

A SYNOPSIS OF THE GRAMMAR, MECHANICS  
AND PUNCTUATION OF ENGLISH WRITING

**I. Sentences**

**A. Four basic types with examples and proper punctuation:**

1. Declarative: States a fact or opinion. School ended on May 30 this year.
2. Interrogative: Asks/raises a question. Did school end on May 30?
3. Exclamatory: Expresses a strong feeling. School finally ended on May 30!
4. Imperative: Issues a command. Close school on May 30!

**B. All sentences must have a subject (a naming part) and a **predicate** (a telling part).** School (subject) **closed** (telling). In an imperative sentence, the subject is not said or written but is understood to be you. (You) Close school!

1. Subjects and predicates may have more than one word. The small elementary school (complete subject) **closed on May 30** (complete predicate). Subjects and **predicates** may be compound. Mel and Dana **ran and jumped all the way home**.
2. Simple subjects are only one word, either a noun\* or pronoun\*; simple predicates consist of a verb\*. The small school **closed** on May 30. N.B. Watch for nouns, such as none, each, everyone, which are singular: none ... **is**; each of the girls ... **is**; everyone ... **is**. On the other hand, data and media are plural — the data in my report **are** correct; the media **were** there. Don't let intervening prepositional phrases fool you (of the girls; in my report) \* See parts of speech, page 2.

**C. Compound sentences** are two complete sentences joined by a conjunction or connecting word (and, but, or, nor) and separated by a comma. There is a subject both before and after the conjunction. School **closed** on May 30 this year, and it **will reopen** on September 6. The following sentence is not a compound sentence because there is no subject after the "and". School **closed** in May and **will reopen** in September; there is a compound verb (closed and will reopen).

**D. Run-on sentences** occur when proper punctuation is not used. School closed in May, students were happy. A comma by itself cannot hold those two statements together. (See semicolon.)

**E. Sentence fragments** (broken pieces) occur when a sentence (1) does not have both a subject and a predicate (A tall man with a red beard) or (2) does not make sense by itself (Because he dyed his beard red).

**II. Clauses:** If a clause can stand alone as a sentence, it is an independent clause. However, if it cannot stand alone, it is a dependent or subordinate clause, subordinated to another part of the sentence and often beginning with words such as if, whether, since, etc. See: <http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/clauses.htm>.

**A. Independent clauses** must have a subject and a verb. We **closed** school because it was very hot. Put the clause first, however, and a comma must follow. Because it was very hot, we closed school.

**B. Dependent / subordinate clause:** Because it was very hot, we closed school. Various signals — How? On what condition? Why? — can start these.

**C. For noun, adjective and adverbial clauses,** see: <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/bldcls.html>.

### III. Punctuation

#### A. End punctuation (see A 1-4 above)

#### B. Internal punctuation

##### 1. Commas

- a. Words in a **series**: Sue bought cakes, pies, cookies and drinks for the party.
- b. Around **appositives**: Miss Jones, **my English teacher**, was tall.
- c. In **compound sentences**: see **IC**.
- d. After **introductory prepositional phrases**: For the party, Sue bought cakes and pies. Before buying, Sue took a vote on people's choices. (on) The day Sue went, she had to hurry.
- e. After **introductory phrases**: Having been elected, Sue went right to work.
- f. After **introductory clauses**: see **2B, last sentence**, above.
- g. Around **interrupting phrases**: Sue, along with two friends, made posters. Sue, we knew, would do a great job.
- h. In **dialogue**: (1) Sue asked, "When does school start?" (2) (No punctuation needed): Sue asked me when school started. (3) "I hope school does not start while it's still hot," she remarked. "I hope," remarked Sue, "that school does not start soon." **Note**: End punctuation goes inside the quotation mark, not after.
- i. In **dates and addresses**: Clinton, Iowa, is a small city. Sue started work on Monday, September 10, 2004, in the cafeteria.
- j. Stress "**however**." We were, however, not surprised that Sue worked so hard. Sue worked hard; however, we weren't surprised. (Without the semicolon, this would be a run-on sentence. *Sue worked hard* is a complete sentence, as is: *However, we weren't surprised.*)

##### 2. Semicolons(;) separate:

- a. Main clauses not joined by a coordinating conjunction: Sue went to work; she took the bus.
- b. Phrases or clauses containing commas, even when joined by coordinating conjunctions. Sue worked on the books, desks,\* and chairs; Tom cleaned the floor and walls; Joan did whatever else was needed. \*This comma is optional.

##### 3. Colon: A colon marks a pause for explanation, expansion, enumeration or elaboration. Use a colon to introduce a list. Sue did a lot of work: she shopped, took a vote, made posters.

### IV. Parts of Speech

1. **noun**: a person (sister), place (park) or thing (ball). See **IB2** on previous page for **unusual nouns**.
2. **proper noun**: the specific name of a person (Mary), place (New York) or thing (World Trade Center)
3. **pronoun**: a word (he, she, it) used in place of a noun (boy, Mary, kite).
4. **verb**: the critical element of the predicate of a sentence (see **IB**) says something about the subject of the sentence and expresses action, as well as present, past or future time. A **present participle** is a verb ending in *-ing*, and is called dangling when the subject of the *-ing* verb and the subject of the sentence do not agree. For example: "Rushing to finish her work, the broom slipped out of Sue's hand." Here the subject is the broom, but the broom isn't doing the rushing.
5. **adjective**: a word that modifies a noun or a pronoun; it answers which one, how many, or what kind. The **slippery** broom flew out of Sue's hands.
6. **adverb**: usually modifies a verb and answers in what manner, to what degree, when, how, how many times. The broom flew **suddenly** from Sue's hands.

### V. References: grammar and style: [www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/](http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/); punctuation: <http://chuma.cas.usf.edu/~olson/pms/intro.html>; parts of speech: [www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/partsp.html](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/partsp.html); participles: [www.chomp.chomp.com/terms/participle.htm](http://www.chomp.chomp.com/terms/participle.htm)