

Sentence Diagramming

Diagramming is a way to show the relationships between the various parts of a sentence. It shows the structure of a sentence, and it can sometimes help the writer recognize a grammatical error in a sentence.

Why teach diagramming?

1. Diagramming gives you a tool to attack sentences as a whole, not in a fragmented approach. You get to see how parts interact. You see not only parts, but also their functions.

"In the town parade, Sam carried the scout troop flag."

Some students might identify six nouns in that sentence, and they might not know which word is the subject. When students diagram that sentence, it becomes clear that there are only three nouns in the sentence (parade, Sam, flag), and it is obvious which one is the subject (Sam).

2. When you diagram, you develop an eye for breaking down a sentence, so you can fix it more easily.

"After the last performance, the director of the play thanked Sue, Mary, and (me/I) for all our work with the children's choir."

It's hard to tell whether to use *me* or *I*. But when you diagram it, you strip it down to the core which is, "The director thanked (me/I)." Now that you've simplified it, it's easy to fix.

3. For some students, diagramming just works much better as a key to understanding.

How to diagram: In Five Steps

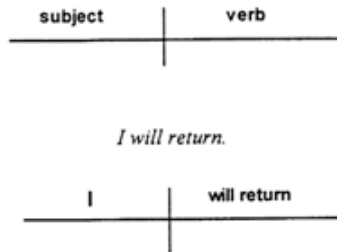
If you follow these steps in order, it will make diagramming easier.

1. Mark up the sentence.
In advanced sentences, mark the break between clauses.
In the basic level, put parentheses around prepositional phrases. Why? I have found that prep. phrases cause more trouble than anything else. They get in there and disguise themselves as other things! So if you safely lock them away in parentheses until you're ready for them (Step 5), they can't fool you and cause trouble.
2. Find the verb and place it onto your diagram to the right of the vertical line.
3. Find the subject and place it onto your diagram to the left of the vertical line.)
Why do I find the verb first and then the subject? There are usually more nouns than verbs in sentence, so it may be hard to know which noun is the subject. Once you know the verb, then ask yourself which noun is performing the action. That is your subject.
4. What kind of verb is it (transitive, linking, or intransitive)? Mark the verb type and direct object or complement (predicate noun or predicate adjective).
5. Place everything else onto your diagram. In basic sentences, "everything else" usually consists of modifiers (including prepositional phrases). Most modifiers go onto diagonal lines below the word they modify.

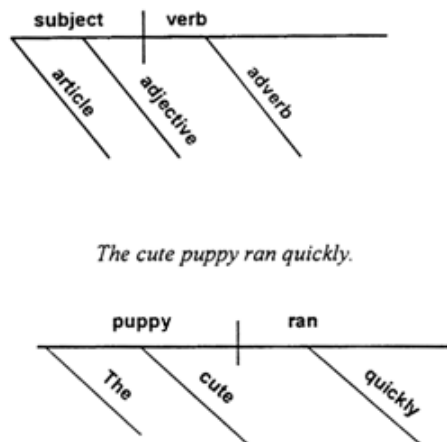
DIAGRAMMING SENTENCES

The basic diagrams used in one system of diagramming are shown below.

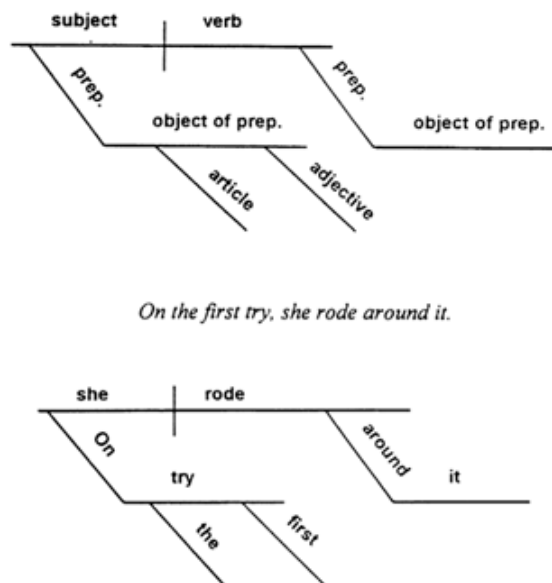
(1) Diagram for a simple sentence with a simple subject (noun or pronoun) and simple predicate (verb):



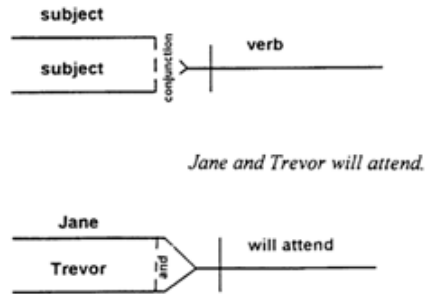
(2) Diagram for a simple sentence with adjectives or adverbs:



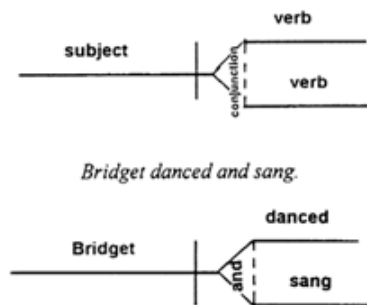
(3) Diagram for a simple sentence with prepositional phrases (adjective or adverb):



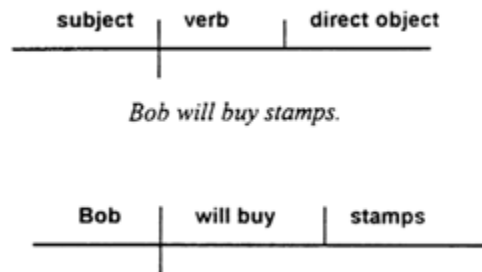
(4) Diagram for a simple sentence with a compound subject:



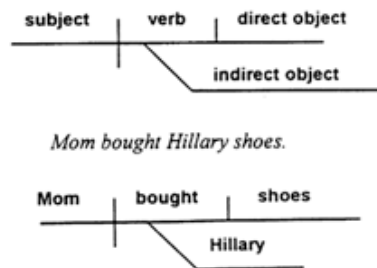
(5) Diagram for a simple sentence with a compound predicate:



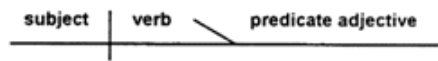
(6) Diagram for a simple sentence with a direct object:



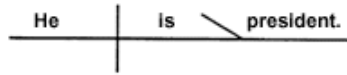
(7) Diagram for a simple sentence with a direct object and an indirect object:



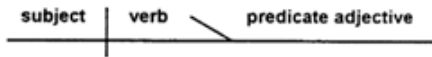
(8) Diagram for a simple sentence with a predicate noun:



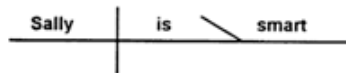
He is president



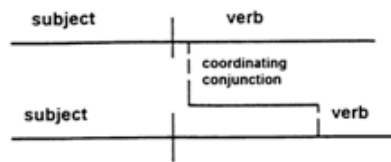
(9) Diagram for a simple sentence with a predicate adjective:



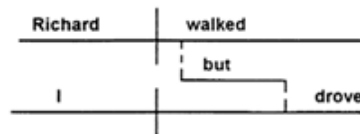
Sally is smart.



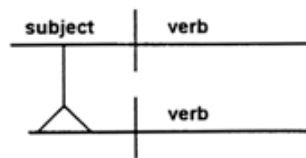
(10) Diagram for a compound sentence:



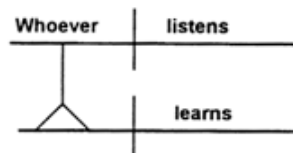
Richard walked, but I drove.



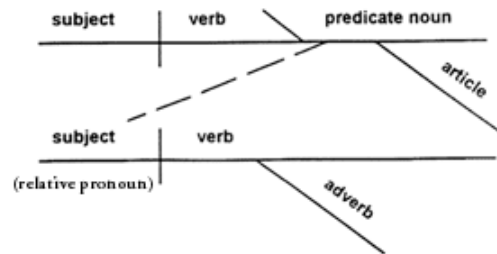
(11) Diagram for a complex sentence with a noun clause:



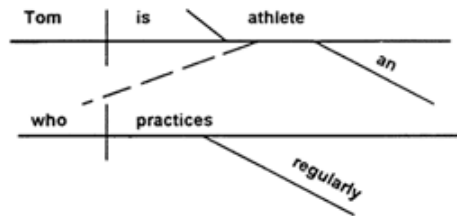
Whoever listens learns.



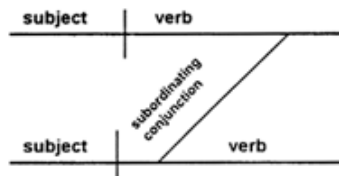
(12) Diagram for a complex sentence with a relative or adjective clause:



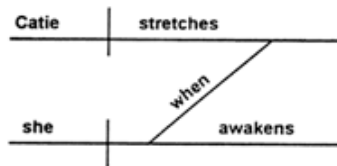
Tom is an athlete who practices regularly.



(13) Diagram for a complex sentence with an adverb clause:



Catie stretches when she awakens.



Other Hints

1. These words are almost always modifiers, so put them on a diagonal:
a, an, the, very, never, not.
2. Beware the **HELPING VERBS!** If you see one of these, look for a **PARTNER!** You'll often find one.
have, has, had
do, does, did
would, could, should
will, can, shall
may, might, must
The "**BEING**" **VERBS** sometimes have a partner too. Sometimes they're linking verbs.
am, are, is
be, been, was, were

3. Test for indirect objects: Can it be replaced by a "to" or "for" prepositional phrase? Does it have a direct object?
4. Independent clauses usually begin with a coordinating conjunction, so learn them by this chant:
And Or But For Nor Yet So! (or a semicolon)
5. Review the common prepositions:
of
on off
in out
to from
up down
above below
over under
around through
between behind
at by near
across
before during after
with without
for against