



Five Basic Structures of Simple Sentences

Recognizing the five basic structures of simple sentences can be helpful as you later begin to identify subordinate structures that expand these simple structures. At the heart of any complete sentence, you will find one or more of these basic patterns. Sometimes the patterns are not so obvious as they appear when listed together. However, as you become familiar with these structures, you will become skilled in recognizing and expanding them with subordinate structures.

Basic Pattern

1. Subject/Verb
2. Subject/Verb/Direct Object
3. Subject/Verb/Complement
4. Subject/Verb/Indirect Object/
Direct Object
5. Subject/Verb/Direct Object/
Object Complement

Pattern Example

Edward laughed.
The baby crawls and coos.
Spring rain and flowers abound.

Margaret recalled a memory.
Susan shovels snow.
President Obama gave a speech.

The consultant seemed pleasant.
All applicants were UM graduates.
Our house is sturdy.

The new candidate gives me hope.
I offered the candidate my support.
He gave the child a stern look.

The girl thinks herself intelligent.
The children made David "it."
Squirrels drove the dogs mad.

You will notice that these basic sentence types can be expanded by dependent (subordinate) structures like dependent adverbial clauses, dependent relative clauses, and the variety of phrases made up of dependent prepositional, participial, appositive, and absolute phrases. These are all strategies of sentence expansion.

Samples of Patterns Expanded with Clauses and Phrases

Subject/Verb expanded with a prepositional phrase:

A herd of elk gathered [beside the stream.]

New students arrive [at the end of August].

Subject/Verb expanded with a dependent relative clause and a prepositional phrase:

The house, [which was originally built in the 1920s], stood [next to an old mill].

Her computer, [which was donated by a colleague], crashed [during a data analysis].

Subject/Verb/Object expanded with a participial phrase:

[Hearing a loud clap of thunder], the campers gathered their gear.

[Intending to garner support for his campaign], the politician delivered his speech.

Subject/Verb/Object expanded with a dependent adverbial clause:

The campers packed their gear [while rain soaked the ground].

[Although the forecast calls for freezing temperatures], she planted her garden.

Subject/Verb/Object expanded with a dependent relative clause:

The athlete, [who knew her own prowess], scored a goal.

Her father, [who could hardly contain his excitement], let loose a cheer.

Subject/Verb/Object expanded with all of the above:

[Using all her strength], the athlete, [who knew her own prowess], scored a goal [while her father cheered from the stands].

The other three basic sentence patterns can also be expanded in the same manner.