

Sentence Basics: A Primer

We all know that sentences are made up of words, but if you stop and think about the words, it can get complicated.

A sentence needs a *subject* and a *predicate* and must be a complete thought. A subject is the person or thing that the statement is made about. A predicate is the word or words that make the statement about the subject.

For example:

My friends built a new house in our neighborhood.

The simple subject is *friends* although the complete subject is *my friends*.

The predicate is *built a new house*. The predicate must have a verb and can include any other words that modify or complete the meaning of the verb.

The object is *house* because it receives the action of the verb *built*.

There is also a modifier—*in our neighborhood* modifies *built* by telling us where.

If any element is missing (subject, predicate, or complete thought), you will not have a sentence, but a sentence fragment.

For example:

The car in the tow yard. This is not a complete sentence because there is no predicate.

Was dented. This is not a complete sentence because there is no subject.

Because it was wrecked in an accident. This is not a complete sentence because it is a subordinate clause and has no complete thought.

To make this a complete sentence, it would have to be put together:

The car in the tow yard was dented because it was wrecked in an accident.

You can put more than one thought into a sentence as long as they are closely related:

The car in the tow yard was dented because the owner's teenage brother was careless, and wrecked it in an accident by rear-ending another car.

Here we have a sequence that is related—we now know who wrecked the car and how it happened.

Sentences can be simple or they can be complex, but they must have all the elements: a subject, predicate, and complete thought. Armed with these basics, write well!