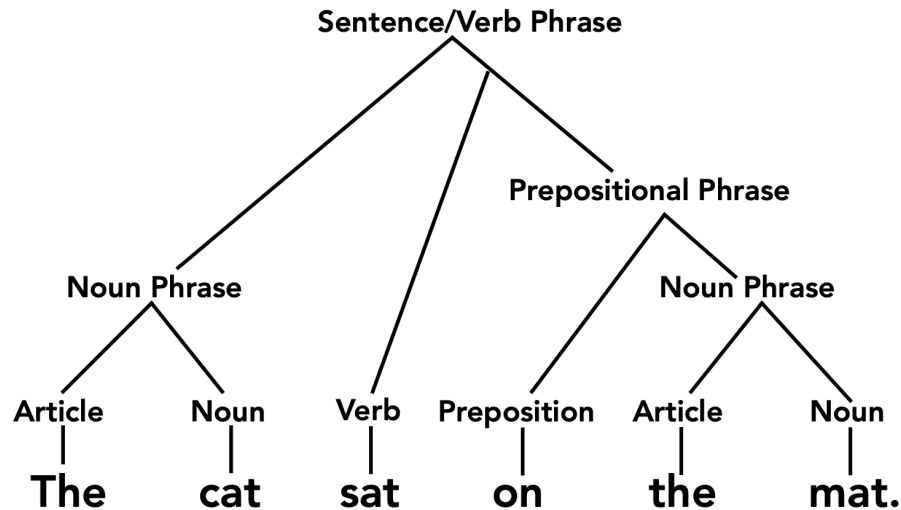# Refresher on Sentence Structure
By John D. Butler, Ph.D., PE
ERandD.com

Sentence structure refers to the way words are arranged to create a complete thought. In order to understand sentence structure, it is important to understand the different parts of speech that make up a sentence.

A **verb** is a word that describes an action or a state of being. It is often the most important part of a sentence, as it expresses the main idea. For example, in the sentence "The dog ran," "ran" is the verb. In the sentence "The dog barked," the verb is "barked."

An **adjective** is a word that describes a noun or pronoun. It provides more information about the noun or pronoun it modifies. For example, in the sentence "The fluffy dog barked," the adjective is "fluffy." In the sentence "The red apple," "red" is the adjective.

An **article** is a word that is used before a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. There are two types of articles in English: "the" and "a/an." "The" is used to refer to a specific noun, while "a/an" is used to refer to any noun of a certain type. For example:
"The dog barked at the mailman." (specific noun) "A dog barked at the mailman." (any noun of a certain type)

A **noun** is a word that represents a person, place, thing, or idea. It is often the subject of a sentence. For example, in the sentence "The dog ran," "dog" is the noun. In the sentence "The dog barked," the noun is "dog."

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun. For example, in the sentence "She ran," "She" is the pronoun.

The **predicate** is the part of a sentence that contains the verb and gives information about the subject. For example, in the sentence "The dog ran," "ran" is the verb in the predicate, "the dog" is the subject.

A **preposition** is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. Prepositions typically indicate the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence as defined below. For example:
"The book is on the table." (spatial relationship) "I will see you at the meeting." (temporal relationship) "He is thinking about his future." (logical relationship)

> A **logical relationship** refers to the relationship between different parts of a sentence in terms of logic or reasoning. For example, in the sentence "If the weather is nice, we will go for a walk," the logical relationship is "if...then."

> A **spatial relationship** refers to the relationship between different parts of a sentence in terms of location or position. For example, in the sentence "The book is on the table," the spatial relationship is "on."

> A **temporal relationship** refers to the relationship between different parts of a sentence in terms of time. For example, in the sentence "After he finishes his homework, he will watch TV," the temporal relationship is "after."

Punctuation is the use of symbols to separate words and phrases to clarify the meaning of a sentence, and to indicate the structure and organization of a sentence.

> A **period** (.) indicates the end of the sentence. In the sentence "The dog barked." the period indicates the end of the sentence.

> A **question mark** (?) is used to indicate a question. Example: "What is your name?" It can be used to end a sentence.

> An **exclamation point** (!)is used to indicate strong feeling or to add emphasis. Example: "I can't believe it!" It can be used to end a sentence.

> A **colo**n (:) is used to introduce a list or to separate a title from its subtitle. Example: "I need to buy the following items: milk, bread, and eggs." If used properly, it can be used to end a sentence.

> A **comma** (,) is used to separate items in a list or to separate clauses in a sentence. Example: "I had eggs, toast, and coffee for breakfast."

> A **semicolon** (;) is used to separate independent clauses in a sentence that are not joined by a conjunction. Example: "I am going to the store; I need to buy groceries."

Double quotation marks (" ") are used to indicate direct speech or to set off a title or phrase. Example: He said, "I will be there in five minutes."

Single quotation marks (' ') are used to indicate a quote within a quote. Example: He said, "She said 'I will be there in five minutes'."

A **hyphen** (-) is used to connect two words together to form a compound word or to indicate a word is being split between lines. For example: "well-being" or "twenty-five."

An **en dash** (–) is slightly longer than a hyphen and is used to indicate a range of values or values that are connected. For example: "Pages 12–15" or "The New York–Boston flight."

An **em dash** (—) is even longer than an en dash and is used to indicate an abrupt change in thought or to set off a parenthetical phrase. For example: "I was going to go to the store—but then I remembered I didn't need anything." or "The new policy—which was met with mixed reactions—has been implemented."

Parentheses ( ) are used to set off information that is not essential to the main sentence. They are used to add extra information, often in the form of a clarification or an aside. For example: "My favorite color is blue (although green is a close second)."

Brackets [ ] are used to set off information that is not essential to the main sentence. They are used to show that something has been added or changed within a quote, for example: "He said [that he was going to the store] and left." Additionally, Brackets can be used to indicate a translation of a word or phrase, for example: "I speak [French]." Brackets can also be used for mathematical equations, for example: "The area of the rectangle is (w*h) square units."

An **ellipsis** (represented by "...") is used to indicate a pause, hesitation, or trailing off of thought. It is also used to indicate that a quote or passage has been shortened or edited, or to indicate a missing word, phrase, or sentence. Examples include:

- "I don't know...I just can't explain it." (indicating hesitation or uncertainty)

- "She said she would be here by now...I wonder where she is." (indicating a trailing off of thought)

- "He said, 'I'll be there...'" (indicating a quote has been shortened)

- "I can't believe he would do something like that...I'm just so shocked." (indicating a trailing off of thought)

- "I have to go to the store, but I'll be back in a few minutes..." (indicating a trailing off of thought)

It's worth noting that usage of ellipsis should be used sparingly in formal writing as overuse can make writing hard to read.

Some punctuation rules to note:

In American English, the rule is that punctuation marks such as periods and commas are placed inside the quotation marks when they are part of the quoted material, and outside the quotation marks when they are not part of the quoted material. For example:
"I'm going to the store," said John.

However, if the quoted material is a complete sentence, the period or full stop goes inside the quotation marks:
John said, "I'm going to the store."

This is the general rule, however, in some cases, it may vary depending on the style guide or the publisher's preference.

A **clause** is a grammatical unit that contains a subject and a predicate. A sentence is made up of one or more clauses. There are two main types of clauses: **independent clauses** and **dependent clauses.** Independent clauses can stand alone as a sentence, while dependent clauses cannot. They must be connected to an independent clause to form a complete sentence.

Three examples of clauses:

1. "I am going to the store." (Independent clause)
2. "Only if you come with me" (Dependent clause)
3. "I will go to the store, but only if you come with me." (Two clauses connected by a conjunction "but")

A **simple sentence** example: "Joey did not study for his test." (one independent clause)

A **compound sentence** example: "Joey did not study for his test, so he got a bad grade." (combines two independent clauses)

A **complex sentence** example: "If Joey studied for his test, he wouldn't have received a bad grade." (combines a subordinate clause with an independent clause)

A **conjunction** is a word that connects words, phrases, or clauses. Examples of conjunctions include: "and", "or", "but", "because", "so", "yet", "although", "since", "unless", "while". For example:

- I will have a sandwich and a drink for lunch. (The conjunction "and" connects the two phrases "a sandwich" and "a drink")

- He was tired but he still went to the gym. (The conjunction "but" connects the two clauses "he was tired" and "he still went to the gym")
- She arrived late because she missed the train. (The conjunction "because" connects the two clauses "she arrived late" and "she missed the train")

When these elements are put together they make a **complete sentence**. A complete sentence must have a subject and a predicate, and it must express a complete thought. For example, "The dog ran" is a complete sentence because it has a subject ("dog") and a predicate ("ran"), and expresses a complete thought. In the sentence "The dog barked." the subject is "The dog" and the predicate is "barked." And, it's a compete thought.

In conclusion, sentence structure is the way words are arranged to create a complete thought. Understanding the different parts of speech, such as verbs, adjectives, nouns, pronouns, and predicate, as well as punctuation, is essential for writing complete sentences. A complete sentence must have a subject and a predicate and express a complete thought.