



Lecture Notes

Module 1, Lesson 5: The Five Clause Patterns

As we saw with the trash-can-rattling raccoon from a few lessons ago, once you start adding modifiers to the main clause of a sentence, and modifiers within modifiers, you can quickly have a very complicated sentence. The possible variations for the structure of an English sentence are effectively infinite.

However, the possible variations for the structure of a clause are actually VERY limited. There are only 5 possible patterns for a clause. Learning these five patterns will get you a LONG way toward mastery of English grammar. You can't begin to master English grammar without them.

These 5 clause patterns are worth the trouble to memorize:

- SUBJECT-VERB
- SUBJECT-VERB-DIRECT OBJECT
- SUBJECT-VERB-INDIRECT OBJECT-DIRECT OBJECT
- SUBJECT-VERB-DIRECT OBJECT-OBJECTIVE COMPLEMENT
- SUBJECT-LINKING VERB-PREDICATE COMPLEMENT

The elements of these sentence patterns always appear in the order above (with a few exceptions mentioned below).

Word order is extremely important in English. English is an SVO language. SVO stands for subject-verb-object. In a given clause, the subject comes before the verb, and the verb comes before the object. The meaning of the sentence depends on the order of the words. THE HUNTER STALKED THE PANTHER means something very different from THE PANTHER STALKED THE HUNTER.

As always, there are a exceptions to the SVO rule. Here are the two biggest:

- Exception 1: When you form a question, you move part of the verb in front of the subject: instead of I WANT ICE CREAM you say, DO I WANT ICE CREAM?
- Exception 2: Certain kinds of dependent clauses monkey with the word order. We will get to those in subsequent modules.

The Five Clause Patterns

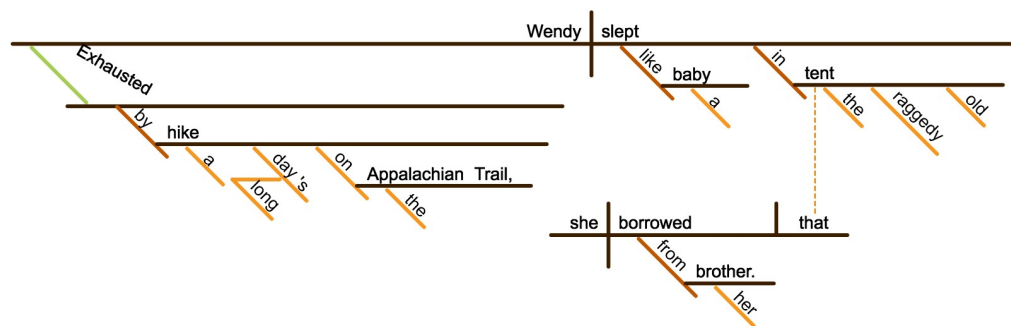
Pattern 1: S-V. Subject, Verb, NO objects or complements.

- CHARLES IS EATING.
- WENDY SLEPT.
- THE SQUIRREL WAS CLIMBING.
- THE CAR DIED.
- MY DOG SMELLS.

You can attach modifiers to any item on the main line, so a sentence can be quite long and still be an S-V sentence—that is, have nothing more than a subject and verb on the main line. This sentence is actually an S-V sentence:

EXHAUSTED BY A LONG DAY'S HIKE ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL, WENDY SLEPT LIKE A BABY IN THE RAGGEDY OLD TENT THAT SHE BORROWED FROM HER BROTHER.

When you apply the Verb Finder, you see that the only verbs in this long sentence are SLEPT and BORROWED. BORROWED is part of an adjective clause (that will make sense in a few lessons if it doesn't right now). So the main line of that sentence is simply WENDY SLEPT. And SLEPT does not have a direct object. So this is an S-V sentence. Here is the diagram:



You can add this kind of complexity to any of the five clause patterns. (I'm not going to keep doing it for the other four patterns in this lesson, but bear in mind that you could.)

Pattern 2: S-V-DO. Subject-Verb-Direct Object.

- THE HUNTER STALKED THE PANTHER.
- THE PANTHER STALKED THE HUNTER.
- THE SQUIRREL CLIMBED THE TREE.
- CHARLES IS EATING BOILED PEANUTS.

In each of these examples, the subject is doing something to something else.

PATTERN 3: S-V-IO-DO Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object.

- KEN GAVE BARBIE FLOWERS.
- PLEASE POUR ME A GLASS OF WATER.

If you have TWO nouns after the verb, you may have an indirect object as well as a direct object. There is no such thing as a sentence that has an indirect object but no direct object. There's no such thing as a sentence in which an indirect object comes after the direct object. (There are, however, sentences in which a prepositional phrase identifies the entity for whom or to whom the action is performed. PLEASE POUR ME A GLASS OF WATER can be phrased as PLEASE POUR A GLASS OF WATER FOR ME. Logically speaking, there is no difference between the two sentences. Grammatically, however, in the first sentence ME is an indirect object appearing before the direct object, and in the second sentence ME is the object of the preposition FOR and appears after the direct object.)

Pattern 4: S-V-DO-OC. Subject-Verb-Direct Object-Objective Complement. This pattern is a little less common than the others. Remember from the last lesson how a predicate complement renames or describes the subject? An objective complement renames or describes the direct object. It might be a noun renaming the direct object, or it might be an adjective describing the direct object.

Consider the sentence, WE PAINTED THE TOWN RED. Using the Direct Object Finder—WE PAINTED who or what?—it is easy to see that TOWN is the direct object. But what do we do with RED? RED describes town. It's an objective complement.

- WE ELECTED MIRIAM CLASS PRESIDENT. (CLASS PRESIDENT = MIRIAM.)
- WE JUDGED JOHN A GRADE-A RAT. (GRADE-A RAT = JOHN.)

A few things to know about objective complements:

- They may be nouns, or they may be adjectives.
- They always come immediately AFTER the direct object.
- You can't have an objective complement without a direct object

So if you've found your direct object and there's another noun or adjective lurking around after it, there's ask whether that noun or adjective renames or describes your direct object. If so, you have found an objective complement.

Pattern 5: S-V-PC. Subject-Verb-Predicate Complement

The predicate complement comes AFTER the verb, and it renames or describes the subject. This is probably the most common of the 5 clause types. We think of verbs

as being words that describe actions, but just as importantly, verbs describe states of being.

- ROSLYN IS A MAIL-CARRIER. (ROSLYN = MAIL-CARRIER.)
- THIS POPSICLE TASTES FUNNY. (POPSICLE [’S FLAVOR] = FUNNY.)
- ALLEN HAS BEEN KIND. (ALLEN = KIND.)

The verb in this sentence pattern is called a linking verb because it LINKS the subject to the predicate complement.

These five patterns account for EVERY grammatically correct clause in the English language. Four elements—subjects, verbs, objects complements—can appear in five combinations, and each of those five combinations has to be in a specific order.

Soon we will start combining clauses and modifiers in ways that will get very complex. But for now, celebrate the truth that the grammatical pieces themselves are shockingly simple. The rigidity of only four elements arranged in only five combinations, each with a very specific order, is a huge gift. Language is complicated and flexible enough. We can make sense of that complexity and flexibility ONLY because here at this level, language is simple and rigid.