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ers are shown in parentheses)

## JCE TURE

---

res (198–205)  
terms (11–18)  
ences (93–98)  
ation (37–62)  
Clauses (161–162)  
d Verbs (9–10, 130–134)  
ts (159–160, 226–227)  
tion  
*Adjectivals* (172–209)  
*Adverbials* (149–171)  
structure  
1, 81–83)  
30–134)  
ansformation (96–97)  
ctive/Passive  
23, 134–135)

## UATION

---

53–55, 56, 202–204)  
02–204)  
and Sentence (46–56)  
(283–292)  
(274–277)  
(271–274)  
e vs. Nonrestrictive  
(90)  
Effects (277–279)  
and the Comma  
(9)  
(52–53, 56)  
mma (42–44)  
ations with Series  
(1, 216–217)

## ON

---

50–151).  
Contract (68–70)

Levels of Generality (84–87)  
Metadiscourse (80–81, 120–123)  
Parallelism (40–41, 81–83)  
Passive Voice (77–78)  
Pronouns (72–76)

## DICTION

---

Be as Main Verb (6, 12, 28–30,  
32–33, 147–148)  
Clichés (113–114)  
Contractions (114–117)  
Formality (110, 111–113, 118)  
Hedging (120–122)  
Idioms (118)  
It-Cleft (94–95)  
Nominalized Verbs (142)  
Personal Voice (107–128)  
Point of View (124–127)  
Precise Verbs (144–147)  
There-Transformation (99–100)  
Tone (107–110)  
*You/One* (125–126)

## REVISION

---

of Abstract Subject (142–144)  
of Be as Main Verb (147–148)  
of Obscure Agent (139–141)  
using Participles (180–183)  
of Passive to Active (139–141)  
using Power Words (101–105)  
Showing, Not Telling (144–147)  
using Subordinate Clauses  
(155–156)

## SENTENCE RHYTHM

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Adverbials of Emphasis (103–104)

(Continued on inside back cover)

# Rhetorical Grammar

*Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*

FIFTH EDITION

Martha Kolln

The Pennsylvania State University

Pearson  
Education

New York San Francisco Boston  
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that follows this chapter pulls together all of the punctuation rules you have studied in context throughout the book.

The Bibliography that follows the Glossary of Punctuation lists the works mentioned in the text, along with other books and articles on rhetoric and grammar. The future teachers among you will find them useful for research purposes and for your teaching preparation.

Throughout the book you will find exercises and issues for group discussion that you are encouraged to work on. Answers to the odd-numbered exercise items are included in the back of the book.

Be sure to use the Glossary of Terms and the Index if you are having problems understanding a concept. They are there to provide help.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Structure of Sentences

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### CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter you will learn to think about a sentence as a series of slots, each of which has a particular role to play. Some of the slots are required and fairly stable, others optional and movable. Looking at sentence structure in this way should help you to appreciate both its systematic nature and its potential for variation. This grammar overview also gives you a vocabulary for thinking about sentences as you write and revise, a language for discussing language. The vocabulary will be useful throughout the book, where you will be learning about various tools for tinkering with the basic sentences you study in this chapter. And if your future plans include teaching, this overview of sentence structure, besides sharpening your own language skills, will help prepare you to help others understand and sharpen theirs.

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### THE TWO-PART SENTENCE

We begin this overview of grammar by looking at sentence structure in action, in the opening paragraph of an essay by Annie Dillard, a well-known essayist and observer of nature:

A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks? He sleeps in his underground den, his tail draped over his nose. Sometimes he lives in his den for two days without leaving. Outside, he stalks rabbits, mice, muskrats, and birds, killing more bodies than he can eat warm, and often dragging the carcasses home. Obedient to instinct, he bites his prey at the neck, either splitting the

jugular vein at the throat or crunching the brain at the base of the skull, and he does not let go. One naturalist refused to kill a weasel who was socketed into his hand deeply as a rattlesnake. The man could in no way pry the tiny weasel off, and he had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his palm, and soak him off like a stubborn label.

—Annie Dillard (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*)

Dillard's opening sentence couldn't be simpler. She has used a common **sentence pattern**,<sup>1</sup> "Something is something." You won't have to read far in most modern essays, or in this textbook, to find that use of *be* as a linking verb. (Notice the first sentence following the weasel quotation!)

Dillard could easily have come up with fancier words, certainly more scientific-sounding ones, if she had wanted to:

Scientists recognize the weasel, genus *Mustela*, as a wild creature. As with other wild animals, one can only speculate about the weasel's thinking process, if, indeed, animals do think in the accepted sense of the word.

Are you tempted to read on? (If you have to, maybe—if there's a weasel test coming up!) It's possible that some people might continue reading even if they didn't have to—weasel specialists, perhaps—but for the average reader, the effect of this stodgy rewrite is certainly different from the breezy

A weasel is wild. Who knows what he thinks?

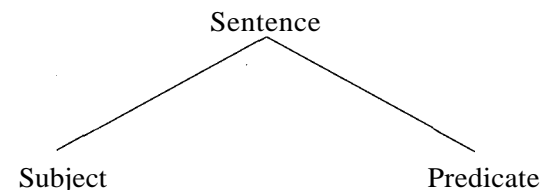
Dillard's reader is likely to say, "Here comes an essay that promises a new glimpse of nature—one that I will understand and enjoy. It's written in my kind of language."

The linking-*be* sentence pattern provides a good illustration of both our subconscious grammar ability and the concept of rhetorical awareness, of recognizing the effect our sentences can have on readers. As native speakers, we learn to use *be*, including its irregular past forms (*was*, *were*) and its three present-tense forms (*am*, *are*, and *is*), perhaps without even realizing they are related to *be*, the form we call the **infinitive**.<sup>2</sup> If you are not a native speaker of English, you have probably spent a great deal of time learning the various forms of *be* and how they are used, just as native English speakers studying a foreign language must do when learning its equivalent of *be*.

<sup>1</sup>Words in boldface type are explained in the Glossary of Terms, beginning on page 293.

<sup>2</sup>The label *infinitive* describes the form of the verb that we use with *to*: *to be*, *to go*, *to have*, *to eat*, and so on. For verbs other than *be*, the infinitive form is identical to the present tense.

Before looking at all of the separate structures in the various patterns, we will examine the two major parts of every sentence: the **subject** and the **predicate**.



You probably know these labels from your study of grammar in middle school or high school. They name the functions of the two major slots of every sentence. The **subject**, as its name implies, is generally the topic of the sentence, the something or a someone that the sentence is about; the **predicate** is the point that is made about that topic. In the following sentences, you'll find a "something or "someone" occupying the subject slot, so you will probably have no trouble recognizing the dividing line between the two basic parts:

1. A weasel is wild.
2. Tomatoes give me hives.
3. Jenny's sister graduated from nursing school.
4. Gino's father flew helicopters in Vietnam.
5. The gymnasium on our campus needs a new roof.

If you divided the sentences like this,

1. A weasel / is wild.
2. Tomatoes / give me hives.
3. Jenny's sister / graduated from nursing school.
4. Gino's father / flew helicopters in Vietnam.
5. The gymnasium on our campus / needs a new roof.

—and chances are good that you did—then you have recognized the two basic units of every sentence.

You were probably able to make the divisions between the subjects and predicates on the basis of meaning, by identifying what was being said about something or someone. But if you're not sure, you can use your grammar expertise to double check: Simply substitute a **pronoun** for the subject. That pronoun, you will discover, stands in for the entire subject slot:

He (*a weasel*) is wild. (*It* can also be used for animals.)

They (*tomatoes*) give me hives.

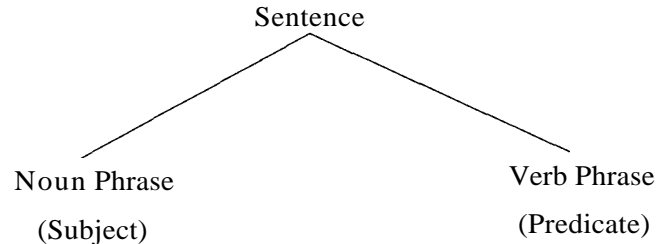
She (Jenny's sister) graduated from nursing school.

He (Gino's father) flew helicopters in Vietnam.

It (the gymnasium on our campus) needs a new roof

Our automatic way of accessing pronouns provides a good illustration of our internalized system of grammar.

Another way to describe the two major sentence slots, the subject and the predicate, is according to the forms of the structures that fill them:



The term **phrase** refers to a word or group of words that acts as a unit. A **noun phrase** consists of a **headword** noun along with all of the words and phrases that modify—that describe or limit—it. In the following list of subject noun phrases from our five sample sentences, the headwords are underlined:

1. A weasel
2. Tomatoes
3. Jenny's sister
4. Gino's father
5. The gymnasium on our campus

The predicate in each of those five sentences is a **verb phrase** in form, as the predicate always is. Like the noun phrase, the verb phrase is a unit with a headword—in this case, a verb. In the following list of verb phrases, the verb headword is underlined:

is wild  
 give me hives  
graduated from nursing school  
flew helicopters in Vietnam  
needs a new roof

Remember that the term predicate refers to the whole verb phrase and the term subject to the whole noun phrase—not to just their headwords.

Note that we are using the word phrase even for a structure that consists of a single word, such as the subject "Tomatoes" in our second example. In the sentence "Babies cry," both the noun phrase and the verb phrase consist of single words.

### Questions and Commands

This two-part structure—subject and predicate—underlies all of our sentences in English, even those in which the two parts may not be apparent at first glance. For example, in questions—also called **interrogative sentences**—the subject is sometimes located in the predicate half of the sentence; to discover the two parts, you have to recast the question in the form of a **declarative sentence**, or statement:

Question: Which chapters will our test cover?

Statement: Our test / will cover which chapters.

In the command, or **imperative sentence**, the subject—the "understood" you—generally doesn't show up at all; the form of the verb is always the infinitive, or base form:

(You) Hold the onions!

(You) Be a good sport.

(You) Come with me to the concert.

Sometimes, for special emphasis, the you is included:

You be nice to your sister.

Don't you forget our date.

Questions and commands are certainly not structures to worry about: You've been an expert at asking questions and giving orders for many, many years.

## THE EXPANDED VERB

In our five sample sentences, the underlined headword in each predicate is the complete verb, the simple **present** or simple **past tense**: *is*, *give*, *graduated*, *flew*, *needs*. As you probably know, however, many of the predicates we use in writing and speech include **auxiliary**, or **helping**, **verbs**. You'll find the auxiliary sometimes more than one, in the position before the main verb. Here are some you have read in this chapter so far:

In this chapter you will learn to think about ...

Note that we are using the word phrase ...

Here are some you have read in this chapter so far.

And in the following example, there are two auxiliaries, in this case separated by the adverb easily:

Dillard *could* easily *have come up* with fancier words ...

Here, then, are the primary auxiliaries we use to expand our verbs, providing variations in meaning related to tense (time) and such conditions as probability, possibility, obligation, and necessity (mood):

Forms of be: be, am, is, are, was, were, been, being

Forms of have: have, has, had

Modals: can, could, *may*, might, will, would, *shall*, should, must, *ought* to

Missing from this list is do, which is a special kind of auxiliary. We call on do, or one of its other two forms, does and did, when we need an auxiliary for converting a positive sentence into a negative or a statement into a question or for carrying the emphasis:

I don't like horseradish.

Do you like horseradish?

Joe does like horseradish.

Do sit down.

This auxiliary use of do is called **do-support**; in other words, do comes to the rescue when an auxiliary is needed. Like be and have, do can also serve as a main verb; all three are among our most common verbs.

### EXERCISE 1

Draw a line to separate the subject and predicate in each of the following sentences. Remember the trick of substituting a pronoun to discover where the subject slot ends.

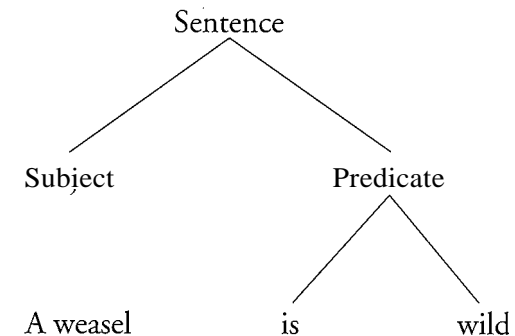
(Note: You will find answers to the odd-numbered items in the Answers section at the back of the book.)

1. My son's kindergarten teacher is teaching the children some simple French and Spanish songs.
2. The naturalist in Annie Dillard's story could not pry the tiny weasel off his hand.
3. The weasel simply dangled from his palm.

4. A friend of mine from Fort Wayne has been volunteering at the library for over twenty years.
5. My uncle from Laramie, my dad, and I are going to hike the Appalachian Trail next summer.
6. The long trail, extending from Maine to Georgia, is maintained by the Appalachian Trail Commission.
7. The name of the Mars Rover, Sojourner, was suggested by a schoolgirl in honor of Sojourner Truth.
8. The term nounphrase refers to a word or group of words that act as a unit.

## SENTENCE PATTERNS

The linking-be pattern, which we looked at earlier, is one of seven basic **sentence patterns** we describe in this chapter. These seven represent the underlying skeletal structure of nearly all our sentences in English—perhaps 95 percent of them. As you study the patterns, you will find it useful to think of each one as a series of slots. You've already seen the two basic slots: the subject and the predicate. The next step is to differentiate among the seven patterns on the basis of the structures that fill their predicate slots. Here are the two slots in our earlier weasel sentence:



In this pattern the structure following the linking-be is called a **subject complement** because it says something about the subject: The adjective wild is a modifier of weasel.

There are four categories of verbs that produce our seven patterns: **be**, the **linking** verbs, the **intransitive** verbs, and the **transitive** verbs. They add up to seven patterns because be is subclassified into two groups and the transitive verbs into three.

### The Be Patterns

Because *be* plays such an important part in sentence structure, not only as a main verb but also as an auxiliary, we put our *be* sentences into patterns separate from the linking verbs. And while most *be* sentences do have a subject complement, as we saw in the weasel sentence, some do not. The first pattern describes those sentences in which the second slot of the predicate contains an **adverbial** of time or place rather than a subject complement. Pattern 1 is not generally considered the linking use of *be*.

PATTERN 1	SUBJECT	BE	ADVERBIAL
	<i>The weasel</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>in his den.</i>
	<i>The rehearsal</i>	<i>will be</i>	<i>tomorrow.</i>

PATTERN 2	SUBJECT	BE	SUBJECT COMPLEMENT
	<i>The students</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>clever.</i> (Adjective)
	<i>Gino's father</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>a pilot.</i> (Noun phrase)

The subject complement describes or renames the subject. If it's a noun phrase, it has the same **referent** as the subject. *Referent* means the person or thing or event or concept that a noun or noun phrase stands for; in other words, *apilot* and *Gino's father* refer to the same person.

When the subject complement is an adjective, as we have seen in two examples—*A weasel is wild*; *The students are clever*—that complement names a quality of the subject. An alternative way of modifying the subject is to shift the adjective to the position before the noun headword: *a wild weasel*; *the clever students*. That, of course, is precisely what the subject complement means; the difference between the two structures, the pre-noun modifier and the subject complement, has to do with emphasis and purpose rather than meaning. The subject complement position puts greater emphasis on the adjective.

### The Linking Verb Pattern

The term **linking verb** applies to all verbs other than *be* completed by a subject complement—the adjective or noun phrase that describes or identifies the subject. Among the common linking verbs are the verbs of the senses—*taste*, *smell*, *feel*, *sound*, and *look*—which often link an adjective to the subject. *Become* and *remain* are the two most common ones that connect a noun or noun phrase. Other common linking verbs are *seem*, *appear*, and *prove*.

		LINKING VERB	SUBJECT COMPLEMENT
PATTERN 3	SUBJECT		
	<i>The pizza</i>	<i>looks</i>	<i>delicious.</i>
	<i>My sister</i>	<i>became</i>	<i>a nurse.</i>

Here again, as with Pattern 2, the subject complement slot is in line for emphasis.

### The Intransitive Verb Pattern

In the intransitive pattern, the predicate has only one required slot: the verb alone.

		INTRANSITIVE VERB
PATTERN 4	SUBJECT	
	<i>The whole class</i>	<i>laughed.</i>
	<i>The baby</i>	<i>cried.</i>

As you know, such skeletal sentences are fairly rare in actual writing. The point here is that they are grammatical: No further slots are required. In the section "The Optional Slot" later in this chapter, you will read about adverbial modifiers, structures that add information about time and place and manner and reason, which are commonly added to all the sentence patterns, including this one. However, adding a modifier does not change the basic pattern. The following variations of our samples remain Pattern 4 sentences:

The whole class laughed *at the teacher's jokes*.

The baby cried *for ten minutes*.

Other common intransitive verbs are *sit*, *stand*, *come*, *go*, *walk*, *run*, *work*, *play*--and literally thousands more. They are among the verbs known as *action verbs*. You've probably read or heard advice about using action verbs to enliven your prose. For example, instead of writing

Henry is a hard worker.

using *be* as your main verb, you could show action with

Henry works hard.

This is a simple example of what is called *paraphrase*, or finding an alternative way of saying the same thing—or almost the same thing (neither

<b>2. Subject</b>	<b>Be</b>	<b>Subject Complement</b>	
<i>The students</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>clever.</i> (ADJ)	
<i>Gino's father</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>a pilot.</i> (NP)	
<b>3. Subject</b>	<b>Linking Verb</b>	<b>Subject Complement</b>	
<i>The pizza</i>	<i>looks</i>	<i>delicious.</i> (ADJ)	
<i>My sister</i>	<i>became</i>	<i>a nurse.</i> (NP)	
<b>4. Subject</b>	<b>Intransitive Verb</b>		
<i>The baby</i>	<i>cried.</i>		
<b>5. Subject</b>	<b>Transitive Verb</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>	
<i>Weasels</i>	<i>stalk</i>	<i>rabbits.</i>	
<b>6. Subject</b>	<b>Transitive Verb</b>	<b>Indirect Object</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>
<i>Marie</i>	<i>gave</i>	<i>Ramon</i>	<i>a birthday gift.</i>
<b>7. Subject</b>	<b>Transitive Verb</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>	<b>Object Complement</b>
<i>The teacher</i>	<i>called</i>	<i>the students</i>	<i>brilliant.</i> (ADJ)
<i>The teacher</i>	<i>considers</i>	<i>the students</i>	<i>hard workers.</i> (NP)

## THE OPTIONAL SLOT

The slots that make up the sentence pattern formulas can be thought of as the basic requirements for grammatical sentences. In other words, a linking verb requires a subject complement in order to be complete; a transitive verb requires a direct object. But there's another important slot that can be added to all the formulas, as mentioned in connection with the intransitive pattern: an optional slot filled by an **adverbial**, a structure that adds information about time, place, manner, reason, and the like.

Pattern 4, the intransitive pattern, rarely appears without at least one adverbial. Sentences as short as our two examples (*The whole class laughed* *The baby cried*) are fairly rare in prose; and when they do appear, they nearly always call attention to themselves. The adverbials in the following sentences are underlined:

1. During the Vietnam War, Gino's dad was a pilot.
2. Because a weasel is wild, it should be approached with great caution.
3. Yesterday the teacher called the students lazy when they complained about their assignment.
4. This morning I got up early to study for my Spanish test.

The term *adverbial* refers to any grammatical structure that adds what we think of as "adverbial information." It adds the kind of information that **adverbs** add, and adverbs, you may recall from your grammar classes of old, are modifiers of verbs. In the first and second examples, you'll see **prepositional phrases**: *During the Vietnam War* tells "when"; *with great caution* tells "how." The second and third sentences include **subordinate clauses**: The *because* clause tells "why"; the *when* clause, of course, tells "when." The third and fourth include adverbs of time, *yesterday* and *early*. And sentence four also has a noun phrase, *this morning*, that tells "when;" along with an **infinitive phrase**, *to study for my Spanish test*, that tells "why."

It's important to recognize that when we use the word *optional* we are referring only to grammaticality, not to the importance of the adverbial information. If you remove those underlined adverbials from the four sentences, you are left with grammatical, albeit skeletal, sentences. However, even though the sentence is grammatical in its skeletal form, many times the adverbial information is the very reason for the sentence—the main focus. For example, if you tell someone

I got up early to study for my Spanish test,

you're probably doing so in order to explain when or why about your morning schedule; the adverbials are the important information. The main clause—the fact that you got up—goes without saying!

The variety of structures available for adding information makes the adverbial a remarkably versatile tool for writers. You can add a detail about frequency, for example, by using a single word, a phrase, a whole clause—or a combination—depending on the writing situation:

My friends and I have pizza regularly.

My friends and I have pizza with persistent regularity.

My friends and I have pizza for breakfast, lunch, and dinner nearly every day of the week.

My friends and I have pizza whenever the mood strikes.

And it's not just their form that makes adverbials so versatile. Perhaps even more important is their movability: They can open the sentence or close it; they can even be inserted between the slots for special effect. Many of

the discussions about cohesion and rhythm that you will read in the next few chapters are concerned with the placement of movable structures, including adverbials.

In Chapter 8 the various forms of adverbials are discussed in detail.

### EXERCISE 3

A. Draw vertical lines between the sentence slots, paying special attention to the various adverbials.

**Example:** To save money / I / always / walk / to work / when the weather is nice.

1. Sometimes a weasel lives in his den for two days without leaving.
2. In 2000 campaign finance reform became a big issue during the primaries.
3. Very soon the issue simply disappeared from the Congressional agenda.
4. During warmups, before the game started, the basketball team looked exhausted.
5. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling chemicals.
6. My bicycle disappeared from the bike rack after I rode it to work on Saturday.
7. Jen worked steadily in the lab throughout the night to finish her project before the Monday deadline.
8. This morning my roommate gave me a bad time because I used her cell phone without permission yesterday.
9. Everyone smiles in the same language.
10. In Chapter 8 you will study adverbials in detail.

B. Rewrite the sentences in Part A in as many ways as you can by shifting the location of the adverbials. You'll discover that some are more movable than others.

## THE PASSIVE VOICE

You're probably familiar with the definition of verbs as "action words," a description commonly applied to both intransitive and transitive verbs:

The baby cried. (Pattern 4)

My roommate borrowed my laptop. (Pattern 5)

In these sentences the subjects are performing the action; they are making something happen. Linguists use the term **agent** for this "doer" of the verbal action. Another term that describes this relationship of the subject to the verb is **active voice**.

What happens when we turn the Pattern 5 sentence around, when we remove the agent from the subject slot and give that role to the original direct object, *my Laptop*?

My laptop was borrowed by my roommate.

This reversal has changed the sentence from active to **passive voice**. However, while *my roommate* is no longer the sentence subject, it is still the agent; and while *my laptop* is no longer the direct object, it is still the so-called receiver of the action. What has changed are their functions, their roles, in the sentence, not their relationship to each other.

The transformation from active to passive involves three steps:

1. The direct object becomes the subject.
2. A form of *be* is added as an auxiliary (in this case the past form *was*, because *borrowed* is past); it teams with the **past participle** form of the main verb.<sup>3</sup>
3. The original agent, if mentioned, becomes the object of the preposition *by* (or, in some cases, *for*).

If you think about the first step in the list, you'll understand why the other example of an action verb, *The baby cried*, is not being used to illustrate the passive voice: Intransitive verbs cannot be made passive because they have no direct object. That's why you read this statement in the discussion of Pattern 5, back on page 15.

Later in this chapter, you will see another way of testing whether or not a verb is transitive. Can the sentence be turned into the passive voice? If the answer is yes, the verb is transitive.

We can add the following statement as well: If the answer is no, the verb is *probably* not transitive. A few transitive verbs generally don't appear in the passive voice, so we have to qualify the rule with "probably." The verb

<sup>3</sup>To figure out the past participle form of any verb, use the verb in a sentence with the auxiliary *have*—and you will automatically use the verb's past participle: *I have already eaten*; *I have walked* to work every day this week; *I have enjoyed* the party. In regular verbs, such as *borrow* and *walk* and *enjoy*, the past participle is identical to the past tense. In **irregular verbs**, such as *eat* and *go*, the **two** forms are often different: *ate/eaten*; *went/gone*.

4. There's a film crew shooting a movie near the marina.  
(PREP. PHRASE)
5. I got up early this morning: to study for my Spanish test.  
(ADVERB)(NOUN PHRASE) (INFINITIVE PHRASE)
6. On its last assignment in outer space, *Voyager 2* photographed the rings of Saturn.  
(PREP. PHRASE)

We begin by looking at the important opening position that adverbials can occupy. Then we discuss each of the forms — prepositional phrases, clauses, and infinitive phrases.

## THE OPENING ADVERBIAL

Adverbials are among the most versatile tools in the writer's toolbox. As the opening list illustrates, they come in a wide array of shapes and sizes—and they are movable. The opening adverbial in a story or essay or paragraph often sets the scene:

Once upon a time . . .

When in the course of human events . . .

Many of the Chapter Previews in this book begin with that scene-setting adverbial:

In this chapter . . .

One important function of the opening adverbial is to provide cohesion, the tie that connects a sentence to what has gone before. In Chapter 4 we saw examples of the cohesion provided by known information, a pronoun or noun phrase that repeats information from the previous sentence. We've also seen the cohesive effects produced by certain stressed words, words that the reader expects because of what has gone before. What opening adverbials do so well is to provide road signs that connect the sentences and orient the reader in time and place. Notice in the following paragraphs from *The Sea Around Us* how Rachel Carson opens her sentences with adverbials. (These are not contiguous paragraphs.)

In modern times we have never seen the birth of an island as large as Ascension. But now and then there is a report of a small island appearing where none was before. Perhaps a month, a

year, five years later, the island has disappeared into the sea again. These are the little, stillborn islands, doomed to only a brief emergence above the sea.

Sometimes the disintegration takes abrupt and violent form. The greatest explosion of historic time was the literal evisceration of the island of Krakatoa. In 1680 there had been a premonitory eruption on this small island in Sunda Strait, between Java and Sumatra in the Netherlands Indies. Two hundred years later there had been a series of earthquakes. In the spring of 1883, smoke and steam began to ascend from fissures in the volcanic cone. The ground became noticeably warm, and warning rumblings and hissings came from the volcano. Then, on 27 August, Krakatoa literally exploded. In an appalling series of eruptions, that lasted two days, the whole northern half of the cone was carried away. The sudden inrush of ocean water added the fury of superheated steam to the cauldron. When the inferno of white-hot lava, molten rock, steam, and smoke had finally subsided, the island that had stood 1,400 feet above the sea had become a cavity a thousand feet below sea level. Only along one edge of the former crater did a remnant of the island remain.

Opening adverbials like these are especially common in narrative writing, the story or explanation of events through time. In fact, you'll notice that most of these adverbial openers—in fact, all but the last one—provide information of time.

## THE PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

No doubt our most common adverbial, other than the adverb itself, is the **prepositional phrase**, a two-part structure consisting of a **preposition** and its **object**, usually a noun phrase. In fact, of the twenty most frequently used words in English, eight are prepositions: *of, to, in, for, with, on, at, and by*<sup>1</sup> Here are examples of adverbial information that prepositional phrases can provide:

**Direction:** *toward the pond, beyond the ridge, across the field*  
**Place:** *near the marina, on the expressway, along the path, behind the dormitory, under the bridge*

<sup>1</sup>This frequency count, based on a collection of 1,014,232 words, is published in Henry Kuçera and W. Nelson Francis, *Computational Analysis of Present-Day English* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1967).

- Time:** on *Tuesday afternoon*, at noon, in modern times, in the spring of 1883
- Duration:** until three o'clock, *for* several days, *during* spring break, throughout the summer months
- Manner:** in an appalling series of eruptions, without complaint, with *dignity*, by *myself*, in a *frenzy*
- Cause:** because of the storm, for a good reason

### The Proliferating Prepositional Phrase

Our most common prepositions, *of* and *to*, are especially vulnerable to proliferation. Both occur in countless idioms and set phrases. For example, we regularly use *of* phrases with numbers and with such pronouns as *all*, *each*, *some*, and *most*:

one of the guests, all of the people, some of the students, most of the problems, the rest of the time, half of the food, each of the parts

*Of* is also used to indicate possessive case, as an alternative to *'s*:

the capacity of the trunk, the base of the lamp, the opening night of the new show, the noise of the crowd

And we use *to* to show direction and position and time:

the front of the house, the top of the bookcase, the back of the page, the end of the play

Prepositions also pattern with verbs to form phrasal verbs (we saw these in Chapter 7), many of which are endowed with new, idiomatic meanings:

look up, bring up, turn on, live down, bring about, bring on, put up with, stand for, hand in, pull through, help out, think up, take off, take up, do away with, get away with, pass out, give up

Because there are so many such situations that call for prepositions, it's not at all unusual to find yourself writing sentences with prepositional phrases strung together in chains. You can undoubtedly find many such sentences in the pages of this book. In fact, the sentence you just read ended with two: "in the pages *of* this book." It would be easy to imagine even more: "in the pages of this book about the grammar of English for writers." As you edit what you have written, it's important to tune in to the rhythm of the sentence: A long string of short phrases is a clue that

suggests revision. Ask yourself if those prepositional phrases are proliferating awkwardly.

Awkwardness is not the only problem—nor is it the most serious. The sentence that ends with a long string of prepositional phrases often loses its focus. Our usual rhythm pattern, which follows the principle of end focus, calls for the new information to be the last or next-to-the-last structural unit. Notice, for example, what happened to that altered sentence in the previous paragraph. Here's the original; read it aloud and listen to the stress:

You can undoubtedly find many such sentences in the pages of this book.

Chances are you put stress on *many* and on *this book*. Now read the altered version:

You can undoubtedly find many such sentences in the pages of this book about the grammar of English for writers.

Because you expected the sentence to have end focus, you probably found yourself putting off the main stress until you got to *writers*. But that last unit (starting with *about*), consisting of three prepositional phrases, is known information. Not only should it get no stress, it shouldn't be there at all. That kind of unwanted repetition of known information is what we call **redundancy**.

Here's another illustration of this common source of redundancy—a, edited version of the opening sentences from the previous paragraph:

Awkwardness is not the only problem with those extra prepositional phrases in our sentences—nor is it the most serious of the writer's problems. The sentence that ends with a long string of prepositional phrases often loses its focus on the main point of the sentence that the writer intended it to have.

Those redundant modifiers add to the total number of words—and that's about all they add. Clearly, they have added no new information. And they have obliterated the original focus.

### EXERCISE 24

The problem with proliferating prepositional phrases lies not only in their ungraceful rhythm but also in the resulting lack of focus—a more serious error. The following are altered versions of paragraphs you read in Chapter 5. Read them aloud, paying particular attention to the intonation, including the points of main stress. Remember that redundant information may

My little sister likes our cat better than me.  
My little sister likes our cat better than I.

2. The following sentences are both illogical and ungrammatical. Explain the source of the problem.

\*The summer temperatures in the Santa Clara Valley are much higher than San Francisco.

\*The Pirates' stolen base record is much better than the Twins.

### EXERCISE 27

Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate the dangling clauses and phrases. In some cases you may want to complete the clause; in others you may want to include its information in a different form.

1. Before mixing in the dry ingredients, the flour should be sifted.
2. Lightning flashed constantly on the horizon while driving across the desert toward Cheyenne.
3. There was no doubt the suspect was guilty after finding his fingerprints at the scene of the crime.
4. While waiting for the guests to arrive, there were a lot of last-minute details to take care of.
5. If handed in late, your grade on the term project will be lowered 10 percent.
6. After filling the garage with lawn furniture, there was no room left for the car.
7. While collecting money for the hurricane victims, the generosity of strangers simply amazed me.
8. The employees in our company who smoke now have to go outside of the building during their breaks if they want a cigarette, since putting the smoking ban into effect a month ago.
9. When revising and editing your papers, it is important to read the sentences aloud and listen to the stress pattern.
10. Your sentences will be greatly improved by eliminating dangling phrases and clauses.

## INFINITIVE (VERB) PHRASES

Another adverbial form in the list of sample sentences at the opening of the chapter—in addition to the adverbs, prepositional phrases, and subordinate clauses—is the **infinitive phrase**:

I got up early this morning to study for my Spanish test.

The infinitive is usually easy to recognize: the base form, or present tense, of the verb preceded by *to*, sometimes called *the sign of the infinitive*. There's an understood "in order to" meaning underlying most adverbial infinitives:

I got up early this morning in order to study.

The problem of dangling that comes up with the elliptical subordinate clause also applies to the adverbial infinitive phrase. As with other verbs, the infinitive needs a subject; the reader assumes that its subject will be the subject of the main clause, as it is in the example with *study*.

When the subject of the infinitive is not included, the infinitive dangles:

\*To keep your grades up, a regular study schedule is important.

\*For decades the Superstition Mountains in Arizona have been explored in order to find the fabled Lost Dutchman Mine.

Certainly the problem with these sentences is not a problem of communication; the reader is not likely to misinterpret their meaning. But in both cases a kind of fuzziness exists that can be cleared up with the addition of a subject for the infinitive:

To keep your grades up, you ought to follow a regular study schedule.

For decades people [or adventurers or prospectors] have explored the Superstition Mountains in Arizona to find the fabled Lost Dutchman Mine.

The dangling infinitive, which is fairly obvious at the beginning of the sentence, is not quite so obvious at the end, but the sentence is equally fuzzy:

\*A regular study schedule is important to keep your grades up.

Two rules will help you use infinitives effectively:

**The subject of the adverbial infinitive is also the subject of the sentence or clause in which the infinitive appears.**

**An infinitive phrase that opens the sentence is always set off by a comma.**

The punctuation rule does not apply to adverbial infinitives in closing position; in fact, the opposite is generally true: A comma is rarely called for when the infinitive closes the sentence.

And, as with other adverbials, it's possible to insert the adverbial infinitive in an almost parenthetical way, in which case commas—or even dashes—are called for:

According to nutritionists, dieting, to have lasting effects, should be undertaken as a lifelong program of sensible eating habits.

## MOVABILITY AND CLOSURE

The movability of adverbials, which enables us to vary our sentences and to change their emphasis, includes a risk for the unwary writer—the risk of losing the reader. As readers, we expect verbs to follow subjects, complements of various kinds to follow verbs, and adverbial phrases and clauses to open or close the sentence. Deviation from that norm comes as a surprise. As writers, we like to include surprises from time to time, but when we do, we should do so for a reason—and within reason.

In the discussion of movable adverbial clauses, we saw two examples in which the placement of the clause changed the stress pattern of the sentence. Here is one of them:

My brother, when he was only four years old, actually drove the family car for about a block.

In spite of the interruption of normal word order, the sentence is short and direct enough for the reader to recognize where it is headed and to experience a sense of closure, or completion. The reader experiences a beginning, a middle, and an end. Given a more complex interrupter, however, the reader is likely to be confused:

My brother, when he was only four years old and so short that all we could see were two small hands holding on to the steering wheel and a tuft of blonde hair, actually drove the family car for about a block.

Here the detour of that interrupting clause takes us too far from the path; we don't have enough information to know where we're headed. And when we do finally get back to our original clause, we've forgotten where we started. We have had to keep too many ideas on hold. Before we can experience a sense of closure, we have to go back to reconsider the opening of the clause. This is the kind of a sentence that produces an “awk” in the margin—when the reader happens to be your English teacher.

### EXERCISE 28

(1) Underline all of the adverbial structures in the following sentence. (2) Identify the form of each: adverb, noun (or noun phrase), prepositional phrase, verb phrase, or subordinate clause. (3) Identify the kind of information it provides: time, frequency, duration, place, reason, manner, condition.

1. To save money, I often eat lunch at my desk.
2. After breakfast let's take the bus to the shopping center.
3. After my dad retired from the navy, he started his own business.
4. We furiously cleaned house to get ready for the party.
5. As soon as the guests left, we collapsed in a heap on the couch.
6. The legislature held a special session last week to consider a new tax bill.
7. When October came, the tourists left.
8. Victoria was crowned queen of England when she was only eight teen years old.
9. African killer bees are slowly making their way northward.
10. At last report, they had reached the southern border of Texas.
11. We stayed home last night because of the snowstorm.
12. If there is no further business, the meeting stands adjourned.

For further practice with adverbials, change the form of the adverbial while retaining the information.

### FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

In his book *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric*, Francis Christensen reports a study undertaken by his students in an English class to discover the kinds of structures other than the subject that professional writers use in the opening sentence slot. They selected works (ten fiction, ten nonfiction) by twenty American authors and counted the first 200 sentences. (They omitted quotations, dialogue, fragments, questions, and sentences with postponed subjects—that is, cleft sentences and there-transformations. Here are the findings, based on 4,000 sentences counted:

The adjective test frame is useful in identifying adjectives: A word that fits into both slots is an adjective—and most adjectives do fit:

The frisky kitten is very frisky.

The comical clown is very comical.

The tough assignment is very tough.

The formula illustrates the two main slots that adjectives fill; however, not all adjectives fit both slots:

\*The principal reason is very principal.

\*The afraid children are very afraid.

\*The medical advice was very medical.

The test frame, then, can positively identify adjectives: Only an adjective can fit both slots. But it cannot rule them out—that is, just because a word doesn't fit, that doesn't mean it's not an adjective.

### Adverbs

Our most recognizable adverbs—and the most common—are those that are formed by adding *-ly* to the adjective: slowly, deliberately, exclusively, *perfectly*. These are called adverbs of manner. Some common adverbs have the same form as the adjective: *fast*, *fill*, near, hard, long, high, *late*. These are sometimes called flat adverbs.

Like adjectives, the *-ly* adverbs and the flat adverbs have comparative and superlative forms:

<u>Positive</u>	<u>Comparative</u>	<u>Superlative</u>
slowly	more slowly	most slowly
fast	faster	fastest

The comparative form of *-ly* adverbs, usually formed by adding more rather than *er*, is fairly common. However, the superlative degree of the *-ly* adverbs—most suddenly, most slowly, *most favorably*—is rare enough in both speech and writing to have impact when used; these forms invariably call attention to themselves and in most cases will carry the main stress:

The committee was most favorably disposed to accept the plan.

The crime was planned most ingeniously.

There are a number of adverbs, in addition to the flat adverbs, that have no endings to distinguish them as adverbs, nor are they used with

more or most. Instead we recognize them by the information they provide, by their position in the sentence, and often by their movability, as we saw in Chapter 8.

Time:	now, today, <i>nowadays</i> , yesterday, then, already, soon
Duration:	always, still
Frequency:	<i>often</i> , seldom, never, sometimes, always
Place:	here, there, everywhere, somewhere, elsewhere, upstairs
Direction:	away
Concession:	yet, still

There are also a number of words that can serve as either prepositions or adverbs: above, around, behind, below, down, in, inside, out, outside, up.

### Derivational Affixes

Besides the inflectional endings that identify the form classes, we also have an extensive inventory of derivational **affixes**, suffixes and prefixes that provide great versatility to our lexicon by allowing us to shift words from one class to another and/or to alter their meanings. For example, the noun beauty becomes a verb with *-ify* (*beautify*), an adjective with *-ful* (*beautiful*), and an adverb with *-ly* added to the adjective (*beautifully*).

Some of our suffixes change the meaning rather than the class of the word: *boy/boyhood*; *citizen/citizenry*; *king/kingdom*; *terror/terrorism*. Prefixes, too, generally change the meaning of the word rather than the class: undeniable, *pro-American*, interaction, *intramurals*, illegal, disenchanted. Some prefixes enable us to derive verbs from other classes: enchant, encourage, enable, derail, dethrone, bewitch, bedevil, disable, dismember.

This remarkable ability to expand our lexicon with uncountable new forms provides yet more evidence (if we needed more) for the idea of the inherent language expertise that native speakers possess. With this system of word expansion it's easy to understand why no one has yet come up with a definitive number of words in English. And although we follow certain rules in shifting words from one class to another, there is no real system: We can take a noun like system, turn it into an adjective (*systematic*), then a verb (*systematize*), then a noun again (*systematization*). There's also the adverb systematically in that set; and the same base, system, produces systemic and systemically. But we can't distinguish between those adjectives that pattern with *-ize* to form verbs (*systematize*, *legalize*, *realize*, *publicize*) and those that pattern with *-ify* (*simplify*, *amplify*, *electrify*) or another affix (*validate*, *belittle*).