

# Sentence patterns

Just about all sentences in the English language fall into ten patterns determined by the presence and functions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

The patterns are most easily classified according to the type of verb used:

**Verb of being** patterns (1, 2, 3) use a form of the verb ***to be*** as the main verb in the sentence.

*is      are      was      were      has been      have been      had been*

**Linking verb** patterns (4, 5) use one of the linking verbs as the main verb in the sentence. The linking verb is followed by a noun or adjective functioning as a subjective complement.

*smell      taste      look      feel      seem      become      appear      grow*

**Action verb** patterns (6, 7, 8, 9, 10) use one of the many action verbs as the main verb in the sentence. The action verb may be either transitive (take a direct object) or intransitive (not take a direct object).

*see      jump      embrace      write      imagine      buy      plummet      think etc.*

**Terms** used to identify various parts of each sentence pattern include the following:

- NP = noun phrase

This abbreviation refers to a headword noun and its modifiers ("noun phrase") functioning as a subject, direct object, indirect object, subjective complement, or objective complement.

- NP1, NP2, NP3, etc. = designations for different noun phrase functions

Numbers in sequential order are used with each NP to designate its difference from or similarity to other NPs before and after it.

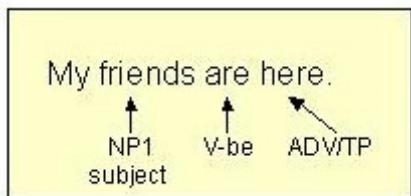
- V-be = verb of being
- LV = linking verb
- V-int = intransitive verb
- V-tr = transitive verb

- ADV/TP = adverbial of time or place
- ADJ = adjective

## THE TEN SENTENCE PATTERNS

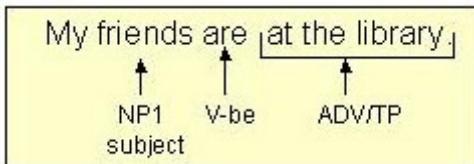
### 1. NP1 + V-be + ADV/TP

The verb of being is followed by an adverb indicating *where* or *when*.



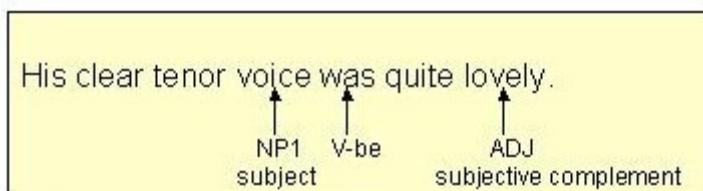
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The adverbial indicating *where* or *when* may be a prepositional phrase.



### 2. NP1 + V-be + ADJ

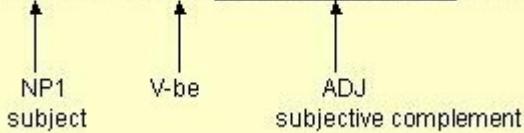
The verb of being is followed by an adjective that functions as the subjective complement.



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The adjectival functioning as the subjective complement may be a prepositional phrase.

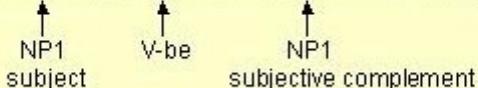
The supervisor was in a good mood today.



### 3. NP1 + V-be + NP1

The verb of being is followed by a noun that functions as the subjective complement.

Mr. James has been a teacher for forty years.

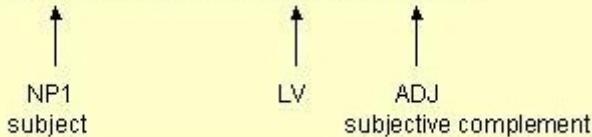


Note: The second NP receives the same numerical designation as the first NP because the second NP, the subjective complement, is the same as the subject (Mr. James = teacher).

### 4. NP1 + LV + ADJ

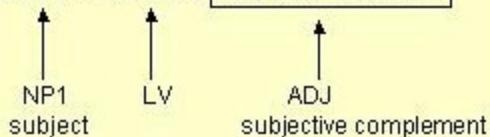
The linking verb is followed by an adjective functioning as a subjective complement.

The cake on the table looks delicious.



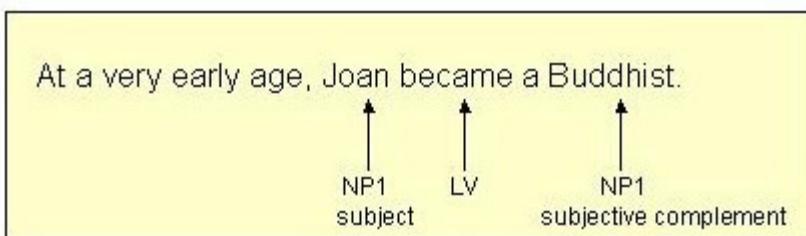
The adjectival functioning as the subjective complement may be a prepositional phrase.

Marianne looks like her mother.



## 5. NP1 + LV + NP1

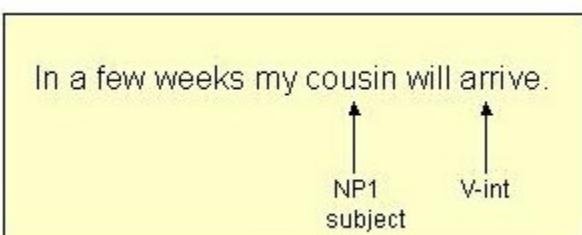
The linking verb is followed by a noun functioning as a subjective complement.



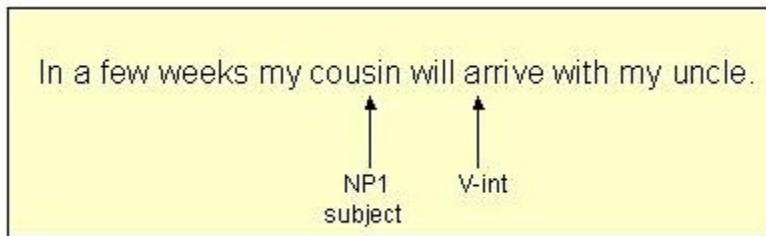
Note: The second NP receives the same numerical designation as the first NP because the second NP, the subjective complement, is the same as the subject (Joan = Buddhist).

## 6. NP1 + V-int

The action verb takes no direct object.



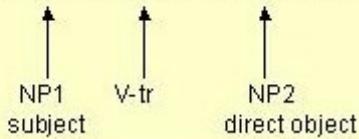
Even if the action verb is followed by a prepositional phrase, the verb is still intransitive as long as it does not take a direct object.



## 7. NP1 + V-tr + NP2

The action verb is followed by a direct object.

The archer shot an arrow into the target.



More information

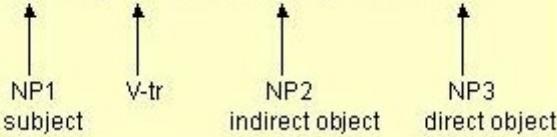
on [direct objects](#)

Note: The second NP, the direct object, receives a different numerical designation (NP2) because it is not the same as the subject (NP1).

## 8. NP1 + V-tr + NP2 + NP3

The action verb is followed by an indirect object and then a direct object.

Smithers gave the employees a raise.



More information on

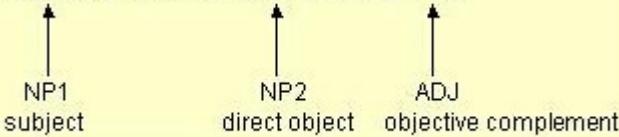
[indirect objects](#)

Note: The indirect object and the direct object each receive a new numerical designation because each is different from the other and both are different from the subject.

## 9. NP1 + V-tr + NP2 + ADJ

The action verb is followed by a direct object. The direct object is followed by an adjective functioning as an objective complement.

The jury found the defendant guilty.



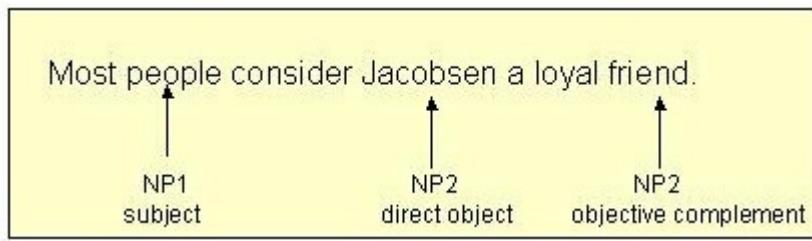
More information on

[objective complements](#)

Note: The second NP, the direct object, receives a different numerical designation (NP2) because it is not the same as the subject (NP1).

## 10. NP1 + V-tr + NP2 + NP2

The action verb is followed by a direct object. The direct object is followed by a noun functioning as an objective complement.



Note: The second NP, the direct object, receives a different numerical designation (NP2) because it is not the same as the subject (NP1). The third NP, the objective complement, receives the same numerical designation as the direct object (NP2) because it is the same as the direct object (Jacobsen = friend).

There are five basic patterns around which most English sentences are built.\*

They are as follows:

|         |                        |   |
|---------|------------------------|---|
| S-V     | Subject-Verb           | John sleeps.<br>Jill is eating.<br>Jack will arrive next week.      |
| S-V-O   | Subject-Verb-Object    | I like rice.<br>She loves her job.<br>He's eating an orange         |
| S-V-Adj | Subject-Verb-Adjective | He's funny.<br>The workers are lazy.<br>Karen seems angry.          |
| S-V-Adv | Subject-Verb-Adverb    | Jim is here.<br>Flowers are everywhere.                             |
| S-V-N   | Subject-Verb-Noun      | She is my mom.<br>The men are doctors.<br>Mr. Jones is the teacher. |

At the heart of every English sentence is the Subject-Verb relationship. Other elements can be added to make a sentence more interesting, but they are not essential to its formation.

The following sentences are examples of the S-V pattern.

She sleeps. *Core sentence*

She sleeps soundly. *An adverb is added to describe how she sleeps.*

She sleeps on the sofa. *A prepositional phrase is added to tell where she sleeps.*

She sleeps every afternoon. *A time expression is added to tell when she sleeps.*

She is sleeping right now. *Verb tense is changed, but S-V relationship remains the same.*

Mary will sleep later. *Subject is named and another tense is used.*

The dogs are sleeping in the garage. *New subject may require a different form of the verb.*

**Note:** Any action verb can be used with this sentence pattern.

The following sentences are examples of the **S-V-O** pattern.

They like rice. *Core sentence*

The people like rice. *Specific subject*

The friendly people like rice. *Subject modified with an adjective*

The people in the restaurant like rice. *Subject modified with an adjective*

The people like boiled rice. *Object modified with an adjective*

The people like hot, white rice. *Object modified with more than one adjective*

**Note:** Only transitive action verbs can be used with this sentence pattern.

The following sentences are examples of the **S-V-Adj** pattern.

He is fine. *Basic sentence with “be” verb*

He seems happy. *Basic sentence with another linking verb*

Jordan is tall, dark and handsome. *Series of adjectives*

He appears very comfortable. *Adverb or intensifier added*

George became sick last night. *Different tense and linking verb*

**Note:** Only linking verbs can be used with this sentence pattern.

The following sentences are examples of the **S-V-Adv** pattern:

The teacher is here. *Basic sentence*

The teacher is over there. *Using an adverb phrase*

Teachers are everywhere. *Plural noun and verb used*

The teachers are in the lobby. *Prepositional phrase functioning as adverb*

**Note:** Only linking verbs can be used with this sentence pattern.

The following sentences are examples of the **S-V-N** pattern.

The man is a doctor. *Basic sentence*

The women are doctors. *Using plural noun and verb*

My father is a nice guy.

*Modified subject and complement*

My grandparents are senior citizens.

*Modified plural subject and complement*

**Note:** Only linking verbs can be used with this sentence pattern.

\*Other, less common structures are dealt with in another unit.