

Subjects and Verbs

The basic building blocks of English sentences are subjects and verbs. Understanding them is an important first step towards being able to write well.

Every sentence has a subject and a verb. Who or what the sentence speaks about is called the subject. What the sentence says about the subject is called the verb.

Look at the sentences below. The subject is in **bold** and the *verb* is in italics:

Examples:

The **boy** *cried*.
That **fish** *smells*.
Many **people** *applied* for the job.
The **show** *is* a documentary.

A simple way to find a subject

To find a subject, ask who or what the sentence is about. As shown below, your answer is the subject.

Who is the first sentence about? The **boy**.
What is the second sentence about? That **fish**.
Who is the third sentence about? Many **people**.
What is the fourth sentence about? The **show**.

A simple way to find a verb

To find a verb, ask what the sentence says about the subject. As shown below, your answer is the verb.

What does the first sentence say about the boy? He *cried*.
What does the second sentence say about the fish? It *smells*.
What does the third sentence say about the people? They *applied*.
What does the fourth sentence say about the show? It *is* a documentary.

A second way to find the verb is to put I, you, he, she, it, or they in front of the word you think is a verb. If the result makes sense, you have a verb. For example, you could put **he** in front of *cried* in the first sentence above. The result is '**He cried**' which makes sense. Therefore you know that *cried* is the verb.

Finally it helps to remember that most verbs show an action. In the sentences we have already looked at the three action verbs are *cried*, *smells* and *applied*. Certain other verbs known as linking verbs do not show an action. They do, however, give information about

the subject. In, “The show is a documentary,” the linking verb *is* tells us that the show is a documentary. Other common linking verbs include *am, are, was, were, feel, appear, look, become* and *seem*.

Activity

In each of the following sentences, draw one line under the subject and circle the verb:

1. The ripening tomatoes glistened on the sunny windowsill.
2. Aspirin reduces the pain of my headache.
3. Francisca nervously twisted a strand of hair around her fingers.
4. My brother made our TV stand from a cardboard box.
5. Diego loves to play tennis as much as he can.
6. On St. Patricks Day our local bar serves green beer.