7 Diagramming Sentences

In the late nineteenth century, Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg developed a method for diagramming sentences in the belief that students would understand sentence structure better if they could picture it. Many students do indeed find the diagrams helpful in seeing the relationships among sentence elements. (Linguists today, though, prefer another type of diagram that looks like a pyramid.) Here are some suggestions for using the Reed-Kellogg diagrams in your classes:

- Use diagrams as you go along teaching grammar so that they become your regular method for illustrating the basic parts of a sentence. If you try to teach diagramming as an added grammar lesson after students have already worked at becoming familiar with the concepts, many of them may find it tedious.

- Sentence diagramming will test your sense of your students' different learning styles. For students who are visual organizers, the diagrams can be very satisfying, an exercise in problem analysis that they enjoy enormously. For others, the spatial arrangement just doesn't help. You will need to find out which students react in which ways and adjust your assignments and exercises accordingly.

- Remember that sentence diagramming (like grammar study in general) is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Teach what will help students make sense of how actual sentences are organized. Sometimes the diagram of just the sentence core— the head of the subject phrase and the head of the main verb phrase—will help students see more clearly.

- Sentence diagrams can make good collaborative projects. Students can argue about them, make posters of the patterns, or try their hand (if they like diagrams) at diagramming famous sentences from the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and so forth.

- The horizontal line of the diagram has been compared to a spine, with the verb and the whole predicate as the backbone and the subject as the head. Not a perfect metaphor, but one your students might like to work with.

1. The main line of the diagram shows the head noun of the subject divided from the predicate by a vertical line running through the horizontal. After the verb, a shorter vertical line divides the verb from the head noun of the direct object.

John | slept

Ellen | needs | help

2. A diagonal line, leaning toward the noun it refers to, precedes the subject or object complement.

I | grew \ sleepy

They | made | it \ easy

3. Modifiers appear on diagonal lines below the appropriate words on the main line. Qualifiers are placed on diagonal lines attached to the modifiers.

students | worked
\ The   \ hard
        \ very

4. A preposition is placed on a diagonal line beneath the word it modifies. The object of the preposition appears on a horizontal line attached to the line of the preposition.

visitors | arrived
\ The \ from   \ on
   \ El Paso   \ schedule

5. An indirect object is set up like a prepositional phrase because its meaning can be expressed by the prepositions *to* or *for*, although the preposition is not written in unless it appears in the sentence. The indirect object is placed below the verb.

student | gave | apple
\ The   \   \ an
        \ teacher
          \ the

6. Conjunctions appear as dashed lines connecting parallel elements.
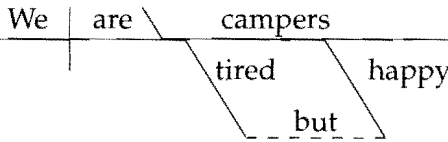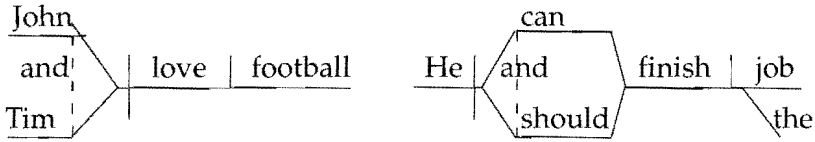
7. Dashed lines also connect clauses to the main sentence elements that they modify. A relative pronoun is placed in its appropriate slot in the relative (adjectival) clause. Subordinating conjunctions are written on the dashed lines.
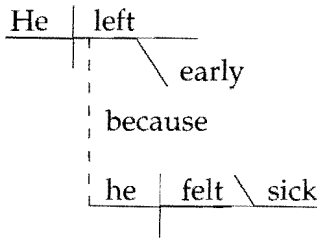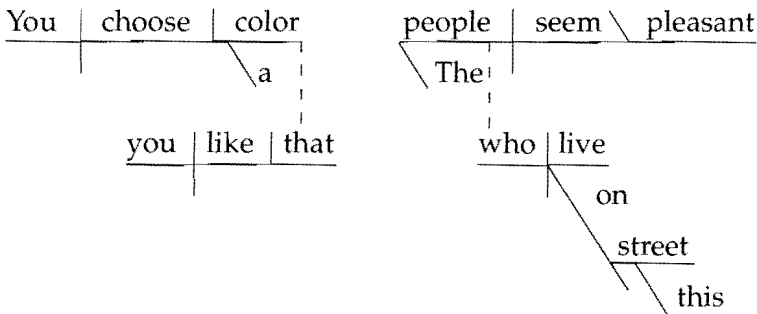
8. An infinitive phrase—with *to* followed by a verb with its modifiers and complements—looks similar to a prepositional phrase.
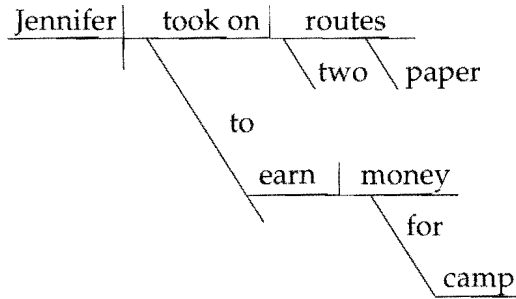
9. Phrases and clauses that occupy the subject or complement slot are written on pedestals above the main clause.
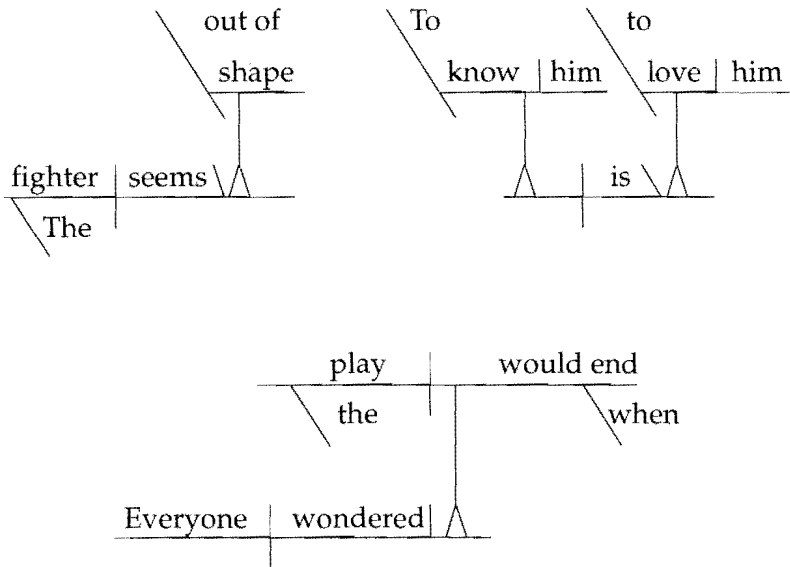
10. The two clauses of a compound sentence are connected with a dashed line from verb to verb, with the conjunction on a solid line between the two.

```
house  |  looks \ tidy
  \The  |      ¦
        |      ¦
        |      ¦
             ¦but
             ┐
              ¦
              ¦
yard     |   is ¦ \ mess
  \ the  |        \ a
```
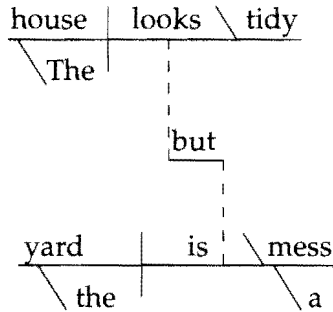
This description of diagramming, from Kolln and Funk's *Understanding English Grammar*, includes slight variations from the original Reed and Kellogg diagrams. Kolln and Funk's text also includes diagrams of many other, and more complex, grammatical structures.

8 An Overview of Linguistic Grammar

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint you with concepts of linguistic grammar that you may find useful in your teaching. We are using the term *linguistic grammar* to distinguish this description from that of traditional grammar, the Latin-based description that has dominated school grammar for several centuries. We are not suggesting that you substitute this grammar for what is already familiar to you. Rather, we hope that you'll find either additional or alternative ways of describing the structure of sentences, ways that take advantage of our subconscious knowledge of language structure.

Word Classes

When linguists looked at English sentences objectively, rather than through the lens of Latin, with its eight parts of speech, they classified words into two broad categories:

1. *Form classes:* nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These "open" classes, which constitute perhaps 99 percent of our language, are open to new members, with nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs entering the language as new technology and new ideas require them.

2. *Structure classes:* determiners, auxiliaries, qualifiers, prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. In general, these are the "closed" classes; they remain constant. While it's true we no longer hear *whilst* and *betwixt* and *thy*, we have managed with the same fairly small store of structure words that Shakespeare used. Although the form classes have more members, the structure classes are by far the most frequently used; in fact, our twenty most frequently used words are all structure-class words.

Another difference between the two classes is their function in the sentence: the form classes provide the primary lexical meaning, while the structure classes provide the grammatical, or structural, relationships. We can compare the two classes to the bricks and mortar of a building: the form classes are the bricks, the structure classes the mortar that holds them together. Consider, for example, lines from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky":

> T'was brillig and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe

All of the nonsense words are form-class words; their form and their position, of course, help give them meaning. But without the structure words, "Jabberwocky" would have no meaning at all:

> brillig slithy toves
> gyre gimble wabe

Notice, too, that when you read these words without the clues of the structure words, the sentences (if you can call them that) lose their rhythm. Most structure words are unstressed: they have the lowest volume and pitch, providing valleys between the peaks of loudness that fall on the stressed syllables of form-class words. As native speakers, or experienced second language speakers, we don't have to pay much attention to the structure classes, but we certainly miss them when they're gone. And they are no doubt the most difficult for non-native speakers to master.

The Form Classes

Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs get the label "form classes" because they have inflectional forms (such as verbs with tense endings) and derivational forms (those with prefixes and some suffixes) that differentiate them from one another as well as from the other classes. These prefixes and suffixes illustrate the internal "rules" of grammar that native speakers begin learning in their earliest stages of speech, rules they follow automatically. (Young children who say "goed" and "sheeps" are demonstrating their knowledge of the inflectional rules.) Bringing these rules into the classroom will help students develop a conscious understanding of the parts of speech. What follows is a brief description of the inflectional and derivational affixes.

Inflectional Suffixes

Nouns: the plural *-s* and the possessive *-s*. Not every noun has a plural form (e.g., *chaos, tennis, happiness*) and many nouns are rarely, if ever, used with the possessive *-s*; however, any word that can be made plural and/or possessive is, by definition, a noun.

Verbs: *-s, -ed, -en,* and *-ing*. With perhaps two exceptions (*rumor* and *beware* come to mind), all verbs have these four inflections. The *-ed* inflection forms the past tense; the *-s* form is the present-tense form used with a third-person singular subject. As main verbs, the *-ing* and *-en*

endings require particular auxiliaries: a form of *have* takes the *-en* form of the verb *(has eaten)*; a form of *be* takes the *-ing (am eating)*. A "regular" verb is one in which both the *-ed* and *-en* inflections are *-ed (I walked to the store; I have walked to the store)*. We also have about 150 verbs with "irregular" *-en* and *-ed* endings, most of which are among our most common verbs, including *be, have, do, say, make, go, take, come, see, get, put,* and *beat.* To figure out the *-ed* (past) ending, simply use the form that would work with *Yesterday: Yesterday we made cookies; Yesterday Joe took me to the movies.* To figure out the *-en* form, simply use a form of *have* as an auxiliary: *We have made cookies already; Joe has taken me to the movies many times.* Other than the irregular verbs, however, all verbs have these five forms: *walk, walks, walked, walked, walking.* In terms of form, the verb is the most systematic word class in English.

      Adjectives: the comparative degree, *-er,* and the superlative, *-est.* In the case of adjectives of more than one syllable, the words *more* and *most* generally substitute for *-er* and *-est.* When Lewis Carroll has Alice saying "curiouser and curiouser," he does so for comic effect. The adjective inflections, however, are not nearly as systematic as those for verbs; that is, many adjectives do not have degrees. We do not, for example, say "more main" or "mainest." Others in this category that do not take inflections include *principal, former, mere, potential, atomic,* and such technical adjectives as *sulfuric.*

      Adverbs: As with adjectives, some adverbs have inflections for the comparative *-er* (or *more*) and the superlative *-est (most)* degrees. Among those that can be inflected are adverbs that are identical to adjectives: *hard, fast, early, late, high, low,* and *deep.* Another group commonly inflected are the adverbs of manner, produced when *-ly* is added to the adjective: *quickly, slowly, correctly, helpfully, beautifully, badly.* There are also a great many common adverbs denoting time, location, direction, and such that have no inflections: *now, then, here, there, everywhere, inside, seldom, never,* etc.

Derivational Affixes

All of the other suffixes (other than the eight inflectional ones just discussed) and all of the prefixes are called "derivational"—that is, they enable us to derive a new part of speech or a new meaning. (The inflectional suffixes do not change the word class.) Even in the absence of semantic meaning, it's safe to assume that the *-y* on *slithy* in "Jabberwocky" turned a noun *(slith)* into an adjective (compare *healthy* and *greasy* and *funny*). Following are some of the most common derivational affixes that help us recognize and use the form classes:

    Nouns: *-tion* and its variations (*-sion, -ion, -ation,* etc.), *-ment, -ness, -ance, -al, -age, -er: abolition, movement, happiness, acceptance, arrival, breakage, teacher*

    Verbs: *-ify, -en, en-, -ate, -ize: typify, darken, enact, activate, legalize*

    Adjectives: *-ous, -y, -ful, -ate, -ish, -ary, -ive, -able: famous, funny, playful, fortunate, selfish, imaginary, active, lovable*

    Adverbs: *-ly: quickly.* It's important to recognize that the *-ly* adverbs are made from adjectives. But not all *-ly* words are adverbs: *friendly* and *lovely* are both adjectives in which the *-ly* has been added to a noun; *bully* and *folly* are nouns.

The Structure Classes

Determiners: Determiners signal, or mark, nouns. The presence of *the* or *a(n)* signals the beginning of a noun phrase. Consider, for example, the noun markers in the sentence you just read:

    <u>The</u> presence of *the* or *a(n)* signals <u>the</u> beginning of <u>a</u> noun phrase.

We generally think of these determiners, the articles *a* and *the*, as the quintessential determiners: determiner is their only role.

    Possessive pronouns and possessive nouns also function as determiners: *my* book; *Susie's* bicycle. Other common determiners are the demonstrative pronouns *(this, that, these,* and *those)* and indefinite pronouns *(some, many, each, every, all,* etc.). These groups, along with the cardinal numbers *(one, two, three,* etc.), are the principal structure words in the determiner category. All of them will appear at the start of a noun phrase, in front of any adjectives that modify the noun *(a big, glass table; every pepperoni pizza; two delightful dogs).*

    At this point, we should emphasize that the label "determiner" does not denote a clear-cut "part of speech" as "conjunction" and "preposition" do. Rather, it denotes both a word class and a function. (In fact, the early structural grammarians called these classes "function" rather than "structure" classes.) Words such as *my,* of course, are members of the pronoun class; words such as *Susie's* are members of the noun class.

    Recognizing this subclass of structure words as noun signalers helps students use their subconscious language ability when they consider sentence structure in a conscious way, not only when they are discussing grammar but also when they write. Our use of the article is a good example. The selection of the definite article *(the)* rather than the indefinite *(a* or *an)* often distinguishes between a known and an unknown referent, a distinction that native speakers generally make without thinking, but one that second language learners must learn con-

sciously. In many instances, we use the indefinite article at the first mention of a noun and the definite article in subsequent mentions:

> There's a big black dog on the porch. I wonder who the dog belongs to.

The determiner can certainly contribute to the cohesion of a text. For example, as the first word in the noun phrase, and thus frequently the first word of the sentence and even of the paragraph, the determiner can bridge ideas in a variety of ways, making subtle but important distinctions and helping readers move from one idea to the next:

> This attempt to solve the problem proved futile.
>
> The attempt to solve the problem . . .
>
> Their attempt . . .
>
> One such attempt . . .
>
> All their attempts . . .
>
> Those attempts . . .

Helping students recognize determiners as a special kind of noun signaler—that is, in a class apart from the traditional "adjective" label—will help them understand not only the structure of the noun phrase but the structure of the sentence patterns as well.

Auxiliaries. Verbs are so systematic that they can almost be defined on the basis of form alone. But another criterion we can use in discussing and understanding verbs is their affinity with auxiliaries: a verb is a word that can be signaled by auxiliaries, such as *can* and *must* and *should.* Our two most common auxiliaries, *be* and *have,* also meet the criteria for verbs; in fact, they are among our most common verbs. In other words, they belong to both classes: verb and auxiliary. The auxiliary *do* (which we use for negative sentences and questions when there is no other auxiliary) also fits into both classes. *Do* is a verb in the sentence *He does that very well;* it is an auxiliary (and *swim* is the verb) in the negative sentence *He does not swim well* and the question *Does he swim well?*

In traditional grammar, all of the auxiliaries are considered verbs. But when you consider the criterion of form, it's obvious that modal auxiliaries such as *can* and *must* and *should* do not belong to the verb class: they have no *-s* and *-ing* forms, and they do not take other auxiliaries.

Qualifiers: Qualifiers are those words that qualify or intensify adjectives and adverbs, such as *very,* our most common qualifier. Others

are *too, quite, rather, fairly,* and *awfully.* (Note: In traditional grammar, the qualifiers are included in the definition of an adverb.) Because some adverbs of manner, the *-ly* adverbs, are themselves used to qualify adjectives (*especially* difficult, *absolutely* true, *dangerously* close), the qualifier class, like that of the determiners, is not a closed class. It can be thought of as both a word class and a sentence function.

Definitions of the Form Classes

Here, then, are definitions of the four form classes based on form, as well as on the structure words that signal them and their function in the sentence:

> *Noun:* A word that may be made plural and/or possessive; it may have a derivational suffix, such as *-tion, -ment,* or *-ness;* it fills the headword position in the noun phrase; it is generally signaled by a determiner.

> *Verb:* A word that can have both an *-s* and an *-ing* ending; it can be signaled by auxiliaries and modified by adverbials.

> *Adjective:* A word that may take *-er* and *-est* (or *more* and *most*). It may have a derivational suffix, such as *-ous, -ful, -ish,* and *-ive.* It can be marked by a qualifier, such as *very.* It functions as a modifier of nouns; it can fill the role of subject complement and object complement.

> *Adverb:* Like the adjective, it may also take an *-er* and *-est* ending (or *more* and *most*); it often ends in *-ly.* It adds such information as time, place, and manner. It can be signaled by qualifiers, such as *very.* It can occupy many different positions in the sentence.

Sentence Constituents

We can use form to help identify sentence constituents, just as we did with words. We begin by considering the two basic units of the sentence, the *noun phrase* and the *verb phrase.* Here is the formula for the two main sentence constituents, as modern linguists generally describe them:

$$S = NP + VP$$
The boy slept in the tent = The boy + slept in the tent.

These terms, of course, refer to forms. Using terms referring to functions, we would say that the two basic units of the sentence are the *subject* and the *predicate.* We begin our discussion with the noun phrase (NP), which has an easy-to-spot characteristic form. Then we look at the other basic sentence constituent, the verb phrase (VP).

The Noun Phrase

The term *noun phrase* is not one that is used in traditional school grammar, so it may be unfamiliar to you and your students. *Phrase* traditionally refers to a group of words that functions as a unit within the sentence; however, because a single word can function as a unit *(Dogs bark; Felipe laughed)*, we will alter the traditional definition to include single words: *A phrase is a word or group of words that functions as a unit within the sentence.* A phrase will always have a head, or *headword;* the headword of a noun phrase is, of course, a noun. Most noun phrases also include the noun signaler we discussed in the section The Structure Classes—the *determiner.*

We saw the sentence in terms of a formula; we can look at the NP in the same way:

$$NP = Det + NOUN$$
$$The\ boy = the + boy$$

We know, of course, that the noun can have modifiers of various forms. We add them to the formula, using parentheses to indicate that they are optional; that is, a noun phrase is grammatical without them. The two required slots in the NP are the determiner and the noun headword. While it's true that not all nouns require determiners, as the two previous sample sentences show *(Dogs bark; Felipe laughed)*, it's useful to think in terms of the determiner as the opening slot in the NP. (Linguists refer to NPs such as *Dogs* and *Felipe* as having a "zero determiner.") When we come to a determiner, we know we are at the opening of a noun phrase.

$$NP = Det + (adj) + (n) + NOUN + (prepositional +$$
$$phrase)$$
$$(participial + (relative$$
$$phrase) \quad clause)$$
$$NP = a + (small) + (race) + car + (with\ a\ red\ stripe) +$$
$$(zooming\ by) + (that\ I\ saw)$$

The structure of the NP provides a good example of the systematic nature of our grammar. When we add modifers, we do so in an established way. In preheadword position, we can add both adjectives and nouns as modifiers, but only in that order:

the <u>industrious grammar</u> students
Det   adj   n   NOUN

In postheadword position, we can add prepositional phrases, participial phrases, and relative clauses (also called adjectival, or adjective, clauses)—always in that order:

the students <u>in our school</u> <u>participating in the 10K race</u>
Det NOUN   prep phr   participial phrase

<u>who were excused from class</u>
relative clause

Most noun phrases will not have all of these modifiers, but all are certainly possible. And all of them can be compounded, or multiplied. In the case of the prenoun, or single-word modifiers, compounding is especially common: the *little old* man; the *beautiful, fluffy white* cat. Those modifiers can themselves have modifiers: the *absolutely perfect* birthday present. And we've all seen the problem of proliferating nouns as modifiers: *the faculty committee conference report*—and, if there are errors in that report, *the faculty committee conference report errors*!

All of these various forms of modifiers in the NP are functioning as *adjectivals*; in other words, they are functioning as adjectives function. The NP formula clearly illustrates that many different forms can function as noun modifiers, not just adjectives. In a phrase such as *the baseball player*, rather than label *baseball* an adjective, as the traditional grammarian might, we would look at both its form and its function: *baseball* is a noun in form, an adjectival in function. The traditional definition of *adjective*—a word that modifies a noun—is essentially a definition of *adjectival.*

The NP itself fills many roles in the sentence, functions known as *nominals*: subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, object complement, object of preposition, and appositive.

Subject: *The bird* is singing.

Direct object: He bought *the bird* in Florida.

Indirect object: He gave *the bird* a bell to play with.

Subject complement: She is *a bird* when it comes to eating.

Object complement: She called her pet *"Bird."*

Object of preposition: The cat is actually scared of *the bird*.

Appositive: Janice, his *bird*, cheers up the whole apartment.

Writers who understand the form and function of NPs will have a great deal of the sentence under control. We examine these roles in the description of sentence patterns.

There are a number of ways to encourage students to use and understand their own linguistic expertise in the study of noun phrases. Determining where the subject NP ends and the predicate begins, for example, will not be a problem, even when the subject NP includes post-headword modifiers:

> The students from our school participating in the race made us
> all proud.

Students can easily find the line between NP and VP, between subject
and predicate, by substituting a pronoun for the subject:

> *They* made us all proud.

Even those non-native speakers who may have had only moderate ex-
perience with English will recognize that the personal pronoun stands
in for the entire NP, not just the noun headword. Pointing out this gram-
mar rule will certainly be of value to the ESL speaker. The following
pronoun test can be used to identify any nominal that fills an NP slot,
not just noun phrases: verb phrases and clauses can also function as
nominals:

> *What you do with your money* is none of my business.
> *That*   is none of my business.

> I really enjoy *running around the track every morning.*
> I really enjoy   *it.*

There are many ways in which NP lessons can be used to help
students with their writing. The students can be asked, for example, to
find and evaluate the expanded NPs in their assigned readings, perhaps
even distinguishing different writers on the basis of their NP styles. They
can look for NPs in their own writing, or in that of their peers during
group work, that could be enhanced with modifiers. Sometimes, of
course, the opposite instruction may be more appropriate: Find a more
precise noun, one that makes those added modifiers unnecessary.

Once students have learned how to identify noun phrases, they can
learn more about the characteristics of some of the components of those
phrases:

1. Movable Participles

Participles are the forms of the verb ending in *-ing* (the present
participle) and *-ed* or *-en* (the past participle) and used in verb phrases
(The baby is sleeping), as well as to modify nouns, as discussed here. The
postheadword slot in the NP, immediately after the noun, can be thought
of as the home base for the participial phrase. (Single-word participles
will usually be in the preheadword position, before the noun: the *sleep-
ing* baby. Qualified participles, too, will be in preheadword position,
often connected with a hyphen: the *well-worn* phrase.) When a
postheadword participial phrase in the subject NP is nonrestrictive—
that is, set off by commas—it can be moved: It can open or close the
sentence:

> The incumbent, *having collected huge campaign contributions*, won by a landslide.
>
> *Having collected huge campaign contributions*, the incumbent won by a landslide.
>
> The incumbent won by a landslide, *having collected huge campaign contributions*.

The opening position is the more common of the two variations; the end position works only when the sentence is fairly short. Notice that, no matter what the position of the participle is, the relationship of the head-word to the participle is a subject-verb relationship. The writer who understands this concept will recognize the problem of the dangling participle, which sometimes occurs in sentence-opening and -closing positions; the dangling participle is a verb without a subject: *Having collected huge campaign contributions, the election was a landslide.*

2. Movable Adjectives

Although usually a preheadword modifier, the adjective can make a stylistic statement when it is compounded and placed after the head-word:

> The unfamiliar neighborhood, *dark and still*, felt strangely ominous.
>
> The neighborhood, *unusually quiet*, felt strangely ominous.

3. Appositives

Most appositives are NPs in form. In function, an appositive can be thought of as a combination of adjectival and nominal. In the following example, the appositive renames the subject NP *(the old house)*—and could actually substitute for the subject; but it also modifies it by adding descriptive information:

> The old house, *an abandoned Victorian with peeling paint*, adds to the ominous feeling of the neighborhood.

Many of the *be* sentences that students so often overuse can be revised when the writers recognize that the NPs in subjective complement position after that linking *be* can be turned into appositives. The complement in the following sentence is the source of the appositive in the previous one:

> The old house is *an abandoned Victorian with peeling paint*.

4. Absolute Phrases

One of the most sophisticated of stylistic devices (and probably the one least used by student writers) is the absolute phrase—an NP in form,

with one postnoun modifier, commonly a participle, following the head-word. A tight, controlled modifier, it sends a message to the reader: "Pay attention! I constructed this sentence carefully."

> The abandoned Victorian house added a note of seedy gentility to the neighborhood, *its paint peeling, its gingerbread scrollwork edging the eaves like lace.*

> *His nose constantly in a book,* my brother has no interest in competitive sports.

These two examples of the absolute phrase offer a detail or point of focus to the idea stated in the main clause. Another kind of absolute explains a cause or condition:

> *The snowstorm showing no signs of abating,* school was cancelled for the third day in a row.

> *A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state,* the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

(Note that this rendering of the second amendment does not include two commas that appear in the original: one following *militia* and one following *arms.* Punctuation conventions have changed in the past two centuries.)

As you can see from this short description, an understanding of the NP can provide the framework for a great deal of sentence grammar.

The Verb Phrase

The VP or verb phrase in the linguist's formula (S = NP + VP) is, of course, the predicate. The form of the predicate will be determined to a great extent by the class of the verb: linking, intransitive, or transitive. The one-word predicates in our earlier sample sentences *(Dogs bark; Felipe laughed)* are obviously intransitive verbs because the intransitive class is the only one in which we find verbs that require no complements in order to be grammatical. The other classes require either adjectivals and/or nominals as complements.

Like the noun phrase, the verb phrase too can be described as a formula; for example, V + NP represents the predicate of the basic transitive sentence, such as,

> Felipe *bought a new car.*

> The students *have finished their homework.*

The VP almost always includes a *finite verb* that shows whether the VP is in the past or present tense. The finite verb in a VP can be iden-

tified in two ways: it is in either the past or present tense, and it appears at the front of the VP (or as the main verb itself if the verb phrase consists of only one verb). Thus, in the previous examples, the finite verbs are *bought*, in the past tense and the only verb, and the auxiliary *have*, the present tense of the verb *to have*, at the front of the VP *have finished.*

Verb phrases that do not indicate tense are called *nonfinite.* The VPs we saw as modifiers in the noun phrase, participles, are among these nonfinite verbs. The other two classes of nonfinite verbs are gerunds, which end in *-ing* and function as nominals (as in *Buying a car is exciting*), and infinitives, which are usually preceded by *to* (as in *I want to finish my homework soon*). Participles, gerunds, and infinitives are known as *verbals.* Verbals, standing by themselves, do not indicate past or present time, so we call them nonfinite verbs.

All VPs, finite and nonfinite, have in common the ability to be modified by *adverbials*, which can take the form of single words, phrases, or clauses. We should note that the traditional definition of *adverb* is (in part) actually the definition of *adverbial:* a word that modifies a verb. There are five different forms that function as adverbials, as modifiers of the verb:

1. adverb (We walked *quickly.*)
2. noun phrase (We went to the movies *last night.*)
3. prepositional phrase (We went *to the movies.*)
4. verb phrase (We walked to the store *to buy a frozen pizza for dinner.*)
5. clause (We walked to the store *because the car wouldn't start.*)

It is not only their variety of form that makes the adverbials such useful tools for the writer; it is also their movability. Adverbials can open or close the sentence, depending on the writer's focus *(Last night, we went to the movies; We went to the movies last night)*. They can also appear in the middle of the sentence, between the subject and the predicate, or between the verb and the complement, positions in which they are often set off by commas—and call attention to themselves (*All three of us, because we studied hard, got A's for the course*). Adverbials are versatile in purpose as well, adding, as they do, information of time and place and manner, reason, and the like.

Sentence Patterns

The seven sentence patterns described here represent the bare bones of perhaps 95 percent or more of our sentences. We should note also that a more accurate term would be *verb phrase pattern;* the seven categories

are determined by variations in the predicates—in the verb headword and the slots that follow it. We should note, too, that all verb phrases, both finite and nonfinite, will have the complements and can also have the adverbials that predicates of sentences have.

Recognizing that all sentences can, and often do, include adverbials of various forms, we include an adverbial slot (ADV) in the sentence pattern formulas. As with the NP formula, the parentheses can be translated as "optional"; we must note, however, that in many sentences the adverbials provide the new, important information, the reason for the sentence. And we have a few verbs in both the intransitive and transitive categories that require adverbial information for the sentence to be grammatical:

> My parents *reside in Arizona.* (intransitive)
>
> She *put* the book *on the shelf.* (transitive)

Here, then, are the seven basic patterns, distinguished by the class of the verb—whether linking, intransitive, or transitive—and the slots that follow the verb. It's also important to recognize that the slots labeled NP are actually nominal slots; they can be filled by forms other than noun phrases—that is, by infinitives, gerunds, and nominal clauses.

Linking Verbs

1. NP	V-link	ADJ	(ADV)
The teacher	seems	tired	today.
SUBJECT		SUBJECT COMPLEMENT	

2. NP¹	V-link	NP¹	(ADV)
The students	are	a boisterous bunch.	
SUB		SUB COMP	

(The identical superscript numbers on the two NPs in pattern 2 denote that the NPs have the same referent; in other words, *the students* and *a boisterous bunch* refer to the same people. The subject complement describes [when an adjective] or renames [when an NP] the subject. Other common linking verbs include *become*, *remain*, and the verbs of the senses: *taste, feel, smell, look.*)

Intransitive Verbs

3. NP	Verb-intr	(ADV)
Felipe	walked	to school.
SUB		

Transitive Verbs

4. NP¹   **V-trans**   **NP²**   **(ADV)**
The students   studied   their history lesson.
     SUB   DIRECT OBJECT

(The superscript numbers provide an almost infallible way of determining that the NP following the verb is a direct object; unlike the subject complement, the direct object has a referent different from that of the subject, so here the number is different. The traditional definition of the direct object—"receiver of the action"—is not always accurate.)

5. NP¹   **V-trans**   **NP²**   **NP³**   **(ADV)**
The teacher   gave   the students   a big assignment   this morning.
    SUB   INDIRECT OBJ   DIR OBJ

(The subgroup of transitive verbs that take indirect objects have a "give"-like meaning: *present, award, deliver, issue, provide, bequeath.* The indirect object is the recipient of the direct object. Note that all three NP slots have different referents.)

6. NP¹   **V-trans**   **NP²**   **ADJ**   **(ADV)**
The teacher   considers   the students   very capable.
   SUB   DIR OBJ   OBJECT COMPLEMENT

7. NP¹   **V-trans**   **NP²**   **NP²**   **(ADV)**
The students   elected   Felipe   class president   yesterday.
   SUB   DIR OBJ   OBJ COMP

(Other members of this subgroup of transitive verbs that can take an object complement include *find, make,* and *prefer.* The relationship of direct object to object complement is like the relationship of subject complements to subjects in the linking category: the direct object and object complement have the same referent. Note that in spite of having three NPs, this pattern is easily distinguished from pattern 5, in which all three NPs have different referents.)

It's important to recognize that many verbs have variations in meaning that may put them into more than one of these patterns:

We *grew* tomatoes last summer in the garden. (*transitive*)

I *grew* fat in the winter. (*linking*)

The kittens *grew* fast. (*intransitive*)

Clearly, it's not only the verb that determines the sentence pattern; we must also consider the structures that fill the predicate slots.

The Verb System of African American English

The sentence *Mary be happy,* which was discussed in Chapter 2, illustrates one of the most noticeable differences between Standard English and African American English: the construction of verb strings. Both systems use forms of *have* and *be* and *do* as auxiliaries, but they do so in different ways. Following is a partial list of common AAE verb strings, along with the Standard English equivalent for each (Green)*:

1. He eat. (present) / He is eating.
2. He be eating. (habitual) / He is usually eating.
3. He been eating. (remote past) / He has been eating for a long time.
4. He been ate. (remote past) / He ate a long time ago.
5. He done ate. (completive) / He has already eaten.
6. He been done ate. (remote past completive) / He finished eating a long time ago.
7. He had done ate. (completive) / He has already eaten.

We can recognize certain regular features of the system from this small sample:

- The auxiliary *done* appears in all the completive forms. Note that the adverb *already* or the verb *finished* is required to express the Standard English equivalent.

- The auxiliary *been* (pronounced "bin" and spoken with strong stress) carries the meaning of remote time. The Standard English equivalent requires "a long time" or "a long time ago" to make this remote past distinction.

- The habitual *be,* shown in the second example, includes the meaning of "usually" or "habitually," whereas in Standard English the adverb must be supplied.

It should be obvious from this brief description that the verb forms of AAE, although different from those of Standard English, are produced by a highly systematized set of rules. This recognition should also reinforce the important lesson discussed earlier: that all varieties of English are equally grammatical.

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*This section on the verb system of African American English is adapted from Martha Kolln and Robert Funk's *Understanding English Grammar,* 6th ed. (New York: Longman, 2002), which is in turn adapted from Lisa Green's article "Study of Verb Classes in African American English," *Linguistics and Education* 7 (1995), pp. 65–81.