judgment call to say whether an element changes the "essential meaning" of a sentence. And it can be hard to trust your judgment.

You might find it more helpful to ask yourself: **Does this element add meaning by making things more precise—by narrowing from general to more specific? Or does this element add meaning by expanding—by providing bonus information?**

Essential elements add precision. They NARROW meaning.
Non-essential elements provide bonus information. They EXPAND meaning.

The noun *Samuel Beckett* is about as specific as a noun can get. It refers to one man. So any appositive or modifier I might attach to *Samuel Beckett* will be non-essential. It will provide additional information about Samuel Beckett, but it won't make the noun more precise. Being a non-essential element, it will need to be set off by commas, as in these examples:

> *Samuel Beckett,* ***driving a flatbed truck****, gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.*
>
> *Samuel Beckett,* ***who had a house in Andre the Giant's hometown****, gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.*
>
> *Samuel Beckett,* ***not knowing he was in the presence of greatness****, gave young Andre the Giant a ride to school.*

None of those appositives narrows Samuel Beckett to anything more specific, so they are all set off by commas. Proper nouns are always specific, so when you add appositives or modifiers, those will almost always be non-essential elements.

> *I like living in a state where there is no income tax.*
> *I like living in Tennessee, where there is no income tax.*

Let's look at one last example:

1. *Cilantro that tastes like soap grosses me out.*
2. *Cilantro, which tastes like soap, grosses me out.*

Which of these two sentences is correctly punctuated? That depends on how you feel about cilantro. Some people actually have a genetic predisposition that makes them think all cilantro tastes like soap. Sentence 2 communicates their position. Since all cilantro tastes like soap, the clause *WHICH tastes like soap* doesn't narrow things down.

For most people however, cilantro doesn't taste like soap. However, if they were ever to run into some cilantro that tastes like soap, it would gross them out. Sentence 1

communicates this position. The essential elements *THAT tastes like soap* narrows the category down from *cilantro* to *cilantro that tastes like soap*.

One more helpful clue: Remember our relative pronouns, which introduce adjective clauses? Use *that* to introduce essential clauses and *which* to introduce non-essential clauses.

Of course, when describing a person you use *who* or *whom*. If you need help remembering when to use *who* and when to use *whom*, look back at Lesson 10 of Module 2.

Quiz 3.5: Essential and Non-Essential Elements

I. **An essential element adds meaning to a sentence by:**

A. narrowing or making things more precise
B. expanding or providing bonus information

II. **A non-essential element adds meaning to a sentence by:**

A. narrowing or making things more precise
B. expanding or providing bonus information

III. **Which kind of element should be set off with commas?**

A. essential
B. non-essential

IV. **An essential adjective clause can start with which of these relative pronouns?**

A. that
B. which

V. **A non-essential adjective clause can start with which of these relative pronouns?**

A. that
B. which

VI. **Elements that modify or rename proper nouns are almost always non-essential. Explain why.**

VII. **In the following sentence, the clauses *who married William Shakespeare* and *who starred in The Princess Diaries* are essential, even though they modify proper nouns. Explain why.**

I was talking about Anne Hathaway who married William Shakespeare, not Anne Hathaway who starred in *The Princess Diaries.*

Lecture Notes
Module 3, Lesson 6: Review

As we wrap up this module on noun equivalents, I want to give two warnings.

1. Noun Equivalents always introduce abstraction.

Your reader always wants to know WHO DID WHAT.
Your reader always wants something to look at.

When you give your reader something to look at, she's able to gather information about your story the same way she gathers information in the real world: through her senses. Data comes in through her eyes and ears, allowing her to reach conclusions, pass judgements, have feelings, and make connections.

Writing (and reading) allows us to skip over the sensory information and go straight to logic/conclusions/emotions. But just because you *can* skip over sensory information doesn't mean that you *should*.

When you write in concrete, sensory terms instead of abstract terms, your writing feels a little more alive.

When you use a noun equivalent in a noun spot, you are introducing abstraction into your sentence. Noun equivalents turn verbs into abstract nouns. That's just how they work. They are, by definition, abstract.

Using abstract language is often easier for the writer than using concrete language. But it is often harder for the reader. If you have a good reason to use abstract language, go ahead. But it costs your reader extra work. Make sure the extra work for the reader is worth it (to the reader—not to you!).

2. Your reader wants to feel confident she can get from subject to verb to object.

One way to make sure your reader can do this is to get to the subject early in the sentence, and to the verb soon after that. Sometimes you have a good reason to make your reader work a little bit. If you do, go ahead. But keep in mind that a long noun equivalent in the subject position delays the arrival of the main verb, and that makes life hard for your reader.

Look at this sentence:

> *Watching the kind of soccer game in which two evenly matched teams battle manfully for 90 minutes and end up in a zero-zero tie makes me happy.*

Everything from *watching* to *tie* is the subject, meaning the reader has to hold 24 words in her brain before she even gets to the verb!

But look how much more readable the sentence is when that 24-word gerund phrase becomes the object rather than the subject:

> *I love watching the kind of soccer game in which two evenly matched teams battle manfully for 90 minutes and end up in a zero-zero tie.*

In that sentence, the reader finds out WHO DID WHAT in the first two words. She's ready to settle in for the rest of the sentence.

Quiz 3.6: Review

I. **Which of the following relative pronouns usually introduce adjective clauses?**
Choose all that apply.

A. who
B. whom
C. which
D. that
E. whoever
F. whomever
G. whichever

II. **Which of the following relative pronouns always introduce noun clauses?**
Choose all that apply.

A. who
B. whom
C. which
D. that
E. whoever
F. whomever
G. whichever

III. **Which of the relative pronouns is often omitted in adjective and noun clauses?**

IV. **To receive this award would be one of the great honors of my life.**
Rewrite this sentence with a gerund in place of the infinitive in the subject slot.

V. **A creature of habit, the routine that I had made for myself was very rigid.**
The sentence above has an appositive-related problem. Explain the problem and rework the sentence.

VI. **Which of the following statements apply to an *essential* clause?**
Choose all that apply.

A. It adds meaning by narrowing or making things more precise.
B. It adds meaning by expanding or providing bonus information.
C. It is set off by commas.
D. It might start with the relative pronoun *that.*
E. It might start with the relative pronoun *which.*
F. It might start with the relative pronouns *who* or *whom*.

VII. **Which of the following statements apply to a *non-essential* clause?**
Choose all that apply.

A. It adds meaning by narrowing or making things more precise.
B. It adds meaning by expanding or providing bonus information.
C. It is set off by commas.
D. It might start with the relative pronoun *that.*
E. It might start with the relative pronoun *which.*
F. It might start with the relative pronouns *who* or *whom.*

VIII. **In the Module 3 review lecture I suggested that lengthy noun equivalents in the subject slot potentially cause more problems than lengthy noun equivalents in object slots. Why is that?**

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 1: Introduction

Perhaps the most important function of grammar is to help your reader see how **things** and **actions** fit together. How does this thing connect to this other thing? How does your reader get from this idea to the next idea? Your grammatical structures set up connections and transitions.

A lot of that happens on the main line:

> *Linda kicked the ball*. (*Kick* pretty well explains the nature of the relationship between *Linda* and the *ball*.)
>
> *Linda is a surgeon*. (*Is* provides the connection between *Linda* and *surgeon.* They reflect one another; *surgeon* renames *Linda*.)

In this module, we're going to talk about other ways you communicate to your reader, "Here's how things connect."

- **Conjunctions** (both coordinating and subordinating)
- **Compounds**
- **Parallelism**
- **Agreement**
- **Antecedents**
- **Modification**

As we've already said, your reader wants to feel confident that he can get from A to B to C. Your connections and transitions carry him along so that he doesn't have to think about how he's getting from one idea to the next. He can pay attention to the action.

Good transitions are the antidote for wordiness. And wordiness doesn't have that much to do with the number of words or the complexity of a given sentence. **A sentence feels wordy when the reader isn't sure how the different parts fit together.**

A reader can handle amazing complexity IF he has clear markers ushering him from one part of a sentence to the next.

For example, if somebody gives you directions to get from Point A to Point B, those directions might require 15 turns. And you can handle 15 turns, as long as the turns are all correctly marked. If someone gives you directions with only 3 turns, but at one of those turns the street sign is missing, you're going to have a lot harder of a time.

The connections in this module are the street signs. In fact, if you've written them well, hopefully your reader won't have to pay attention to them at all. If you think about your connections and transitions, your reader won't have to.

You want your reader to SEE what you mean, not FIGURE OUT what you mean.
Grammar is never just grammar.

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 2: Subject-Verb Agreement

Disagreement. It causes so much stress and uncertainty. It makes your blood pressure go up just being in the room with two people who are disagreeing with one another. It can be hard to think straight in such a situation. You want to say, "Can't we all just get along?"

You've probably heard of subject-verb agreement and pronoun-antecedent agreement.

When verbs don't agree with their subjects or when pronouns don't agree with their antecedents, the reader gets distracted and stressed. She might not be able to think straight about what you're trying to communicate.

Subject-Verb Agreement = making sure that if your subject is singular, your verb is singular

> *The otter lazes about*. (*Otter* is singular, *lazes* is singular.)
> *The otters laze about.* (*Otters* is plural, *laze* is plural.)

Sometimes I hear someone say, "My license are expired." If you were raised speaking English, you don't generally get this wrong.

There are a couple of tricky spots where it is possible to get tripped up:

> *My favorite fruit is apples.*
> *Apples are my favorite fruit.*

The number of the verb (singular or plural) matches the number of the subject. The number of the predicate nominative doesn't matter. *Fruit is. Apples are.*

1. The title of a work of art is always treated as a singular noun: *Starry Night* is my favorite painting by Van Gogh. *War and Peace* is a great novel.

2. Collective nouns tend to be singular in American English: *The choir is singing in the quad. The baseball team is staying in our hotel.*
3. In British English, collective nouns tend to be plural: *The cricket team are staying in our hotel.*

Native English speakers do sometimes have a problem when a lot of other nouns come between the grammatical subject and the verb. For instance:

> *My neighbor, along with two hundred other librarians through the United States, is attending the American Library Association Conference in Kansas City.*

The grammatical subject is the singular noun *neighbor*. So the verb has to be singular: *is attending*. It doesn't matter that *librarians*, *cities*, and *United States* (which is actually singular but looks plural) are interposed between the subject and the verb. In fact, everything from *along* through *United States* is a prepositional phrase modifying *neighbor*.

Do you remember, way back in the introductory lecture for this whole course, I talked about the difference between thinking of grammar as **proper usage**, and thinking of grammar as **a way to love your reader**?

Proper usage tells me that the sentence about my neighbor is correct, the subject and verb agree, and I've done my duty.

Loving my reader makes me realize that the sentence is a little confusing. It's correct, but it feels a bit odd. Is there another way to communicate?

> *My neighbor is one of two hundred librarians from cities throughout the United States attending the American Library Association conference in Kansas City.*

The verb moved closer to the noun, and now your reader isn't thinking about your grammar.

Quiz 4.2: Subject-Verb Agreement

I. ***The Bad News Bears*** **is/are not an especially good movie.**
Select the correct verb.

A. is
B. are

II. **My favorite meal is/are Ramen noodles.**
Select the correct verb.

A. is
B. are

III. **Ramen noodles is/are my favorite meal.**
Select the correct verb.

A. is
B. are

IV. **The committee recommend/recommends that you stop eating so many Ramen noodles.**
Select the correct verb.

A. recommend
B. recommends

V. **The members of the committee recommend/recommends that you stop eating so many Ramen noodles.**
Select the correct verb.

A. recommend
B. recommends

VI. **The boys' choir, made up of juvenile delinquents from small towns all over the country, arrive/arrives in an hour.**
Select the correct verb (according to the American usage).

A. arrive
B. arrives

VII. **In the above example about the boys' choir, even the correct verb form sounds odd and draws attention to itself. Rewrite for clarity.**
(Remember, you always have the option of breaking the sentence in two.)

VIII. **Bonus (tricky) question:**
One of those things that happen only on TV happened to me today.
The subject of this sentence is the singular *One*. So why is the plural verb *happen* correct in this sentence? (And, in case you were wondering, *happen* IS correct here).

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 3: Pronouns and Antecedents

You might not think of a pronoun as a connector word, the way a conjunction or even a preposition is a connector word. But a pronoun is very much a connector. A pronoun is a word that **reaches back** to an earlier phrase or clause and says, "Remember that noun we were talking about a second ago? Well, now we're talking about it again."

This is the pronoun-antecedent relationship.

Antecedent = the noun that a pronoun renames

Think back to relative pronouns (who, whom, whose, which, that, where, when, etc.), which we talked about back in Module 2. They sit at the beginning of adjective clauses and refer back to nouns in the main clause. In that way, the relative pronoun CONNECTS the subordinate clause to the main clause.

Look at this sentence:

*When I confronted Mr. Purifoy about **his** messiness, **he** challenged me to a fistfight.*

His and *he* are both pronouns reaching back to *Mr. Purifoy.*

A pronoun and its antecedent don't have to be in the same sentence. Very often, the antecedent is in the sentence before the pronoun. But if the pronoun gets too far from its antecedent, your reader will have to work too hard figuring out which noun the pronoun is supposed to rename.

If your pronoun and antecedent are more than a sentence apart, be absolutely sure that your reader will be able to see the connection without any trouble. Err on the side of repeating your antecedent rather than assuming your reader can figure it out.

It's your job as the writer to present things in such a way that your reader can SEE your meaning.

Pronoun-Antecedent Trouble Spots
Here's an example of pronoun-antecedent trouble in one sentence:

> *After Governor Haslam watched the tiger perform, he was taken to Main Street and fed fifteen pounds of raw meat in the town square.*

He is pretty close to its intended antecedent, *tiger*. But *he* could just as easily be referring to *Governor Haslam. Governor Haslam* is the subject of the sentence, so he's closer to the center of the reader's attention. Also, the reader might expect *tiger* to take the pronoun *it*.

The result is that we all end up envisioning Governor Haslam eating fifteen pounds of raw meat in public. To fix this sentence, you could change *he* to *it*, or else repeat the word *tiger*.

> *After Governor Haslam watched the tiger perform, it was taken to Main Street and fed fifteen pounds of raw meat in the town square.*

Or,

> *After Governor Haslam watched the tiger perform, the tiger was taken to Main Street and fed fifteen pounds of raw meat in the town square.*

Here's another example:

> *Blame, bitterness, and recriminations can be emotionally destructive to you and your children. You must get rid of them.*

Wait a second, get rid of whom? Your children? The pronoun *them* makes your reader naturally go looking for the nearest plural antecedent, which happens to be *your children.*

Here's another great one:

> *The batter hit an RBI single off the shortstop's leg, which rolled into left field.*

No doubt you see the problem here. The relative pronoun *which* introduces the adjective clause. The adjective clause sits right behind the noun it modifies, which is also the antecedent for its relative pronoun. You can't help but picture the leg rolling into left field. It seems a shame to fix it, but here goes:

> *The batter hit an RBI single that bounced off the shortstop's leg and rolled into left field*.

Pronouns used well help **focus** your reader's attention. Used poorly, they **distract** your reader. Look at this confusing paragraph about a man's beard:

> *At the dinner table at night,* ***it*** *is a deep red like an Irishman's beard. In the sun,* ***he*** *looks like a Viking from Scandinavia.* ***It*** *smells like a tropical fruit smoothie from the beard balm he uses.*

In the first and third sentences, *it* refers to the beard. In the second sentence, *he* refers to the man. In the third sentence we're back to the beard. This is just too much for your reader to try and figure out. The writer was probably trying to add variety, but **variety for its own sake is not helpful.**

Remember this: **A pronoun needs to refer to a noun (or noun equivalent) and not a whole sentence or whole idea.**

Here's an example of a pronoun referring to a whole idea:

> *But my dad reclaimed a piece of himself from his disease that night and etched it into the minds of ten young men forever.*

What is the antecedent for *it*? His disease? A piece of himself? The antecedent is unclear to the reader for the same reason that it is perfectly clear to the writer. The event is etched so clearly into the writer's mind that he knows exactly what he means when he says his dad *etched it into the minds of ten young men forever.* He has forgotten that we don't know what *it* is.

NOTE: The rule that a pronoun needs to have a single noun (or noun equivalent) for its antecedent, rather than a whole idea or sentence is almost impossible to keep. I break this rule all the time. However, you should try to keep this rule; only let yourself break it if you can't find a good way to keep it.

Lesson Summary

- Every pronoun needs an antecedent.
- That antecedent needs to be a noun (or noun equivalent).
- That noun needs to be nearby.
- Be sure there is not another possible antecedent close to the pronoun.
- When in doubt, repeat the antecedent rather than using a pronoun and asking your reader to figure it out.

Quiz 4.3: Pronouns and Antecedents

I. **Between my fingers each petal feels like soft suede, stronger than THEY appear.**
Explain why there is a problem between the capitalized pronoun and its antecedent. Then offer a rewrite that corrects the problem.

II. **As my mother's health deteriorated, IT caused problems in their marriage relationship.**
Explain why there is a problem between the capitalized pronoun and its antecedent. Then offer a rewrite that corrects the problem.

III. **Sniffing a handful of leaves and throwing IT into the air was even more fun than kicking through THEM.**
Explain why there is a problem between the capitalized pronouns and their antecedent. Then offer a rewrite that corrects the problem.

IV. **Lelo's shop near the edge of town provided his main income. Concrete and mud blocks supported frames and shelves of wide home-crafted lumber of non-standardized dimensions. IT was the size of our kitchen.**
Explain why there is a problem between the capitalized pronoun and its antecedent. Then offer a rewrite that corrects the problem.

V. **Dave looked up at his father's angry expression. *His* brow was knitted. *His* eyes flashed. *His* mouth was pinched.**
Explain why there is a problem between the italicized pronouns and their antecedent. Then offer a rewrite that corrects the problem.

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 4: Connecting Clauses

We've already talked about combining clauses into compound and complex sentences through coordination and subordination. In this lesson we will revisit those ideas.

Remember:

1. A compound sentence is: _____.

2. A complex sentence is: _____.

3. The seven coordinating conjunctions are: _____.

4. A compound-complex sentence is: _____.

5. Subordination is: _____

6. Coordination is:_____

[Answers: 1. Two or more independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction and a comma into a single sentence. 2. A sentence comprised of one independent clause and at least one subordinate (dependent) clause. 3. For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So 4. A sentence containing two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. 5. Expressing an idea or action as a dependent (subordinate) clause and attaching it to an independent (main) clause. Subordination allows you to set up different relationships between ideas and actions. 6. Creating balance between two ideas in a single sentence. Coordinating conjunctions (and semicolons) allow you to say: "These two ideas are the same KIND of idea."]

Did you get all that? Coordination and subordination spell out the relationship between two clauses: coordination communicates a relationship of balance and equality, whereas subordination communicates an unequal relationship. But don't forget: **another way to connect two clauses is to put them next to one another as two separate sentences.** Whereas coordination and subordination spell out the relationships between ideas, placing

clauses in adjacent sentences *implies* a relationship. It leaves a little to your reader's imagination.

There was a pop song in the 70s or 80s that said, "My Maserati does 185. I lost my license. Now I don't drive." Those ideas are not connected by either coordination or subordination. They are connected by proximity. The proximity *suggests* that these three ideas are connected, but it is up to the reader to make the connections. That's part of the fun.

I often tell writers not to make the reader do work that is the writer's to do. But the converse can also be true: sometimes it is good NOT to do too much for the reader.

Semicolons
A semicolon joins INDEPENDENT clauses into a compound sentence.

You write a complete sentence; you write another complete sentence.

A semicolon says to your reader "These ideas are so closely related that I didn't want them in separate sentences. But I'm going to let you figure out their relationship."

The information you communicate in a clause demands a little more of your reader's attention than information you communicate in other ways (prepositional phrases, participles, adjectives and adverbs, etc.), because a clause tells a little story. A clause tells WHO DID WHAT.

Lastly, I want you to consider **the hierarchy of clauses.**

The Hierarchy of Clauses

1. **Main Clause.** The main clause generally demands more attention than any subordinate clauses attached to it.
2. **Adverb Clause.** An adverb clause is just an independent clause with a subordinating conjunction in front of it, so it is only a little lower than the independent clause in the hierarchy.
3. **Adjective and Noun Clauses**. The action in an adjective or noun clause feels like it's tucked away compared to the action of the main clause or an adverb clause.

Quiz 4.4: Connecting Clauses

I. **What are the seven coordinating conjunctions? (Hint: their initials spell FANBOYS.)**

II. **Which of the coordinating conjunctions comments the least on the relationship between two ideas or events?**

A. for
B. and
C. nor
D. but
E. or
F. yet
G. so

III. **Which kind of connection is best for creating balance?**

A. coordination
B. subordination
C. proximity (a semicolon or two adjacent sentences)

IV. **Which kind of connection allows for the most subtlety and nuance by commenting more specifically on the relative importance of one idea as compared to another?**

A. coordination
B. subordination
C. proximity (a semicolon or two adjacent sentences)

V. **Which kind of connection comments the least on the relationship between two ideas?**

A. coordination
B. subordination
C. proximity (a semicolon or two adjacent sentences)

VI. **And there are no keys for those, at least we don't have any.**
This sentence has an error in the way it connects clauses or ideas. Identify the error, then rewrite the sentence to correct the error.

VII. **Next, she grabbed a large pink bottle; this one familiar to him.**
This sentence has an error in the way it connects clauses or ideas. Identify the error, then rewrite the sentence to correct the error.

VIII. **The neurotransmitters in my brain were crackling, and firing off like a poorly planned fireworks display.**
This sentence has an error in the way it connects clauses or ideas. Identify the error, then rewrite the sentence to correct the error.

IX. **The root sprouts and the waiting is over, life has returned.**
This sentence has an error in the way it connects clauses or ideas. Identify the error, then rewrite the sentence to correct the error.

X. **Press gently and the fragile web bends, press harder and it dissolves.**
This sentence has an error in the way it connects clauses or ideas. Identify the error, then rewrite the sentence to correct the error.

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 5: Connecting Clauses – Case Studies

Some of the ideas we covered in the last lesson about joining clauses and the hierarchy of clauses may have seemed a little abstract. I want to walk through some examples from student stories to help bring these ideas down to earth.

Example 1
My grandfather's farm was tucked into a hollow in the Tennessee mountains, and it had an abundance of daffodils.

What are the two clauses?
1. My grandfather's farm was tucked into a hollow in the Tennessee mountains.
2. It had an abundance of daffodils**.**

How are the joined?
They are joined by the coordination conjunction *and* + a comma into a compound sentence.

Remember, a coordination conjunction suggests that two clauses deserve equal attention and the same kind of attention. I think that's why this sentence feels a little off. The two ideas don't feel coordinate, though the grammar suggests that they are.

Here is one way to revise the sentence:

> *My grandfather's farm was tucked into a hollow in the Tennessee mountains; it had an abundance of daffodils.*

A semicolon joins the two clauses closely, but it doesn't comment on exactly how the ideas are related. Another option is to use subordination:

> *My grandfather's farm was tucked into a hollow in the Tennessee mountains, where daffodils abounded.*

Or,

> *Daffodils abounded on my grandfather's farm, tucked into a hollow in the Tennessee mountains.*

Example 2
After class, when he starts to head upstairs for his monthly turn as greeter, he needs someone to carry his cup of coffee for him so he can hold his plate of doughnuts and clementines with one hand and hold onto the stair railing with the other.

That's a lot of actions. What are the subject and verb of this packed sentence? *He needs.* So how are all those other actions and ideas communicated?

- *When he heads upstairs* is an adverb clause.
- *For his turn as a greeter* is a prepositional phrase.
- *Someone to carry his coffee for him* is an infinitive phrase serving as the direct object of *needs*.
- *So he can hold his plate of doughnuts and clementines with one hand and hold onto the stair railing with the other* is a long adverbial phrase with a compound verb (*hold his plate* and *hold the stair railing*).

Whew! There are probably dozens of ways to improve this sentence. The best ones, I suspect, involve breaking it down into more than one sentence:

> *After class, he heads upstairs for his monthly turn as a greeter. But he has to ask someone to carry his cup of coffee. He'll need one hand for his plate of doughnuts and clementines and another hand for the stair railing.*

Example 3
He doesn't like the microphone but uses it so he can be heard clearly by Irena, who is 96 years old and hardly ever misses a Sunday.

This writer has used
- a compound verb to communicate all that action: *doesn't like but uses*.
- an adverbial clause with a passive verb: *so he can be clearly heard*.
- an adjective clause with another compound verb: *is 96 and hardly misses.*

This is not a bad sentence. But here are a few changes that improve it:

> *He doesn't like the microphone, but he uses it so Irena can clearly hear him. Irena is ninety-six years old; she rarely misses a Sunday.*

This version gets rid of the passive construction, *so he can be heard*, and also gives a little more attention to Irena. She's ninety-six and always makes it to church, so she gets two main clauses all her own.

Promoting ideas to independent clauses or demoting them to dependent clauses can make significant changes in the way a passage reads. Still, sentence construction is an art, not a science.

Quiz 4.5: Connecting Clauses – Case Studies

Questions I through VI refer to the following sentence:

When her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway, the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream and watched her sister crying on her bed.

This complex sentence depicts the following actions:

1. The father walked away.
2. The father left a blank space in the doorway.
3. The little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream.
4. The little girl watched her sister.
5. The sister cried on her bed.

ACTION 1 ACTION 2
When her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway,
ACTION 3 ACTION 4
the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream and watched
ACTION 5
her sister crying on her bed.

I. **In the sentence above, Action 1 (the father walked away) is expressed by which of the following grammatical structures?**

A. independent clause
B. adverb clause
C. adjective clause
D. noun clause
E. participle
F. infinitive

ACTION 1 ACTION 2

When her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway,

ACTION 3 ACTION 4

the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream and watched

ACTION 5

her sister crying on her bed.

II. **In the sentence above, Action 2 (the father left a blank space in the doorway) is expressed by which of the following grammatical structures?**

A. independent clause
B. adverb clause
C. adjective clause
D. noun clause
E. participle
F. infinitive

III. **In the sentence above, Action 3 (the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream) is expressed by which of the following grammatical structures?**

A. independent clause
B. adverb clause
C. adjective clause
D. noun clause
E. participle
F. infinitive

IV. **In the sentence above, what parallel structure connects Action 3 (the little girl ate her ice cream) and Action 4 (the little girl watched her sister)?**

A. compound sentence
B. compound verb

V. **In the sentence above, Action 5 (the sister cried on her bed) is expressed by which of the following grammatical structures?**

A. independent clause
B. adverb clause
C. adjective clause
D. noun clause
E. participle
F. infinitive

VI. **Change the adverbial clause *When her father walked away* into an independent clause and express the sentence below as a compound sentence:**
When her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway, the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate chip ice cream and watched her sister crying on her bed.

VII. **CHALLENGE QUESTION:**
The following sentence is grammatically correct. But there's something odd about the clause in bold type.

I carried my pretzel onto the bus, ***where the bus driver's aide didn't see it as I walked to the back of the bus and sat beside a window****.*

Two questions about the clause in bold type:

1. What kind of clause is it?
2. What function does the clause serve? (In other words, if it's a modifying clause, what word does it modify, and if it's a noun clause, what slot does it fill in the main clause?)

HINT: That word *where* is misleading. *Where* is often a subordinating conjunction signaling an adverbial clause. But here it's a relative pronoun. Once you realize that, you should be able to work out what kind of clause this is, and what function it serves.

VIII. **CHALLENGE QUESTION: This question refers to the same sentence as above.**

I carried my pretzel onto the bus, ***where the bus driver's aide didn't see it as I walked to the back of the bus and sat beside a window****.*

1. We have already seen that the clause in bold is an adjective clause modifying *bus.* Does this adjective clause seem like an appropriate way to depict the action described in the clause? Why or why not?
2. How would you revise this sentence?

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 6: Parallelism

Human beings love symmetry. We respond to it. We strive for it. We strive for it in architecture, interior design, visual arts. We respond to it in the created world, in the human face, in the human body. Symmetry is a fundamental principle of beauty.

Now, there are lots of beautiful things that are not symmetrical. Most mountains aren't symmetrical. We like plenty of things that aren't even supposed to be symmetrical. What we DON'T like are things that are supposed to be symmetrical, but aren't.

Have you seen Toy Story 3? One of the bad guys is this baby doll called Big Baby. He's terrifying. The only thing unusual about his appearance, however, is that one eyelid droops to being almost closed. Besides that little asymmetry, he's just a regular baby doll.

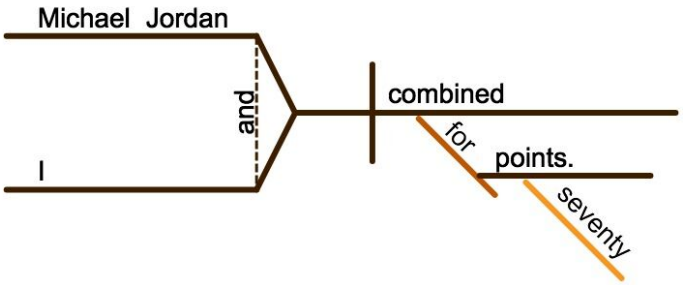
As in other art forms, we use symmetry in writing. In the architecture of sentences, as in the architecture of buildings, we set up symmetries all the time. Actually, I used symmetry in that last sentence: "In the architecture of sentences, as in the architecture of buildings..." And it wasn't even on purpose. We just do it naturally.

Symmetrical structures **lend balance and beauty to your sentences.** They also **help your reader grasp the ideas that you are presenting.**

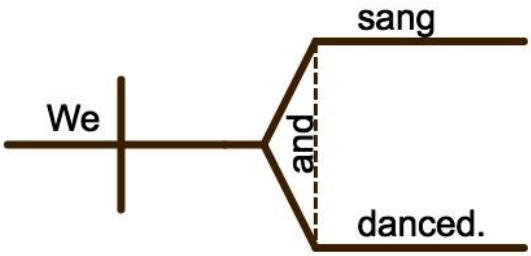
BUT, if you set up a symmetrical structure and then fill that structure with words or phrases that aren't symmetrical, you end up with **Faulty Parallelism.** Faulty Parallelism will be about as disturbing to your reader as Big Baby's eyelid was to me.

Three of the coordinating conjunctions, AND, OR, and BUT, as well as the correlative conjunctions EITHER/OR and NEITHER/NOR can set up parallel structures anywhere in a sentence.

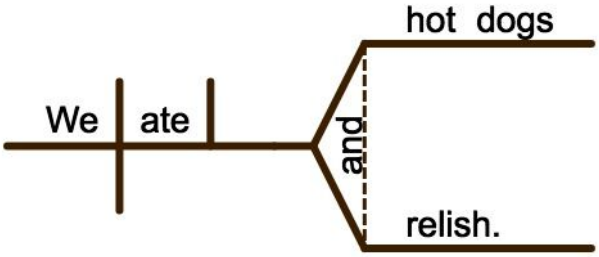
Look at these compounds:



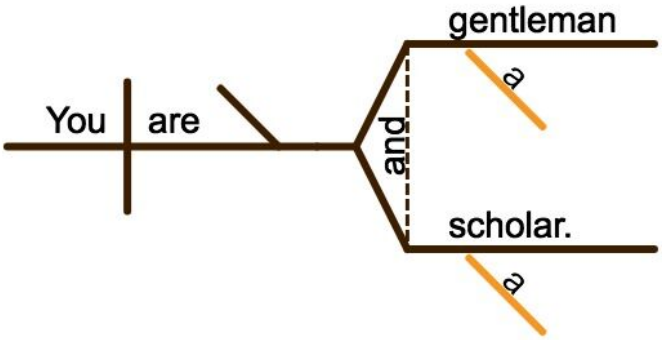
Compound subject: *Michael Jordan and I combined for seventy points.*



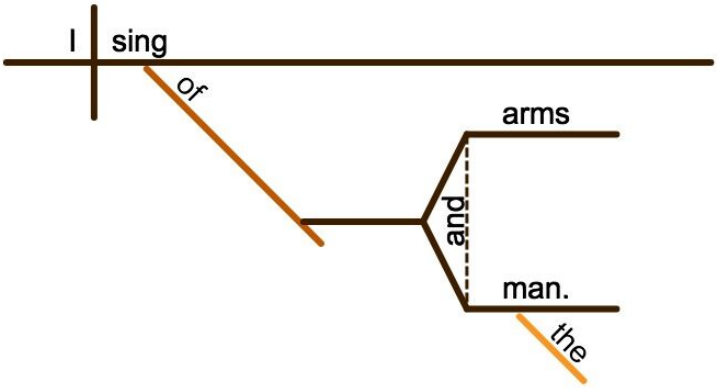
Compound verb: *We sang and danced.*



Compound direct object: *We ate hot dogs and relish.*



Compound predicate complement: *You are a gentleman and a scholar*.



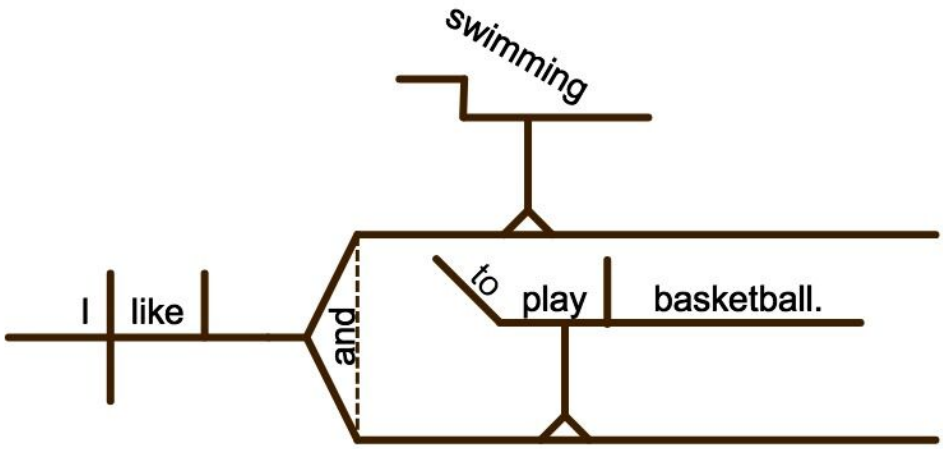
Compound object of the preposition: *I sing of arms and the man.*

As you can see in these sentence diagrams, a compound is typically represented with that branching structure that looks like a rocket ship. In a properly formed compound, the items on either leg of the rocket ship will be the same kind of grammatical structure.

English grammar gives you so many ways to express the same idea, however, that you might end up expressing similar ideas using different structures on either side of a compound.

Here's an example of Faulty Parallelism:

I like swimming and to play basketball.



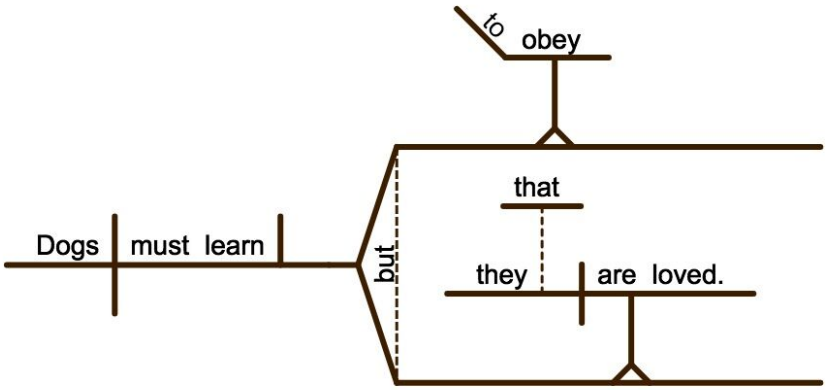
Here we have a compound direct object, but on one leg is the gerund *swimming*, and on the other is the infinitive phrase *to play basketball*. They aren't the same kind of noun equivalents, and therefore our rocket ship is asymmetrical. The sentence promised parallelism, but delivered faulty parallelism.

Here are a few ways to correct faulty parallelism:

1. *I like to swim and to play basketball.* (Two infinitives)
2. *I like to swim and play basketball.* (Compound infinitives)
3. *I like swimming and playing basketball.* (Two gerunds)
4. *I like swimming and basketball.* (Two abstract nouns both naming a sport)

Here is another example of faulty parallelism:

Dogs must learn to obey but that they are loved.



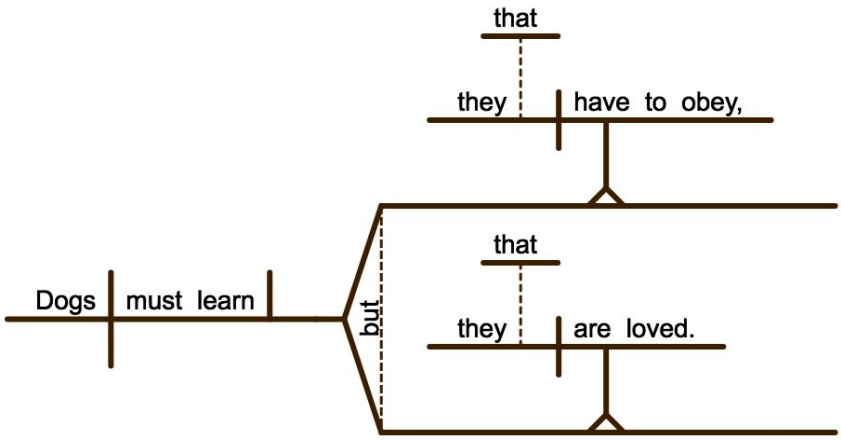
In the compound direct object, one leg of the rocket ship is an infinitive, and the other leg is a noun clause.

We could fix it by saying:

Dogs must learn that they have to obey, but that they are loved.

Or,

Dogs must learn to obey. But they also need to know that they are loved.



Correlative Conjunctions
I mentioned correlative conjunctions earlier. They are,

EITHER...OR
NEITHER...NOR
BOTH...AND
NOT ONLY...BUT ALSO

If you are using a correlative conjunction, make sure the words on the first half (after the first conjunction) **are exactly the same structure** as the words on the second half (after the second conjunction.)

Incorrect: *I am **not only** scared of alligators **but also** grammar instructors.*
Correct: *I am scared **not only** of alligators, **but also** of grammar instructors.*

In the above example, each half of the correlative conjunction is followed by a prepositional phrase.

Faulty Parallelism in Compound Verbs
With compound verbs, sometimes you can lose parallelism by accidentally switching from active to passive voice (or vice-versa). For example:

> *I had never been slapped in the face before and sat there stunned.*

You could fix this parallelism with a participle:

> *Having never been slapped in the face before, I sat there stunned.*

Or make it a compound sentence:

> *I had never been slapped in the face before, so I sat there stunned.*
> *I had never been slapped in the face before; I sat there stunned.*

One quick tip: You do have more flexibility with a compound sentence than with other kinds of compounds. As long as you have an independent clause on either side of the conjunction, you have a parallel construction.

Sometimes the best way to fix faulty parallelism is to get rid of it. Just because faulty parallelism is the problem, that doesn't mean good parallelism is the solution.

Think in terms of "equal signs."
In a sentence like *Laszlo is a fireman,* that linking verb (*is*) is effectively an equal sign in the middle of your sentence: *Laszlo = fireman*.

Just as in math or science, when you have to pay attention to units, make sure that the things on either side of the equal sign are the same kind of thing.

Consider this sentence, for instance:

> *A child undergoing anesthesia is a fearful experience for any parent.*

In this sentence, *child* = *experience*. The writer probably intended for the gerund *undergoing* to be the subject. In that case, he should have used the possessive: *A child's undergoing anesthesia is a fearful experience for any parent*.

I prefer that sentence without the parallelism: *The thought of a child undergoing anesthesia terrifies any parent.*

Or maybe fixing this sentence is a chance to get more creative: A thousand fears race through a mother's head when her child undergoes anesthesia. *Will he feel alone on the operating table? Will he wake up? Will he be the same when he does wake up?*

Grammar is never just grammar. Think of every grammar challenge as an opportunity to make your sentence more expressive.

Comparisons and Parallelism

On a related note: When you set up a comparison, the things on either side of the comparison need to be the same kind of thing:

> *Like Eve's bite of the forbidden fruit, I had eaten grief and lost my innocence. Unlike Eve, I hadn't been given a choice.*

Those "likes" are equal signs. *Eve's bite* = *I.* The writer means to say that she is like Eve, not that she is like Eve's bite.

> *Like Eve when she bit the forbidden fruit, I had eaten grief and lost my innocence.*

Below are a couple of last things to wrap this up. Do spend some time on the quiz for this lesson. It covers several things I wasn't able to get to in the lecture.

1. Don't try to make everything parallel. If something isn't quite parallel but fixing the parallelism makes things worse, don't fix the parallelism. For example, *The oil tycoon addressed Congress powerfully and with great conviction. Powerfully* is an adverb, and *with great conviction* is a prepositional phrase, but it doesn't sound bad. There isn't a good adverb equivalent to *with great conviction*, so I would leave it as it is.
2. These issues of parallelism are one of the reasons you need to know your grammar pretty well. It helps to be able to identify, *Oh, here's a compound direct object, but on one side it has a gerund and on the other there's a noun clause*. You can feel your way through a lot of writing issues when you're editing, but it helps to have the technical knowledge.

Quiz 4.6: Parallelism

Each of the questions in this quiz involves a sentence with a parallelism error. For each of these examples, you will answer two questions:

1. **What is the problem in parallelism in this sentence?** Hint: look for the AND, BUT, or OR and compare the structures on either side of it. Or else look for comparison words, especially LIKE or AS. You might find it helpful to determine what kind of parallel structure APPEARS to be set up in the sentence *(for example: compound verb, compound subject, compound direct object, compound predicate complement, compound object of preposition, etc.)* and go from there.
2. **Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.** Hint: this may mean making things parallel, or it may mean throwing out the parallelism altogether.

Here's a sample question with answers:

Jorge likes to play video games, board games, and jumping on the trampoline.

1. This sentence appears to have a compound direct object for the infinitive *to play*. The phrases *video games* and *board games* work fine as a compound direct object, but the gerund *jumping on the trampoline* doesn't work as a direct object of *play*.
2. Rewrite: *Jorge likes video games, board games, and jumping on the trampoline.* (In this version, *video games, board games*, and *jumping on the trampoline* form a compound direct object of *likes*.)

I. **He came walking up our driveway in cowboy boots and bandy legs.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

II. **I began to panic: my heart thudded and quick sucks of air.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

III. **He picked it up, took a bite, but half the contents spilled out onto the plate.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

IV. **Cynthia was the first to call me 'Grandma' and caused me to think about future generations.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

V. **The policeman told me to get my car out of the road and also that I should get a new wardrobe.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

VI. **My arms are heavy and yet jittery like having low blood sugar.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

VII. **He no longer has the bronzed twenty-year-old hands I met around the swimming pool in 1979.**

1. What is the parallelism problem in this sentence?
2. Rewrite this sentence without the parallelism problem.

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 7: Nominative Absolutes

The Nominative Absolute is one of those grammatical structures that you don't hear a lot about, though you see it and use it all the time.

The Nominative Absolute is a structure within a sentence, made up of a noun and its modifiers (usually including a participle) that has no grammatical connection to anything else.

The word absolute is from the Latin, *absolutus* which means *set free*. *Nominative* is another word for *noun*, so a Nominative Absolute is a noun phrase that is floating free from the sentence it's in.

A Nominative Absolute **usually sits at the beginning** of a sentence, **sometimes at the very end**, and **occasionally somewhere in the middle**.

Here are a few examples:

> ***All things considered****, that wasn't such a bad riot.*
>
> ***All things being equal****, I like tea better than spoiled milk.*
>
> ***My dog having chewed up my retainer again****, I made yet another trip to the orthodontist.*

You'll notice that you could easily move any of those Nominative Absolutes to the end of the sentence:

> *That wasn't such a bad riot,* ***all things considered.***

Let's look at what a Nominative Absolute is made of, its **form**.

- Nominative Absolute = Noun + modifiers... almost always a participle (either present or past)
- For example: *Things* (noun) + *considered* (past participle)

The participial phrase can be as long as you want. For example:

> *My dog having chewed up my retainer in the dark of night while I slept the sleep of the blessed, completely unaware of the nefarious deeds being committed in the next room,* I made another trip to the orthodontist.

Of course, that long participle ("having chewed up...") delays the main verb longer than we normally like, but the grammar allows for such a long and complicated nominative absolute (though consideration for the reader probably doesn't).

Now let's look at the **function** of a Nominative Absolute.

- A Nominative Absolute **does not** have a grammatical connection to the sentence where it lives. It isn't an object or a complement. It's just there. And the participial phrase is just a sidekick to the floating noun.
- The Nominative Absolute has a **logical** connection to its sentence. It provides explanatory information that adds meaning to the main sentence. In that sense, it's almost adverbial, commenting on the whole action of the sentence.

You wouldn't say:

> *My grandmother, having been born in 1918, I picked up some grocery-store sushi.*

It's grammatically fine to say that, but there's no **logical** connection between the Nominative Absolute and the main clause.

A Couple of Final Thoughts

The Nominative Absolute looks a lot like a participial phrase at the beginning of the sentence. *Having chewed up my retainer again, my dog looked ashamed.* The difference is that the participle modifies the subject, *my dog*. In the Nominative Absolute, the noun is moved into the phrase. So now it is self-contained and can move around.

I warn writers against over-using Nominative Absolutes. They're complex structures, so they sound very sophisticated. But they tend to become a sort of verbal habit, and that gets wearying for your reader. By definition, a Nominative Absolute introduces a disconnect into your sentence. You're shooting for connection, so always ask yourself if the Nominative Absolute is really necessary.

Quiz 4.7: Nominative Absolutes

I. **What grammatical role does a nominative absolute serve in the sentence where it lives?**

A. It is a subject.
B. It is a verb.
C. It is an object.
D. It is a complement.
E. It is a modifier.
F. It has no grammatical connection, only a logical connection.

II. **Annie sits slumped on a concrete slab, her back curved like a nautilus shell.**
What is the nominative absolute in this sentence?

III. **Warm, fresh bread tucked under my arm, I waited for my new neighbor to answer my knock.**
What is the nominative absolute in this sentence?

IV. **Bill pushed the wheelbarrow up the driveway, Sadie walking beside him.**
What is the nominative absolute in this sentence?

V. **I booked it off-stage, my friends waiting to help me into a blue dress while the chorus continued to sing and dance under the lights.**
What is the nominative absolute in this sentence?

VI. **He's coming, determined little legs crossing carpet expanse, entering the dog zone.**
What is the nominative absolute in this sentence?

Lecture Notes
Module 4, Lesson 8: Course Wrap Up

Have a look at this very long, very complex sentence:

This is the farmer sowing his corn,
Who kept the rooster that crowed in the morn,
That woke the priest all shaven and shorn,
Who married the man all tattered and torn,
Who kissed the maiden all forlorn,
Who milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog,
That worried the cat,
That killed the rat,
That ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

That sentence has 78 words. It has 12 adjective clauses, 3 prepositional phrases, and 3 participial phrases. And you understood it just fine.

This is a very complex sentence, and yet quite readable. Why? Because it follows two principles we've been discussing all along in *Grammar for Writers*.

- It gets immediately to the subject/verb nexus: *This is the farmer*.
- All of the modifiers sit immediately next to the words they modify.

A reader can handle tremendous complexity as long as you are providing the markers he needs to navigate it. When you love your reader you are saying, "I've got this thing I want to show you. It's a little complicated. So I'm to stick to these rules that you and I share, and that way we can get through this together."

Language allows for nearly infinite complexity. But that complexity rests on a combination of forms that are themselves pretty simple and often pretty rigid. That's why something like *Mad Libs* works. You can plug in almost any noun or verb or adjective and still have a working sentence, as long as you plug it into a spot where a noun or verb or adjective goes.

A squirrel ate an acorn.
A squirrel **stole** an acorn.
A **plumber** stole an acorn.
A plumber stole the **petty cash box**.

Almost every word of that sentence has changed, and the meaning has changed entirely. But the underlying structure hasn't. **It's still Subject-Verb-Object**.

As long as you put the right **kind** of word in each slot, grammar doesn't care about the specific words. So the combinations of words within the grammatical structures are effectively infinite.

And the possible combinations of the grammatical structures are effectively infinite too. But the grammatical structures themselves are not infinite. In fact, you've interacted with pretty much all of them in this course.

You know all the grammar you need to connect effectively with your reader. If you have trouble remembering some forms, go back and watch the lectures again, or review the lecture notes, or have another look at the quizzes.

And here's something else: you know all the grammatical structures you need, **and your reader knows them too.** He might not know he knows them, but his brain knows them when it sees them. You are ready to communicate.

As far as vocabulary goes, you probably already know enough words to write what you want to write. It never hurts to learn more vocabulary, but if you read a lot your vocabulary will grow naturally. Don't learn vocabulary just to impress people; that just puts them off.

Language is complex. Complexity means there are a lot of opportunities to get things wrong. AND YET, complexity also means that you have a lot of different options for reaching out to your reader and making connections.

I hope this course has made you less afraid of those possible pitfalls in grammar and more confident in your ability to connect readers you care about with ideas and stories that you care about.

Now, go write something beautiful.

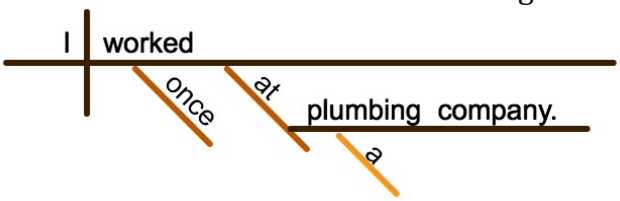
Answer Key

Dr. Jonathan Rogers

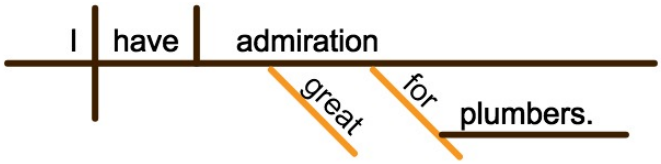
Quiz Answer Key

Quiz 1.2 Answer Key

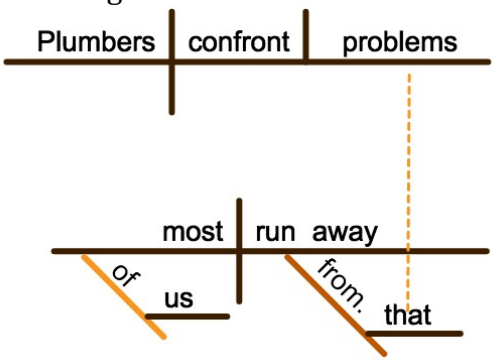
I. This sentence consists of a single clause, the main line of which is **I worked**. Everything else is a modifier. *Once* tells when I worked, and *at a plumbing company* tells where I worked. Here's a diagram.



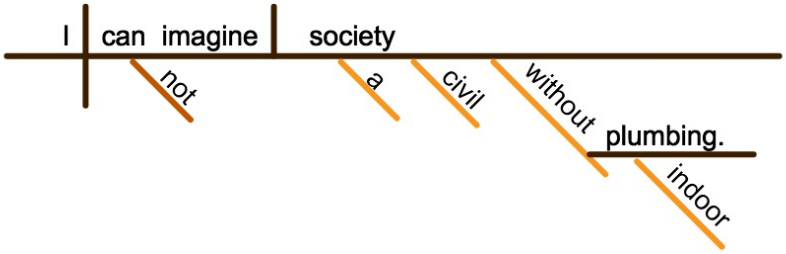
II. The main line here is **I have admiration.** The other words are all adjectival, modifying *admiration.* Here's a diagram:



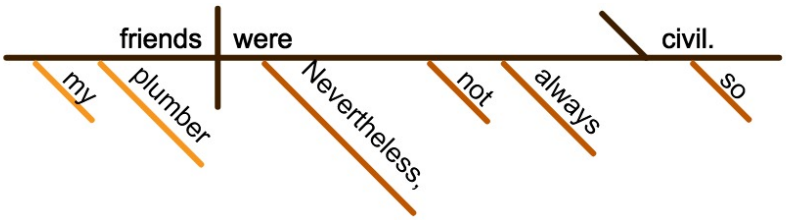
III. This sentence consists of two clauses, but only one is a main (or independent) clause. *That most of us run away from* is a dependent (adjective) clause modifying *problems*. The main clause is **Plumbers confront problems.** Here is a diagram:



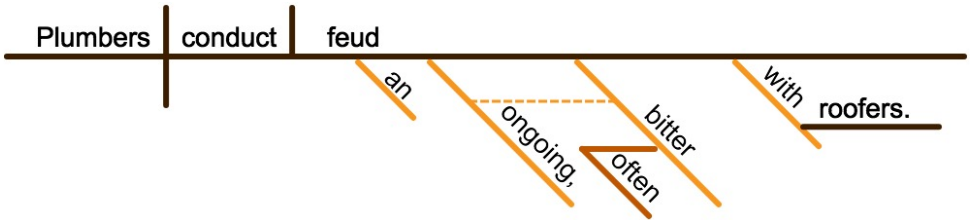
VI. This sentence just has the main clause with one adjective and one adjectival phrase. The main line of the clause is **I cannot imagine society.**



V. The main line here is **friends were (not) civil.** Everything else is a modifier. Here's a diagram:

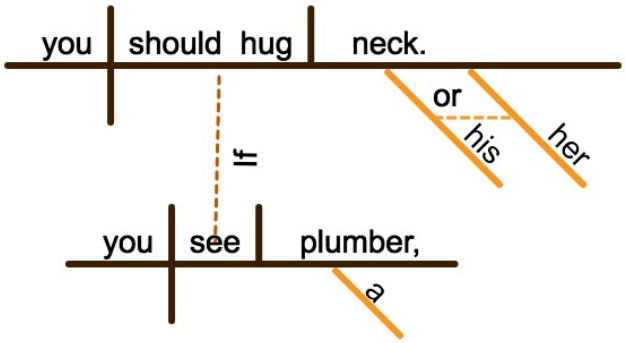


VI. The main line here is **Plumbers conduct feud.**



VII. Again, we have a sentence with two clauses. It starts with a dependent (adverbial) clause that tells when, or under what conditions you should hug a plumber's neck. But the main clause is **you should hug neck.**

Bear in mind that almost everything that is true of a main clause is also true of a dependent clause. As you can see from the diagram below, the two clauses in this sentence are very similar in structure. Still, the distinction between dependent and independent clauses is important and not to be ignored. Here's that diagram:



Quiz 1.3 Answer Key

I. Hopefully this was an easy one for you. If you apply the Verb Finder, **chased** is really the only word that fits.

Well, I suppose it's possible that 'mob' could fit...it seems like the Beatles were always getting mobbed. Do pop singers still get mobbed?

II. If you use your Verb Finder here, **shone** is the only word that fits in the blank:

I [blank]. You [blank]. He/She/It [blank].

III. From the last question, you know that the verb for this sentence is *shone*. Plug that verb into your Subject Finder: Who or what *shone*? *Wisdom* shone.

The words "many years' rough" modify *wisdom*. They tell us *what kind* of wisdom we're talking about. E*ye* is the object of the preposition *from*, and it is modified by the words "one good," which tell us what kind of eye.

IV. Pull out that Verb Finder again: I [blank]. You [blank]. He/she/it [blank].

In this case, more than one word could fit in those blanks. *Frightened* could fit. *Cried* could fit.* So which of those is the verb? Well, the action here is crying. *Frightened* started out life as a verb, but here it is not a verb but a modifier—a past participle describing John Barber's pitiable state of mind.

Cried is the verb. Plug that verb into the subject finder—*Who cried?*—and you easily find your subject. *John Barber* cried.

* If this were Latin, *possum* would also be a candidate for the verb. *Possum* is Latin for "I am able."

V. I'm sure you've already memorized your list of *to be* verbs, so you wouldn't have had any trouble seeing that *was* (a form of *to be*) points to your verb. The

question is whether or not *was* is the whole verb or a helping verb. In this case, it's a helping verb. The whole verb is **was chased**.

VI. You know from the previous question that the verb here is *was chased*. When you apply the Subject Finder and ask *Who was chased?* it's relatively easy to see that the subject is **pirate**.

Remember, identifying the grammatical subject is not the same thing as identifying the actor. The angry mob is the actor. That poor pirate is receiving the action of chasing, not doing the action (though, no doubt, it feels plenty active to him). From a logical perspective, if the action is chasing, he is the recipient of that action, not the agent. But the whole point of the passive voice is to allow something or somebody besides the actor to be the subject. The Subject Finder will always identify the *grammatical subject*, not the actor. In a later lesson I'll have a lot more to say about aligning the subject with the actor.

VII. In one sense, this is an easy one. Any time you see a form of *to be*, you have found the verb (or at least part of the verb). And, as you know, **is** is a form of *to be*. So that's our verb.

However, this is another sentence that demonstrates the difference between the action in a sentence and the verb in a sentence. *Chasing* feels more active than *is*. So, for that matter, does *activity.* But if you use your Verb Finder, neither *chasing* nor *activity* fits in the blank. Only *is* does.

VIII. You may have found this one a tad tricky. But, as always, the Subject Finder comes to the rescue. We know from the previous question that the verb is **is**. So our Subject Finder question is *What is?*

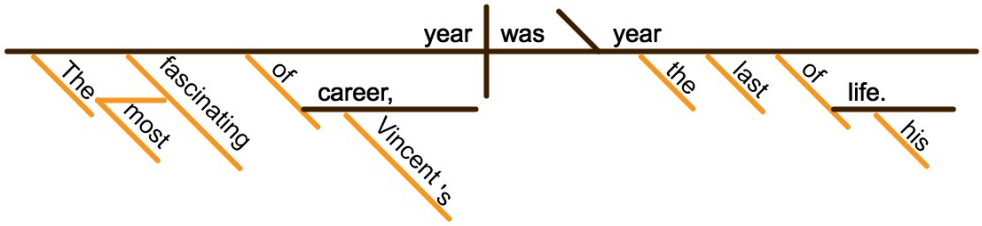
If this were a short-answer question rather than a multiple-choice question, you probably would have answered *chasing cars.* That would have been a good answer. But I didn't give you that choice, because I wanted you to have to choose between *chasing* and *cars.* And since you're having to choose, the correct choice is **chasing**. The dog's favorite activity is chasing, not cars.

IX. The subject/verb nexus of the first clause is **I arrange**.
The subject/verb nexus of the second clause is **you destroy**.

Quiz 1.4 A Answer Key

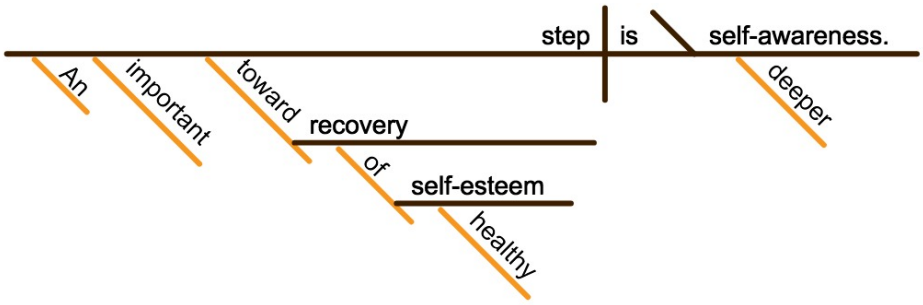
I. The subject is **year** (the first one), the verb is **was**, and the predicate complement is **year** (the second one).

Here's the diagram:

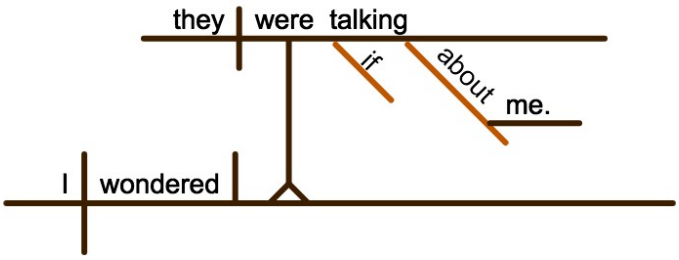


II. The subject of this sentence is **step**. *Toward recovery* modifies *step*, and *of self-esteem* modifies *recovery.*

Self-awareness is a **predicate complement**. It renames *step*. The to-be verb *is* is a clue that we have a predicate complement rather than a direct object.
Here's the diagram:

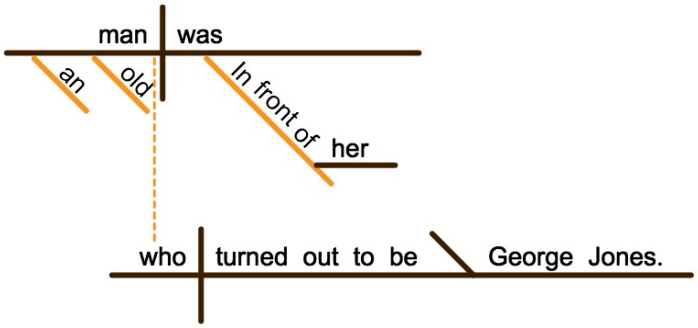


III. This sentence does have a direct object—the noun clause **if they were talking about me**. *I wondered what? If they were talking about me.* We will discuss noun clauses in Module 3. Meanwhile, bear in mind that the Direct Object Finder works not only with simple nouns, but with every kind of noun equivalent.
Here's the diagram:



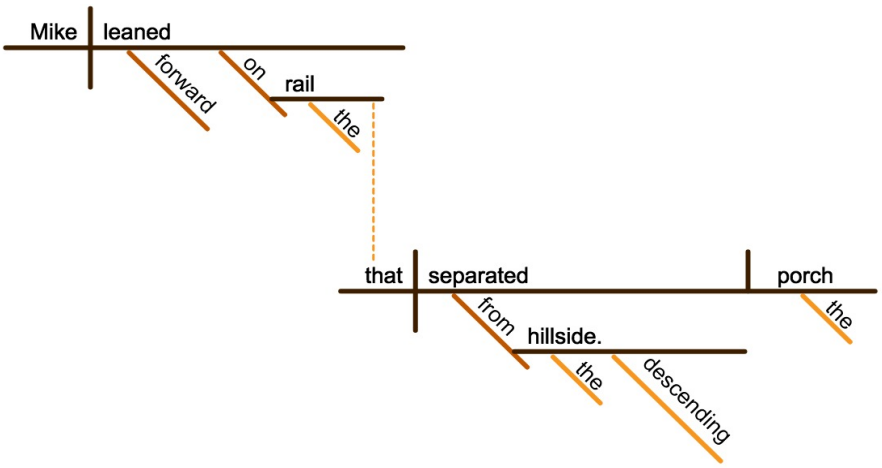
IV. Subject: **old man**
Verb: **was**

Here's a simplified diagram (technically speaking, the verb in the *who* clause is *turned out* and *to be George Jones* is an infinitive phrase serving as the predicate complement, but at this point in our journey this simplified version seemed adequate):

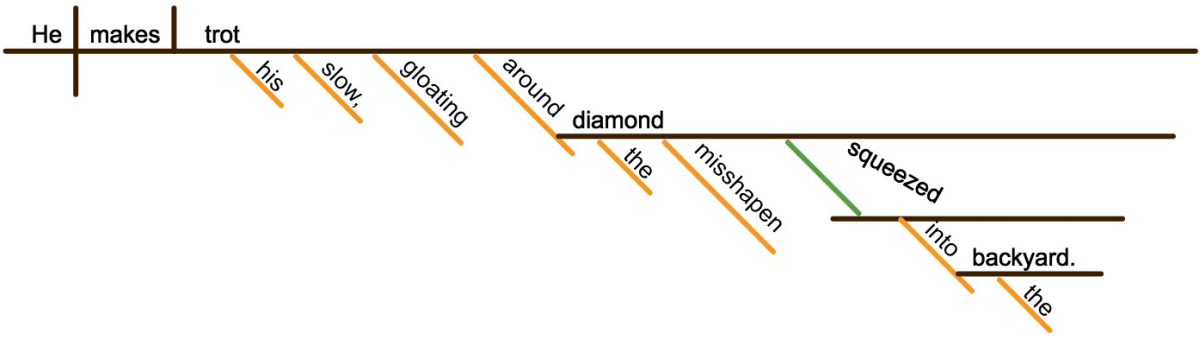


Quiz 1.4 B Answer Key

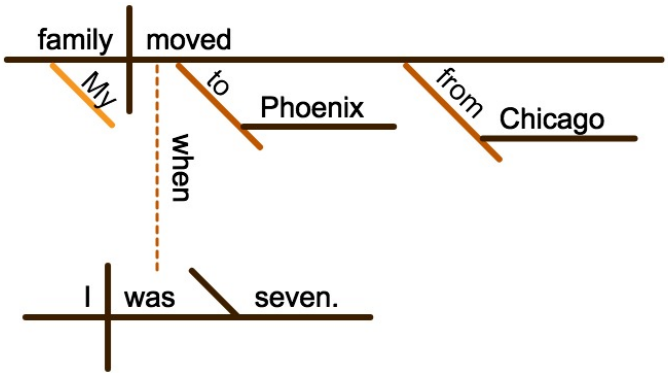
I. The main line here is **Mike leaned**. Everything else is a modifier. The adverb *forward* tells *how* he leaned, as does the phrase *on the rail*. Everything else tells us *which rail*. There is a second clause in this sentence--"that separated the porch..."--but this is an adjective clause telling us *which rail*, not a main clause. Here's the diagram:



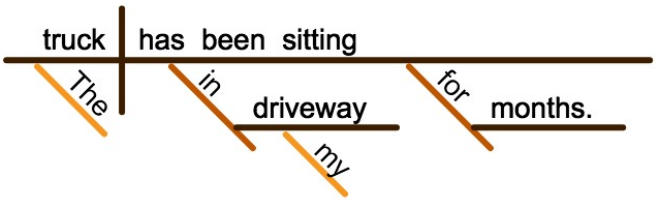
II. The main action here is **He makes (his) trot.** Everything else is a modifier. *Slow* and *gloating* tell us what kind of trot. *Around the diamond* tells us where he trotted. *Squeezed into the backyard* tells us what kind of diamond (or possibly which diamond). Here's the diagram:



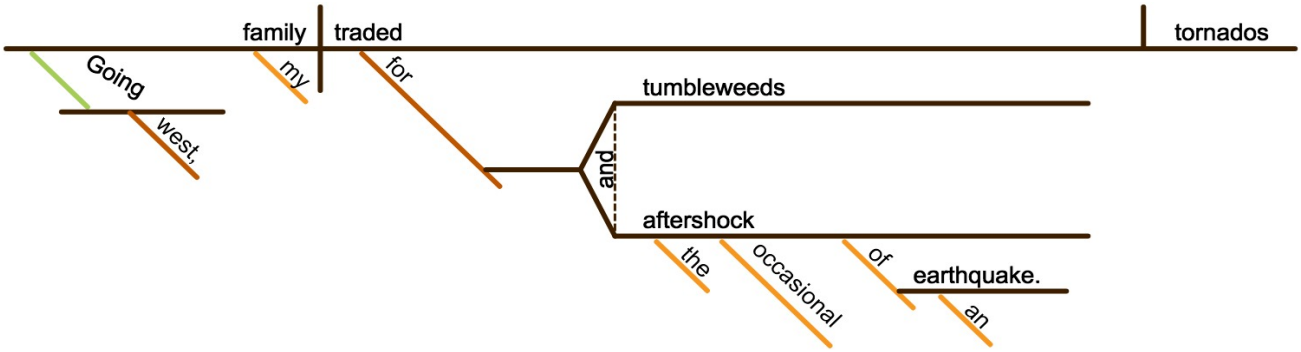
III. The main line here is **family moved**. *To Phoenix* and *from Chicago* both tell us *where* the family moved, and *when I was seven* tells us *when* the family moved. Here's the diagram:



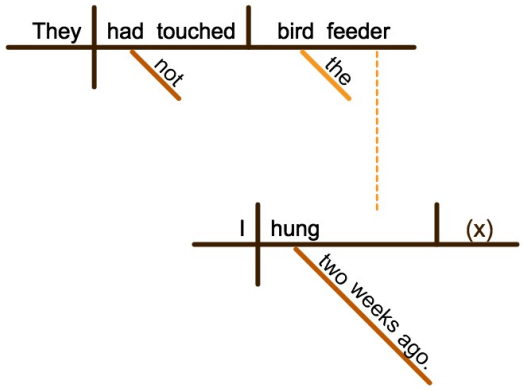
IV. The main line is **truck has been sitting**. The verb here is three words—*has been sitting*. *Has* and *been* are helping verbs. *In my driveway* tells us *where* the truck has been sitting, and *for months* tells us *when* the truck has been sitting. Here's the diagram:



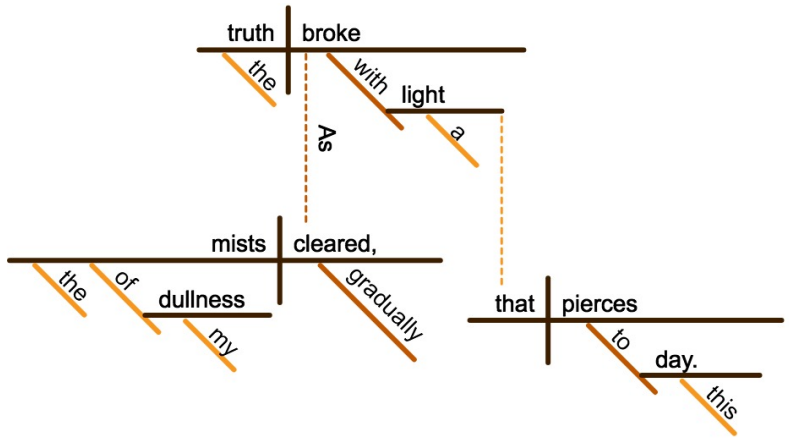
V. The main line is **family traded tornadoes**. *Going west* is a modifier. Technically, this is a participial phrase modifying *family*, but really it feels more adverbial here, telling us under what circumstances the family traded tornados for tumbleweeds and earthquake aftershocks. Everything after *tornados* is, technically speaking, a compound prepositional phrase serving to tell *how* the family traded tornadoes. Here's the diagram:



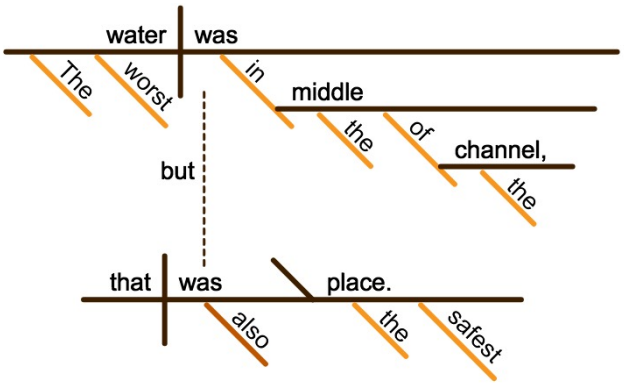
VI. The main line here is **They had not touched the bird feeder**. *I hung two weeks ago* is a clause telling us *which* bird feeder. Here's the diagram:



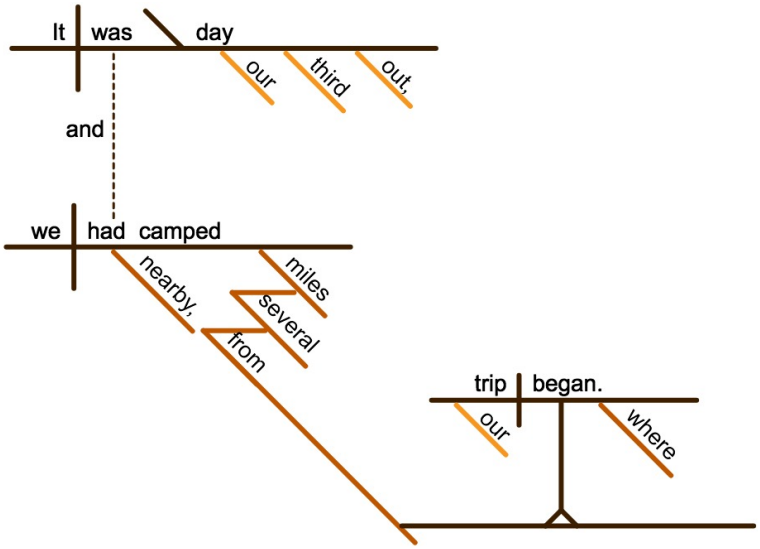
VII. This one is a little tricky. The subject/verb nexus of the main clause is **truth broke**. That opening clause, *As the mists...cleared*, tells us *when* the truth broke, and the phrase *with a light that pierces to this day* tells us *how* the truth broke.



VIII. For the first independent clause, the subject/verb nexus is **water was**. For the second independent clause, the subject/verb nexus is **that was**.
Here is the diagram:



IX. For the first independent clause, the subject/verb nexus is **it was**. For the second independent clause, the subject/verb nexus is **we had camped**.
Here's the diagram:



X. The only complete sentence is **Like the back of my grandmother's hands, the delicate veins are visible.** (This sentence has some issues, as you will learn when we discuss passive voice in Lessons 7 and 8 of this module, and when we discuss parallelism in Module 4, but it is a sentence with both main subject and a main verb, unlike the other three groups of words above.)

XI. Trick question! There's no main verb here. This is a sentence fragment. *Made* is a verb, but it is a verb in a dependent (adjective) clause. And 'to drink' is an infinitive rather than a verb. These things will make sense later if they don't already.

Quiz 1.5 A Answer Key

I. **E.** Nemesis renames John Barber, so it is a predicate complement.

II. **C.** Direct Object Finder: John Barber sold what? A fake elevator pass. Indirect Object Finder: John Barber sold a fake elevator pass to or for whom? Me. I'm still mad about it.

III. **D.** Once you have identified *John Barber* as the DO in this sentence, you still need to account for *sneaky monkey*. The phrase renames the DO *John Barber*, so it is an OC. I could have called him much worse.

IV. **B.** The phrase *with a glove* is a modifier telling *how* John Barber slapped. It's not on the main line. That leaves *John Barber slapped me* on the main line, and it is relatively easy to see how that clause conforms to the S-V-DO pattern.

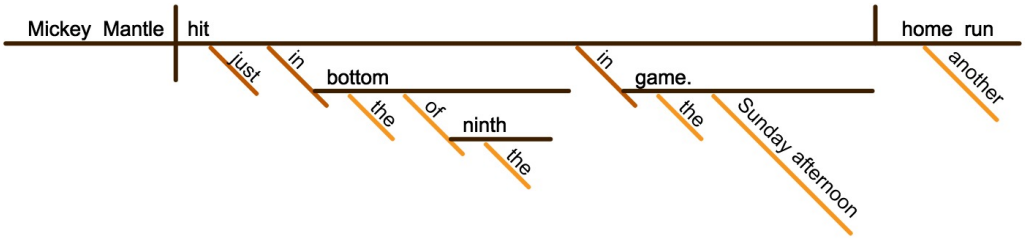
V. **B.** The verb here is *could (not) ignore*. I could not ignore what? *The insult.* I daresay you couldn't have ignored it either.

VI. **A.** The phrase *in the vestibule* is adverbial, telling *where* we fought. That leaves *We fought* on the main line, so it's obviously the S-V pattern.

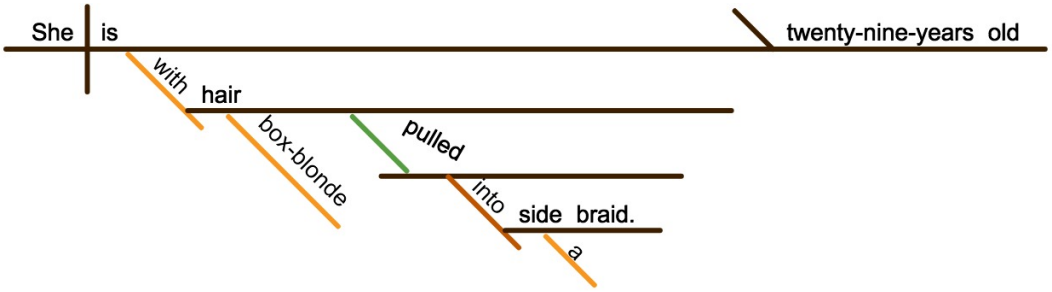
VII. **B.** The story has a happy ending.

Quiz 1.5 B Answer Key

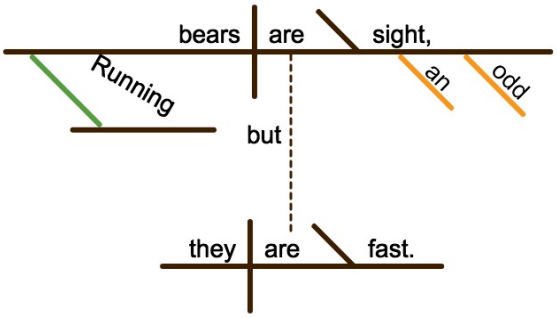
I. **B**. S-V-DO



II. **E**. S-V-PC

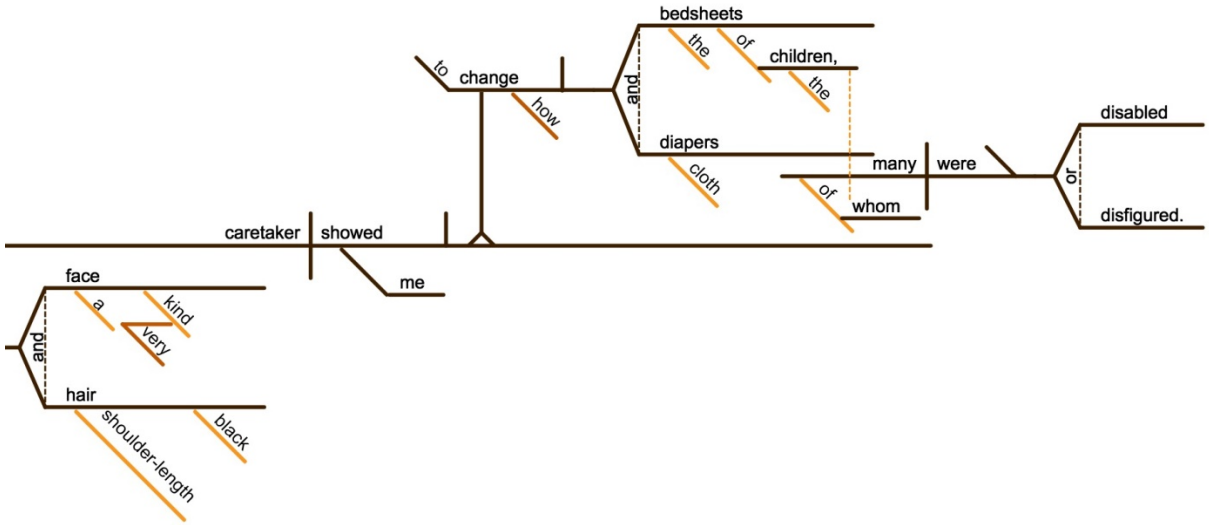


III. **E**. S-V-PC

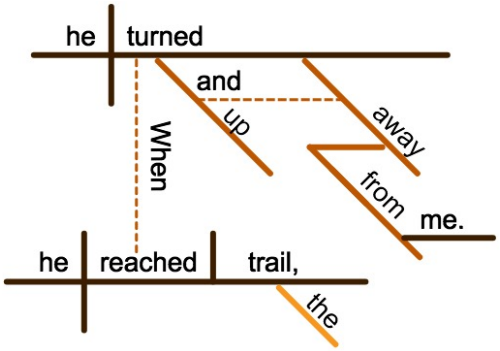


IV. **B**. S-V-DO

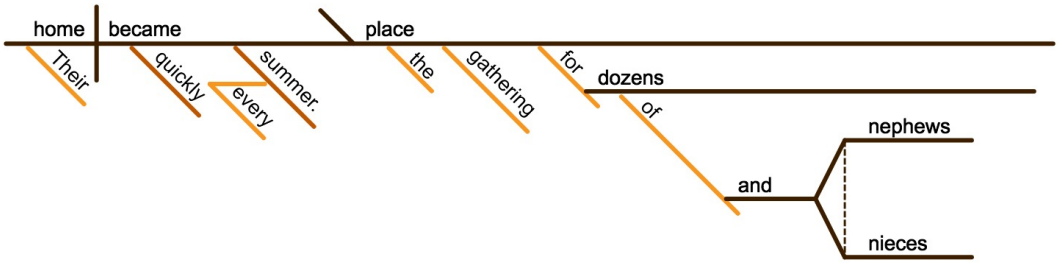
As you can see in the diagram below, *how to change the bedsheets...* is a noun clause serving as the direct object of the verb *showed*. [It looks like the left side of the diagram got cut off. Sorry about that, but for the purposes of this question, the more relevant parts of the diagram are all there.]



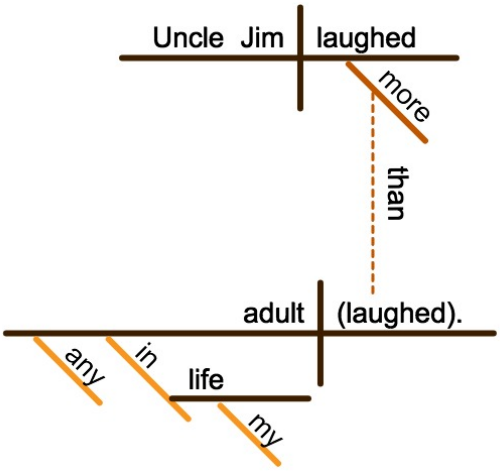
V. **A**. S-V



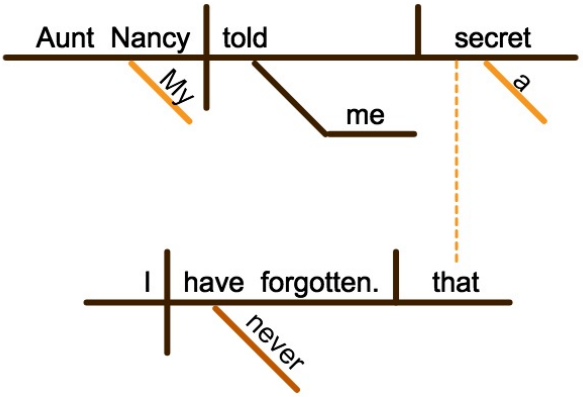
VI. **E**. S-V-PC



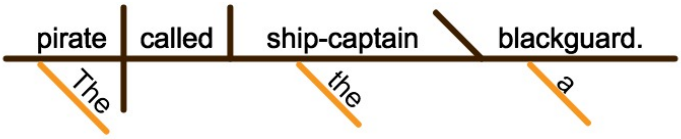
VII. **A**. S-V



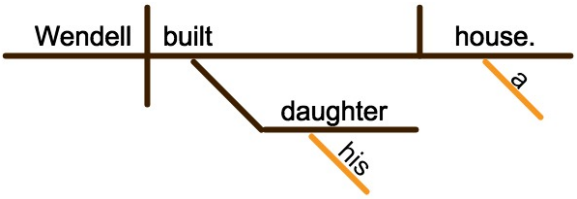
VIII. **C**. S-V-IO-DO



IX. **D**. S-V-DO-OC



X. **C**. S-V-IO-DO



Quiz 1.6 Answer Key

I. There are two actions in that second sentence: Irene calls out, and Jimmy laughs. But the verb *laughs* becomes the noun laughter, tucked away as the direct object in an adjective clause. And Jimmy has disappeared completely from that second sentence. Here is one way to rework the sentence*: Irene would call out "Jimmy, stop it!" and Jimmy would laugh all the more.*

II. Look at the subject and verb of this sentence: **furniture, clothing, and education made** the mother willing (this clause pattern is S-V-DO-OC). The real action here—the mother making choices—gets moved to a participle (**willing**) modified by an infinitive phrase (**to stretch…**) modified by an adverbial clause (**that they sometimes disappeared altogether**). Bringing the grammar in line with the action will probably involve making the mother the subject of the sentence.

- *My mother sometimes stretched our limited means to the breaking point in order to give us fine furniture, good clothes, and private education.*
- *My mother thought it was important for us to have fine furniture, good clothes, and a private education. She was willing to stretch our means to the breaking point to make sure we had those things.*

As always, these are just two of many possible ways to rework these sentences.

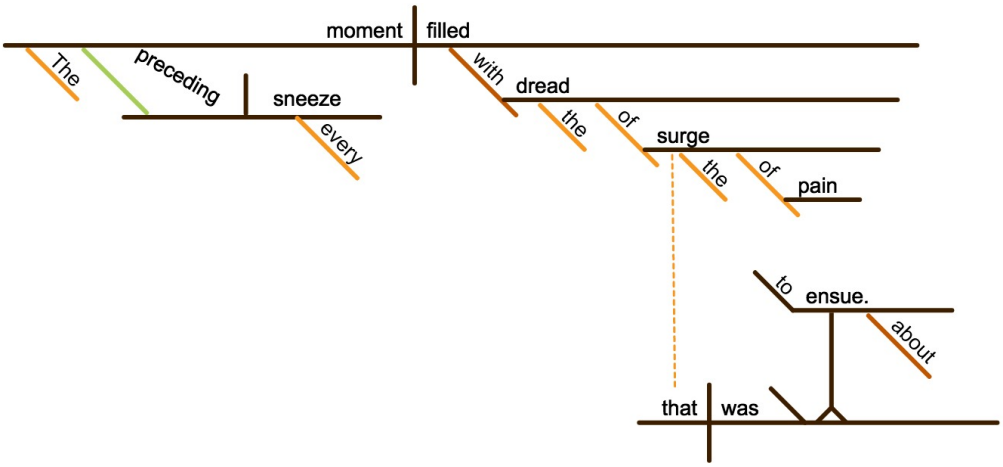
III. That phrase *snapped off and never reattached* is a participial phrase (actually, two participial phrases). *Snapped* and *reattached* look like verbs, but they serve as modifiers. The verb here is the passive *is [presumed] lost*.
So here are the actions:

- A ski pole is snapped off.
- A ski pole is never reattached.
- A ski pole is lost.

(I have expressed all three of these actions as passive constructions, but since we don't know the actors here, I hope you will forgive me.)

Here's one way to bring the verbs and subjects more in line with the action: *The right ski pole snapped off and was never reattached. It is lost to the tundra.*

IV. The subject-verb nexus of the main clause is **moment filled**. The subject-verb nexus of the subordinate clause is **that [surge] was about to ensue**. Here's a diagram:



What are the actions?

- A person sneezes (or, rather, is about to sneeze).
- A person feels dread.
- A person knows that pain is coming.

There are lots of ways to revise this sentence. Here's one: *Every time I felt a sneeze coming on, I was filled with fear. I knew I was about to feel a surge of pain.* I'm not convinced this is the best way to revise this sentence, but as you can see, the grammar more closely aligns with the action than in the original.

V. **Quick note:** When you start a sentence with "there is/was/are/were," you will ALWAYS have a mismatch between actors/actions and subjects/verbs.

Actions/States of Being:

- Events and venues were scarce.
- Mother gladly paid the cost of road trips.

Subjects and Verbs:

- Scarcity was
- Cost was

Possible revision:

Cultural events were scarce in our hometown, so my mother gladly paid the cost of frequent trips to the city.

Or perhaps,

We had few cultural opportunities in our hometown, so my mother gladly made frequent trips to the city.

VI. Actors and actions:

- A seventh-grader begs her mother to take her to a play.
- The mother enthusiastically says “Yes.”
- The seventh-grader isn't surprised.

Subjects and verbs:

- "Yes" was (not) surprising.
- I begged.

Here's one way to revise: *In seventh grade I begged my mother to take me to a play at the Tivoli Theater. I wasn't surprised when she gave me an immediate and enthusiastic "Yes!"*

Quiz 1.7 Answer Key

I. **No**. This is active. The verb *had beaten* is in past-perfect. Like passive voice, the past-perfect tense uses the fourth principal part (beaten). So in that regard it resembles passive voice. But think in terms of function, not form. In this case, the bear is the grammatical subject, and the bear is the actor (he's the one who does the beating). The passive form would be something along the lines of *We were beaten here by the large bear…*

II. **No**. This sentence is not in passive voice. In this case, the to-be verb *was* depicts a state of being. Remember, if this were in passive voice, the grammatical subject would be receiving some action.

III. **Yes**. This sentence starts with a dependent clause, *When all else fails*. That clause is in active voice. But the main clause, *a dog can be counted on*, is passive.

IV. **Yes**. This is a pretty gross passive construction. It would be better to say, *We saw a creature swimming—a beaver?*"

V. **No**. In this case, the to-be verb *was* is used as a helping verb in the past-progressive verb *was studying*. The grammatical subject (He) is the actor (He is doing the study, not getting studied), so this is not passive voice.

VI. Both of these sentences are passive. The difference between them is that in Sentence 1 the actors (wolves) are named, and in Sentence 2 the actors are omitted. Who raised John Barber in a barn in Sentence 2? Wolves? His parents? French mimes? There's no way of knowing.

VII. *Elvis used this handkerchief.*

VIII. *A glass of water was given to Linda by Uncle Thurston.*

or (if you wish to leave Uncle Thurston out of it)

A glass of water was given to Linda.

IX. *Linda was given a glass of water by Uncle Thurston.*
Also acceptable:
Linda was given a glass of water.

X. Revised version: *Two hours later, after we had eaten the sandwiches, the thunder came.* (I'm just guessing, of course, that *we* are the correct actors for this action, since the passive construction conceals the actor(s). You may have guessed differently. That's fine.)

XI. 1. That last sentence is in passive voice.

2. This is an unfortunate choice, because quick-thinking Curtis, the man of the hour, completely disappears just at his moment of triumph. Actually, there are two passive verbs in that last sentence. The second—*I was surrounded by friends*—isn't so egregious as the first—*I was tossed*—which effectively erases our hero.

3. Revised, active version: *He tossed me in the pool, and friends surrounded me within seconds.*

If you prefer to leave the second passive construction, that works fine: *He tossed me in the pool, and I was surrounded by friends within seconds.* In that second version, notice that the narrator, there in the center of her friends, is the grammatical subject of her own clause, and that is entirely appropriate.

Quiz 1.8 A Answer Key

I. **A**. In the active voice, the actor is the subject. In the passive voice, the actor is moved out of subject position. The actor may be tucked away as the object of a preposition (*The flowers were given to Barbie BY KEN*), or the actor may disappear altogether (*The flowers were given to Barbie*).

II. **C** and **D**. In a passive construction the actor is moved out of the subject position, to be replaced by a direct object (*Flowers were given to Barbie by Ken*) or an indirect object (*Barbie was given flowers by Ken*).

III. **A** thru **D**. All of the answers are problems associated with the passive voice.

IV. 1. When concealing/denying agency
2. When the actor is unknown
3. When directing the reader's attention to something besides the actor
4. When expressing passivity (the subject of the sentence was the victim/receiver of an action)

Quiz 1.8 B Answer Key

I. I would give his passive construction a hard **no**. The painter is holding his brush, dabbling it in the paint, brushing it on the canvas... and then just when he's about to finish his masterpiece, *POOF!*, a passive construction renders him invisible.

II. By using the passive voice, this writer gives the subject position to the catalogs rather than giving it to the truck. The truck isn't as important as the catalogs and the bills. I don't know if the writer was doing this on purpose, but this sentence structure creates a nice balance between the catalogs and the bills, with the truck as the fulcrum of the teeter-totter. I think the passive voice is a good choice here.

III. I would say the two passive constructions in the second sentence are entirely appropriate. It doesn't seem relevant to say *who* brought the water from the mountains and distributed it through the canals, even if we knew. As for the first sentence, that passive construction isn't terrible, but I find it a little distracting. You could say "Farmers grow citrus trees, almond trees, etc.," but I think I would just say "Citrus trees, almond trees, cotton, and grapes grow successfully..."
Here's what my revision would look like:

Citrus trees, almond trees, cotton, and grapes grow successfully thanks to irrigation. The water is brought down from the mountains through an aqueduct and distributed by a canal system.

IV. I don't think it makes a lot of sense to introduce the anonymous artist here. I would probably make the whole thing passive, or perhaps just use a good old linking verb or two to describe the scene so that I have less passive voice but I don't have to talk about the artist. Here's an all-passive version:

He is glued to thick skis that sit atop a wooden plank. The wooden plank is a canvas on which the cedar scene is set. Into cedar wood is carved a tiny fir tree stunted at half the bear's height.

And here's a version that uses linking verbs in those last two sentences:

He is glued to thick skis that sit atop a wooden plank. The wooden plank is a canvas for the cedar scene. A tiny fir tree carved from cedar stands stunted at half the bear's height.

V. I would definitely keep the first passive construction. There is no active-voice way to communicate the idea of being transported (though you could, of course come up with something fresher that might be active). I'm not as sure I would keep the second passive construction, though it's hard to know how best to revise it. I assume that *Pedro and I* from the first clause explored their creativity. Did they foster it too, or did their parents foster it? Did the environment foster it? Notice how the passive voice allows a writer to get away with some imprecision. Here's one way to revise:

Pedro and I have little contact these days, but when I think back on our friendship I'm transported back to that red brick house on Spruce Street where we fostered creativity and explored our imaginations.

Quiz 1.9 Answer Key

I. **Abstraction**

II. **Comply**

III. **Reveal**

IV. Here's one possible revision: *Leonard wasn't paying attention, so he collided with a telephone pole.*

If you want to be more specific, you can say something like this:
Leonard looked up from his telephone just before he collided with the telephone pole.

V. *Maria argued that she would be exposed to new risks when the policy expired.*

VI. *I originally wasn't interested in knowing her; I only wanted her to accept me.*

VII. Here's one way to do it: *After Dale fell from a ladder at a warehouse job and injured his shoulder working as a janitor at the county jail, he was none too steady on his feet.*

VIII. *Some of my favorites were books and baseball cards, but in general I was under the impression that the bigger the gift the better, and I had little respect for birthday cards.*

IX. *On those occasions when he removed his shades, he revealed glassy, bloodshot eyes***.**

Or,

*Occasionally he removed his shades. When he did, I could see his eyes were glassy and bloodshot***.**

Quiz 1.10 Answer Key

I. **am, is, are, was, be, being, been**

II. This statement is **false**. Communicating a state of being is a perfectly respectable job for a verb. The *to be* verb is the most common state of being verb. This verb has a bad reputation because it is often an accomplice in writing crimes such as inappropriate passive voice and excessive nominalization. But there is no shame in using a *to be* verb to communicate a state of being, nor is there any shame in using the *to be* verb as a helping verb in the progressive tenses (which you will learn about in a future lesson).

III. I can envision hair that is as expansive as an explosion; it's a vivid image. And I can envision tight, brown ringlets. But it's hard to envision both at the same time. If you want me to envision tight, brown ringlets, don't ask me to imagine them as an explosion. If you want me to envision an explosion, don't ask me to envision it as something tight and controlled.

IV. Cliffs don't hover. Actually, they stay very still and solid. There may be circumstances under which you could describe a cliff as *hovering* in some figurative sense. But here, where a person is jumping off a cliff to go hang-gliding, the cliff is the least hover-y thing in the sentence. The hang-glider might hover. The person attached to the hang-glider might hover. But the cliff is the one thing that just sits there.

V. When a thing melts, it gets softer. But we don't think of a defiant face as being softer than a bewildered face. In fact, we usually think of it as quite a bit harder. I would say something more along the lines of: *His bewildered face hardened into defiance.*

VI. I suspect this is one of those situations in which the writer started out with *The rectangular studio had polished wood floors*... and decided that *held* would be a more interesting verb than *had*. I don't agree that *held* is more interesting than *had.*

When you notice that a verb isn't as interesting as you want it to be, remember, the answer isn't necessarily a matter of plugging in a different verb. Maybe you need to do more reworking than that.

The studio was a rectangle about half the size of an Olympic swimming pool—more than enough room for my ten little dancers to plie and pirouette. The gleam of its polished wood floor was reflected in a full wall of mirror. A barre ran the length of the mirror, then turned the corner to run along a side wall in a great "L."

VII. *Painting*, *brushing*, and *patting* are very different actions from chiseling. The writer here wants to convey the idea that this exhilarated expression is as permanent as if it had been chiseled, but because he has already committed to *painting*, *brushing*, and *patting*, *chiseling* is no longer available to him.

The use of the preposition *onto* instead of *into* makes me think this writer isn't too serious about the verb *chisel* anyway.

Quiz 1.11 Answer Key

I. **Subject**: *pain*
Verb: *would surge*

That comma just before the verb is a clue that there is a problem. Any time you're tempted to put a comma before the verb, you probably need to get the subject and the verb closer together. Here's one possible rewrite:

Every time I tried to get out of bed, liquid pain surged through my back, so intense that it stole my breath.

II. One option: *She had never before experienced the eerie, empty darkness that now enveloped the three-story foyer of her father's big, glassed-in office.*

III. One possibility: *His ponytail comes loose and three feet of graying brown hair drapes his shoulders; this sight is typically only observed by immediate family or anyone lucky enough to catch him sipping coffee on a day off.*

IV. One possible answer: *My great, great uncle Marion was an eccentric artist. He framed his watercolors with planks from the porch and wore his teeth only for important events. A few years after he died The Vase appeared, and we joked that his son Bert had put his ashes in it and placed it on his mantel.*

V. Here's one option: *In the red brick home of the woman next door, a weekly rhythm band for the neighborhood children put the delight to music.*

VI. Here's one option: *Thirty feet from the water a fringe of gnarled pine roots reached out into the empty air, marking the border between bare rubble and stubborn forest.*

This alteration looks like it didn't move the subject at all, but it actually changes the verb from *marks* to *reached*.

VII. One possibility: *Loaded with purse, emptied picnic basket, and tissue-filled gift bag, the mother trudged up the back steps with three sweaty kids, ready to escape the July sun.*

VIII. Here's one possibility: *Sheer exhilaration mixed with utter terror. Launching from the swing, I felt weightless, suspended in midair, until I felt the pull of the earth downward and saw the growing puddle below me. The journey was astonishing.*

Quiz 1.12 Answer Key

I. **A to D**. Anything on the main line can be compounded.

II. for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

III. Run-on sentence
Comma splice

IV. 1. The compound complement is *bell-bottoms* + *sweater*.

2. There are thirteen words between *bell-bottoms* and *sweater.* Simply flip-flopping the two makes a big difference:

3. *Maybe that day it was a pilled tan sweater and green plaid bell-bottoms a year or two past their height of coolness.*

V. 1. The compound verb is *was furnished + smelt.*

2. You might flip-flop the two verb phrases: *The room smelt musty and was furnished with pieces that could easily have been from a 1960s catalog.*

Or you might give up on the compound verb and communicate the musty smell with a participle: *The musty-smelling room was furnished with pieces that could easily have been from a 1960s catalog.*

VI. 1. This is a run-on sentence*. I finished playing* and *the hiss of the respirator once again filled the room like incense* are independent clauses. To join them into a compound sentence, you need a coordinating conjunction (**and**) along with a comma.

2. Technically, this is correct: *I finished playing, and the hiss of the respirator once again filled the room like incense.* However, the actions of the two clauses are so different that I think this sentence makes more sense divided into two simple

sentences: *I finished playing. The hiss of the respirator once again filled the room like incense.*

VII. *My sister had asked for a dozen dolls, and my brother's wish list had a front and back.*

VIII. 1. The compound object of the preposition is *doll* **+** *heart***.**
2. *My doll* and *a repentant heart* vary so widely in nature that it is hard to picture Brian walking in the door holding both. Writers often do this sort of thing for humorous effect, and that is fine. Just be aware that you don't want to do this thing if you're not being funny.

One revision might be: *Brian came home with a repentant heart, holding my doll in his hand.*

Quiz 1.13 Answer Key

I. **This time tomorrow** is the time flag.

II. The time flag is **December 11, 1941**.

III. *I realized after a few minutes that my dad had not driven away but was sitting in the car watching.*

The flag on the timeline is *after a few minutes*. The sentence also uses the past progressive tense: *was sitting*. Sequentially, *had not driven* comes between those two verbs and is completed, so the past perfect tense makes the most sense.

IV. **I**. The time flag is *this time tomorrow*, so you know it will be one of the future forms. *Will be* + *-ing* signals **future progressive**.

V. **B**. Since the time flag is December 11, 1941, you know the verb tense will be one of the past forms. The helping verb *had +* the *-ed* ending signals the **past perfect** tense. The declarations of war were complete as of December 11, 1941.

VI. **B**. The best option here is: *I hadn't ridden more than a mile before the downpour started. I felt bad for my wife; she HAD BEEN hanging laundry outside when I left the house.*

In that last sentence, the flag on the timeline is *when I left the house*. The laundry-hanging was in progress at that point in the past, so the past progressive *was hanging* should become *had been hanging*.

Quiz 2.2 Answer Key

I. **B, C, F**

In each of these examples, simply trying the word *and* between the two adjectives gives you the answer. You wouldn't say *basic and human decency* or *tedious and planning meeting* or *plain and gold band*, so you don't need commas between those pairs. But you could say *ripe and sweet berries* or *long and tedious planning meeting* or *fat and soft sheep.*

Another trick that I failed to mention in the lecture is to try flip-flopping the adjectives. If they work just as well in the reverse order, you definitely need a comma between them. There's no real difference between *fat soft sheep* and *soft fat sheep*, so you need a comma there. On the other hand, *sweet spring grass* and *spring sweet grass* are not interchangeable, so you don't need a comma there.

II. **A, B, E, G, H, J**

Hyphenate two or more words when they serve as a single adjective before the noun they modify—but not when they form a predicate adjective. So you would hyphenate *my two-year-old nephew* but not *my nephew is two years old*.

Do notice that when you have an adverb, you *don't* need a hyphen. Neither *heavily painted* nor *clearly impossible* should be hyphenated. Do you see the difference between *heavily painted* and *hand-painted*? The word *hand* isn't an adverb. If this doesn't make sense now, it may make more sense after we get into participles.

III. **B, D, G**

IV. **Sloppily** is an adverb telling HOW John Barber cried.

V. **Lazy** in as adjective modifying *goat*. It tells WHAT KIND of goat (or possibly WHICH goat.)

VI. **Tomorrow** is an adverb modifying the verb *call*. It tells WHEN I will call.

Quiz 2.3 Answer Key

I. I would omit both *digitally* and *relationally*. These adverbs simply repeat the meaning of the phrases they inhabit. Being connected to the Internet is necessarily digital, and being connected to people is necessarily relational. The resulting sentence is cleaner while still keeping obvious the contrast between digital connection and relational disconnection: *They may be connected to the Internet, but they are disconnected from one another.*

II. This sentence is a good example of why adverbs have a bad reputation. The adverb *loudly* allows the writer to be lazy. Instead of finding the most precise verb, the writer has just added an *-ly* adverb to the generic verb *shut*. There's an easy fix here: the verb *slam* means *to shut loudly.* But this would also be a good opportunity to think through a more vivid depiction of the scene. Maybe something like this: *A moment later his door swung open, then shuddered on its hinges as he slammed it behind him.*

III. The adverb *quickly* is entirely unnecessary. If she's half-running, she's moving quickly.

IV. In this case, the adverbs contribute meaning. This writer (who happens to be Wendell Berry) is not using these adverbs as a substitute for a better verb, nor is he being redundant. There's no shame in using -ly adverbs when they add specificity and clarity.

V. This writer was trying a little too hard to avoid *-ly* adverbs. That four-word prepositional phrase, *in a frantic manner*, is not an improvement over the adverb *frantically*. *He bounced frantically, yipping and barking.*

Quiz 2.5 Answer Key

I. The prepositional phrase *after me* is adverbial, telling *when* you can have a turn.

II. The prepositional phrase *after me* is adverbial, telling *when* you can have a turn. Notice that an adverbial phrase is movable. It doesn't matter whether it appears at the beginning of this sentence or the end.

III. The prepositional phrase *into the burning building* is adverbial, telling *where* John Barber ran. (The phrase *to save his Beanie Baby collection* is an infinitive phrase, not a prepositional phrase, even though *to* is usually a preposition. We'll discuss infinitive phrases in a couple of lessons.)

IV. The prepositional phrase *of birdsong* is adjectival, telling *what kind* of cacophony.

V. The prepositional phrase *under the mattress* is adjectival, telling *which* money.

VI. The prepositional phrase *under the mattress* is adverbial, telling *where* I hid the money.

VII. The prepositional phrase *on the floor nearby* is adverbial, telling *where* the fan sat.

VIII. The prepositional phrase *with a straight face* is adverbial, telling *how* Helen looked.

IX. The prepositional phrase *with the mermaid* tattoo is adjectival, telling *which* girl.

X. The prepositional phrase is *with binoculars*. But it's not entirely clear whether it's supposed to be adverbial, telling *how* Helen looked, or adjectival, telling *which* girl.

Quiz 2.7 Answer Key

I. The grammatical subject of the sentence is *smile*. But the smile, of course, didn't wipe tea from its mustache. Here's one way to fix it: *The husband wipes tea from his handlebar mustache. His smile is wide enough to drive a tractor through.*

II. The grammatical subject is *bird*. But the bird isn't breakfasting on the patio. Here's one way to fix it: *On a warm October morning, while they breakfasted on the patio, a bird swooped down and landed on their table.*

III. Here's one fix: *I spent five hours answering all the ER nurses' questions, never getting clarity on any of mine, before the doctor finally entered the room*.

IV. The tempera painters are half-clothed, but thanks to the passive construction, they have disappeared from the sentence altogether, so the participle *half-clothed* has no noun to modify (neither a *back yard* nor the abstract noun *tempera-painting* can be half-clothed). Change the passive construction to the active, and the sentence fixes itself: *We did all of our tempera-painting in the back yard, half-clothed.*

V. *Dampening* is a participle, not a verb. If you change it back into a verb, the sentence fixes itself: *The forest dampened the insects' chorus like stage curtains deadening an orchestra's tuning before a concert.*

VI. This is probably the tidiest way to do it: *The dog followed him everywhere, growling, yipping, and barking.* This option loses the idea of the dog alternating through a repertoire (though it is implied). The writer would have to decide whether that idea is important enough to justify the awkwardness of the original phrasing.

Quiz 2.8 Answer Key

I. *To nest* is an **adverbial** infinitive telling WHY the blackbirds come. (The phrase to the marsh is a prepositional phrase, though it starts with *to*, like an infinitive.)

II. The phrase *to win her love with tuba solos* is an **adjectival** infinitive phrase telling WHAT KIND of attempts. Note that the prepositional phrase *with tuba solos* is an adverbial phrase (modifying *to win*) within the larger adjectival phrase.

III. *To leave quickly* is **adverbial**, telling WHY Richie turned.

IV. The phrase *to eat* is an **infinitive** telling WHICH mushrooms.

V. This one is a little tricky. *To make the undergrowth sparse* is an adverbial **infinitive** phrase. But what is it modifying, and what question is it asking? I would say it modifies the adjective *enough*, answering TO WHAT EXTENT.

VI. *To season your broth* is **adverbial**, telling HOW (possibly WHY?) you need.

VII. *To sit at the bench at the bend in the trail* is **adverbial**, telling WHY I would trade it all.

Quiz 2.10 Answer Key

I. The adjective clause THAT I LIKE BEST modifies *goat.* The relative pronoun THAT is the Direct Object of the clause.

II. WHERE I GOT MY START is an adjective clause modifying *post office*. The relative pronoun WHERE functions as an adverb in the adjective clause.

III. The adjective clause ABOUT WHICH I TOLD YOU modifies *alligator*. The relative pronoun WHICH is the object of the preposition *about* within the adjective clause.

VI. The adjective clause I TOLD YOU ABOUT modifies *alligator*. The relative pronoun THAT has been omitted, but it would be the object of the preposition *about.*

V. WHO INSTALLED OUR ICE MACHINE modifies *plumber*. The relative pronoun WHO is the subject of the adjective clause.

VI. The clause WHOSE CAR I TOTALED modifies *guy*. The relative pronoun WHOSE is an adjective modifying *car.*

Quiz 2.11 Answer Key

I. The adverbial clause is AFTER JOHN BARBER SHOWED UP. The subordinating conjunction *after* tells WHEN the party got lame. Since the adverbial clause is at the beginning of the sentence, you need a comma to separate the adverbial clause from the main clause.

II. The adverbial clause is AFTER JOHN BARBER SHOWED UP. The subordinating conjunction *after* tells WHEN the party got lame.

Remember, an adverbial modifying a verb is movable. This is the same sentence as the one above, except that the adverbial clause has been moved from the beginning of the sentence to the end. Notice that you DON'T use a comma to separate the main clause from adverbial clause if the adverbial comes at the end.

III. The adverbial clause is UNLESS SOMEONE ASKED FOR IT. It tells WHY (or, you might say, UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS) the speaker offered information.

Note that even though *after* served as a subordinating conjunction in the previous two sentences, it is a preposition in this sentence. How do you know? It does not introduce a clause. Instead, it precedes the noun *point*. *After that point* is an adverbial prepositional phrase telling WHEN the speaker didn't offer information.

IV. The adverbial clause is THAN HE COULD HAVE KNOWN. It modifies the adjective *closer*, answering the question TO WHAT EXTENT.

V. The adverbial clause EVERYWHERE THEY GO tells WHERE slugs leave a trail of slime.

VI. The adverbial clause is AS ANTONIO BROUGHT THE BANANA PUDDING INTO THE DINING ROOM. It tells WHEN Linda's eyes burned with tears of gratitude.

VII. This is a trick question. This is a sentence fragment. *As* is a subordinating conjunction, which suggests that AS THE CASHIER TOOK HER PLACE BEHIND THE COUNTER should be an adverbial clause. But there's no main clause for the adverbial clause to modify. Without a main clause, a subordinate clause is just a sentence fragment.

VIII. The adverbial clause AS I HAVE EVER BEEN modifies *angry*, telling TO WHAT EXTENT the speaker is angry.

Note that in the previous sentence, *as* introduces a WHEN clause, but in this sentence, *as* introduces a TO WHAT EXTENT clause.

IX. This sentence has two adverbial clauses: WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN and AFTER MY MOTHER DIED AND MY FATHER RAN OFF. The first clause tells WHEN the grandmother sent the speaker to the group home. The second clause is actually a compound sentence rendered subordinate by the subordinating conjunction *after*. Like the first clause, it tells WHEN the grandmother sent the speaker to the group home.

Quiz 2.12 Answer Key

I. **A**. When the antecedent is a person, you don't use the relative pronoun *that*. Since the relative pronoun serves as the subject of the subordinate clause, use the nominative-case *who*.

II. **B**. Since Peanut is a person, *that* is out of the question. Since he is the object of the preposition *at*, the objective-case *whom* is correct.

III. **A**. Again, since *people* are human, it's down to *who* or *whom*. Since the relative pronoun is the subject of the subordinate clause, *who* is correct.

IV. **B**. The relative pronoun renames *people*. And those people are the direct object of the verb *knows. (John Barber knows whom or what? People.*) So the objective-case *whom* is correct.

V. **B**. Hopefully this was an easy one. The relative pronoun is the object of the preposition *of*.

VI. **A**. The pronoun is half of a compound subject. So use the nominative-case *I.* (You wouldn't say *Me chased a panther.*)

VII. **B**. The pronoun is half of a compound direct object. So the objective-case *me* is correct. (And you wouldn't say *A panther chased I.)*

VIII. *Than he* is elliptical, a shortening of the clause *than he is tall*. The pronoun *he* is the subject, therefore in the nominative case.

IX. Because the verb *is* is missing from the elliptical clause, the pronoun looks a lot like an object of a preposition. (True, *than* is not a preposition, but nevertheless, it feels like one if you don't realize that this is an elliptical clause). And the object of a preposition is in the objective case. Hence *him.*

Quiz 2.13 Answer Key

I. The clause *because he knows how to train champions* is adverbial, answering the question WHY. But which verb does it modify? Does it tell why the coach yells, or does it tell why the speaker puts up with the coach's yelling? One suspects the writer means the latter: she is willing to put up with the yelling coach because he knows how to train champions. But the clause is closer to the verb *yells,* so the grammar is at odds with the logic of the sentence. It gives the impression that the coach yells because he knows how to train champions. Start by moving that adverbial to the beginning of the sentence:

Because he knows how to train champions, I put up with a coach who yells at me.

That's all right, but it's not great. Here are a couple of other options:

My coach knows how to train champions, so I put up with his yelling.

I put up with a coach who yells at me. Why? Because he knows how to train champions. (In this configuration, *Because he knows how to train champions* is a sentence fragment. Nevertheless, it's definitely a contender.)

II. Notice how the passive voice causes the dangling modifier here. If you turn the passive construction into an active construction, the sentence fixes itself:

From the ages of twelve to eighteen, I spent half my weekends at Randall's house making movies.

III. Like the previous sentence, this one starts with a dangling modifier. It's the *microchip* that is near weightless, not *you*. Here's a possible revision:

The microchip is near weightless. You cannot feel it resting in your palm if you close your eyes.

IV. Who has the hard face? Mike or his son? I think the point is that Mike has a hard face. The phrase is adverbial: HOW did Mike look? With a hard face. As you are well

aware by now, adverbials are highly movable. But in this case, the writer moved the adverbial to a place where it could be mistaken for an adjectival modifying Mike's son (WHICH son? The one with a hard face). Here's the good news: the movability of the adverbial causes the problem here, but it also makes for an easy solution:

With a hard face, Mike looked at his eldest son.
Or,
Hard-faced, Mike looked at his eldest son.

And while we're at it, we might as well look for a more precise verb: *Hard-faced, Mike glared at his eldest son.*

V. There's a lot happening in this sentence. People are crossing log bridges. People are clearing webs. The webs are dripping with morning mist.

One quick solution is simply to move the adverbial phrase *from the log bridges we crossed* to the beginning of the sentence (once again, the movability of the adverbial is a helpful thing to remember): *From the log bridges we crossed, we cleared away webs dripping with the morning mist.*

That's a little better, but not a whole lot better. Try something like this: *As we crossed the log bridges, we cleared away webs dripping with morning mist.*

VI. That phrase at the beginning of the sentence is a dangling participle. The grammatical subject is *ballet*, but *ballet*, of course, wasn't born with German bones or raised alongside a puppy.

I was born with German bones and raised alongside a puppy, frolicking in an overgrown pasture, often crawling along a creek bed to catch tadpoles. But ballet made me feel lovely and dainty.

But even when the dangling participle is fixed, you see that this sentence needs more than a grammar makeover. What are German bones, and how are they different from other people's bones? What about that puppy? What is its relationship to ballet? I would keep revising this passage to something more like this:

I was big-boned like my German forbears. And I was a tomboy as well, always frolicking with a puppy in an overgrown pasture or crawling along a creek bed to catch tadpoles. Ballet was the one thing in my life that made me feel lovely and dainty.

VII. Here's one possibility: *My favorite project was a shadowbox of her old jewelry. I made it in 2004 to hang in her bathroom.*
Or possibly,
My favorite project was a shadowbox of her old jewelry. I made it in 2004 and hung it in her bathroom.

Quiz 3.2 A Answer Key

I. The noun clause *Whichever table you pick* serves as the subject of the sentence.

II. This sentence is very similar to the previous sentence. The noun clause, as before, is *whichever table you pick*. But in this version, the noun clause is an object of the preposition *with*. The prepositional phrase *with whichever table you pick* is adverbial, modifying *fine.*

III. The noun clause *that George had his own agenda* serves as the direct object. I learned WHAT? *that George had his own agenda.*

IV. **A.** The noun clause is *I was being generous when I offered my half-eaten hot dog.* This is a little tricky for two reasons. First, the relative pronoun *that* has been omitted. That omission is perfectly acceptable, of course, but it does take away one of the clues for easily identifying a noun clause. Secondly, this noun clause contains an adverb clause. The clause *when I offered my half-eaten hot dog* modifies the noun *being* within the noun clause.
B. The noun clause serves as a direct object. I thought WHAT? *that I was being generous.*

V. The noun clause *whoever interviewed you* serves as the object of the preposition *to*. (The prepositional phrase is adverbial, modifying the verb *send*. WHERE should you send a note? *to whoever interviewed you*.)

Bonus question: If the clause serves as a direct object, why is the relative pronoun the nominative-case *whoever* instead of the objective-case *whomever*?

Answer: because the relative pronoun serves as the subject WITHIN the dependent clause. The role of the dependent clause within the main clause has no bearing on the case of the relative pronoun.

VI. The noun clause is the same as in the previous sentence: *whoever interviewed you*. In this version, however, the noun clause serves as an indirect object. You should send a thank-you note to whom? To *whoever interviewed you*.

VII. The noun clause *Whomever they appoint* serves as the subject of the sentence. Note that even though the clause is in the subject slot, the relative clause *Whomever* is in the objective case because it serves as a direct object within the dependent clause.

VIII. The noun clause *Whoever is appointed* serves as the subject of the sentence. The real reason I included this question was so you could think about that relative pronoun *whoever*. It was *Whomever* in the previous sentence. Why is it *Whoever* here in this sentence that looks so very similar? In this version, the use of the passive construction (*Whoever is appointed* rather than the active *Whomever they appoint*) moves the direct object into the subject spot of the dependent clause. And a subject, as you know, has to be in the nominative case.

Quiz 3.2 B Answer Key

I. **B**. The clause is adverbial, telling WHEN Martha pats her hair net.

II. **D**. This is simply the main line of the clause: WHO DID WHAT? Martha patted the hairnet. The rest of the sentence will provide additional information, but this hair-net-patting is the central action (and the grammatical kernel) of the sentence.

III. **A**. This clause tells WHICH hairnet, so it is adjectival.

IV. **C**. When you use your Direct Object Finder, it is relatively easy to see that you have a noun clause serving as a direct object. The traveler sees what? *what he sees.* In that second main clause after the semicolon, the clause *what he has come to see* works in exactly the same way.

V. **B**. The word *because* is a subordinating conjunction; it turns the independent clause *it is not there* into the adverbial clause *because it is not there.* This clause answers the question WHY. WHY can't God give a happiness apart from himself? *Because it is not there.*

VI. **A**. This adjective clause modifies *best-seller.* WHICH (or WHAT KIND OF) bestseller? One *that could have been prevented by a good teacher.*

VII. **A**. The relative pronoun *that* (or possibly *when)* is omitted from this clause, which might make it hard even to recognize it as a dependent clause at all. But it is an adjective clause modifying time. WHICH time? The time *(that) I encountered such a smell.*

VIII. **C**. This one is pretty tricky. That *when* at the beginning of the clause makes it look like this is an adverb clause. But take a closer look: the main line of this sentence is *The last time… was* _____. That verb *was* is a linking verb, and as such it needs a complement—either a predicate adjective or a predicate nominative. The clause *when I toured a coleslaw factory* is a noun clause serving as a predicate nominative. It answers the question WHAT, not WHEN.

IX. **A**. This is a main or independent clause. WHO DID WHAT? She looked. (*At nice young men* isn't technically part of the main line. It's an adverbial prepositional phrase telling HOW or WHERE she looked.)

X. **B**. The phrase *as if* is a subordinating conjunction turning the independent clause *she could smell their stupidity* into an adverbial clause. HOW did she look at young men? *as if she could smell their stupidity.*

Quiz 3.3 Answer Key

I. *Defending any of the cardinal virtues* is a gerund phrase serving as the object of the preposition *of.*

II. This is a gerund phrase serving as the direct object of the verb *means*. Tradition means WHAT? *Giving votes to our ancestors.*

III. The two italicized phrases are both present participles modifying *men*.

IV. *Accepting oneself* is a gerund phrase serving as the subject of the sentence.

V. *Carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood* is a participle modifying *faun.* WHICH faun? One *carrying an umbrella...*

VI. The grammatical subject is the gerund, *spending almost six decades at almost seven feet.*

VII. When a sentence begins with a modifying phrase, that phrase must modify the subject. In this case, the subject is the gerund *spending*. But, of course, *spending* isn't head and shoulders above anybody. The person who is head and shoulders above everybody is the *him* mentioned about two-thirds through the sentence.

VIII. Here's one way to do it:

He has spent almost six decades at almost seven feet, head and shoulders above most people since his early teens. The strain has left him with a stoop that grows more pronounced as he gets older.

IX. *Riding the now-drenched scooter back home* is a gerund phrase that serves as the grammatical subject. The verb is *would soak.*

X. This is a tough question; to decide what this phrase is and what it's doing, your best bet is probably to use the process of elimination. There is no noun function it could

possibly serve: it's not a subject, not a direct or indirect object, not an object of a preposition or a predicate nominative. So it can't be a gerund.

It must be a present participle. But participles are adjectival; they modify nouns. Which noun might this participle modify? Does it modify the gerund *Riding the scooter?* Well, it feels more like it's the backside-soaking that forces the change, not the riding. But that phrase *would soak my backside* doesn't provide any noun or noun equivalent that the participle could modify.

So forcing a change into dry pants is a participle, but it has no clear grammatical duty in the sentence.

XI. 1. A person rides a now-drenched scooter.
2. The scooter-rider's backside gets soaked.
3. The scooter-rider needs to change pants.

XII. Here's one way:

If I were to ride the now-drenched scooter, my backside would get soaked and I would need to change my pants.

Quiz 3.4 Answer Key

I. **B**. *Leonard* renames *cousin*.

II. **D**. The word *nemesis* renames *John Barber*. The whole appositive phrase is *my nemesis*.

III. **D**. This sentence is very similar to the sentence above, but in this case *nemesis* is the object of the preposition *from* and *John Barber* renames *nemesis*.

IV. **B**. The appositive in this sentence is *marsupial*, which renames the subject *opossum*. The whole appositive phrase is *the only marsupial native to North America.* Note that *non-primate* is the predicate complement (the whole phrase is *the only non-primate with opposable thumbs*).

V. **E**. This sentence does not have an appositive.

VI. **A**. This is a situation in which the appositive appears before the noun it renames. Why do we say that *hockey player* renames *I* rather than the other way around? Because *I* is the subject. Who loves being on ice? *I* do.

VII. **D**. The word *year* renames *1922*. The whole appositive phrase is *the year the Soviet Union was formed*. There has never been a better time to be a Vanderbilt fan.

VIII. **A**. This is another sentence in which the appositive comes *before* the word it names. The subject of the main clause is *they. Food snobs* renames *they.*

IX. **B**. *The Man in Black* renames *Johnny Cash*. The one-word appositive is *Man*.

X. **E**. While *Man in Black* renames Johnny Cash as in the previous sentence, the phrase is not an appositive because it appears within an adjective clause modifying Johnny Cash.

XI. **A**.

XII. **D**, **E**, and **F**. Remember, gerunds are noun-equivalents and therefore can serve as appositives. The gerunds *yelling, crying,* and *banging* are all appositives renaming the noun *actions*.

XIII. An appositive needs to be right next to the noun it renames. In this sentence,z*a creature of habit* appears to be an appositive, but it is right next to *routine*. A routine, of course, can't be a creature of habit. The writer means that *I* am a creature of habit. Here's the easiest way to fix the sentence: **A creature of habit, I made a very rigid routine for myself.**

Quiz 3.5 Answer Key

I. **A**.

II. **B**.

III. **B**. The commas around a non-essential element say to the reader, "Here's a little extra information, a little bonus."

IV. **A**.

V. **B**. If it helps, remember that *which* clauses are set off with commas. *That* clauses aren't. If an adjective clause modifies a person, it starts with *who* or *whom,* whether the clause is essential or non-essential.

VI. The whole point of a proper noun is to narrow a category down to something very precise. (The common noun *city* is a broad category; the proper noun *Honolulu* narrows the category down to one specific city). Any appositive or modifier that is applied to, say, *Honolulu* isn't going to make it any more specific than it already is.

VII. Though *Anne Hathaway* is a proper noun, this sentence involves two different people with that name, and the adjective clauses narrow a very small category (people named Anne Hathaway) down to specific individuals. That's why the clauses are essential rather than non-essential.

Quiz 3.6 Answer Key

I. **A**, **B**, and **C**. *Who*, *whom*, and *which* typically introduce adjective clauses. *Where* and *when* often do as well, but these words just as often introduce adverb clauses. The relative pronoun *that* is a toss-up: it is as likely to introduce a noun clause as an adjective clause.

II. **E**, **F**, and **G**. *Whoever, whomever*, and *whichever* always introduce noun clauses. *Whenever* and *wherever* may introduce noun clauses, or they may introduce adverb clauses. *That*, as mentioned in the above question, may signal a noun clause or it may signal an adjective clause.

III. The relative pronoun *that* is often omitted in adjective and noun clauses. In adjective clauses, *that* can be omitted when it serves as an object, though not when it serves as a subject. You can say "the man *that* I told you about" or "the man I told you about." Either is acceptable. You can say "the chicken *that* I gave you" or "the chicken I gave you."

But you don't even have to do that much analysis of the grammar. In both adjective clauses and noun clauses, if it feels right to omit the relative pronoun *that*, it is acceptable to do so.

IV. *Receiving this award would be one of the great honors of my life.*

V. An appositive needs to be right next to the noun it renames. In this sentence, *a creature of habit* appears to be an appositive, but it is right next to *routine*. A routine, of course, can't be a creature of habit. The writer means that *I* am a creature of habit. Here's the easiest way to fix the sentence:

A creature of habit, I made a very rigid routine for myself.

VI. **A**, **D**, and **F**

VII. **B**, **C**, **E**, and **F**

VIII. One of the principles of this course has been the idea that, all things being equal, the sooner you get through the subject-verb nexus the more clear your sentence will be. A lengthy noun equivalent in the subject slot delays the arrival of the subject.

Once a reader gets through the subject-verb nexus (that is, after he knows who did what), he is better able to process complexity in the remainder of the sentence. Complex structures that come *after* the verb don't feel as complex to the reader as the complex structures that come before the verb.

Quiz 4.2 Answer Key

I. **A**. *The Bad News Bears* is the title of a movie, so it is treated as a singular noun even though it looks plural.

II. **A**. A singular subject takes a singular verb, regardless of the predicate complement.

III. **B**. A plural subject takes a plural verb, regardless of the predicate complement.

IV. **B**. *Committee* is a collective noun. In American English, collective nouns are typically treated as singular. If you are British, however, you would say, "The committee *recommend*..."

V. **A**. In this sentence, the subject is the plural *members* so the plural verb *recommend* is appropriate. Now *committee* is the object of the preposition *of*, so all of us, Brits and Americans alike, can agree that we need the plural verb here.

VI. **B**. The subject of this sentence is *choir*, a collective noun treated as singular in American English. The plural nouns *boys, delinquents,* and *towns* don't figure in the question one way or another.

VII. Here's one way to revise the sentence:
The boys' choir arrives in an hour. The choir is made up juvenile delinquents from small towns all over the country.

Or you might say:
Made up of juvenile delinquents from small towns all over the country, the boys' choir arrives in an hour.

VIII. *One* is the subject of the main clause, but *happen* is not the verb of the main clause; rather, it is part of the adjective clause *that happen only on TV*. The subject of *happen* is the plural *things* (technically, the subject is the relative pronoun *that*, which renames the plural *things* and is therefore plural). So the verb *happen* is plural too.

Quiz 4.3 Answer Key

I. The antecedent of THEY is *petal*, which is singular. So the plural pronoun isn't correct.

*Between my fingers each petal feels like soft suede, stronger than **it** appears.*

II. Really, the only available antecedent for IT is *health*. But the mother's health didn't cause problems with the marriage relationship. Quite the opposite: the deterioration of her health caused problems.

Possible corrections:

As my mother's health deteriorated, problems grew in their marriage relationship.

The deterioration of my mother's health caused problems in their marriage relationship.

As my mother's health deteriorated, so did their marriage relationship.

III. This is an interesting case. IT isn't wrong, since you could easily make a case that the antecedent is the singular *handful* rather than the plural *leaves.* But if IT is correct, THEM can't be correct. Really, THEM can't be correct in any case, since you can't kick through a handful of leaves. Unless you're really, really small.

Here's one option for correcting this sentence:

Sniffing a handful of leaves and throwing it into the air was even more fun than kicking through a leaf pile.

IV. What was the size of our kitchen? Go back 26 words: Lelo's shop. That's a long way to go for an antecedent.

I would do at least two things to this passage: First I would reverse the first sentence so that Lelo's shop comes at the end of the sentence, signaling to the

reader that the second sentence is all about Lelo's shop. Then, rather than using the pronoun in the third sentence I would repeat the antecedent.

Lelo's main income came from his shop near the edge of town. Concrete and mud blocks supported frames and shelves of wide home-crafted lumber of non-standardized dimensions. The whole shop was the size of our kitchen.

V. The grammar doesn't make it clear whose brow was knitted, whose eyes flashed, or whose mouth was pinched. Presumably it's the father. Grammatically speaking, *Dave* is as likely a candidate for the antecedent as *father*, especially since *father* is turned into the modifier *father's*.

One possible rewrite:

Dave looked up at his father's angry expression. The old man's brow was knitted. His eyes flashed. His mouth was pinched.

Quiz 4.4 Answer Key

I. For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

II. **B**. The conjunction *and* doesn't set up a contrast or a cause-and-effect relationship or anything more subtle than the idea that two things happened or two things are true.

III. **A**. Coordination suggests that two ideas deserve a similar AMOUNT of interest and a similar KIND of interest.

IV. **B**. Subordination allows you to set up all kinds of relationships between ideas. Subordination always says, "Between these two ideas, one is more important than the other, one depends on the other, one serves the other."

V. **C**.

VI. This is a comma splice. *There are no keys for those* is an independent clause. So is *at least we don't have any*. To connect two independent clauses, you need a comma AND a coordinating conjunction, or else a semicolon. When two independent clauses are connected with just a comma, that's a comma splice.

Correction: *And there are no keys for those; at least we don't have any.*

VII. This is a faulty use of a semicolon. A semicolon joins two independent clauses. The phrase *this one familiar to him* is not a clause (notice it has no verb). Actually, it's an appositive. So the semicolon is erroneous.

Correct version: *Next, she grabbed a large pink bottle, this one familiar to him.*

VIII. This sentence contains a compound verb, *crackling and firing off*. With a compound verb, you only need a coordinating conjunction (in this case, *and*), not a comma.

Correction: *The neurotransmitters in my brain were crackling and firing off like a poorly planned fireworks display.*

IX. Here we have both a run-on sentence and a comma splice. To connect two clauses, you need BOTH a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or else a semicolon. Between the first two clauses (*The roots sprout* and *the waiting is over*) we're missing a comma. Between the second two clauses *the waiting is over* and *life has returned*), we're missing a coordinating conjunction.

Correction: *The root sprouts, and the waiting is over; life has returned.*

X. This is yet another comma splice. One possible correction:

Press gently and the fragile web bends. Press harder and it dissolves.

Quiz 4.5 Answer Key

I. **B**. *When her father walked away...* is an adverb clause.

II. **E**. *Leaving a blank space in the doorway* is a participle within the opening adverb clause. It modifies *father.*

III. **A**. This (together with Action 4, the girl watching her sister) is the main action of the sentence.

IV. **B**. There's only one main clause in this long sentence, but that clause contains a compound verb: *ate* and *watched.* They share the subject *little girl.*

V. **E**. The phrase *crying on her bed* is a participial phrase modifying *sister.*

VI. *Her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway, and the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate ice cream and watched her sister crying on the bed.*

Or you could use a semicolon (I prefer this version):

Her father walked away, leaving a blank space in the doorway; the little girl took a bite of mint chocolate ice cream and watched her sister crying on the bed.

VII. As strange as it seems,

1. This is an adjective clause.
2. It modifies *bus.*

VIII. Consider the actions in this sentence:

1. A school-child carries a pretzel onto a bus.
2. The school-child walks to the back of the bus with the pretzel.
3. The bus driver's aide doesn't notice the pretzel-sneaking.

Actions 2 and 3 seem at least as important as Action 1; you might say they are the main point of the sentence. The fact that those two actions are tucked into an

adjective clause modifying *bus* is misleading. This is a good example of the grammar of a sentence getting crossways with the logic of the sentence.

Possible rewrites:
I carried my pretzel onto the bus, but the bus driver's aide didn't notice it as I walked to the back of the bus and found a seat beside a window.

I carried my pretzel onto the bus. I walked past the bus driver's aide on the way to my seat in the back, but she didn't notice the pretzel.

Quiz 4.6 Answer Key

I. 1. *Cowboy boots* and *bandy legs* appear to form a compound object of the preposition *in.* A person can be *in* cowboy boots, but not *in* bandy legs.

2. One possible rewrite: *The bandy-legged stranger came walking up our driveway in cowboy boots.* (Remember, just because faulty parallelism is the problem, that doesn't mean correct parallelism is the solution. Just as often, it's better to get rid of the parallel structure altogether.)

II. 1. On one side of *and* is an independent clause (*my heart thudded*), but on the other side is the noun phrase *quick sucks of air.*

2. One possible rewrite: *I began to panic: my heart thudded, and I took in quick sucks of air.* (In this version, I turned that last noun phrase into an independent clause, creating a compound sentence after the colon.)

III. 1. It appears that we have a compound verb: *picked it up* and *took a bite* have the same subject. But that third action is expressed as an independent clause. The subject of *spilled* is *contents*, not *he*.

2. One possible rewrite: *He picked it up and took a bite, but half the contents spilled out onto the plate.* (In this version, the simple insertion of *and* between the two parts of the compound verb separates the compound verb from the second independent clause that starts with *but*. In other words, the insertion of *and* takes away the reader's expectation that there will be a third verb in the compound.)

IV. 1. This is a Subject-Verb-Predicate Complement sentence: *Cynthia was the first*... The *and* appears at first to signal a compound predicate complement. In fact, the writer was thinking of this as a compound verb: Cynthia *was* and *caused*. The problem here is that *was* is a linking verb, and *caused* is an action verb. That makes it very tricky to combine them in a compound verb: the first half of the compound is a S-V-PA pattern, and the second half of the compound is a S-V-DO pattern.

2. A few possible rewrites:
Cynthia was the first to call me 'Grandma.' She caused me to think about future generations.

The first to call me Grandma, Cynthia caused me to think about future generations.

Cynthia was the first to call me Grandma, and she was the first to make me think about future generations.

V. 1. This sentence has a compound direct object. The policeman told me two things: a) *to get my car out of the road*, [an infinitive phrase] and b) *that I should get a new wardrobe* [a noun clause]. Either an infinitive phrase or a noun clause is an acceptable way to phrase an indirect quotation, but the writer needs to choose.

2. Three possible rewrites:
The policeman told me to get my car out of the road and to get a new wardrobe.

The policeman told me that I should get my car out of the road and also that I should get a new wardrobe.

The policeman told me that I should get my car out of the road and get a new wardrobe.

VI. 1. If we think of the *like* as an equal sign (or an *is congruent* sign), it becomes easier to see the parallelism problem here. The words *heavy* and *jittery* are adjectives. The words *having low blood sugar* are a gerund phrase—that is, a noun equivalent. A noun doesn't *equal* an adjective. There's our parallelism problem.

2. One possible rewrite: *My arms feel heavy and jittery, the way they feel when I have low blood sugar.*

VII. 1. This may not technically be a parallelism problem, but it is a related problem. The way this sentence is phrased, the writer speaks of having met a pair of hands in 1979. That is an odd thing to say.

2. One possible rewrite: *He no longer has the bronzed twenty-year-old hands of the man I met around the swimming pool in 1979.*

Quiz 4.7 Answer Key

I. **F.** That word *absolute* comes from the Latin *absolutus,* meaning "set free." So a nominative absolute is a noun that is floating free from the sentence where it lives. No grammatical connection to the sentence is holding it back.

II. The nominative absolute is *her back curved like a nautilus shell.*

III. *Warm fresh bread tucked under my arm* is the nominative absolute here.

IV. *Sadie walking beside him* is a nominative absolute.

V. The nominative absolute is *my friends waiting to help me into a blue dress while the chorus continued to sing and dance under the lights.*

VI. The nominative absolute here is *determined little legs crossing the expanse of the carpet.* Though nominative absolutes usually appear at the beginning or the end of a sentence, sometimes they appear mid-sentence, as in this example.