

# **The Well Bred Sentence**

## **Chapter 1: What is a Sentence?**

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The sentence is ...

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon.  
Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will  
be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest.  
EM Forster, *Howards End*

We are relentless communicators. We have a passion for ‘reaching’ people, for ‘connecting’. We tell one another where we, they and all the others are ‘at’ or ‘coming from’. Even our refusal to speak is an act of communication: ‘I won’t speak to you’, it says. And it is understood as ‘This person won’t speak to me.’ We communicate in sentences even on this pre-speech level.

On speech level the sentence is openly with us, even when it is only a word of itself: When someone says ‘Milk!’ a shopkeeper will understand something like ‘This rude slob is asking me to sell him some milk’, having already understood the slob’s ‘Milk!’ to be an economical version of ‘I should like some milk, please’.

There is no getting away from it: We communicate in sentences. They are to communication as oxygen is to breathing. The long and the short of it is this: When we say something, or understand what someone else has said, we make sentences whether we intend to or not. So did Neanderthal Man. The difference between his and our way was achieved in the interim that saw ever more refined structures assemble to make life easy. One of those was the prose-structure we now know as that sequence of words that raises a subject and says something about it: the sentence. We use it to transmit our passion for communicating, successfully or unsuccessfully, depending on how well we understand its capabilities.

This prose structure, our highly-refined contemporary sentence, manifests in two ways: as an independent sentence and as a dependent sentence.

## **The independent sentence**

The sentence that raises a subject and says something about it (or 'predicates something of it') is an independent sentence. It makes a statement that makes sense, and only one sense. Such a statement has only three structural models, or basic-sentence types. They are the verb sentence, the copula sentence and the copular-verb sentence.

The independent sentence is the typical written sentence. It is the one we depend on when we write an essay, an article for a periodical, or a thesis. In short, it is the sentence style we require when we write in any *genre* that forbids casual-speech structures or poetic ones.

## **Subject and predicate**

The sentence raises a subject and says something about it. To put it another, more formal, way: The sentence predicates something of the subject. This is all that Traditional Grammar means when it declares that the sentence consists of a subject and a predicate.

## ***The indispensable basic sentence***

No sequence of words is a sentence if it fails to make one unambiguous sense. No sequence of words makes one unambiguous sense unless it is a basic sentence or it contains one. Stripped of its basic sentence, this sequence makes no sense:

very best a dog called Caesar contemporary street.

It becomes sensible only when a basic sentence (underlined) gives it a sense:

My very best friend, a dog called Caesar, ***does not respect***  
contemporary street sculpture.

Writers must become so familiar with the three models of the basic sentence that one jumps out at them from every sentence they read or write. Such a level of familiarity will ensure that the sentences they write will never fail to meet the first and most important criterion of valid sentence-construction: the unmistakable presence of a basic sentence. It will ensure also that they are able to punctuate the longer sentences they write.

***Before you read on***

In the course of reading about what sentences do, you will come upon quite a bit of ‘parts of speech’ vocabulary. If you are new to this, don’t let it worry you. This Chapter means to make only the point that every part of a sentence does something to contribute to the sense the whole makes. Observe this, and leave concerns about the precise meaning of ‘noun’, ‘adjective’, *etc.* until you read the Chapter 2. (You will find that these terms ‘stick’ to you anyway. Don’t make heavy weather of it.)

**Verb model of the basic sentence**

In the verb model of the basic sentence there always is a specific relationship between the subject and object in a sentence. In every instance of a verb basic sentence, the subject and object relate in one the following ways:

**1. *The subject acts upon the object.***

In this sentence:

Nationalism ***alarms*** minorities

the subject *nationalism* perpetrates an act, denoted by the verb *alarms*, upon the object *minorities*. Traditional Grammar says of sentences in which the subject acts upon the object that they are **active voice** sentences.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	OBJECT
Nationalism	alarms	minorities.
The man	opened	the gate.

**2. *The object acts upon the subject.***

In this sentence:

Minorities are alarmed by nationalism

the object *nationalism* acts upon the subject *minorities*. The verb *alarmed* denotes this act. Traditional Grammar says of sentences in which the object acts upon the subject that they are sentences cast in the **passive voice** mode.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	OBJECT
Minorities	are alarmed	by nationalism.
The gate	was opened	by the man..

### Infinitive complications and the complemented verb

Infinitives are the *to*-led expressions from which we derive verbs, nouns and adjectives; to eat, to fish, to sing, *etc.*

There are infinitives that consist of more than *to* and one word: ‘to set’ is one infinitive, ‘to set free’ is quite another. Their meanings are different, just like the meanings of ‘to give’ and ‘to give up’ are different.

In the sentence below, the operative infinitive is ‘to set free’, not ‘to set’:

He set me free.

The complication here is that the object *me* comes between the parts of ‘set free’. These structures are otherwise ordinary active-voice verb sentences that typically also have a passive voice:

I was set free by him.

This situation is less obvious in the infinitive that seems to have a ‘to make (someone) do (something)’ structure. We meet this structure regularly in statements such as:

He made me clean the house. [ACTIVE VOICE]

There is no doubt that this, too, is a sentence in which the subject acts upon the object (active voice), and the object acts upon the subject (passive voice):

I *was made to clean* the house by him. [PASSIVE VOICE]

So *made ... clean* certainly makes the above two sentences verb sentence. The curious thing in both the foregoing sentences is that at first glance, it seems that *the house* is the object of the verb. But it is not: It is indisputable in the active-voice sentence above that the subject *he* acted upon the object *me*, and not on *the house*. So in the active-voice sequence, *clean the house* does no more than name the direction of the activity denoted by the verb *made*. In that sense, *clean the house* is the complement of the verb *made*. (More will be

said below about how the active-voice sentence uses the complementing noun phrase to name the content of the verb.)

With the forced reconstruction of the active-voice *he made me clean the house* to make the passive-voice *I was made to clean the house by him*, the object *him* acts upon the subject *I*. And, of course, *to clean the house* does not act upon the subject, so it cannot be the object in this sentence. So *to clean the house* must be deemed to be the noun phrase that complements the verbs *made* and *was made* by naming their content. (Traditional Grammar tends to fudge this complication by calling *the house* an indirect object. But that is illogical.) Observe the component parts of these two sentences on this grid:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE		
	VERB	OBJECT	COMPLEMENT
He	made [ACTIVE VOICE]	me	clean the house. (VERB-CONTENT Namer)
I	was made [PASSIVE VOICE]	by him	to clean the house. (VERB-CONTENT Namer)

### 3. The activity between subject and object devolves upon a third party, the indirect object.

As subject and object perpetrate an act upon each other, a third party is affected by the action. So in *He read me the Riot Act*, the subject *he* perpetrated an act upon the object *Riot Act*: *he* read it; *the Riot Act* is therefore the **direct object** of the subject's activity denoted by the verb *read*. This subject acts also upon *me*. So *me* is also an object. But it is not the direct object that the subject acts upon: it is the **indirect object** of the subject's activity *read*.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	OBJECT
He	read [ACTIVE VOICE]	me [INDIRECT] the Riot Act [DIRECT].
The Riot Act	was read [PASSIVE VOICE]	by him [DIRECT] to me [INDIRECT].

### 4. The activity between subject and object is named by the predicate noun complement.

In this sentence:

He *called* them liars,

the subject *he* acts upon the object *them*. To this extent, this sentence is of the type outlined in '1' above. It differs from it markedly,

however, in that the noun *liars* is embedded into the ‘1’ sort of structure, *he called them*, to name the content of the verb *called*. *Liars* is not an object in any sense. It is therefore not possible to call it an *indirect object*. Other sentences of the same structure are:

The boy *taught* his grandmother Mathematics.

The boy *taught* his grandmother to suck eggs.

The subject *the boy* perpetrated the act denoted by the verb *taught* on the object *his grandmother*. The content of the subject’s act is named by the noun *Mathematics* in the first sentence, and by the infinitive-noun phrase *to suck eggs* in the second.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE		
	VERB	OBJECT	COMPLEMENT [VERB-CONTENT NAMER]
He	called	them	liars.
The boy	taught	his grandmother	Mathematics.
The boy	taught	his grandmother	to suck eggs.

### 5. The subject acts upon the object to procure its existential or geographical state.

In this sentence:

The film *had* me laughing,

the subject the *film* acts upon the object *me* to put *me* into a laughing state. The meaning here can be paraphrased as ‘The film had me in a laughing state’: ‘in a laughing state’ names the existential condition of the object *me*. The actual sentence, however, has truncated the noun phrase ‘in a laughing state’ to *laughing*. The truncation nevertheless functions as a noun in this sentence, as the paraphrasing indicates that it must. It is a noun embedded into the basic sentence *The film had me*. In another sentence:

The usher *sat* John in the front row

an embedded noun phrase with the same function, *in the front row*, is kept in entirety to name the whereabouts of the object *John*. It, too, is embedded into the verb basic sentence:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE		
	VERB	OBJECT	COMPLEMENT
The film	had	me	[ <i>in a</i> ] laughing [ <i>state</i> ].
The usher	sat	John	in the front row.

**6. The subject acts upon the object such that only the object is the *experiencer* of that act.**

In this sentence:

John *intrigues* Mary,

the subject *John* certainly perpetrates an act upon the object *Mary*. But only the object *Mary* experiences the effect of that act. The subject *John* may not even be aware that he has perpetrated that act. This situation exists because there are verbs that are inherently ***object-experiencer verbs***. These are: **annoy, irritate, amaze, provoke, impress, interest, intrigue**. Some of their synonyms might also prove to be object-experiencer verbs in some constructions.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	OBJECT
John	intrigues [ACTIVE VOICE]	Mary.
Noise	annoys [ACTIVE VOICE]	an oyster.

In their passive-voice forms, these verbs yield the lone **subject-experiencer**. But the passive voice form turns the structure into a copula sentence. (The copula will be discussed later in this Chapter.) This actually proves the lone-experiencer fact about the object. Again, as above, the object-perpetrator of the act denoted by the verb may not even be aware of having perpetrated it upon the subject:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	PREDICATE ADJECTIVE
Mary	is	intrigued by John.
An oyster	is	annoyed by noise..

**The ‘subject + verb’ sentence as the basic sentence**

Where the basic sentence is a ‘verb + subject’ sentence, nothing is predicated of the subject other than that the subject does, has done or will do something:

- Mary *teaches*.
- Mary *has taught*.
- The Prime Minister *will resign*.

The only other thing that can happen in the ‘verb + subject’ sentence is that certain indicators describe the subject’s act. Those indicators are adverbs. They describe:

- when (*time*) the subject perpetrated an act:  
She *arrived* early;
- how (*manner*) the subject perpetrated an act:  
The girl *answered* slowly;  
The girl *came* begging for mercy;
- the intensity (*degree*) of the subject’s act:  
I *see* perfectly clearly;
- why (*reason*) the subject perpetrated and act:  
Mary works to survive.
- outcome (*result*) of the subject’s act:  
I *think* therefore I am.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	ADVERB
She	arrived	early. [TIME]
The girl	answered	slowly. [MANNER]
The girl	came	begging for mercy. [MANNER].
I	see	perfectly clearly. [DEGREE]
Mary	works	to survive. [REASON]
I	think	therefore I am. [RESULT]

### **We can describe sentence structure!**

It has been claimed that describing sentence structure is a sham. The claimants argued that Traditional Grammar holds that ‘Mother is cooking’ and ‘Dinner is cooking’ are sentences of the same syntactic structure. This is so despite the vastly different meanings of these sentences. If Traditional Grammar’s system of analysis were constrained to hold that they are syntactically the same, it would indeed be a sham. But it is not so constrained. The sentence ‘Mother *is cooking*’ (Mother is doing the cooking) is a ‘verb + subject’ sentence. ‘Dinner *is cooking*’ is a copula sentence in which the predicate adjective ‘cooking’ describes the subject ‘dinner’ (‘the cooking dinner’). Confirmation of this is available upon our grasping the nature of the copula sentence. We shall proceed to do this immediately:

## Copula model of the basic sentence

The copula model of the basic sentence makes a statement in which the **copula (a formation that derives from the infinitive ‘to be’: am, was, is, are, were, be, been, shall, will)** assigns the subject either a description or a definition or a location (geographical or existential) or an occupier. In behaving thus, the copula basic sentence is completely different from the verb basic sentence. It has to be different because there is no relationship of subject and object in it. Indeed, the copula sentence does not have an object. It has instead a **complement**.

### 1. The copula assigns a description to the subject

In the sentences that follow, the copula has the complement describe the subject. A description that occurs in this way is called a **predicate adjective** if it is achieved by a single word, and **predicate-adjective phrase** if it is achieved by a sequence of words. In the sentence:

John *was* ill/annoying/pleased,

the copula assigns the description *ill* (or *annoying* or *pleased*) to the subject *John*. Such assigned descriptions are predicate adjective. In the next sentence:

Walking to school *might have been* as bad as you say,

the copula *might have been* assigns the description *as bad as you say* to the subject *walking to school*. So *as bad as you say* is a predicate adjective:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	PREDICATE ADJECTIVE
John	was	pleased.
Walking to school	might have been	as bad as you say.

### 2. The copula assigns a definition to the subject

This activity of the copula has the complement define the subject. In:

Practice *is* what you need

the copula *is* defines the subject *practice* in terms of the noun phrase *what you need*. In the next sentence:

To know that you are well ***has always been*** all I asked

the copula phrase *has always been* has the complement *all I have ever asked* define the subject *To know that you are well*.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	COMPLEMENT
Practice	is	what you need.
To know that you are well	has always been	all I asked.

### 3. The copula assigns a place in space to the subject.

In this role, the copula has the complement name the location of the subject. In so doing, it names the place that, geographically speaking, the subject occupies (or did, will or might occupy). The complement in such sentences names a geographic location (which is necessarily a place). It is therefore a locative noun phrase when it names a place (John was in London/at the party), and a locative pronoun when it refers to a place (John was here/there).

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	COMPLEMENT
John	was	at the party. [LOCATIVE NOUN PHRASE]
John	was	there. [LOCATIVE PRONOUN]

### 4. The copula assigns a place to the subject in existential space

In this role, the copula has the complement tell us where the subject is on a spiritual, ethical, moral, professional, *etc.* plane. In:

He ***is*** beyond recall,

the subject *he* is located by the copula *is* in some spiritual (or ethical or moral) space that is named by the noun phrase *beyond recall*. In the sentence:

They ***were*** in mourning,

the subject *they* is located by the copula *were* in the spiritual space named by the noun phrase *in mourning*. In the sentence:

She ***had been*** on duty

the subject *she* is located by the copula phrase *had been* in her professional space, named by the noun phrase *on duty*:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	COMPLEMENT
He	is	beyond recall.
They	were	in mourning.
She	had been	on duty.

### 5. The copula effects the occupation of the vacant subjects ‘It’, ‘That’ and ‘What’.

When the copula sentence does not name a subject but erects a token one instead (‘It’, ‘That’, ‘What’) the erection is a vacant one yet to be filled with the naming capacity (a noun or noun phrase) of the complement. The copula directs that this filling, or occupying, take place. Thus in the sentence:

It *is* true that he is happy

the copula *is* directs the noun phrase *that he is happy* to occupy the vacant subject *It*. This occupation is evident in that the noun phrase can sensibly take the place of the subject:

That he is happy *is* true.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	COMPLEMENT
It	is	true that he is happy.
That he is happy	is	true.

*The subjects ‘It’ and ‘That’ are not always vacant subjects.*

The vacant subject should not be confused with ‘It’ subjects that are not vacant. In this sentence, *It* represents the subject raised in an earlier sentence:

This machine *is* in good order. It *was* fixed yesterday.

In this sentence *That* represents the sense *the person you saw who was not me*:

‘I am sure I saw you there.’  
‘No. *That* was my sister.’

### *No adverb in a copula sentence*

The important characteristic of **the copula sentence** is that it **cannot contain an adverb**. This is no more than logical, for adverbs modify verbs, and the copula sentence does not contain a verb, for the simple reason that it is a copula sentence, not a verb sentence. Now, it might seem that this copula sentence:

He *is* really ill,

contains the adverb *really*. But it does not, for *really* modifies (or qualifies, as some people prefer) the predicate adjective *ill*. Qualifying an adjective, a word cannot be said to be functioning as an adverb. Rather, *really* is itself an adjective in this sentence. It has exactly the same function as ‘very’, or any other degree/intensity-setting qualifier of an adjective: *He is very/dangerously/etc. ill*. (For some reason that is not at all easy to identify, Traditional Grammar tends to call these qualifiers ‘adverbs of degree’. I suggest that ‘adjectives of degree’ is an essential correction here.)

Critics of the observation that there is no adverb in a copula sentence have proposed that sentences such as:

It *is* really John./It really *is* John.

refute that observation. These critics rely on the erroneous assumption that ‘really’ is by nature an adverb. Well, it is not, as we noted in the sentence ‘He is really ill’. Just as in that sentence *really* pertains to the predicate adjective *ill*, so in the above sentences *really* pertains to the noun *John*. And, pertaining to a noun, it is necessarily an adjective. ‘Is’ in these sentences effects the occupation by the complement *really John* of the vacant subject *It*. (The semantic template is obviously not ‘the is-ing John’; it is ‘the really John’.)

### **Copular-verb model of the basic sentence**

The copular verb looks like a verb, and, like the verb, it denotes an activity. But otherwise, it behaves like a copula because it does not have an object. In the copular-verb sentence, the subject does not act upon the object, for it has no object; it has a complement. (A subject acts upon the object only when the sentence is a verb sentence.)

**No verb is copular by nature. This is a fact, despite the common delusion that some are.** Rather, a verb is copular when it has a complement that determines something about the activity it denotes. A picture of those determining complements follows:

### 1. The complement locates the place of the subject's act.

In the sentence:

He *rested* in bed

there is no object: Rather, the subject's act *rested* is located by the noun-phrase complement *in bed*. Simply, *in bed* names the place where the subject *he* performed the act denoted by the copular verb *rested*. Some other place-naming functions of the complement are illuminated on this grid:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
He	rested	in bed
The man	slipped	on the wet path.
She	lives	in London.

### 2. The complement identifies the existential character of the subject's act

Whether the existential character of the subject's act is named prosaically:

The girl *left* in a hurry,

or metaphorically:

The girl *left* in high dudgeon,

it is a fact that the complement specifies the character of the subject's act by giving it an identity. The identity of *left* in the foregoing sentences is the *in a hurry* or *in high dudgeon* version of the act denoted by *left*. Other identity-givers of the act denoted by *left* might be 'in a leisurely manner', 'without regret', 'threatening revenge', *etc.* **These givers of identity to the subject's act are nouns for the simple reason that they name an identity.** That they function as nouns is obvious even morphologically: 'a hurry', 'dudgeon', 'tears'. (A further discussion of why they are not properly classified as adverbs occurs in the Chapter 2 'The Parts of Speech', under the heading 'Noun Case'.)

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
The girl	left	in a hurry. [NOUN PHRASE]
She	departed	in high dudgeon. [NOUN PHRASE].
The romance	ended	in tears. [NOUN PHRASE]

### 3. The complement identifies the direction of the subject's act.

When the copular verb itself identifies its own character, as in this sentence:

The pair *raved* about the trip,

its orientation (or 'direction' or 'bent') is further identified by a noun-phrase complement. The same reasoning informs the analysis of the sentence 'He *talked* of morality'. The subject's act, denoted by the copular verb *talked*, is said to have an 'of morality' bent, just as the subject's act, denoted by the copular verb 'raved', is said to have an 'about the trip' bent. In exactly the same way, the complement identifies the bent of the subject's act with an *-ing* ending noun:

I *went* fishing./We *go* dancing.

Without the direction-naming service of the nouns *fishing* and *dancing*, the copular verbs *went* and *go* would not be capable of denoting a specific activity:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
The pair	raved	about the trip.
He	talked	of morality.
I	went	fishing/to the pub/ <i>etc.</i>

### 4. The complement names the mood-context of the subject's act.

In this sentence:

The comment *was uttered* in jest/on the spur of the moment,

there is no activity at all. There is instead a locating of the subject *The comment* in an 'uttered in jest' or an 'uttered on the-spur of the-moment' mood-context. It is clear in these sentences that the point

made about the subject *The comment* is not simply that it perpetrated an act. The point is that the act was perpetrated in a particular mood-context. That mood-context is named by the noun phrases *in jest* and *on the spur of the moment*:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
The comment	was uttered	in jest. [NOUN PHRASE].
The comment	was uttered	on the spur of the moment. [NOUN PHRASE]

### 5. The complement names the content of the subject's act.

In the sentence:

The bushman *predicted* that there will be a storm,

the noun-phrase *that there will be a storm* names the content of the act *predicted* of the subject *the bushman*. The content of that act was 'storm prediction'. The other sentences on the grid also have 'content' templates: 'war prophecy', 'revenge threat', 'nonsense talk':

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
The bushman	predicted	that there will be a storm.
The speech	prophesised	war.
She	threatened	revenge.
The politician	talked	nonsense.

### 6. The complement names the purpose of the subject's act.

Sentences like:

I *live* to please you

and

They *shouted* to warn him

are all too easily mistaken for verb sentences in which *live to please* is the verb phrase, *I* the subject, and *you* the object. However, that the subject does not act upon the object is made clear in their passive-voice cast:

To please you *is* why I live.  
 To warn him *is* why they shouted.

Nothing attests more clearly than the above cast of this sentence that *to please you* and *to warn him* are noun phrases. And the *why* component of both sentences attests to the purpose-naming role of the noun phrases. Purpose-naming roles are performed also by ‘for’-headed noun phrases, as the grid shows:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
I	live	to please you.
They	shouted	to warn him.
That	was done	for your good.

### 7. The subject and complement depict their genitive relationship

In the sentence:

The soldiers *had* orders,

there is no activity. There is only the depiction of a genitive relationship between the subject *the soldiers* and the noun complement *orders*. The relationship depicted here has the meaning-template ‘the soldiers’ orders’. In the other sentence on the grid, the meaning template is ‘the child’s doll’:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA VERB	COMPLEMENT
The soldiers	had	orders.
The child	owns	a doll.

### 8. The complement joins the copular verb to describe the subject

In these sentences:

The chicken *was fried* crisp.

[THE CRISP-FRIED CHICKEN]

He *waxed* lyrical/indignant.

[THE INDIGNANT/LYRICAL WAXING HE]

She *stood* out.

[THE OUT-STANDING SHE]

there are the predicate-adjective complements *crisp*, *lyrical/indignant* and *out*. Being predicate adjectives, they necessarily describe the noun subject *the chicken* and the pronoun subjects *he* and *she*. In neither sentence is the subject described by the predicate adjective alone. That is, the subject *the chicken* is not

described merely as *crisp*; it is described as *crisp-fried*. And the other sentence, the subject *he* is not described only as *lyrical/indignant*; it is described as ‘*waxed-lyrical/indignant*’ In this sense, the copular verb is part of the description that a predicate-adjective complement makes of the subject.

subject	predicate	
	<i>copula verb</i>	<i>complement</i>
The chicken	was fried	crisp. [PREDICATE ADJECTIVE]
He	waxed	lyrical/indignant. [PREDICATE ADJECTIVE]
She	stood	out. [PREDICATE ADJECTIVE]

### What’s it all for?

Why do we need to know about the three basic-sentence procedures ‘verb basic sentence’, ‘copula basic sentence’ and ‘copular-verb basic sentence’ and their habits? The good reason is that we cannot know how the parts of sentences work to make sense if we do not know what those parts are, and what each does. Each of the basic-sentence procedures raises a subject, but each has a characteristic way of saying something about it. The ability to understand those ways is the first and the essential step in learning to analyse sentences. And it is only by analysing sentences that we are able to determine whether they are soundly constructed and therefore competent to make unambiguous sense.

### Styles of the independent sentence

There are only four styles of sentences that make statements. These styles are infinitely accommodating and flexible. They do not limit our self-expression any more than does the fact that all our reasoning procedures are either inductive or deductive. (People who think they can reason ‘laterally’ are kidding themselves!) It is a writer’s way of thinking about what he wants to say that determines the style in which each of his basic sentences will extend their scope for saying something.

The following is a sample of the four sentence styles. The basic sentence in each is underlined, and the verb, copula or copular in each is rendered in bold italics. (This sample is indicative, not exhaustive):

### Simple-sentence style

The simple sentence is any basic sentence. It is 'simple' because no complex or compound operations happens in it. A few inter-planted adverbs and adjectives do not make a complex sentence of it.

This is a simple copula basic sentence in which the subject *book* is assigned the definition *a polemic* by the copula *is*. The adjective phrase *justifiably angry* describes the noun *polemic*.

The book *is* a justifiably angry polemic.

This is a simple verb sentence:

Nature *abhors* a vacuum [ACTIVE VOICE].

A vacuum *is abhorred* by nature [PASSIVE VOICE].

This is a simple copular-verb sentence:

John *was keen to learn* basic French.

### Complex-sentence style

The complex sentence is formed when a basic sentence is embedded by phrases with a variety of syntactic functions. The following (in italics) is just one kind of embedding:

*Reopening their battle on the eve of the election, they warned that all candidates will be challenged to oppose the proposed defence cuts.*

This complex sentence (underlined) has a copular-verb basic sentence that specifies the content of the act *warned* of the subject *they* with the noun phrase *that all candidates will be challenged to oppose the cuts*. The basic sentence here is embedded by the introductory phrase 'Reopening their battle on the eve of the election'.

### Compound-sentence style

The compound sentence conjoins two or more simple sentences by means of logical operators.

It *is* an annoyance that their writers play historian *because there is no more* in these stories than ordinary romance.

This compound sentence contains a copula basic sentence in which the copula *is* directs the noun phrase *an annoyance that their writers play historian* to occupy the vacant subject *It*. This sentence is compounded by the logical operator *because* to the copula basic sentence in which the copula *is* directs the noun phrase *no more than romance* to occupy the vacant subject *there*.

### Composite-sentence style

A composite sentence is made up of several independent sentences that are capable of being spliced by commas.

We insist on fresh vegetables, they like strong spicing, their children will eat only chips, so choosing a restaurant is always a problem.

This sentence contains:

(i) a copular-verb basic sentence in which the noun phrase *on vegetables* locates the direction of the act *insist* of the subject *We*.

This is spliced to:

(ii) a verb basic sentence in which the subject *they* perpetrates the act denoted by *like* upon the object *spicing*.

This is spliced to:

(iii) a verb basic sentence in which the subject *children* perpetrates the act denoted by *will eat* upon the object *chips*.

This is spliced by a comma and the logical operator *so* to:

(iv) a copula basic sentence in which the copula *is* assigns the definition *a problem* to the noun-phrase subject *choosing a restaurant*.

### The dependent sentence

The dependent sentence does not construct its own subject-object/complement unit. It borrows that unit, and the sense it makes, from the independent sentence that precedes it. The dependent sentence is a staple feature of texts that represent dialogue:

‘Margaret was married yesterday.’  
‘I know.’

‘You will miss her.’  
‘Yes.’

Both the sentences ‘I know’ and ‘Yes’ depend for their sense on the sentences that precedes them: It is only because the sentence ‘Margaret was married yesterday’ precedes it that ‘I know’ can make the sense ‘I know that Margaret was married yesterday’. And it is only because the sentence ‘You will miss her’ precedes it that ‘Yes’ can make the sense ‘I will miss her’.

The next sentence, ‘The tall girl’, is not a model of the basic sentence. Yet it raises the subject *girl* and describes her as *tall*: Doing this, it should be acknowledged as a copula basic sentence. But it is not: The description is not effected by the implicit copula: The adjective *tall* is an attributive adjective, not a predicate adjective. Given its text, this sentence reveals itself to be the verb sentence ‘The tall girl is flying to the moon tomorrow’:

‘Who is flying to the moon tomorrow?’  
‘The tall girl.’

The dependent sentence is in no way an inferior sentence. In some texts it is much more appropriate than the independent sentence. Indeed, the writer or speaker who uses independent sentences in contexts that prefer dependent ones is irritating enough to provoke protest along these lines:

Don’t keep finishing your sentences. I am not a bloody fool.  
Frederick Lonsdale, *Child of the Twenties*

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