

## VIU Grammar and Punctuation Study Guide 2: Subjects and Verbs

### Subjects

1. An easy way to find *the subject* in a sentence is to ask:

#### **Who or what is the sentence about?**

For example, in the sentence:

*'Most students love the summer semester'* who or what is the sentence about? The sentence is about students, so 'Students' are the subject of this sentence.

2. Identify all *prepositional phrases* (a group of words that begins with a preposition, ends with a noun or a pronoun, and shows a relationship such as time, direction, location between the noun and the rest of the sentence) in the sentence. The subject will **not** be in these word groups.

Some examples of prepositional phrases are: *above the water, after the races, about the story, beside the still waters ...*

In a sentence such as:

*'Most students in the college on the hill love the summer semester'* - "***in the college***" and "***on the hill***" are prepositional phrases. The subject **will not** be in these groups of words.

### Verbs

A verb is a word or group of words that tell what a person or thing is, does or feels. Another way of defining a verb is that it denotes action, existence or occurrence.

- e.g. Tom **is** a fascinating speaker.  
Mary **will have been studying** for more than an hour by now.  
Serena **has thought** about changing careers, but she **lacks** self-confidence.

No verb starting with "**to**" is the verb of the sentence.

- e.g. At the end of semester, some classes **like** **to go** to the pub together **to celebrate**.

Words such as **always, never, just, not** and **only** are not part of the verb, but may interrupt a two-word verb.

- e.g. This course **has** **never** **included** grammar.

No “ing” word **by itself** is the verb of the sentence.

e.g. They **are having** dinner at her mother’s house.  
↑the whole verb

1. An easy way to find **the verb** in a sentence is to ask what the sentence says about the subject.

### What is the subject doing or being?

In the sentence, ‘*Most students in the college on the hill love the summer semester*’, what does the sentence say about students? The students love, so ‘love’ is the verb in this sentence.

2. Another way to find the verb is to place a **subject pronoun** (*I / you / he / she / it / we / they*) **in front of the word(s)** you **think** is the verb. **They love**. If the sentence sounds right – you have probably identified the verb.

**Note:** A sentence may have more than one subject and/ or more than one verb.

**Teachers and students** **met** and **talked** about the activities of the day.  
↑ subjects ↑ verbs ↑

Now it’s your turn. Underline the subject(s) and circle the verb(s) in each sentence.

1. Everyone is going to the opening of the play about Carol on Monday.
2. Before the rodeo began, Byron and Avril searched for seats in the gallery.
3. We hugged and stroked the cat to comfort it.
4. Shiona, Linda, Apryl and Isobel have keys to the lab.
5. Unlock the back door.
6. Inching forward in the dark, Craig nearly fell over the cliff.
7. Babies and senators are an odd combination.

## Answers

1. **Everyone** **is going** to the opening of the play about Carol on Monday.

“To the opening”, “of the play”, “about Carol”, and “on Monday” are all *prepositional phrases*. The subject will not be found in any of these groups of words. **Everyone** is the subject of this sentence (answers “who or what is the sentence about?”).

2. Before the rodeo began, **Byron** and **Avril** **searched** for seats in the gallery.

There are **two people** whom the sentence talks about, so there are two subjects (**compound subjects**). The subject is not found in *prepositional phrases*, so cannot be in “before the rodeo” or “in the gallery”. To find the verb, put the pronoun “they” (referring to Byron and Avril) in front of the word you think is the verb - “they **searched**”. Or ask what they did ... “they **searched**”. Therefore “**searched**” is the **verb**.

3. **We** **hugged** and **stroked** the cat to comfort it.

Who or what is the sentence about? “**We**”. What did “**we**” do? (**hugged, stroked** are **compound verbs**.)

4. **Shiona, Linda, Apryl** and **Isobel** **have** keys to the lab.

There are four people talked about in this sentence, so all four make up the subject of this sentence. The subject will not be found in the *prepositional phrase* “to the lab”. Use the subject pronoun “they” (to replace the four subjects named) in front of the word you think is the verb. The verb is “**have**”, so “they **have**”. “**keys**” is the object of the verb, and describes **What** they have. It is not the subject.

5. **Unlock** the back door.

The subject of this sentence is **understood** but not written: “You”. It is not written because the sentence is a command. The verb is what you are to do (**unlock**).

6. **Inching forward in the dark, Craig** nearly **fell** over the cliff.

Who or what is the sentence talking about? **Craig**. What about Craig? He **fell**. “Nearly” is a word like “only”, “never” and “always” that would not be part of the verb.

7. **Babies** and **senators** **are** an odd combination.

Who is the sentence talking about? **Babies** and **senators** (the subject pronoun would be “they”). There is no action in this sentence, so place the subject-pronoun before the word you think is the verb. **They are**. The verb “**are**” is a form of the verb “to be”. (I am, we/you/they are, she/he/it is).