

Rhetorical Grammar for Expository Reading and Writing

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STUDENT VERSION

MODULE 1: WHAT'S NEXT? THINKING ABOUT LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Sentence Fundamentals: Complete and Incomplete Sentences

Activity 1

Guided Composition

This activity is based on Joe Rodriguez, “10 Rules for Going to College When Nobody Really Expected You To.” The purpose of this activity is for you to write a paragraph on the topic of this module. Your teacher will read a paragraph while you listen, and then read it again while you take notes. You will then write your own paragraph based on what you heard using your notes.

Noticing Language

Which of these sentences are complete? How do you know?

1. I grew up in East LA and attended the famous Garfield High.
2. Because I grew up in the barrio, had no idea it would take me eight years to graduate from college.
3. Even if you live at home, work full-time and attend school part-time.
4. Hang out less or not all with old friends.
5. Worrying too much about the high cost of college tuition.

Rhetorical Grammar Concepts

The materials labeled Rhetorical Grammar Concepts are for your reference as you do the activities in this unit.

Identifying Verbs, Subjects, and Prepositional Phrases

Every sentence in English must have at least one *verb* and one *subject*. When you identify the verb first, it is much easier to find the subject of the sentence. The verb in a sentence is always related to the subject. The subject usually appears in front of the verb. Since the verb expresses what the subject *does* or *is*, verbs either express

- **Action** (eat, stop, help, buy, make, do, gain, succeed)
or
- **State of being** (am/is/are/were, become, seem, look, appear, taste, sound, remain)
- **Mental states** (know, think, feel, remember, believe)

If a verb consists of only one word, it is automatically the “main verb.” However, sometimes the main verb has “helping verbs” that go along with it. Together with the main verb, they make up the “complete verb phrase.” It is possible to have more than one helping verb, so the verb phrase can be four or five words long.

Main verb (if alone) = the complete verb

Example: I study every day.

Helping/modal verbs + main verb = the complete verb phrase

Example: I should study every day.

It is easier to recognize the subject or subjects of sentences when you find the verb first. The subject of the sentence usually

- Occurs before the verb
- Tells who or what does the action or expresses the state of being or state of mind

Tip: Subjects are either nouns or pronouns. Many nouns have a determiner such as **a, an, or the**. Other determiners are possessive nouns, possessive pronouns, and numbers (**student’s, her, those, seventeen**). If you aren’t sure if a word is a noun, try using a determiner with it or making it plural or possessive. If you can, you’ve identified a noun; then you need to decide if it is the subject of the verb. Remember that the –ing form of a verb can act as a noun (**Studying** math and science opens doors to many careers.) and be the subject of a sentence.

In some sentences, nouns or pronouns in *prepositional phrases* can be confused with the subject. For this reason, it is easier to identify nouns that are subjects if you first identify the prepositional phrases in sentences by putting parentheses around them. Remember that a prepositional phrase may contain one or more nouns or pronouns.

Common Prepositions

One-word Prepositions				
about	before	down	off	toward(s)
above	behind	during	on	under
across	below	for	out	until

after	beneath	from	over	up
against	beside(s)	in	since	upon
along	between	into	through	with
among	beyond	like	throughout	within
around	by	near	till	without
at	despite	of	to	
Two-word and Three-word Prepositions				
according to	as many as	because of	in place of	such as
across from	as much as	by means of	in spite of	together with
along with	as well as	due to	on account of	instead of
apart from	aside from	in addition to	subsequent to	on top of

Note: When “to” is followed by a verb, it is an infinitive. Do not confuse infinitives with prepositional phrases.

The ability **to bounce back** is a fundamental life skill students have **to learn** on their own.

Activity 2

Identifying Verbs, Subjects, and Prepositional Phrases

This activity is based on Lawrence B. Schlack, “Not Going to College is a Viable Option.”

Review the list of common prepositions in the chart above. Then put parentheses (around any prepositional phrases) in the following sentences. Next, double-underline the verbs, and finally underline the subjects.

1. Many young people (in college) don't know why they are there or where they are going.
2. The experience of going to college becomes a very expensive form of career exploration.
3. Status, economics and competition drive the pressure to go to college.
4. There is a widespread belief that more college degrees will make the United States competitive.
5. The next logical step for high school students is not always college.

Activity 3

6. In Europe graduates take time off for travel, work or public service.
7. Getting a job after high school offers experience.
8. Instead of paying tuition you earn money and learn business skills.

Identifying Subjects and Verbs in Your Own Sentences

This activity is based on Lawrence B. Schlack, "Not Going to College is a Viable Option."

Answer questions 1-8.

- Put parentheses (around any prepositional phrases) in your responses. Next, double-underline the verbs, and finally underline the subjects. Remember that -ing verbs can act as nouns in prepositional phrases.
 - Mark the end of a complete sentence with a period, question mark, or exclamation mark (use sparingly or not at all in academic writing).
 - Never use a comma to separate the subject from the verb.
1. Does going to college guarantee that a student will earn more money?
Going (to college) doesn't guarantee that a student will earn more money.
 2. What is a logical next step for a high school graduate other than college?
 3. What is a good reason not to go to college?
 4. How can we make our country more competitive?
 5. What are examples of "honorable non-college choices" right out of high school?
 6. What do you have an aptitude for?
 7. What career do you aspire to?
 8. What are some good careers that do not require a four-year degree?

Activity 4

What Makes a Sentence Complete?

The following sentences are incomplete because they are missing an essential element, either the subject or the verb. Therefore, the sentences do not express complete ideas. What is wrong with each one? Mark the box if the sentence is missing a subject, a verb, or both.

**Rhetorical
Grammar Concepts**

Incomplete sentences	No subject	No verb
Putting high school behind them. (Who put high school behind them? What were they doing?)		
Experts who have researched the success of college graduates. (What did the experts conclude?)		
On a major area of study. (What was done? And who did it?)		
Attended college immediately after high school. (Who attended college?)		
To be able to pursue your own interests and discover a career. (Who was doing it? What were they doing?)		

Recognizing and Forming Complete Sentences

Complete Sentence	Incomplete Sentence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can stand alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a fragment; needs a subject or a verb or both
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expresses a complete thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not express a complete thought (needs to be completed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains a complete verb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not contain a word that expresses an action or state of being; may contain part of a verb, but it is incomplete (-ed, -ing, to + verb)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains a subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not have a noun or pronoun that answers the questions who or what about the verb

Sentences in expository writing: Writers of expository texts generally write long sentences as they seek to pack information into their sentences and indicate the logical relationships among those pieces of information (Is it new information or old? Is it additional information, or contrasting information, or a cause, or a concession?). The preceding sentence is an example. However, writers also know that sentence variety is important to keep readers

Activity 5

engaged. A short sentence can have maximum impact. And very occasionally in an expository text, a writer will use a fragment, usually where the missing subject and verb are easily inferred. Used sparingly, these fragments can surprise readers and emphasize the writer's point.

Identifying Complete and Incomplete Sentences

This activity is based on Gerald Graff, "Hidden Intellectualism."

Write "C" for complete and "I" for incomplete in front of each sentence below. Rewrite the incomplete sentences so they are complete. When you are done, write the definition of a complete sentence.

- I 1. A young person who is intelligent but does not apply that intelligence to academic work.
2. We associate street smarts with anti-intellectual concerns.
3. Real intellectuals can raise thoughtful questions about lightweight topics.
4. Draining interest out of the richest subjects.
5. Until I entered college, I hated books.
6. I also loved sports novels and autobiographies of sports stars.
7. Believing for a long time that I was your typical teenage anti-intellectual.
8. In the Chicago neighborhood where I grew up.
9. Negotiating class boundaries was a tricky matter.
10. Torn between the need to prove I was smart and the fear of a beating.
11. Streets smarts also satisfy the thirst for community.
12. And in distancing themselves from anything as enjoyable as sports.

A complete sentence _____

Combining Sentences

This activity is based on Gerald Graff, "Hidden Intellectualism."

The sentences below are complete, but they are short and choppy. Combine them to make one or more sentences that are longer and more interesting.

Make sure your new sentences are complete, that their subjects and verbs agree, and that they contain all the ideas in the original sentences. Also make sure they are punctuated correctly. There is more than one way to combine the sentences correctly. When you have finished, look back at the article, and observe how the writer composed his sentences. Number 1 has been done as an example.

1. I was less than negligible as a fighter.

If you were less than negligible as fighter, you settled.

What you settled for was the next best thing.

The next best thing was to be inarticulate.

It was to carefully hide telltale marks of literacy.

Telltale marks were like correct grammar.

They were like correct pronunciation.

New sentence(s):

If you were like me, less than negligible as a fighter, you settled for the next best thing. You were inarticulate and careful to hide telltale marks of literacy like correct grammar and pronunciation. (possible response)

Original sentence:

If you were less than negligible as a fighter, as I was, you settled for the next best thing, which was to be inarticulate, carefully hiding telltale marks of literacy like correct grammar and pronunciation.

2. Real intellectuals turn any subject into grist for their mill.

The subject may seem lightweight.

They turn it through the thoughtful questions they bring to it.

A dullard will find a way.

The way will drain the interest out of the subject.

It is the richest subject.

New sentence(s):

Activity 7

Editing Student Writing

This activity is based on a student essay from the What's Next? Thinking About Life After High School module.

Read the passage of student writing below. Then mark sentences with an ✕ that are missing a subject, verb, or both. In addition to the example, you should find five more sentences that need editing. Edit the sentences so they are complete (have both subjects and verbs) and are correctly connected and punctuated.

✕Becoming a child psychologist been my calling ever since I could remember. Having the opportunity to figure out emotions and actions. Has always interested me. My mother owned a daycare center, so I'm familiar with taking care of children. I noticed that when those children went through difficult times with parents or school, no one knew. I was the only one because had developed friendships with them, and they trusted me. When I came across the book *A Child Called "It"* by Dave Pelzer, it opened my mind. To how repulsive some parents can be to their children. The book truly made an impact on my life. I knew I wanted to be a helping hand to children and young teens. I've had my share of bullying because of my weight, but a psychologist helped me through the rough times. I admire psychologists because they open your eyes. To another side of yourself. Ever since I found out that there was a career where I could help others and work with children, I knew child psychology was for me.

Sentence rewrites:

Becoming a child psychologist **has** been my calling ever since I could remember.

Activity 8

Editing Your Guided Composition

Return to your guided composition from Activity 1.

- Double-underline the main verbs and underline the subjects.

- Make sure the sentences are complete (have both subjects and verbs) and are connected and punctuated correctly. Rewrite any sentences that you think are incomplete. Put a question mark in the margin next to anything that you are unsure about.
- Exchange your paragraph with a partner and discuss your questions. Check with your teacher if you can't agree on an answer.

Activity 9

Editing Your Own Writing

Select a paragraph from your writing assignment for What's Next? Thinking About Life After High School.

- Double-underline the main verbs and underline the subjects.
- Make sure the sentences are complete (have both subjects and verbs) and are connected and punctuated correctly. Rewrite any sentences that you think are incomplete. Put a question mark in the margin next to anything that you are unsure about.
- Exchange your paragraph with a partner, and discuss your questions. Check with your teacher if you can't agree on an answer.
- Now edit the rest of your essay for missing subjects and verbs and for correct punctuation.

