THE SUBJECT AND THE PREDICATE: THE BASIC SENTENCE PARTS

“Just to write a good sentence--that’s the postulate I go by. I guess I’ve always felt that if you keep a kind of fidelity toward the individual sentence, that you could work toward the rest.” - Richard Ford

Question: What is a subject?

The subject is the person, place, or thing that acts, is acted on, or is described in the sentence. Three types of subjects exist:

Simple subject: a noun or a pronoun

- he
- she
- dog
- house

Complete subject: a noun or a pronoun plus any modifiers

- the black dog
- the trees across the bay
- his dog house

Compound subject: two or more subjects joined by a conjunction

- Mitch or Amy
- the dog and the house
- he and I

Question: What is a predicate?

The predicate is the action or description that occurs in the sentence. As with subjects, three types of predicates exist:

Simple predicate: a complete verb (a verb and any helping verbs)

- sit
- was singing
- could have danced

Complete predicate: a simple predicate plus all modifiers

- sit on the couch
- was singing quietly
- could have danced across the room
Compound predicate: two or more predicates with the same subject

- was singing quietly and smiling to himself
- could have danced across the room and stayed awake all night
- sit on the couch or sit on the floor

**Question:** Do all sentences need both a subject and a predicate?

Yes, most complete sentences need both.

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Complete</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>My friend James</td>
<td>James and I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
<td>jumped</td>
<td>jumped on the bed</td>
<td>jumped on the bed and fell on the floor</td>
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Subject + Predicate =

- James jumped.
- James and I jumped.
- My friend James jumped on the bed.
- James jumped on the bed and fell on the floor.
- James and I jumped on the bed.

**Exception:** A command is the only type of sentence that has no subject. The subject ("you") is implied:

Stop.

- Implied subject: you
- Predicate: stop

Read the book.

- Implied subject: you
- Predicate: read the book

Walk the dogs and get the mail.

- Implied subject: you
- Predicate: walk the dogs and get the mail