

BASIC GRAMMAR: SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A complete sentence MUST contain both a subject (*un sujet*) and a verb (*un verbe*). The most basic sentence structure is S V (Subject Verb):

Je parle.
Tu dances.
Philippe voyage.
Le chien mange.
Le professeur écoute.
Nous dormons.
Mes amis écrivent.

A. SUBJECTS (*un sujet*)

A subject is a NOUN (*un nom* or *un substantif*) or a PRONOUN (*un pronom*)

1. NOUNS can be PROPER NOUNS (*un nom propre*) (capitalized names of people, places or things):

Victor Hugo Mme Dupont Paris la Maison blanche

2. Other nouns are COMMON NOUNS (*un nom commun*):

le professeur la ville les croissants la maison

COMMON NOUNS are usually accompanied by an ARTICLE (*un article*) or an ALTERNATIVE (See information on ARTICLES here)

mon professeur cette chaise trois croissants
quelle voiture?

3. A PRONOUN is a SUBSTITUTION for a NOUN. Use the SUBJECT PRONOUNS (*je, tu, il, elle, on, nous, vous, ils, elles*) in the subject position.

Watch for common confusions in agreement:

X et moi > nous	X et toi > vous
toi et moi > nous	X et Y > ils/elles
la famille > elle	une personne > elle

B. VERBS. Verbs express actions (parler, dormir, manger) or states (être).

1. VERBS that accompany nouns are CONJUGATED (*conjugué*). That is, they change in both PERSON and NUMBER to correspond with their subject.

Je finis.

Nous finissons.

Elles finissent

Most modern English verbs have only two conjugated forms: one form for the "he/she/it" conjugation, and another form for all the rest:

I eat

we eat

you eat

you eat

he/she eats

they eat

The closest thing we have in English to a verb conjugated the way French verbs are is the verb "to be," at least in the first-person forms, which are all different:

I am

we are

you are

you are

he/she is

they are

2. The INFINITIVE (*un infinitif*) form of the verb (the non-conjugated, base form: parler, finir, être, avoir, vendre...) is used:

- a. as a subject:

Dormir est nécessaire. ("Sleeping is necessary"/ "It is necessary to sleep")

Finir est impossible.

- b. as a direct object of another verb (with no prepositions between):

Je veux dormir.

Tu peux danser.

Nous n'aimons pas regarder la télévision.

- c. following a preposition:

Je viens d'arriver.

Il agit sans réfléchir.

Il est important de regarder le texte.

En mangeant, on grossit!

C. OBJECTS. Sentences may also contain nouns as OBJECTS (*un objet*). There are three types of objects:

DIRECT OBJECTS (*un objet direct*)

INDIRECT OBJECTS (*un objet indirect*)

OBJECTS OF A PREPOSITION (*un objet d'une préposition*)

1. A DIRECT OBJECT (*un objet direct*) is a noun that follows a verb WITHOUT A PREPOSITION:

Je parle français.

Tu dances le tango.

Nous regardons Georges.

Le chien mange sa nourriture.

Le professeur écoute les étudiants.

The DIRECT OBJECT receives the action of the verb DIRECTLY. Several verbs take INDIRECT objects in English and DIRECT objects in French. The French version is more logical here. (Why? Because there is nothing between your eyes and the TV when you are watching it, for example).

Nous regardons la télé. = We are looking at the TV. (watching)

Je cherche mon livre. = I am looking for my book.

J'écoute la radio. = I listen to the radio.

Tu attends le bus = You wait for the bus.

2. An INDIRECT OBJECT (*un objet indirect*) receives the action of the verb INDIRECTLY. There is "something" between our senses and the object. In French, the indirect object is signaled by the preposition "à" + person/animal. ("à" plus a non-person/animal is considered the object of a preposition, see below)

Je parle à Paul. (I'm speaking something--words, French--to Paul)

Nous écrivons au professeur. (We are writing something—a postcard, a letter, a check--to the professor)

Je donne une chaussure à mon chien.

3. An OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION (*un objet d'une préposition*) follows the verb, like the direct and indirect objects, and is preceded by ANY PREPOSITION OTHER THAN "à" for a person/animal, and any préposition for a non-person.

J'habite avec Claude.

Nous parlons des vacances. (de + les =des)

Je veux sortir avec mes amis.

4. Multiple objects in a sentence usually go in the following order:

OBJET DIRECT OBJET INDIRECT OBJET D'UNE PRÉPOSITION

J'ai posé une question au professeur.

Tu donnes un cadeau à ta mère. ("You give your mother a gift.")