



**BUILDING  
GRAMMAR  
SKILLS**  
FOR THE  
**TOEFL® iBT**

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## Grammar Point 1 - Parts of the sentence

### A sentence

Grammatically speaking, a sentence is a group of words that has a subject and predicate. More importantly, however, a sentence is an expression of an idea. Sentences can be one word long or one paragraph long – the only true common element is that the listener gets information.

All sentences in English are constructed the same way. The first rule about sentence structure is that the most important thing must go at the beginning. There are many ways to slightly alter the sentence structure in order to accomplish this, but in general, every sentence is constructed in the form:

### Subject - Verb - Object

#### The Subject

The **subject** is the person, place or thing that the sentence is about. It is the most important thing in the sentence. A subject is usually a noun, pronoun, or noun clause. The subject is usually followed by a verb.

There can be more than one subject in a sentence, but usually there is one main subject.

► Note: The subject is not always the “doer” of the action. Remember, in some situations the receiver of the action may be more important

- e.g. *The window was broken.*  
*The package was delivered.*  
*The conference was well-attended*

In these cases, the end result is more important, or you don't know who did the action.

#### Pattern to look for:

There can be many nouns together. In this case, the LAST noun in the list is the subject – the other nouns are acting as adjectives and modifying that noun. This can be important, because the final noun can be plural and therefore the verb must be plural also.

- e.g. *The stone wall was too high to see over.*  
*The glue bottles were empty.*

#### Pattern to look for:

There are some situations in which the subject is not the first thing in the main clause, but these are rare – most of the time, the subject is at the beginning of the main clause:

- e.g. *In the hall are three umbrellas.*  
*Not only does she play the piano, but she is also an accomplished dancer.*  
*Rarely does it snow in Toronto in May.*  
*There are some extra books in the closet.*

## The Verb

The **verb** in the sentence describes the subject or describes the action of the subject. The verb must “agree” with the subject in number (if the subject is singular, the verb must be in the singular form) and in person (I/you/he/she/it etc.)

There are many forms of verb structures in English, and all verbs are classified as either Main or Auxiliary (helping). When you are examining a sentence, it is important to understand that all parts of the verb structure are part of the verb and they give important information about the verb.

### Things to remember about subject-verb agreement:

- The verb must always agree with the subject – regardless of how far away the subject is from the verb:  
e.g. *The boy at the end of the hall in the glasses is my son*  
*The books at the bottom of the box are for sale.*
- If an “expression of quantity” (most/some/none/all + of the... ) is used as the subject, the noun after the “the” is the subject, and the verb must agree with it:  
e.g. *Some of the rice is gone.*  
*Most of the people are gone.*
- If the paired conjunctions either.. or .. or neither ... nor ... introduce the subject, the one closer to the verb affects the verb:  
e.g. *Either the students or the teacher is going to be there.*  
*Either the teacher or the students are going to be there*
- If the word “and” is part of the subject, the subject is always plural and must take a plural verb, even when both of the items in the subject are non-count:  
e.g. *The rice and the bread are gone.*  
*The game and the celebration are finished.*  
However, when the subject is one unit, even when there is an “and”, it is considered singular:  
e.g. *The macaroni and cheese was good.*  
*Cowboys and Indians was a popular game.*
- Words like someone, something, nothing, nobody, everything, everybody and expressions with each are always considered singular – however, if words like some are used as adjectives, then they don’t affect the verb:  
e.g. *Somebody is at the door. but Some people are waiting.*  
*Everybody is standing outside*  
*Nothing is left.*
- In a command, there is no subject – it is understood to be “you”. Therefore, the verb must always be in the second person singular form.

### Sentence analysis shorthand

When you are analyzing a sentence, you need to be able to quickly recognize the main parts – subject, verb, preposition phrases, etc. Here is a useful “key” for analyzing sentences on paper:

underline the subject (and any adjective directly connected to the subject) once:

*e.g. There is a big hairy spider on your leg.*

underline the verb (the entire verb structure, including any auxiliary verbs, and “not”) twice:

*e.g. The people are waiting in line outside.*

put parentheses around any preposition phrase:

*e.g. The people (at the corner) (of this street) are (from a country) (in Europe).*

put brackets around any adjective clause or phrase

*e.g. The man {wearing glasses} is someone {whom I don't know}.*

put square brackets around any noun clause or phrase

*e.g. [What I want to know] is [when you will arrive].*

put angle brackets around any subordinate clause or phrase

*e.g. <If you don't tell me>, I can't meet you on time.*

### Exercise 1.1 Sentence analysis

In each sentence, underline the subject once and the verb twice. Mark if the sentence is correct (C) or incorrect (I). Then, fix any mistakes.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Bob is coming home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. California is the most populous state in the U. S.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Theoretical mathematics are difficult.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I saw the sports news on TV last night.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Did he call yet?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. There is people waiting for you outside.

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. It is going to rain tomorrow.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Frank and Yoko was studying for the test all night.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The pencils you gave me is very nice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The book on the shelf at the top of the stairs are on sale.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. My new computer looks nice, but really it's nothing special.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Yesterday I bought some new CDs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Before transistors, radios used to were much bigger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. There are, in the room upstairs, many noises.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. There have been fire all over upstate New York in the last few weeks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. He, in the past four months, have taken 5 exams and written.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. The children in the backyard has not yet brushed their teeth today.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. There are many geography book on the shelf at the top of the stairs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Stop saying that!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. In the box on the shelf at the top of the stairs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. The test have 200 questions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. There have 3 children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. There is, in the library, over 800 new books.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. In the family there are over 25 children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. Sit down!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. Under the lid.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. Please hand me the papers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. He turned on the computer and left.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. Some people like fishing, and some don't.



## Grammar point 2 – “There is” vs. “To have”

These structures both show a relationship between the speaker and others.

**“I have”** is used in the following situations:

1. to emphasise **ownership** or **possession** of an object.

*e.g. I have a dog*

*The dog has big teeth*

2. to talk about **one** specific thing, rather than an idea:

*I have 2 children*

### Things to remember about “have”:

- To make a question, use the auxiliary verb “do”, in the appropriate form.  
*Do you have any brothers or sisters?*  
*Do you have any classes before 10?*  
*Does he have a car?*  
*Did she have a good time?*
- When answering with a reduced form, remember to use the auxiliary “do”, NOT “have”  
*Yes, he did **not** Yes, he had*  
*No, I don't **not** No, I haven't*  
(If you answer with *No, I haven't*, you are making the present perfect tense rather than a simple tense)

**Have** is also used with:

- **meals**  
*e.g. I had lunch in Tokyo and dinner in Cairo*  
*I was very busy this afternoon so I didn't have lunch*
- **time** (for a specific purpose)  
*e.g. I have time to talk to you now.*  
*When do you have time to meet?*
- **aches and pains**  
*e.g. I have a headache.*  
*I have pain in my back.*

**“There is”** is usually used

1. When the subject is invisible to the listener  
*e.g. There is an extra set of clubs in the trunk*  
*There is a big black spider crawling up your back*
2. To talk about general thing  
*e.g. There are lots of children in my family*  
*There are many people in the store*
3. When there is no obvious owner  
*e.g. There is lots of water in the canoe*  
*There are many hybrid cars on the market these days*
4. To emphasize something to the listener  
*e.g. There are three mistakes in this report*  
*There is someone waiting for you*

Pattern to look for:

The real subject comes **AFTER** the verb, but the verb “to be” must agree with it.

- e.g. There are four people*  
*There is no rice*  
*There is some brandy*

Keep in mind:

- The verb must agree with the subject, regardless of the tense, and/or the distance of the subject from the verb.  
*e.g. There have been many problems recently.*  
*There is, in my opinion, no excuse for his actions.*

Look at these further examples:

I have a family  
I have 2 brothers

There are three boys in my family

I have an apartment

There are three rooms  
There is a lot of space