

GUIDE TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR

*Comma Rules, Subjects and Verbs,
Who vs. Whom, Independent and
Dependent Clauses, Run-Ons, Comma*

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Part 9: Direct and Indirect Objects

In a sentence, the subject and verb may be followed by an object. An **object** is a noun or pronoun that gives meaning to the subject and verb of the sentence. Not all sentences contain objects, but some may contain one or more. There are two kinds of objects within a sentence: **direct** and **indirect objects**.

A **direct object** is a noun or pronoun that receives the action of a verb.

Daniel fixes computers.
direct object

Try this technique when determining the location of the direct object in the above sentence:

- 1) First locate the subject and verb in the sentence. The subject in the above sentence is “Daniel” and the verb is “fixes.”
- 2) Now ask yourself the questions *What?* or *Whom?* about the verb “fixes.”
- 3) *What does the subject, **Daniel**, fix?* Daniel fixes computers.

Sometimes a direct object is followed by an indirect object. An **indirect object** is the noun or pronoun for which the action is done.

Daniel fixes computers for his family.
indirect object

- 1) First locate the subject (*Daniel*) and the verb (*fixes*).
- 2) Now ask yourself the questions *To Whom?* *To What?* *For Whom?* or *For What?* about the subject and verb.
- 3) *For whom does the subject, **Daniel**, fix computers?* Daniel fixes computers for his family.

**An indirect object may also come *before* the direct object:

Susan gave me her notes. (*To whom did Susan give her notes? me*)

Part 8: Five Fixes for Run-Ons and Comma Splices

Days are cooler leaves are falling. [run-on sentence]

Days are cooler, leaves are falling. [comma splice]

Fix # 1: Use end punctuation to make two sentences.

Days are cooler. Leaves are falling.

Fix # 2: Use a comma and conjunction to join sentences.

Days are cooler, **and** leaves are falling.

Fix # 3: Use a semicolon to join sentences.

Days are cooler; leaves are falling.

Fix # 4: Use a semicolon to join sentences, and use a conjunctive adverb to show relationship.

Days are cooler; **therefore**, leaves are falling.
(The conjunctive adverb “therefore” indicates cause/effect relationship).

Fix # 5: Use a subordinate conjunction to make one of the sentences a dependent clause.

Because days are cooler, leaves are falling.

Part 1: Locating Subjects

A sentence must always consist of at least a subject and a predicate. A **subject** is anything that governs the action of a verb while the **predicate** includes the verb and any accompanying objects, modifiers, or complements. The **verb** is the action of the subject. In the following examples, the sentences are split into subjects and predicates, and the verbs are underlined:

[The baby] [cried for a bottle.]
subject predicate

[The price of this necklace] [is too expensive.]
subject predicate

The **simple subject** is the specific noun or pronoun while the **complete subject** is the simple subject along with all the words that modify or explain the simple subject. In the following examples, the simple subjects are underlined and the complete subjects are in boldface:

The **gray cat in the pet store** is for sale.
Many people attended the banquet.

The subject of the sentence is **compound** when it consists of two or more subjects often joined by *and* or *or*.

Sara and Amy went to the movies.
compound subject

When the subject is a command, the subject is implied to be *you*.

(You) Go to bed.
implied subject

(You) Sit.
implied subject

Part 2: Locating Verbs

Every sentence includes a predicate along with the subject. The **predicate** includes the verb along with any accompanying objects, modifiers, or complements. Within the predicate, the **verb** is the word that expresses action or state of being. In the following sentences, the verbs are underlined while the predicates are in boldface:

The elephant escaped **from the zoo**.
Tom gave **Laura flowers on her birthday**.

Two types of verbs include action and linking. **Action verbs** are verbs that describe action while **linking verbs** join the subject with a word or phrase that describes the subject. For example:

Sally dropped her papers.
action verb

Two students are absent.
linking verb

A **compound verb** consists of two or more verbs joined by *and* or *or*.

The dog begged and whined for a treat.
compound verb

Words such as *never*, *not*, *hardly*, *seldom*, and *so on* are modifiers, not verbs.

You hardly ate any food.
v

Rule Eight

Use commas to separate a direct quotation from the rest of the sentence.

- The instructor warned, “Students who do not study hard will fail the test.”
- Mother asked, “Who wants to go get ice cream?”
- “Yes,” the store clerk replied, “we do have this shirt in your size.”

Rule Nine

Use a comma to separate sentence elements to create the intended meaning.

- Still water is very refreshing.
- Still, water is very refreshing. (the comma changes the meaning)
- When we visited John, Robert came along.
- When we visited, John Robert came along.

Rule Ten

Use a comma to set off most conjunctive adverbs (*however*, *otherwise*, *therefore*, *similarly*, *hence*, *on the other hand*, and *consequently*). But do not use a comma after the conjunctive adverbs *then*, *thus*, *soon*, *now*, and *also*. In the following examples, a semicolon is used to separate two independent clauses.

- The sick woman needs to be given treatment; **otherwise**, her illness will become fatal.
- Mark’s goals were materialistic; **therefore**, he discarded any career choices that offered only minimal salaries.
- The maid washed the dishes and mopped the floor; **however**, she forgot to make the beds.
- We need to evacuate the beach quickly; **soon** there will be a severe thunderstorm.

Rule Six

If the dependent clause comes after the independent clause, no comma is needed.

- We went to the store to buy school supplies **since the new school year was about to begin.**
- English is my favorite subject **because I love to read and write.**
- The boy felt nervous **even though he had been to the dentist before.**

Rule Seven

Use commas around nonessential words, phrases, and clauses that interrupt the flow of the sentence. If these words are dropped, the sentence will still make sense and retain its basic meaning.

- John, **the boy who drives the ice cream truck**, is my brother.
- John is my brother. (the sentence retains its basic meaning without “the boy who drives the ice cream truck”)
- The pillow, **soft and fluffy**, cushioned my head as I napped on the hammock.
- The pillow cushioned my head as I napped on the hammock. (sentence still makes sense, retains basic meaning)

Do not use the commas if the clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence and cannot be taken out.

- Everyone **who does their homework and studies** will make an “A.”
- Everyone will make an “A.” (meaning is not the same, it is not guaranteed that everyone will make an “A”)
- All the apples **which were brown and rotted** were thrown away.
- All the apples were thrown away. (meaning is not the same, not all of the apples will be thrown away)

Part 3: Passive vs. Active Voice

Verbs can be either passive or active. Consider the following sentences:

Of Mice and Men was published in 1937 by John Steinbeck.

John Steinbeck published *Of Mice and Men* in 1937.

These two sentences carry the same message, yet they are worded differently. The first sentence, written in **passive voice**, makes the subject (*Of Mice and Men*) receive the action of the verb (*was published*). The second sentence, written in **active voice**, makes the subject (*John Steinbeck*) the “doer” of the action (*published*).

Sentences written in active voice are more direct since the subject does the action of the verb. Passive voice, on the other hand, is less preferable since it often omits the subject of the action. The following examples show that passive sentences do not give credit to the subject of the action while active sentences do:

The key was lost. [**passive**]
Linda lost the key. [**active**]

The man was struck by lightning. [**passive**]
Lightning struck the man. [**active**]

Students should avoid using passive voice in academic writing; however, when the subject of the action is unknown, obvious, or unimportant, passive voice is acceptable. For example, in scientific lab reports, the passive voice is often used because the subject of the action is unimportant:

Participants in the study were asked to record their responses.
passive voice

The original water level was subtracted from the final amount.
passive voice

Part 4: Independent and Dependent Clauses

Sentences may contain both dependent and independent clauses, but they must always contain at least one independent clause. An **independent clause** is a group of words with a subject and verb that *can* stand alone and make sense. For example:

Todd ate dinner.
We entered the building.
I was tired.
The storm ended.

A **dependent clause**, on the other hand, is a group of words which may contain both a subject and a verb; however, it *cannot* stand alone since it depends on the independent clause to give it meaning. In the following examples of dependent clauses, the subjects are in boldface while the verbs are underlined:

While **Todd** ate dinner
When **we** entered the building
Because **I** was tired
After **the storm** ended

The words *while, when, because, after, and since* are all **dependent marker words**, or words that indicate a dependent clause. Other dependent marker words include: *although, as, as if, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, whenever, whether.*

Rule Four

Put a comma between coordinate adjectives. (They are coordinate if they sound natural when they are either reversed or joined by *and*.)

- The road dwindled into a **rough, narrow** path.
or
- The road dwindled into a **narrow and rough** path.

The comma does not separate adjectives when they sound unnatural when switched or separated by *and*.

- Correct: She gave the teacher a large red apple.
- Incorrect: She gave the teacher a red and large apple.

Rule Five

Set off long introductory dependent clauses and phrases (four or more words) with a comma. These clauses and phrases do not include the subject and verb of the sentence, and they cannot stand alone as complete sentences.

- **At the beginning of spring**, flowers began to bloom.
- **Although the prices were reduced**, they were still absurdly high.
- **Having finished his homework**, the boy was permitted to go outside and play.
- **Forgetting to set her alarm clock**, Ann woke up to find she was three hours late for work.
- **A studious and hard-working student**, Thomas turned in every assignment on time.

Commas are optional after introductory word groups that are not four words or more.

- **During summer** we go on vacation.
- **On Fridays** we order pizza.

Part 7: Comma Rules

Rule One

Put a comma before coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*--remember the acronym FANBOYS) only if they connect two independent clauses (a clause that is capable of standing alone as a sentence).

independent clause + conjunction + independent clause = comma before conjunction

- Jerry picked vegetables, **and** Bob mowed the lawn.
- I did not bring an umbrella in the rain, **nor** did I wear a raincoat.

Rule Two

Do **not** put a comma before coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS) if they connect an independent clause with a dependent clause (a group of words that cannot stand alone as a sentence).

*independent clause + conjunction + dependent clause = **no** comma before conjunction*

- The teacher scolded the boy for being late **and** sent him to the office.
- We watched the sky **and** hoped to see a shooting star.

Rule Three

Put a comma after words, phrases, and clauses in a series.

- **Dogs, cats, and birds** are common household pets. (words)
- The hound ran **down the hill, through the meadow, and into the forest** in pursuit of the rabbit. (prepositional phrases)
- **When the weather warms up, when the snow is melted, and when the roads are clear,** school will be back in session. (three dependent clauses followed by an independent clause)

Part 5: Punctuating Clauses Within Sentences

Compound Sentences: Two or more independent clauses can be connected with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so*). For example:

The weather cleared up, **and** we went to the park.

Two independent clauses can also be joined by a semicolon as long as the clauses are closely related:

The boy raised his hand; he wanted to ask a question.

Conjunctive adverbs can follow semicolons to show relationship between two independent clauses. Examples of conjunctive adverbs include: *also, consequently, furthermore, hence, however, in fact, moreover, nevertheless, now, on the other hand, otherwise, soon, therefore, similarly, then, thus*. For example:

My alarm clock broke; **therefore**, I missed my first class.

Complex Sentences: A sentence containing one independent clause and one dependent clause can be written without any punctuation when the independent clause comes first and the dependent clause comes second:

[I watered the plant] [because it was dying.]
independent **dependent**
clause **clause**

An exception to this rule is when the dependent clause begins with the words *although, though, or even though*. These words should have commas before them when the dependent clause comes after the independent clause:

John continued playing, **even though** his mother told him to come inside.

When the dependent clause comes first, a comma is needed before the independent clause:

[When summer arrived,] [we went on vacation.]
dependent independent
clause clause

Punctuating Restrictive & Nonrestrictive Clauses

Restrictive Clause: When a dependent clause begins with a relative pronoun such as *that*, *which*, *who*, *whom*, or *whose*, do not set it off by commas if it is essential to the meaning of the sentence. For example:

The milk that is in the refrigerator is expired.
relative clause

Nonrestrictive Clause: When the relative clause introduces information that is *not* essential to the sentence, set it off with commas:

The photograph, which is now faded, was taken in the 1930s.
relative clause

The relative clause “which is now faded” is nonrestrictive because it can be taken out, and the sentence still makes sense and retains its basic meaning.

Part 6: Who vs. Whom

When introducing a relative clause with *who* or *whom*, the choice depends on whether the pronoun is in the subjective or objective case. **Subjective case pronouns** act as subjects of sentences while **objective case pronouns** act as objects of sentences.

Subjective Case Pronouns: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who*

She ate lunch. (*she is the subject of the sentence*)

Objective Case Pronouns: *me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom*

We saw him. (*him is the object of the sentence*)

To decide between *who* or *whom*, rephrase the clause as a sentence and substitute a different pronoun for *who/whom*.

I met the actor (who/whom) played in this movie.
relative clause

Now rephrase the relative clause into a sentence by substituting *who/whom* with the correct pronoun:

(He/him) played in this movie. (*He played* or *Him played?* **He**)

Who should be used in subjective case while *whom* should be used in objective case. Since the pronoun *he* is a subjective pronoun, the pronoun *who* should be used instead of the objective pronoun *whom*.

Correct: I met the actor **who** played in this movie.

Now decide whether to use *who* or *whom* in this sentence:

She is the girl (who/whom) I hired.

Rephrased: I hired **her**. (*her is an objective case pronoun*)

Correct: She is the girl **whom** I hired. (*whom is used since it is an objective case pronoun*)