

## Sentence Structure

While syntax — or word order — is sometimes a matter of style, the foundation for all your syntactical choices should be grammatically correct sentence structure. Every language follows a set pattern of word types to form sentences. This is not just a matter of habit; this word order determines the meaning of the sentence. English follows a subject-verb-object pattern, as in the sentence: Sookja pet the dog. The Korean language, like many Asian languages, follows a subject-object-verb pattern, so the same sentence translated word-for-word into English looks like this: Sookja the dog pet. Understanding the basic rules of word order and sentence structure allows us to form grammatically correct, understandable sentences. This handout moves from the simple to the more complicated parts of sentences and how to arrange them.

**Sentence Types:** There are four basic types of sentences in English: **simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.**

A simple sentence includes a single subject, verb, and often a complement.

Xinxin works at the Media Center. (declarative)

SUBJECT VERB COMPLEMENT

A command or directive changes a sentence's subject to an implied "you."

[You] Call your mother this evening. (imperative)

S V C

A compound sentence is made up of two simple sentences joined by a conjunction: for, and, not, but, or, yet, so.

Chris submitted his assignment, but he hasn't received his grade yet.

S V C S V C

A complex sentence includes two things: a main clause, which could stand alone as a simple sentence; and one or more subordinate clauses, which affect the main clause, but can't stand alone. A subordinate clause begins with a subordinator such as because, since, after, although, or when or a relative pronoun such as that, who, or which.

MAIN CLAUSE SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

Belén was surprised when she won the student design prize.

S V S V C

Always include the subject of a subordinate clause, either as a pronoun or an introductory subject such as it or there.

MAIN CLAUSE

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

The committee cancelled the outdoor art show because it was raining.

S V C S V

Do not include a pronoun when a relative clause comes between the subject and verb of a main clause.

MAIN CLAUSE

RELATIVE CLAUSE

MAIN CLAUSE

The studio where she created most of her sculptures has been made into a museum.

S V C

[NOT: The studio where she created most of her sculptures it has been made into a museum.]

A compound-complex sentence is made up of two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses. Accurate cues to meaning become even more important in such complicated sentences, so be careful to follow the word order and conventions of both compound and complex sentences at once.

My painting is hanging in the gallery, but Sam hasn't seen it yet because it is upstairs.  
 S V C S V C S V C

**Direct & Indirect Objects**

A direct object is a noun or pronoun that receives the action of a verb. It answers the question "what?" or "who?" A direct object comes after the verb.

The department gives [tours of the studios].  
 S V [DIRECT OBJECT]

The direct object stays immediately after the verb — even when you add an adverb or adverbial phrase.

The film department has shown [that old movie] many times.  
 S V [D.O.]

**Questions**

The basic rules of word order in English change when you are forming a question.

When the main verb in a question is **to be**, the order of the subject and verb switches.

José is an intern at an industrial design firm. (declarative)  
 S V C

Is José an intern at an industrial design firm? (interrogative)  
 V S C

When the main verb has a **helping verb** (to have, to do, can/could, will/would), the helping verb goes before the subject and the main verb stays after the subject.

José has had his position for a long time. (declarative)  
 S HELPING + V C

Has José had his position for a long time? (interrogative)  
 HELPING S V C

When the main verb is not *to be* and does not already include a helping verb, the helping verb *do* is used to form a question. The helping verb goes before the subject and the main verb stays after the subject.

José works on his own design projects. (statement)  
 S V C

Does José work on his own design projects? (question)  
 HELPING S V C

### Reported Questions

When a question is reported instead of asked, the word order and punctuation change.

When the direct question is a “yes/no” question (has no wh- word), add if or whether to the reported question.

<p>Direct Question: May wondered, “Can I apply for a grant next semester?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">HELPING S V</p> <p>Reported Question: May wondered if she could apply for a grant next semester.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">+ IF S HELPING + V</p>
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If the question was asked in the past tense, it is usually necessary to change the verb tense in the reported question to the same tense. Also, change any pronouns to reflect the perspective of the person reporting the question.

<p>Direct Question: His professor asked, “When are you handing in your project?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V (PAST) V (PRESENT) PRONOUN PRONOUN</p> <p>Reported Question: His professor asked when he was handing in his project.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">V (PAST) PRONOUN V (PAST) PRONOUN</p>
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### Description

Adding description to your writing can clarify, specify, or add to the reader’s experience.

To do this effectively, follow these word order guidelines:

An adjective precedes the noun it modifies. With multiple adjectives, the following order generally applies:

<p>a tiny old crooked grey Italian wool hat</p> <p>ARTICLE SIZE AGE SHAPE COLOR ORIGIN MATERIAL NOUN</p>
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Position a long adjectival phrase after, not before, the noun it modifies.

<p>His art hangs in museums <b><i>all over the world.</i></b></p>
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