

Writing Center

Tidewater Community College
Phone: 757-822-7170
Fax: 757-427-0327
<http://www.tcc.edu/writing>

SENTENCE PATTERNS

English sentences are based on the following five patterns. Every clause is one of these patterns or a variation of one of these patterns. The models here are all *simple sentences*.

SUBJECT-VERB =S-V

PATTERN 1

A *noun or pronoun* acts as the subject. Adjectives, adverbs, and prepositional phrases may be included in the sentence or clause but are not marked as pattern parts. In fact, it is advisable to bracket prepositional phrases to exclude them from pattern identification.

S V S V
The cat slept. The fluffy brown cat (with black spots) slept peacefully (on our porch).
S V S V
The students study hard. All the students (in my math class) study hard every night.
S V S V
Fido barks. Usually, Fido barks (in the back yard) all night.

SUBJECT-VERB-DIRECT OBJECT = S-V-DO

PATTERN 2

A *direct object* is a noun or pronoun that comes after an action verb (also classified as a transitive verb). A direct object helps to complete the meaning of the subject-verb group; it receives the action of the verb. To help identify the direct object, after finding the subject and verb, ask the question “what?” or “whom?”

S V DO S V DO
The man bought a coat. The tall thin man (in my math class) bought a bright blue coat (at the sale).
S V DO S V DO
Crows eat corn. Several large black crows always eat the corn (in our garden).
S V DO S V DO
My friends surprised me. My best friends (from school) surprised me (with a party) (on my birthday).

SUBJECT-VERB-INDIRECT OBJECT-DIRECT OBJECT = S-V-IO-DO

PATTERN 3

An *indirect object* is a noun or pronoun that is positioned between the verb and the direct object. The indirect object answers one of these questions: “to whom?”, “for whom?”, or “for what?”

Note that a sentence cannot have an indirect object unless it has a direct object.

S V IO DO S V IO DO
The man bought his son a coat. The tall man (in my math class) bought his son a blue coat (at the sale).
S V IO DO S V IO DO
Chris told me a secret. Yesterday, Chris told Pat and me a very important secret.
S V IO DO S V IO DO
The girl gave her friends some cookies. The little girl (in my neighborhood) gave her friends some
DO

freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

**SUBJECT-LINKING VERB-NOUN COMPLEMENT = S-LV-NC
PATTERN 4**

A **noun complement** is a noun or pronoun that follows a linking verb and completes the meaning of the subject-verb group. A noun complement renames or reidentifies the subject.

S LV NC S LV NC

Kelly is a dentist. Kelly is a dentist (in a large medical practice) (in Michigan).

S LV NC S LV NC

My sister will become a dentist. My ambitious younger sister (in Chicago) will become a dentist.

S LV NC S LV NC

The man was a thief. The pleasant young man (from my office) was a thief (on weekends).

**SUBJECT-LINKING VERB-ADJECTIVE COMPLEMENT = S-LV-AC
PATTERN 5**

An **adjective complement** is an adjective that follows a linking verb and describes the subject.

S LV AC S LV AC

Peanuts are salty. The small peanuts (in the blue jar) (beside the desk) are very salty.

S LV AC S LV AC

Candy tastes sweet. That chocolate-coated caramel candy tastes very sweet.

S LV AC S LV AC

The bell sounds loud. The heavy brass bell (on the ship's deck) sounds loud.

S LV AC

My family's freshly baked bread always smells wonderful (to me).