Sentences, Phrases, and Text Construction

4

Overview

- Rigid and mobile sentence elements.
- The order of elements in the noun phrase.
- The order of elements in the verb phrase.
- Transitive and intransitive verbs.
- Compound sentences.
- Common errors in sentence construction.

The structure of a basic English sentence is relatively easy to teach because English has rigid word order, e.g. the subject is followed by a verb, which is followed by an object. Although many variations of this skeletal structure are possible, the additions also adhere to somewhat inflexible patterns. For example, a prepositional phrase cannot be a sentence subject: only noun phrases can, and a verb must be present in every sentence for it to be grammatical. In this case, the structure ****For most students go to the US to study*** is incorrect because a prepositional phrase occupies the subject position.

The simplest approach to teaching basic sentence structure can take advantage of the relative rigidity of English sentence structure. An example of a basic sentence structure can consist of the following:

(1) An optional adverb/prepositional phrase.
(2) A subject noun or noun phrase.
(3) A verb.
(4) An object if the main verb is transitive, that is, it requires a direct object.

The essential sentence elements and their positions relative to one another are sometimes called **slots**, and in many sentences, some slots can be empty, e.g. the object slot is not filled if the verb is intransitive (does not require an object).

In English sentences, **the verb phrase is required for all sentences to be grammatical**. The subject slot can be empty only in the case of imperatives (commands), e.g. ***Ø close the door***.

The approach to teaching sentence- and phrase-structure systems of English described below does not place a great deal of emphasis on conveying a particular meaning. Rather, students can be taught to use the regularities and the rigid order of sentence and phrase elements to increase their grammatical accuracy. For academic L2 learners, a reasonable degree of grammatical accuracy represents a crucial factor in their academic, professional, and social opportunities (Celce-Murcia, 1993; Fries, 1945; Hammerly, 1991; Hinkel, 2015, 2016).

Rigid and Mobile Sentence Elements

In general, the breakdown of a sentence into ordered and sequential slots is based on three fundamental principles.

The Fundamental Principles of Sentence Structure

Basic English sentences are not very complicated.

Principle #1. Sentence elements are ordered and can be identified relative to other sentence elements, e.g. in most sentences, other than questions, the subject noun phrase precedes the verb.

Minimal Sentence Slots

Subject	Verb/Predicate
Particles	*expand.*
Flowers	*bloom.*
Computer technology	*evolves.*
The temperature	*rises.*

Principle #2. The contexts in which sentence elements occur determine the grammar variations among them, e.g. singular subject nouns require singular verbs, or (transitive) verbs that require an object (e.g. ***construct***, ***develop***, ***make***) have to be followed by an object.

On the other hand, prepositional phrases are slippery elements, and they can occur in various slots – at the beginnings or ends of sentences and/or following a subject or an object noun phrase.

Sentence structures are always dynamic, but variations among them follow predictable patterns, and these have to be explicitly (and persistently) taught.

- *Subject or object slots* can be filled by all sorts of words or phrases that can be nouns or pronouns, e.g.
    - Proper and common nouns, e.g. ***John***, ***Smith***, ***desk***.
    - Countable and uncountable nouns, e.g. ***pens***, ***equipment***.
    - Abstract and concrete nouns, e.g. ***happiness***, ***a cloud***, or gerunds (a gerund is a noun that is derived from **a verb** + ***ing***), e.g. ***reading***, ***writing***.
    - Compound noun phrases, e.g. ***vegetable soup***, ***a grammar book***.
    - Pronouns, e.g. ***I***, ***we***, ***they***, ***one***.
    - Sets of parallel nouns, e.g. ***pens***, ***pencils***, ***and papers***; ***flowers and trees***.

Noun phrases include all their attendant elements, e.g. articles, possessives, quantifiers, and numerals, e.g. ***a book***, [***Ø*** article] ***information, their book, most of the book(s), three books***.

In fact, subject and object slots are usually filled by a **noun phrase** rather than a single-word noun because in real language use, **single-word nouns are relatively rare**. Proper (***Mary***), uncountable (***wood, dust***), and abstract (***knowledge***) nouns represent a majority of all such cases.

The simplest way to explain the noun phrase is to practice identifying the "main" noun and all its "pieces", e.g.

- ***vegetable soup/the blue book*** – does the word ***vegetable*** describe the ***soup***? Does the word ***blue*** describe the ***book***? Do these two words go together?
- ***most of the book*** – do the words ***most***, ***of***, and ***the*** refer to the ***book***? Do all these words go together?

Similar techniques for identifying elements and their order in the verb phrase and the prepositional phrase are discussed later in this chapter.

A practical and simple technique for identifying entire noun phrases, their elements, and the singular vs. plural subjects is to replace phrases with pronouns.

Locating the Subjects and their Elements

Sherlock Holmes *He*	***was*** *a famous private detective.* ***was*** *a famous private detective.*
Mary Peters and John Smith *[1 + 1] They*	***are*** *planning to attend the conference.* ***are*** *planning to attend the conference.*
The seminar and the technology presentation *They*	***start*** *at 9 am on Saturdays.* ***start*** *at 9 am on Saturdays.*
The idea to develop a new type of packaging *It*	***appealed*** *to store managers.* ***appealed*** *to store managers.*

Once the noun phrase is replaced with a pronoun, subject–verb agreement is relatively easy to check.

An important step in locating the subject noun phrase in a statement is to (1) find the verb, then (2) go to the left to begin looking for the subject noun.

The Basic Sentence (optional sentence elements are shaded)

Sentence Slots			
(Adverb/ Prepositional Phrase – Optional)	**Subject Noun Phrase**	**Predicate Verb Phrase**	Object Noun Phrase
↓ *(In the evening/ Every day)*	*They/* *Students/* *Group members*	***study.*** (intransitive verb – optional object)	
		review (transitive, object required)	*class materials.*

Building on this core structure, it is possible to construct more complicated sentences that adhere largely to the same order of elements.

This approach to sentence structure analysis is highly flexible because it accounts for practically any number of grammatical and contextual variations, even though the core sentence elements remain rigid in their order relative to one another.

Principle #3. Sentence elements are organized according to a hierarchy of their importance for a sentence to be grammatical:

Each English sentence must have **the subject and the verb**, and in most cases an object or a subject complement that describes the subject (e.g. *Bob is **tall/at home***).

Other elements, such as adverbs or prepositional phrases are mobile and can occur in a few highly predictable locations.

Two Sentences with Prepositional Phrases

Subject Noun Phrase	Two Prepositional Phrases that Describe the Subject	**Predicate Verb Phrase**	Object Noun Phrase	Adverb/ Prepositional phrase
Interaction	↓	*develops*	*social patterns*	↓
	among people from different organizations			*among those organizations.*
A player	↓	*kicked*	*the ball*	↓
	from the visiting team in the match			*into the goal.*

The previous sentences include several units (prepositional phrases) that are added to the core structure.

In practical terms, explanations of English sentence structure that are based on the core elements with other elements added can greatly simplify instruction in learning to identify the subject, the predicate verb phrase, and the importance of subject-and-verb agreement (see further discussion later in this chapter). For instance, in the case of a compound noun phrase and/or a compound verb phrase, a similar approach can be very useful.

A Sentence with a Compound Subject Noun Phrase and a Transitive Verb

Subject Noun Phrase (Parallel Nouns)	**Predicate Verb Phrase**	**Object Noun Phrase**	A Prepositional Phrase that Describes the Object	Adverb/ Prepositional Phrase
Talent, training, and effort	*affect*	*placement*	↓ *of the individual*	↓ *in professional organizations.*

In teaching, analyzing sentences as sequences of units that are relative to one another in their order and importance can provide a practical and useful tool for dealing with large and small features of sentences, from subordinate clauses to the role of nouns as subjects or objects, parallel structures, or the effects of verb transitivity on the presence of objects.

> The slot organization of sentence elements accounts for fluidity in sentence construction and stylistic variation.
>
> This analysis is sufficiently clear-cut for L2 writers to understand how to use it to their advantage in both constructing new sentences and editing their text.

Speaking broadly, noun phrases have a limited number of functions:

- A sentence subject.
- An object.
- A complement.

The type of the main verb largely determines the structure of a sentence.

The Order of Elements in the Noun Phrase

Rigidity in the order of sentence slots can be very profitable for teaching elements of the noun phrase structure and the verb phrase structure. For example:

- Articles ***a, an, the*** mark noun phrases and the article is always the first element in the noun phrase, e.g. ***the book, a lunch***.
- Articles occur in the same slot as proper noun possessives, e.g. ***John's book/lunch***, possessive pronouns, e.g. ***his/her/their book***, or indefinites, e.g. ***some/any/every book***.

> Articles cannot be used together in the same position as proper nouns (e.g. names), possessives, or indefinites (e.g. ***some, any, each***) – once the pronoun or article is in the slot, the slot is full.

Articles and possessives can be followed by quantifiers, e.g. ***the five books***, ***John's five books***, and quantifiers by adjectives, e.g. ***the ten blue books***, ***Mary's/her ten blue books.***

Indefinite Articles Cannot Be Used with Two Types of Nouns

(1) General/non-specific **plural** nouns, e.g. ***Researchers investigate processes in language learning.***
(2) Non-count nouns, e.g. ***Health/honesty is more important than wealth.***

On the other hand, definite articles are possible in specifically marked contexts, such as ***The researchers from the Famous University*** . . . or ***The health of the patient/The honesty of the accountant***. . . . Articles, plural, count, and non-count nouns of all sorts are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

> In general, noun phrases are not very complex.
>
> - In noun phrases with plural main (head) nouns, all elements are optional, except, of course, the main noun.
> - In noun phrases with singular head nouns, the article or the possessive also represents a required element.

The Basic Noun Phrase

Article or Possessive Noun/Pronoun	Quantifiers	Adverbs to Describe Adjectives	Adjectives	**Main (Head) Noun**
The/Ø	*ten*	*really/most*	*important*	*books*
Their/ Mary's	*two*	*very*	*good*	*grades*
A		*highly*	*qualified*	*teacher*

The Order of Elements in the Verb Phrase

The type of the main verb determines the sentence pattern and its optional and required slots. Main verbs belong to several classes that vary in their prevalence in academic texts.

- Analyses of large language corpora demonstrate clearly that action verbs, e.g. ***walk***, ***sing***, ***talk*** are far less common in academic prose than ***be***-verbs in all their forms.
- Other verb types common in academic texts are linking verbs that connect the subject to the complement, e.g. ***appear***, ***become***, ***seem***, intransitive verbs that do not require an object, and transitive verbs that do require direct objects, e.g. ***read a book***, ***write a paper***.

The discussion of the main verb types below is organized based on their prevalence in academic prose, as identified in various analyses of academic English language corpora (Biber, et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Leech & Svartvik, 2003; Quirk, et al., 1985).

Be-verbs

Copula ***be*** main verbs can be followed by:

- Nouns and noun phrases.
- Adjectives and adjective phrases.
- Adverbs of time and place (***when*** and ***where*** words and phrases).

Main ***be***-verbs are often considered to be a subset of linking verbs (see the next section).

Be-verb Patterns

Be-verbs	Nouns, Adjectives, OR Adverbs of Time/Place
is	*a book* (noun)
are	*the most important books* (noun phrase)
was	*important* (adjective)
were	*highly important* (adjective phrase)
is/are	*yesterday/in January* (words and phrases of time)
was/were/been	*here/in the text/on the top* (words and phrases of place)
can/will/may be	*the case* (noun phrase) *true/necessary* (adjective) *on time/at the right place* (adverb phrases)

Because sentences with ***be***-verbs are easy to construct, many L2 writers overuse them in their academic writing (Hinkel, 2002, 2003, 2016).

(1) The most common structure that follows ***be*** is the prepositional phrase (a preposition and a noun/noun phrase, e.g. ***in the lab***, ***at the start***.
(2) The second most prevalent pattern is ***be***-verbs with adjectives (also called predicative adjectives because they are a part of the sentence predicate).
(3) In some texts, predicative adjectives that follow ***be***-verbs and linking verbs are also called subject complements because they describe (complete) the subject noun. (The function of adjectives is to describe nouns, no matter whether adjectives precede nouns or occur behind ***be***- and linking verbs.)

A ***good*** [attributive adjective] *book* [noun]	*is*	*a joy*.
A book	*is*	***good*** [predicative adjective].
The student	*is*	***very intelligent*** [predicative adjective phrase].

Linking Verbs

The most common linking verb, ***become***, can be followed by nouns and adjectives, but not adverbs. However, most other types of linking verbs, such as ***seem/appear***, ***get***, ***prove***, ***remain***, ***sound***, ***smell***, ***turn***, rarely occur with nouns. (***Get*** is common only in conversations and informal spoken discourse.)

- By far, the most prevalent structures with linking verbs include adjectives, e.g. ***become old/cold***, ***seems small/large***, ***proved boring/exciting***.
- Another prevalent conversational pattern includes an insertion of the preposition ***like***:
  - *He seemed like a nice man.*
  - *That seemed like a boring movie.*

Linking Verb Patterns

Linking Verbs (***become, seem***)	Nouns and Adjectives **only**
becomes	*a task/a consideration*
became	*a difficult task/an important consideration*
seems	*a good plan* (a noun phrase – relatively rare)
seemed/remained	*ridiculous/wonderful/cute*

The adjectives and nouns that occur after linking verbs, similar to those with ***be***-verbs, are a part of the sentence predicate that complement the subject noun.

> Because ***be***-verbs and linking verbs (***appear***, ***become***, ***seem***) are **the only two types** that can be followed by adjectives, identifying linking verbs can be based on the presence or absence of the predicative adjective. That is, *if a = b, then b = a.*

If an adjective follows the verb, it is probably a ***be***- or linking verb.

> The presence of a predicate adjective can be used for catching missing ***be***-verbs, in structures such as ****it possible*** or ****average temperature high.***

Intransitive Verbs (object not required)

Intransitive verbs (those that do not require an object or an adjective for a sentence to be grammatical) are actually somewhat infrequent.

- Altogether, intransitives number fewer than 25.
- In fact, most verbs in English can be both transitive and intransitive, e.g. ***John reads/writes***; ***Mary reads/writes a book***.

Because intransitive verbs make for short sentences, they are usually followed by optional adverb phrases (some exceptions, such as ***reside*** and ***glance*** require an adverb, e.g. ***Bob resides on/glanced at Market Street***).

> Intransitive verbs are relatively tricky because they are often found in two-word verbs – and are therefore idiomatic, e.g. ***turn in, turn up, turn around***.
>
> The majority of intransitive two-word verbs occur with adverbs.

in – out	*John jumped in/slept in, and a fight broke out.*
up – down	*Mary cannot come down because something came up.*
over	*However, Peter can take over/move over/run over.*

- **Two- or three-word verbs are highly infrequent in academic prose** and may not be worth the effort expended on teaching them, unless the goal is to work on L2 conversations.
- These verbs are hardly ever used in academic prose (Biber, et al., 1999).
- The most common are ***to be set out in*** or ***to be set up in*** used at the rate of 0.002% (20 occurrences per million words).

Common Intransitive Verb and Adverbial Combinations

Intransitive Verb	Adverbial
remain	*on the job/at rest*
occurred	*regularly/in the library*
look	*carefully/everywhere/up*
gave	*in/out/up*

In general terms, intransitive verbs are simple to use, but they are important inasmuch as they have to be distinguished from transitive verbs that are far more numerous and complex.

Transitive Verbs (Object or Adjective Required)

Transitive verbs require direct objects (monotransitive verbs with one object, e.g. ***cause an accident***), direct and indirect objects (ditransitive verbs with two objects, e.g. ***give John a sandwich***), or direct objects and additional noun or adjective complements (e.g. ***elect Mary president, consider Jane smart***).

The important thing about transitive verbs is that all of them require a direct object (always used without a preposition), similar to the noun complement following ***be***- or linking verbs. Here are some examples.

John	*reads*	*a novel.*
This book	*is*	*a novel.*
His memoirs	*became*	*a novel.*

The tricky aspect of object constructions is to distinguish between direct and indirect objects (this distinction will become very important in chapter 7 in the discussion of passive verbs).

All verbs that require two types of objects entail an element of meaning associated with giving and can be called giving verbs, and these are highly frequent.

Frequent "Giving" Verbs

announce	*give*	*owe*	*recommend*	*show*	*tell*
bring	*hand*	*pass*	*remember*	*speak*	*write*
deny	*lend*	*pay*	*report*	*suggest*	
describe	*mention*	*prove*	*sell*	*take*	
explain	*offer*	*read*	*send*	*teach*	

Two Effective Techniques to Tell Direct and Indirect Objects Apart

(1) To determine which object is direct and which is indirect, a "giving" preposition ***to*** or ***for*** may be inserted, e.g.

The professor sent me an email message.
The professor sent an email message ***to*** *me.*

If you can put the preposition in front of the noun or pronoun, it is the indirect object, because direct objects never occur with prepositions. For instance, all verbs listed above take the preposition ***to***, and a few others take ***for***.

answer	*catch*	*design*	*find*	*order*
build	*change*	*do*	*hire*	*prepare*
buy	*close*	*draw*	*leave*	*save*
call	*correct*	*fill*	*make*	

(2) The second technique for distinguishing direct and indirect pronouns is to ask a **what** (or **whom**) question:

- Option 1: *The professor sent me (**what?**) [an email message]*
- Option 2: ***What** did the professor send? [an email message]*

Overnight delivery companies fill the market demand.

- Option 1: *Overnight delivery companies fill **(what?)** [the market demand]*
- Option 2: ***What** do overnight delivery companies fill? [the market demand]*

The noun that answers the ***what*** question is the direct object.

Direct objects are important to identify when the voice is changed from the active to the passive: direct objects become subjects of passive verbs, and indirect objects are not affected. For example,

Advertising	*brings*	*new information*	*to consumers.* [active] →
New information	*is brought*		*to consumers.* [passive]

On the other hand, transitive verbs that require object complements (adjectives or nouns) are relatively easy to figure out.

- Noun complements, e.g. ***consider the book a problem***, the first noun is the direct object, and the second noun is the object complement, e.g. ***the book [is] a problem***.
- Adjective complements, e.g. ***consider the book difficult***, the only noun that follows the verb is the direct object, e.g. ***consider the book***. . . .

A very useful technique can be used to decide whether an adjective or adverb should be used after a verb.

Mary considers her job hard/easy.
**John finds his course hardly.*

The insertion of ***to be*** can clarify the ambiguity, e.g.

Mary considers her job ***[to be]*** *hard/easy.*
John considers his job* *[to be]*** *hardly.*

One of the common learner errors entails inserting ***as*** in the wrong place and with the wrong verbs, such as ***consider***, e.g.

We consider our changes in the program design **as important.*
Locke considered this human talent **as a gift.*

With object complements, ***as*** is required with only three frequent verbs that learners need to remember – but not with ***consider*** (a very frequent L2 error), which takes ***to be***.

refer (to) as, know as, and think (of) as
We refer to Locke as the greatest philosopher of our time.

The Order of Elements in the Main Verb Slot

Several verbs, such as ***be***, ***have***, or ***do***, have a variety of grammar and vocabulary functions: they can be **main or auxiliary** verbs.

*John **is** a student, and he **does** his homework daily.*
~~~ [***be*** and ***do*** are main lexical verbs]

*Bob has been **work**ing on his term paper.*
~~~ [***work*** is the main lexical verb; ***has*** and ***been*** are auxiliary]

The order in which main verb elements occur is also rigid and can be illustrated by means of slots, similar to the elements of the noun phrase.

A Top-most Rule that Applies at All Times in Formal Writing
No Exceptions
Every English sentence must have a verb to be grammatical.
However, only the main verb is absolutely essential, and all other slots inside the verb phrase system are optional.

Here are a few examples.

Peter		*cooks/cooked.*	[The essential main verb]
Peter	*Should*	*cook.*	[Optional ***should*** + the main verb]
Peter	*should have*	*cooked.*	[Optional ***should*** and ***have***, + the main verb]
Peter	*has been*	*cooking.*	[Optional ***has***, ***been***, and ***-ing***, + the main verb]

Inside the Verb System

- The optional slot is reserved for modal verbs, e.g. ***can***, ***may***, ***should***, or the future tense marker, ***will***.

- If this slot is occupied, then the rest of the slots can contain only the **base form** of the main verb, e.g. ***I/he should go***, ***we/she can sing***.
- If the slot is not occupied, then the form of the main verb depends on **the tense and the number** of the subject noun, e.g. ***I walk***, ***he walks***, ***they walked***; ***I go***, ***he goes***, ***they went***.

The Modal Verb Slot

Subject Noun Phrase	Modal/Future Verbs (Optional)	The Main Verb
Mary/I/They/Students	*should/may/will*	*come and go*
I/We/They/You/Students		*walk and talk*
Mary/He/She/It		*walk**S** and talk**S**/walk**ED** and talk**ED***
John/I/We/He/Students		***came and went***

- The verb phrase can include more slots than just those for modals/future markers and the main verb.
- For this reason, the slot system has to allow for more options to account for various tense auxiliaries, such as ***was***, ***have/has*** or ***been***.
- All sentence verbs have some sort of tense.

For example, even in the case of modal verbs (***can***, ***could***, ***may***, ***might***), two options are possible, e.g. ***should cook*** or ***should have cooked***, not to mention such complex constructions as ***will be cooking*** or ***will have finished/sung*** (an outdated construction that can still be found in most L2 grammar textbooks).

> The tense of the verb is the first thing that needs to be identified because it determines what happens to the rest of the elements in the verb system.

For example, a couple of leading questions are very useful in teaching:

- *What tense is used in the preceding text – the present or the past?*
- *Are time markers and adverbs found to allow the tense switch?*

> **Identifying the tense/time** to use **verbs in a particular context** is the first step, followed by marking the verb for a particular tense.

The tense can be marked (e.g. ***talkS***, ***talkED***, ***goES***, ***went***) or unmarked (e.g. ***I/we/you/they talk/go***).

> Once the tense of the verb is determined, it creates a domino effect in the rest of the verb phrase elements.

Another important element of the verb system is **aspect**, such as progressive and/or perfect, and both require auxiliaries, e.g.

- *is singing* [progressive].
- *has sung* [perfect].
- *has been singing* [perfect progressive].
- *were eating* [progressive].
- *had eaten* [perfect].
- *had been eating* [perfect progressive].

Progressive Verbs: The Order of the Verb Phrase Elements

	be	**+ the base** form of the main verb	*+ -ing*
present →	*am/is*	*+ sing*	*+ -ing*
	I am/He is	*singing*	

Perfect Verbs: The Order of the Verb Phrase Elements

	have	**+ past participle**
present →	*have/has*	*+ spoken/eaten*

In addition, perfect and progressive aspects can occur together in the present perfect progressive, e.g. ***have/has been speaking***, or the past perfect progressive (***had been singing***).

A Quick Overview
Auxiliary Verbs with a Few Tense and Aspect Combinations

am/is/was		*sing+ing/ cook+ing*	[**BE** + base verb + ***-ing***]
have/had		*talked/ spoken*	[**HAVE** + past participle]
has/had	*been*	*talking/ speaking*	[**HAVE** + **BE-*en*** (past participle) + base verb + ***-ing***]

For the various elements of the verb phrase, such as the tense, modals, and other auxiliaries, a slot system can be created specifically tailored toward the regularities in the verb system.

(1) The **tense** determines the form of verb in the next slot, e.g.

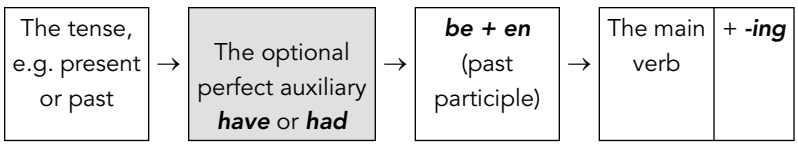
- Present tense → *walk/walk**s***.
- Past tense → *walk**ed***.

With additional **aspect** auxiliaries, e.g.

- Present progressive → *is walk**ing***.
- Past progressive → *was walk**ing***.
- Present/past perfect → *has/had eat**en***.

(2) The **aspect** (including zero marked aspect as in simple tenses) determines the form of verb in the slot that follows it – usually, the main verb (e.g. progressive – the base verb + ***-ing***; and perfect – the past participle).

(3) The combination of the **tense and both progressive and perfect aspects** results in a series of verb elements:



A gigantic English verb phrase system is summarized below, but it is likely too complicated to teach all its component pieces at one time. It is useful,

however, because it demonstrates clearly how difficult and problem-prone the verb phrase can be, but fortunately many of the (confusing) combinations are rare in academic writing.

The Verb Phrase Slots

Tense/Aspect	Modal (Optional)	HAVE (Optional)	BE (Optional)	**Main Verb**
Present Simple				*cook(s)/speak(s)*
Past Simple				*cooked/spoke*
Present/Past Progressive			*be* (present/past) *am/is/was/ were*	Verb + *-ing* *cook+ing/ speak+ing*
Present Perfect		*have/has*		Verb – past participle *cooked/spoken*
Past Perfect		*had*		*cooked/spoken*
Present Perfect Progressive		*have/has*	*be-* past participle *been*	Verb + *-ing* *cooking/speaking*
Modal/Future	*will*			*cook/speak*
Modal/Future Progressive	*may*		*be*	*cooking/speaking*
Modal/Future Perfect	*will/may*	*have*		*cooked/spoken*

The verb phrase has only two essential elements, the tense (+ aspect) and the main verb.

In light of the enormous complexity of the English verb system, it is hardly surprising that many advanced L2 learners often have trouble using verb tenses and aspects appropriately in their academic writing. Techniques for teaching L2 academic writers to get around the complexities of the verb phrase are further discussed in chapter 7.

Subject and Verb Agreement

Based on the system of required and optional sentence slots, in the teaching of subject and verb agreement, two easy techniques can be used. However, both require a successful identification of the main (head) subject noun or noun phrase.

> One of the thorniest issues with subject and verb agreement is that the head subject noun can be difficult to locate and separate from other elements, e.g. prepositional phrases, that sometimes sit between the subject and the verb.

A couple of simple teaching techniques are certainly worth the time and work in the long run, though.

How to Teach It

Trouble Spot

The subject noun phrase is often obscured by the prepositional phrases that follow it, making the use of the appropriate verb form somewhat difficult.

Teaching Tip #1

An example of a trouble-spot sentence:

> *Current **developments** in technology and broadcasting **are** at a crossroads comparable to the early development of television.*

The main noun phrase includes the plural noun ***developments*** that requires the verb ***are*** also to be plural; however, the prepositional phrase ***in technology***

and broadcasting contains two singular nouns that obscure a connecting relationship between ***developments*** and ***are***.

- The first step is to identify the prepositional phrases and the nouns that are included in the sentence subject.
- Then they can be safely "ignored," for example, and blocked off with a thumb, a piece of paper, or a cap of a pen.
- As the Basic Sentence illustration shows, prepositional phrases always sit at a lower level than the subject and the object phrase.

In academic written text, only six prepositions account for 90% of all prepositional phrases (Biber, et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006).

of	*in*	*for*	*on*	*to*	*with*

An additional six prepositions each account for approximately 1.00% of all prepositional phrases.

about	*at*	*between*	*by*	*from*	*like*

To identify a sentence subject correctly, all phrases that are located between the subject and verb and that are marked with any of these 12 prepositions simply need to be ignored.

An example for teaching:

Some improvement in employees' working conditions	**come about. . . .*
Some improvement	**come about. . . .*

This technique for identifying head subject nouns can also be effectively applied to blocking off adjectives, adverbs, or whole subordinate clauses (see also chapter 10).

Teaching Tip #2

This technique for finding sentence subjects can very useful for learners at intermediate and higher levels of proficiency.

- The first step is to convert sentences into yes/no questions and moving the verb to the front of the question.
- Then the subject is the very first element or phrase that occurs after the verb.

Here are couple of examples for teaching.

(1) *One of the most powerful ways of increasing one's levels of education is reading.*

Is (main verb) *one [of the most powerful ways of increasing one's levels of education reading]?*

(2) *Various personal accounts of the events during World War II help the reader to construct a full picture of the impact of war on families.*

Do *various personal accounts [of the events during World War II]* ***help*** (main verb) *the reader . . .?*

> Thus, if the subject noun is singular, then the verb needs to be singular (as in (1)), and if the subject is plural, the verb is also plural (as in (2)).

Other types of elements that locate themselves between the subject and the verb can include adjective phrases and clauses or appositives. All these can be done away with by means of the analysis of slots and ***yes/no*** questions.

(3) *Someone who is self-confident is less likely to find a given situation stressful.*

Is [main verb] *someone (who is self-confident) less likely to find . . .*?

(4) *Psychologists working from a biological perspective point out that similar experiences can lead to different reactions.*

Do *psychologists (working from a biological perspective)* ***point out*** [main verb] *that . . .?*

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences are those that consist of two or more simple sentences. (Similarly, compound nouns and compound verbs consist of two or

more parallel nouns or verbs; see chapter 11 for further discussion.) Compound sentences can be pretty easy to teach.

(1) Comma + Coordinating Conjunction

Sentence #1	*, and*	Sentence #2
	, or	
	, yet	
	, but	

*Washington is the nation's top cherry producer, **and** farmers in the state grew a record 85,000 tons of cherries last summer.*

Sentence #1,	Sentence #2	*, and*	Sentence #3
		, or	
		, but	
		, yet	

*People like to eat sweet cherries, bakers put them in their pies, **and** jam-makers cannot get enough of them.*

- In formal academic text in general, compound sentences may be of limited value, and most are found in informal prose.
- Formal written discourse highly prefers the use of comma in compound sentences joined by conjunctions (Leech & Svartvik, 2003; Quirk, et al., 1985).

The use of commas without conjunctions results in one of the **most frequent sentence-boundary errors found in L2 writing**, usually referred to as run-on sentences (or comma splices).

**The new advances in technology in the 21st century are amazing, we now have the Internet to connect people for communication, scientists have invented new AIDS drugs.*

Run-ons of this type are relatively easy to fix by simply inserting a coordinating conjunction at the sentence boundary after the comma.

(2) Semicolons (rare in formal writing)

Semicolons may not be worth a whole lot of time and work. They are used without coordinating conjunctions, but they can conjoin **only fairly short sentences**, and this is the main reason that these punctuation marks are rare in academic prose.

Sentence #1	;	Sentence #2

Books are sold here ; software and magazines are next door.

Semicolons can also be used with sentence transitions (conjunctive adverbs), such as *however*, *thus*, or *therefore*.

Sentence #1	*; however,* *; thus,* *; therefore*	Sentence #2

When teaching the comma + coordinator and semicolon uses in compound sentences, it is useful to mention that these two patterns largely have the same "power" to conjoin short simple sentences and mark their boundaries. However, their "power" is less than that of a period.

Punctuation

The easiest punctuation rule of all can be obtained from the system of sentence slots:

> No single (lonely) commas can be used between required sentence slots.

Commas are separators of sentence elements, and the essential sentence slots, such as subjects and verbs, verbs and direct objects, and direct objects and indirect objects, cannot be separated. No matter how long the subject or object noun phrases might be, the required sentence slots are never separated by single commas (appositives, ***My father, the scientist***, are discussed in chapter 5). These structures actually occur inside the subject slot and are set off by two commas. However, **paired** commas, e.g. ***Smith (2003), who researched xxx,*** mark modifiers of the head/subject noun phrase. Such modifiers are a part of the noun phrase.

Common Errors: Missing or Too Many Required Sentence Slots

One of the most common errors in L2 sentences is the missing main verb or its elements, e.g. ****Without any doubt, school life a very important period of life for students.***

Other types of sentence-level errors that are frequently found in student writing can be the following:

- More than one subject noun (phrase), e.g. ***Freud, he*** . . .
- Prepositional phrases used as sentence subjects, e.g. ****In my country happens all the time.***
- Missing objects of transitive verbs, e.g. ****Science proposes.***
- Missing subject or object complements, e.g. ****The Internet has become.***

Although some of these errors cannot be completely avoided, L2 writers can be taught to edit many of them by means of identifying the filled or unfilled required sentence slots.

In practically all cases, a grammatical sentence must include:

(1) A subject noun phrase.
(2) A verb.
(3) Most often, a direct object.

The examples in the following section are from student academic essays and demonstrate how teaching students to identify the required sentence slots can lead to correction of many sentence- and phrase-level errors.

A good number of various L2 errors can be corrected relatively easily when sentences are parsed (divided or chopped up) into slots.

Counting Sentence Parts

Checking sentences for grammaticality entails locating all required sentence elements and making sure that they occupy their correct slots.

Step #1. Find all verb phrases and go to the left to locate their subject noun phrases.

With the Google maps, **Ø ← [verb] **could be** anywhere in several seconds.*

Step #2. Block off all the prepositional phrases that sit between the subject noun phrase and the verb.

Medical technology ~~for both patients and doctors~~* [verb] ***are* safe after testing.

Step #3. Go to the right of the verb phrase and locate the direct object, the subject complement, or the object complement.

Insurance companies **can still* [verb] ***access*** *→ to people's health records.*

Step #4. Find the required slots and check to see if they are empty or overfilled.

Policy-makers* [verb 1] ***are* [verb 2] ***respond*** to public opinions.

Step #5. Fill the required slots, if they are empty, or delete overfillers.

Who* [add ***IS*] consider[add ***-ED***] *successful can be hard to define.*

The following examples illustrate this.

(1) **There are differences and similarities between the two major theories are easy to notice.*

The Original Sentence							
Subject	**Verb**	**Object/ Complement**	**Prep. Phrase**	**Comma + Conjunct. or;**	**Subject**	**Verb**	**Object/ Complement**
There	are	differences and similarities	*between the two major theories*		**Ø**	*are* [verb without a subject]	*easy to notice.*

The Corrected Sentence							
Subject	**Verb**	**Object/ Complement**	**Prep. Phrase**	**Comma + Conjunct. or;**	**Subject**	**Verb**	**Object/ Complement**
There	*are*	*differences and similarities*	*between the two major theories*	***, and*** [comma + conjunct added]	***they*** [Subject added]	*are*	*easy to notice.*

(2) ***These chemical elements, they combine at a high temperature.***

The Original Sentence		
Subject	**Verb**	**Object/Complement**
1. These chemical elements, *2. they*	*combine*	*at a high temperature.*

The Corrected Sentence		
These chemical elements	*combine*	*at a high temperature.*

(3) ***We are work very hard to reach our dream.***

The Original Sentence				
Subject	**Verb**			Object/Complement
	Tense (+Auxiliary)		Main Verb	
		Aux ***be***	+***ing***	
We	(present)	*are*	*work*	*very hard to reach our dream.*

The Corrected Sentences (Two Possibilities with Slightly Different Meanings)				
We	(present)	***Ø***	*work*	*very hard to reach our dream.*
We	(present progressive)	*are*	*work +* ***ing***	*very hard to reach our dream.*

For additional examples of sentence correction see Strategies and Tactics for Teaching.

Chapter Summary

Rigid and predictable patterns in English syntax provide a framework for teaching sentence structure by means of slots that must or may be filled. Sentence slots are easy to explain, and students can use the slot patterns to more effectively edit their own writing for grammaticality:

- Sentences must have a verb and a subject (except for imperative sentences with an "understood" subject ***you***).
- In academic writing, adverbs and prepositional phrases are mobile, but subjects and verbs are not.
- Noun phrases must include a main (or head) noun, which can be preceded with, in this order:

  (a) An article or possessive.
  (b) Quantifiers.
  (c) Adverbs to describe adjectives.
  (d) Adjectives.

- Main ***be***-verbs can be followed by nouns, adjectives, or adverbs/adverbial phrases of time or place.
- Main linking verbs (***become***, ***seem***) are similar to main ***be***-verbs and can be followed by nouns or adjectives, **but not adverbials of any kind**.
- Transitive verbs require a direct object (***Bob reads books***), and some transitive verbs (**giving** verbs) can also take an indirect object (***Stuart sends Kevin messages***).
- Inserting the prepositions ***to*** or ***for*** or asking a ***what*** question work like a charm for identifying the direct object.
- The verb phrase has two essential elements: tense (which can be marked or not, e.g. ***I go/we go***) and the main verb. Optional verb slots include modals and auxiliary verbs.
- Isolating the Subject and the Verb helps greatly for checking the subject-verb agreement.

Strategies and Tactics for Teaching and Teaching Activities

Teaching Activities

Teaching suggestions are presented here from simpler to more advanced.

The primary instructional objectives are to reduce the frequency of preventable errors and/or fine-tune students' self-editing skills.

The exercises and teaching activities are designed to focus on the following sentence structure skills:

- Identifying missing or incorrectly added sentence elements based on the regular structural patterns in English (focus noted, e.g. find and correct all errors in subject–verb agreement).
- Identifying and correcting incorrectly used sentence and phrase elements (focus unspecified).
- Noticing and correcting fragments and run-ons.
- Editing entire text passages written by someone other than the editor.
- Editing one's own essay-length texts.

The practice with identifying regular sentence patterns is cumulative. When the work with particular focus structures is completed, the structures cannot be simply abandoned on the assumption that students can productively use them in writing and editing.

- All grammar, vocabulary, and editing practice must be designed to build on the structures:
  (a) From the familiar to the unfamiliar.
  (b) From the structurally and functionally simple to more complex constructions.
- Depending on the students' proficiency level, the sentences in this exercise can be extracted from authentic texts of varying degrees of complexity.
- Selecting somewhat lengthy sentences, such as those in authentic texts or academic textbooks, can be essential in the long run.
- The sentences should include prepositional, adjective, and adverb phrases that sit between the subject and the verb.

A realistic degree of sentence complexity represents a key feature of this practice.

Useful sentences can be reasonably easily adapted from those found in the science and health sections of online posts or newspapers, popular

print media such as magazines, Internet news, business reports, movie reviews, and introductory college-level textbooks.

All exercises exemplified below can be assigned as individual or group tasks, or homework with a follow-up in-class discussion.

Sentence-level Practice: Dividing and Chopping Up Sentence Slots[1]

- Draw a vertical line to separate subjects and predicates in as many cases as you can identify.
- Also mark various parts of the verb phrase: auxiliary verbs, the main verb, and the object noun or the subject complement.

(1) The experiment proved the point.
(2) Later studies and additional experiments provide additional positive information.
(3) Researchers at Excellent State University report early evidence that berries are actually good for one's health.
(4) Various fruit trees and berry shrubs have been selling quite well in Oregon and neighboring states.
(5) Making phone calls is usually difficult for those individuals who do not speak the language very well.
(6) At this time of year, all over the country, celebrities, politicians, and writers have been asked to give graduation speeches in high schools and colleges.

Dividing and Chopping Up Sentence and Phrase Slots

- Find all subject phrases, all predicate phrases, and all objects/complements in all sentences.
- Circle the entire subject and predicate and include all their elements.
- Do not forget that sentences can be compound and complex, in addition to simple.
- After all subject, predicate, and object phrases are found, underline the main subject noun, the main predicate verb, and the main object noun.

a) Vitamin C and minerals, such as iron, can be found in many types of foods.

b) Frequently, a shortage of Vitamin D occurs during the winter months.

c) Nationwide, the average commute increased 3.1 minutes from 22.4 to 25.5 minutes during the previous year. Among the 25 large cities, Seattle's average commute time ranked 7th in among the top 10 large cities, up slightly from the 9th just a couple of years ago. San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore, Boston, and Los Angeles were ahead of Seattle on the latest list.

(Adapted from the US Census Community Survey, Transportation Survey, April 30, 2019)

d) The basic categories of marketing mix elements are product, place, price, and promotion. The product variable includes design, innovation, the brand name, packaging, labelling, and customer service. The brand name refers to the various methods of communicating the qualities of the product or company. The computation of the price for goods and services includes discounts. For consumers, time, energy, effort, and attention that are required in order to obtain the product are also added to the cost.

e) Business research methods of setting prices are in the domain of pricing science. Pricing goods and services involves establishing appropriate price levels. Using discounts, rebates, and other techniques is a way of adjusting prices to make them low in the short term. Cost, competition, and desired profit determine prices. Distribution of products and services deals with the process of delivering goods to the consumer. In management, decisions about transportation and storage are examples of distribution activities.

f) The science, art, and technology of enclosing products for distribution, sale, and use are usually known as packaging. Packaging also refers to the technology of designing and producing packages. The entire system of preparing goods for transport, sale, and consumer use depends on the type of product that is packaged. Package containers protect, transport, and sell. Good examples of common types of packaging can be cardboard boxes, paper and plastic bags, bottles, cans, envelopes, wrappers, and trays. Packaging simplifies the use or storage of products and makes them easier to identify.

(Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marketing, www.ftc.gov, www.fda.gov, www.gsa.gov)

Text-level Editing Practice with an Explicitly Stated Focus[2]

Identifying specified missing or incorrectly added sentence elements:

- The exercise can consist of typed or scanned (but not photocopied) short text excerpts from one to four sentences.
- Typed or scanned text can allow the flexibility of deleting or adding elements without visible deletions and omissions.
- Missing and added elements are included in the square brackets and they should **not** appear in the student copy of the text.

Instructions for students

> *Correct all errors in (1)* ***the subject–verb agreement*** *and (2)* ***object/adjective constructions*** *that follow the verb phrase.*

For parents, air travel with kids differ[S – deleted] greatly from the days when they could take [object missing – their bags/noun] and head out for a vacation or a fun trip to a distant location. . . . Parents who [ARE – deleted] unfamiliar with airline rules or new to air travel can find [missing object – guidelines/tips/noun] for both adults and children on how to prepare and be safe. Many families across the country believes [added -S] that it [IS – deleted] especially important for parents to pack a bag of toys and snacks to keep a child occupied during the flight. Many experts says [added -S] that the best way to do this [IS – deleted] to select games and activities that can keep children's attention.

(Adapted from www.faa.gov)

Text-level Editing Practice without an Explicitly Stated Focus

- This exercise can be used as individual or small group practice, or assigned as homework to be spot-checked and discussed in class, as needed.

Instructions for students

> *Correct all errors that you can find. Be ready to explain each structure that you believe to be incorrect and show how you arrived at your conclusion.*

Text #1

Direct mail marketing generate about billions of dollars per year in sales. There is at least two considerations related to direct mail advertising that needs to be taken into account. Direct mail advertisers, or direct marketing companies, as they are sometimes called, develops and maintains customer information data. Data information include name, address, age, education, occupation, family size, and income. They also contain a recent list of products that purchases. Your name is probably on the list, marketers sell to other mailers. Direct mail are more intelligent than ever before. Each of the digital technologies combine email, text, and direct mail and allow businesses to better target consumers with more relevant messaging. Implementing smarter direct mail campaigns help users reach their marketing and sales goals. A combination of marketing campaigns that integrate direct mail and digital media are far more successful than digital campaigns alone.

(Adapted from www.usps.gov)

Text #2

The human family relationship in the 21st century complex. Society is composed of individuals pursue different goals in life and have different interests and personality. The family is the basic form of society we are from the moment we are born.

Text #3

A big problem in this story. Mathilde in the story "The Necklace," she needs to work very hard for 10 year to earn some money to replace the lost necklace. After she done her jobs, which is work for ten years to replace it, she can breathe freely. Do not see is that, a small problem or big problem.

Sentence Building I

Students receive "stripped down" sentences without optional slots and are asked to build them up.

Instructions for students

> *Add optional elements to these sentences that consist only of filled required slots. Be ready to explain the differences between the meanings of the original sentences and your own.*

For example, here are a few sentence variations.

- ***Sports shoes are popular.***
  - *Many sports shoes are popular among young people/people of all ages.*
  - *Usually/Typically/Generally, sports shoes are popular in many countries/around the world.*
  - *Various brands/types of sports shoes are popular and fashionable, and they are used/worn every day.*
  - *Sports shoes are popular because they are comfortable and convenient.*
  - *Sports shoes are popular, and they can have many names in different locations.*

(1) People like playing soccer.
(2) Soccer is the most famous game.
(3) The game is played by two teams.
(4) The rules of the game require advancing a round ball.
(5) The equipment for playing soccer is not expensive/is uncomplicated/is affordable.
(6) Important soccer games are broadcast on TV/streamed online.

Sentence Building II

- Lists of academic nouns and verbs have been extracted from the University Word List, developed by Paul Nation (see also chapters 5 and 8).
- Students receive a few of these items singly or in combination and work to build sentences that include them.
- The teaching focus (and a bit of a discussion) is on required and optional sentence slots.
- This activity can be carried out in pairs or be assigned as homework to be discussed in class or small groups.
- The same exercise can be repeated for nouns and adjectives and adverbs (chapter 9).

Instructions for students

> *Construct sentences with the following verbs and be particularly careful with required and/optional sentence elements, e.g. some of these verbs require objects and some do not. You can include as many of these verbs as you like in a single sentence.*

Academic Verbs for Sentence Building

accumulate	concentrate	contradict	estimate	generate
accelerate	conclude	elaborate	establish	identify
challenge	constitute	eliminate	found	integrate
communicate	cooperate	emphasize	function	

Sentence Building III

- This task can be associated with an assignment on a particular topic or consist of individual sentences.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Complete the following sentences and pay special attention to required and optional slots.

(1) The first step in a research project _____.
(2) The statement of a problem can consist of _____.
(3) _____ gather data, such as facts and information.
(4) _____ can be divided _____.
(5) Each research design _____.
(6) The researcher collects _____.

Endnotes

1 In this chapter and the rest of the book, the practice sentences and texts are excerpted from authentic L2 student writing. The samples and text selections are adapted from freely accessible materials disseminated by the US Census Bureau, USPS, the US Department of State, the US Department of Agriculture, the US Government Publishing Office, the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Aviation Administration, US government pamphlets, research reports, fact sheets, instructional manuals, and handbooks.

2 The benefits of various types of editing/error correction practice (sometimes also called "negative models" or "negative instances") have been noted by many researchers since at least the 1960s, such as Pit Corder, Hector Hammerly, Carl James, and Teresa Pica, to mention just a few.

Further Reading

Hinkel, E. (Ed.). (2016). *Teaching English grammar to speakers of other languages*. New York, NY: Routledge.
A practical introduction to research-based methods of grammar teaching that can be useful and usable in a broad range of instructional settings. The book provides a rounded overview of the principles, strategies, and techniques in L2 grammar teaching for pre-service and in-service teachers to help them develop their professional knowledge and skills.

Larsen-Freeman, D. & Celce-Murcia, M. (2016). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course* (3rd edn). Boston, MA: Cengage.
Insightful and thorough grammatical descriptions of English constructions that are designed for classroom applications. The linguistic system and details of English grammar, as well as their contextual variations and teaching suggestions, are organized into sections based on Form, Meaning, and Use.

Swan, M. (2017). *Practical English usage* (4th edn). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
A reference grammar specifically oriented for language teachers and pedagogy. With the primary model of British English, the book features basic descriptions of grammar and usage, as well as selected vocabulary that can be problematic for language learners. The most recent changes within British English, the stylistic differences between British and American usage, and novel Americanisms are also taken into account.

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Appendix A to Chapter 4

Sentence Stems for Written Academic Discourse

The teaching of sentence and phrase structure needs to co-occur with instruction on vocabulary and common academic collocations.

- Using stock sentence stems in actual writing is probably one of the most efficient ways of expanding L2 writers' vocabulary and grammatical range, particularly when supplemented with substituting discrete elements.
- Grammatical constructions, such as commonly occurring sentences, clauses, and phrases, can be viewed as "big words" and memorized as lexicalized stems.

All sentence stems presented in Appendices A and B can be used for Sentence Building activities (see above in this chapter), as well as activities in slot structure analysis and the replacement of slot elements (see also chapters 5, 8, and 9).

Openings/Introductions

The central issue in xxx is yyy . . .
The development of xxx is a typical/common problem in . . .
Xxx and yyy are of particular interest and complexity . . . .
For a long time xxx, it has been the case that yyy
Most accounts/reports/publications claim/state/maintain that xxx
According to Smith/recent (media) articles/reports/studies, xxx is/seems to be yyy.
One of the most controversial/important/interesting issues/problems/xxxS (recently/in recent literature/media reports) is yyy.

Thesis/Topic Statements

The purpose of this essay/paper/analysis/overview is to xxx e.g. take a look at/examine/discuss yyy.
The main emphasis/focus/goal/purpose of the/this essay/paper/project is to xxx e.g. *is to analyze/provide an overview/discussion of xxx*
This paper describes and analyzes . . . xxx.
This paper discusses/examines/investigates xxx.
This paper claims/shows that xxx is/is not yyy.
This essay/paper addresses/examines/
is designed to
analyze/provide an overview of/take a look at xxx.
My aim in this paper is to . . .
In this paper, I/we report on/discuss . . .
I intend/will demonstrate/show/explain/ illustrate that xxx
My (basic/main/most important) argument/claim is largely/essentially that xxx

Secondary purpose

The primary aim/purpose of this paper is xxx. In addition, it examines/discusses . . . yyy
Additionally, yyy is discussed/examined.
A secondary aim of this paper is to yyy.
Another reason/point/issue addressed/discussed in this paper is yyy.

Rhetorical Mode/Discourse Organization Statement

This paper (will) compare(s)/describe/illustrate xxx first
by analyzing/comparing/demonstrating yyy (that yyy is zzz),
then by yyying zzz, and finally by yyying aaa.
This paper first analyzes/discusses xxx,
followed by an examination/illustration/overview of yyy and zzz.

Other Types of Sentence Stems for Essay Development

Assertion

It can be claimed/said/assumed that xxx
It seems certain/likely/doubtful that xxx
I/we maintain/claim that xxx

Agreement with the author/source

As XXX perceptively/insightfully states /
correctly notes /
rightly observes /
appropriately points out, *xxx is/seems to be yyy* (adjective/noun)

I/we rather/somewhat/strongly agree with/support (the idea that) xxx
XXX provides/lends support to YYY's argument/claim/conclusion that zzz

Disagreement with the author/source

I/we rather/somewhat/strongly disagree with XXX/ that yyy.
As XXX states (somewhat) unclearly/erroneously,
XXX does not support YYY's argument/claim/conclusion about zzz/that zzz
Although XXX contends that yyy, I/we believe that zzz
However, it remains unclear whether . . .
It would (thus) be of interest to learn more about yyy/how . . .

Comparison

Both xxx and yyy are (quite) similar in that zzz
Xxx is like/resembles yyy
Both xxx and yyy are/seem to be zzz (adjective/noun).
Xxx and yyy have/share some aspects of zzz.
Xxx is similar to/not unlike yyy (with respect to zzz).

Contrast

Xxx is (quite) different from yyy (in regard to zzz).
Xxx is not the case with yyy/the same as yyy.
Xxx does not resemble yyy (in regard to zzz).
Xxx contrasts with yyy (with regard to zzz.)
Xxx is unlike yyy in that/with respect to zzz

Recommendations

Let me recommend/suggest that xxx be/have/do yyy
What I want/would like to recommend/suggest is that xxx
One suggestion is/may be that xxx (do yyy)

Citing sources/Supporting arguments, claims, conclusions, and generalizations

As proof/evidence/an example (for this), (let me cite/quote xxx)
According to xxx,
As XXX says/claims,

XXX provides evidence/support for yyy/that yyy
XXX demonstrates that yyy
shows evidence for yyy/that yyy
Xxx is an illustration/example of yyy.

Citing sources/Referring to external sources of knowledge

It is/has been (often) asserted/believed/noted that xxx (YYY, 2023)
It is believed that xxx (YYY, 2025)
It is often asserted that xxx
It has been noted that xxx

Classification

Xxx can/may be divided/classified into yyy (and zzz.)
Xxx and yyy are categories/divisions of zzz.
There are xxx categories/types/classes of yyy.

Generalization (see also chapter 11)

Overall,
In general,
On the whole,
Generally speaking,
In most cases,
One can generalize that xxx
For the most part,

With the exception of xxx,
With one exception,

Closing statement

In sum/conclusion,
To sum up/conclude,
To tie this (all) together,

(Adapted from Graff, Birkenstein, & Durst (2018); Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992); and Swales & Feak (2012))

Appendix B to Chapter 4

The Most Frequent Verb/Preposition Combinations in Academic Prose

The Top Most Frequent

be applied to	*be known as*	*depend on*	*result in*
be associated with	*be used in*	*lead to*	
be based on	*deal with*	*refer to*	

The Second Most Frequent

account for	*be included in*	*come from*	*look at*
allow for	*be involved in*	*consist of*	*obtain [noun] from*
add to	*be related to*	*contribute to*	*occur in*
be composed of	*be required for*	*differ from*	*think of*
be divided into	*belong to*	*look for*	

(Adapted from Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Biber, et al., 1999) (see also Appendix to chapter 7)