



SUBJECTS

The subject of a sentence includes all words that are part of the phrase or clause that is functioning as a noun. The subject is the part of the sentence about which something is said or described. Pronouns, nouns, noun phrases, and noun clauses can be the subject of a sentence.

5a Pronouns and nouns as subjects

Single words—pronouns and nouns—can be subjects.

Pronoun → **He** can fly the plane.

Noun → **Sheila** can fly the plane.

5b Noun phrases and noun clauses as subjects

More complex than single words, noun phrases and noun clauses can also be subjects of sentences.

Noun phrase → **The flight attendant** can fly the plane.

Noun phrase → **The substitute flight attendant who is training to be a pilot** can fly the plane.

Noun clause → **That she can fly the plane** is lucky.

A complete subject that is made up of a noun phrase includes all pre-modifiers and post-modifiers of the head or main noun. Note that *pilot* is the head—also known as the simple subject—of the following noun phrase, but that the entire noun phrase is the complete subject of the sentence.

- **The unconscious pilot who had suffered a heart attack** left the controls unattended.

5c

Other parts of speech as subjects

When they are functioning like a noun, other parts of speech, such as verb infinitives or gerunds, can also be the subject of a sentence.

Verb infinitive phrase → **To fly the plane** is easy.

Gerund phrase → **Flying the plane** is easy.

Prepositional phrase → **In the courtyard** are two pilots ready to fly the plane.



5d

Delayed subjects

In English, the subject occurs before the verb in most sentences since English has what is called an S-V-O (Subject-Verb-Object) language pattern. Some sentences, though, can have delayed subjects when a placeholder—*it* or *there*—occurs before the verb, and the delayed subject comes after the verb. Note that these placeholders occur with forms of the *to be* verb.

- **It** has been **some time** since the flight attendant went into the cockpit.
- **There** seems to be **some problem** in the cockpit.

The subject is also delayed in questions.

- **Where** is **the river**?
- **Why** are **we** losing altitude?

Although English allows for the subject to be delayed, this type of sentence structure, if not a question, is often referred to as wordy. Try to rephrase the sentence without using the delayed subject. If your re-

phrased sentence has the same meaning and emphasis you intended, then use the less wordy sentence.

Wordy → It has been some time since the flight attendant went into the cockpit.

More concise → **The flight attendant went into the cockpit an hour ago.**

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Underline the complete subjects in the following sentences.

Example: During the flight, the pilot saw signs of engine problems.

1. The plane filled with passengers on vacation was given its takeoff signal.
2. At some point during the flight, the flight attendant working the coach section heard a slight popping noise.
3. The pilot and co-pilot listened to the flight attendant's concerns.
4. About ten minutes later, they asked the passengers to fasten their safety belts securely.
5. What the flight attendant had heard was the sound of a goose flying into one of the engines.

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