

How to

...write in sentences

We all think that we can write sentences, but many people write in fragments of sentences or in sentences that run into each other. You can learn to write good sentences by following some grammatical rules.

Try this!

Put a tick against the examples below which you think are sentences. Say them out loud to yourself. Do they sound right?

- 1 Elizabeth asked her colleague to fetch another file.
- 2 Fetching another size.
- 3 To be polite to customers is important.
- 4 Polite to customers waiting on the phone.
- 5 She had left stationery on the floor.
- 6 He needed a place at the table.
- 7 The unattended stock was stolen.
- 8 The stolen stock.
- 9 The places in the queue.
- 10 The manager arrived 20 minutes late.

You have now decided which of the above are sentences. But how do you know? What is a sentence?

A sentence is a complete idea

The first thing to remember is that 'sentence' is the name given to a group of words that can stand on their own and make sense.

Try this!

Do the following make complete sense? If not, add whatever you need to make a sentence.

- 1 She was unable to find the right file.
- 2 Working alone.
- 3 To come here.
- 4 Walking towards the supervisor.
- 5 She laughed.



A sentence can be:

A STATEMENT:

The manager brought the letter.

A QUESTION:

Has the manager brought the letter?

A COMMAND:

Bring me the letter!

A sentence is a complete idea. It can stand on its own and make sense.

What is a subject?

To say that a sentence must make sense is not a very satisfactory explanation of what a sentence is. We need more information in order to be able to check whether we are writing in sentences.

Every sentence must have a subject.

David orders the stationery.
(proper noun)

He has worked for this company for many years.
(pronoun)

Working for the same company can provide benefits.
(noun phrase)

It can provide benefits.
(pronoun)

SUBJECT

is the name given to the word or words about which a statement is being made.

PREDICATE

is the part of the sentence that tells us more about the subject.

The words 'orders the stationery' would be an incomplete sentence by itself because the reader is not told *who* does the ordering. 'David' is therefore the subject of the sentence.

Try this!

Add subjects to the following to make them complete sentences.

- 1 is the capital of the United Kingdom.
- 2 is not clear.
- 3 does me good.
- 4 is not certain.

Try this!

Write some sentences and underline the subject.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

You can replace the whole of the subject with a pronoun. This is a useful way of checking whether your sentence has a subject. For example:

- **The manager** changed the rota.

He changed the rota.

- **The team** waited to be served.

They waited to be served.

Try this!

Can you find the subject in the following? If not, what does this mean?

- 1 Dawn likes creating new systems.
- 2 The apprentices go for a drink at lunchtime on Fridays.
- 3 The office consists of three rooms.
- 4 Mary cleaned the shelves.
- 5 Those are mine.
- 6 It was raining.
- 7 Following our decision.

What is a finite verb?

For a sentence to make sense, it needs more than just a subject. It also needs a 'finite verb' to tell us more about the subject. For example:

- The manager **changed** the rota.
- He **changed** the rota.
- The team **waited** to be served.
- They **waited** to be served.
- Those **are** mine.
- It **was raining**.

For more examples of finite verbs, look at the sheet 'How to...use parts of speech'.

NOUN

the store manager;
the manager; the
apprentice; the alarm
system

NOUN PHRASE

the customer's boots;
painting the room;
cutting hair

PRONOUN

he; she; it; they

A VERB IS A 'DOING' WORD.

A **FINITE** verb tells you **WHAT** the subject is doing, being or having and **WHEN** this action takes place. It gives the sentence a tense: present, future or past. For example:

PRESENT TENSE

The learner **completes** his portfolio.

The learner **is completing** his portfolio.

FUTURE TENSE

The learner **will complete** his portfolio.

The learner **will be completing** his portfolio.

PAST TENSE

The learner **completed** his portfolio.

The learner **was completing** his portfolio.

Every sentence needs a finite verb.

Try this!

Circle the finite verb in the following sentences:

- 1 London is the capital of the United Kingdom.
- 2 The meaning was not clear.
- 3 She was eating the fruit.
- 4 Sheila completed the paperwork.

Try this!

Write some sentences and circle the finite verb.

1

2

3

So now we can see that a sentence needs:

a complete idea

a subject

a finite verb.

