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# Sentence Structure for Reading Comprehension

Second Edition



Panatip Pinijsakkul

## **Sentence Structure for Reading Comprehension**



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# **Sentence Structure for Reading Comprehension**

*Second Edition*

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Department of English

Faculty of Liberal Arts

Thammasat University

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Panatip Pinijsakkul

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# Preface

This book is intended as a reference and exercise book which is appropriate for beginning students of the reading subject and interested people who may wish to review and strengthen their understanding of sentence structure for better reading comprehension.

This book neither explains steps to read English texts, tells about processes of reading, nor explains grammatical terminology. According to my own teaching experience, a problem frequently found in my reading class is that students often read slowly due to the difficulty to understand long and complex sentences, apart from other obstacles, such as difficult vocabularies and other required reading skills. The purpose of this book then is to encourage students to be able to read and understand more quickly complicated sentences by applying grammatical knowledge.

The book begins with an overview of basic structure of English language. Students also will, in later units, be able to analyze and synthesize longer and more complicated structures found in various kinds of texts. I have tried to make the presentation as practical as possible by giving numerous examples taken from real publications to illustrate what I have explained.

I truly hope that this book, which provides students various helpful practices and activities, will prepare them for reading more efficiently.

**Panatip Pinijsakkul**

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Academic Affairs Division, Thammasat University for its supporting fund. Also, I owe appreciation to others who helped along the way: all my colleagues at the English Department for their comments and support and Khun Jiraporn (Thammasat University Press) for her exceptional editorial role. With them, this book can be complete much better than I could have managed on my own.

# Introductory Unit

This introductory unit will show you the use of various sentence structures in different kinds of texts. Some examples given can more or less illustrate why non-native English readers have difficulties in understanding reading texts and articles.

Look at the first passage and ask yourself if it is too difficult for you or not. Why is it so?

## Passage 1

### Land of Midnight Sun

Bright sun hanging on the northern horizon forced me to keep my sunglasses on even though it was well into the night. The summer sun here, on the northern tip of the European continent, aroused my curiosity. It was already 11 p.m., but it's still glowing brightly, the rays still strong. Every year for a period of two months, June and July, there is no night in this part of the northern hemisphere as the sun doesn't go down the horizon.

Travel News, *Bangkok Post*, 17 July 2003.

Many non-native English readers who happen to read it might face the problem of not understanding all the thoughts expressed in this paragraph. In addition to difficult vocabulary and lack of necessary reading skills, complicated sentence structure is also a chief among those reading obstacles. In order to understand such sentences, you should know how to extract the core, or backbone, of each sentence which is the verb and its subject. Without a verb, any group of words is only a sentence fragment, which is only a part of a complete thought.

In passage 1, there are altogether four long sentences. In each sentence, the main ideas that the writer tried to communicate to you are as follows:

1. Bright sun forced me to keep my sunglasses on.
2. The summer sun aroused my curiosity.
3. It was already 11 p.m., but it's still glowing brightly, the rays are still strong.
4. There is no night in this part of the northern hemisphere.

However, in some texts, as in passage 2, you may find them much easier to read. This is because a writer tends to choose less complicated sentence structure and easier vocabulary to get target readers to understand fully what s/he wants to convey.

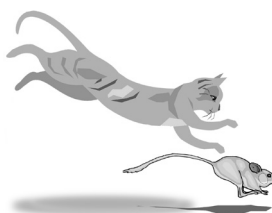
## Passage 2

### Venus and The Cat

Once upon a time there was a cat who fell in love with a handsome young man. She prayed and prayed to Venus, the Goddess of Love, to give her the young man for a husband. So Venus, taking pity on the cat, changed her into a beautiful young lady. The man saw her and instantly fell in love. So the two were married, and the man took home the young lady as his bride.

But had she really changed, or was she still a cat underneath? Venus wanted to find out.

One day the goddess sent a little mouse into the lady's house, where she was sitting with her husband. At first the young lady did not notice the mouse, but



suddenly she saw it. She made a quick movement and sprang upon it, and almost before the young man had seen the mouse, it was dead.

“So,” said Venus to herself, “she may *look* like a young lady, but she behaves like a cat.”

And the goddess was so angry that she changed the young lady back into the cat, and the young man never saw her again.

We cannot change our true nature.

*Fables from Aesop*, retold by James Reeves, Glasgow, UK: Blackie & Son Ltd., 1961.

Passage 2 is an excerpt from Aesop’s fables. As most target readers are children, language use is not too complex to understand. Passage 3 is another example of an easy language use by a non-native English student whereas Passage 4, with a similar theme about drugs but different in its details and target readers, is written in a much more complicated structure and difficult word selection.

### Passage 3

## Say Yes to Sports

Drugs are now one of the country’s most serious problems. I am very sad to see that the number of drug addicts in Thailand is increasing every year, especially among teenagers. Our society and economy went down because of ya ba (amphetamines). I think drugs are very dangerous. Taking drugs is bad for your health because they affect your mind and body.

You are the future generation of this country so you must stay away from drugs. Know how to wisely make the best of your free time with good activities such as music and sports. For me, I like to play badminton in my free time. When I play badminton I feel fresh and I enjoy myself. I think it makes me healthy and lets me have a lot of friends. Playing sports is better than taking drugs.

Palita Chatbubpha, a student from Chonburi

*Student Weekly*, 20 July 2003.

## Piling Pressure on Wa Drug Lords

Time may be running out for the United Wa State Army drug trafficking cartel, as well as for its chief sponsors in the Burmese military junta. The United States has put leader Wei Hsueh-kang and his Wa gang on the A-list of drug smugglers. Major ramifications will occur. If anything, the decision to name this group as “drug kingpins” is overdue. It is the type of pressure needed to force Wa leaders to stop peddling drugs. And it adds to the formal indignation countries must feel about the sponsorship of this group by Rangoon generals.

There are immediate effects to being named on this short, exclusive list. For one thing, reports seeped out of northern Burma at the weekend that Rangoon has detained Wei Hsueh-kang and charged his brother Wei Hsueh-tang with actual trafficking. It remains to be seen if Rangoon is finally acting, or putting up a trial balloon. In any case, the world political and economic community now knows the names of the largest and most powerful organised drug trafficking gang in the region. All US businesses and banks, and all foreign firms doing business in America, must blacklist Wei Hsueh-kang and the UWSA.

Editorials, *Bangkok Post*, 15 July 2003.

To sum up, when one decides which text is difficult for comprehension, what s/he considers is not only the writing style or word selection but also sentence structure. The more complex it is, the more confused non-native English readers will be. It is significant then for us, as non-native English readers, to understand how a sentence works, how it is formed and how a simple sentence is transformed into a more complicated one.



# Sentence Structure in Reading Texts

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In a reading text, you may find the mixture of different sentence structures including phrases and fragments. It is important for a reader to be able to identify which is a sentence and which is not.

## Sentence Components

A sentence is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate and expressing a complete thought.

Look at the following examples:

1. Jogging in the park.
2. I like jogging in the park.

The first example is not a sentence because it does not consist of necessary elements that are subject and predicate. Moreover, it lacks a complete thought. We don't know who does the jogging and what is the rest of information the writer would like to convey whereas the second example tells us what we want. We know who is the one who performs

the action (“I”) and what is the action that the performer does (“like jogging in the park”). When the thought is complete as in the second example, the writer will stop it by using a period (.) in a declarative sentence, a question mark (?) in an interrogative sentence or an exclamatory mark (!) in an exclamatory or an imperative sentences. These help you know how many complete thoughts there are in what you are reading.

Look at the following passage and answer how many complete thoughts there are:

The Republic of Korea has a democratic form of government based upon the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. Sovereignty resides in the people, from whom all state authority is derived. The people’s basic rights to freedom and to the benefits of and participation in government are guaranteed by the Constitution. In order to protect freedom and rights to the maximum extent, the Constitution also provides for the independence of the three branches of the government: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

Adapted from *Facts about Korea*, Seoul: Korean Overseas Information Service, 1997, p.29.

There are 4 complete thoughts:

1. The Republic of Korea has a democratic form of government based upon the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances.
2. Sovereignty resides in the people, from whom all state authority is derived.
3. The people’s basic rights to freedom and to the benefits of and participation in government are guaranteed by the Constitution.
4. In order to protect freedom and rights to the maximum extent, the Constitution also provides for the independence of the three branches of the government: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.



Subject	Predicate
The Republic of Korea	has a democratic form of government based upon the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances.
Sovereignty	resides in the people, from whom all state authority is derived.
The people's basic rights to freedom and to the benefits of and participation in government	are guaranteed by the Constitution.
the Constitution	also provides for the independence of the three branches of the government: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary in order to protect freedom and rights to the maximum extent.

## 1. Subject

The subject of a sentence is a noun or noun substitute which usually appears at the beginning of the sentence. It answers the questions, “who?” or “what?” did whatever the predicate says.

A subject can be:

1. **noun/ noun phrase/ pronoun**

*Examples:*

- ⊙ The story on the new interest in early Christian Gospels noted the discovery of Scriptures that were unearthed in 1945.

- ⊙ Maria is at especial risk, traveling to the country collecting stories of Muslims killed. She is our reliable news reporter.
- ⊙ Prime Minister Junishiro Koizumi told the parliament that corporate profits were improving and capital expenditure was growing.
- ⊙ This old veteran is highly respected by all Thai people.
- ⊙ The man and his wife went to the church yesterday.

2. **infinitive phrase**

*Examples:*

- ⊙ To study hard for success is the most important.
- ⊙ To live in her old dirty place makes her sick.

3. **gerund and gerund phrase**

*Examples:*

- ⊙ Living his life in a hut alone is not good for his health.
- ⊙ Swimming is a good exercise.
- ⊙ Planting trees is my brother's hobby.

4. **noun clause**

*Examples:*

- ⊙ What the chairman said in the meeting will be published tomorrow.
- ⊙ Why Tony cannot accept this job is a secret.
- ⊙ What we did last summer is not acceptable.

In other words, a subject can then be:

1. **a simple subject (one word)**

- 1.1 a common noun, such as *Boys, Girls, Teachers, Parents*
- 1.2 a proper noun, such as *Susan, Bangkok, John*
- 1.3 a personal pronoun, such as *He, She, It, I, You, We, They*
- 1.4 an indefinite pronoun, such as *Someone, Somebody, Something, All, No one, Nobody, Everybody, None*

- 1.5 an interrogative pronoun in an interrogative sentence, such as, *Who* (as in *Who will come with me tonight?*) and *What* (as in *What caused the conflict between these two parties?*)

**2. a phrase (group of words):**

- 2.1 a noun phrase (a noun plus all the words associated with it; these may include determiners, modifying adjectives, phrases and sometimes whole clauses)

*Examples:*

- ⊙ This American President ...
- ⊙ This old veteran ...
- ⊙ A little boy ...
- ⊙ A lovely dog ...
- ⊙ The student ...

- 2.2 an infinitive phrase (a verb phrase beginning with *to*)

*Examples:*

- ⊙ To live in a cave alone ...
- ⊙ To work hard ...
- ⊙ To wake up early ...

- 2.3 a gerund phrase (a phrase beginning with a gerund)

*Examples:*

- ⊙ Collecting stamps ...
- ⊙ Planting trees ...
- ⊙ Living in a hut alone ...

**3. a compound subject** (two subjects are combined by coordinating conjunctions'—and, both ... and ..., not only ... but also ..., neither ... nor ..., either ... or ...)

*Examples:*

- ⊙ A boy and a girl ...
- ⊙ Not only the man but also his wife ...
- ⊙ Both swimming and jogging ...
- ⊙ Neither love nor hatred ...

#### 4. a clause

*Examples:*

- ⊙ What the chairman said in the meeting ...
- ⊙ Why Tony cannot accept this job ...
- ⊙ What we did last summer ...

## 2. Predicate

The predicate is the part of the sentence that says *what the subject does or who/what it is like*. It consists of the main verb along with its auxiliaries and any objects, complements and modifiers, if any, or it is the main verb alone; for example:

- ⊙ The boy drinks milk everyday.
- ⊙ The boy is my youngest son.

The predicate can be compound because some parts of the predicate are combined by coordinating conjunctions; for example:

- ⊙ I love both swimming and jogging.
- ⊙ Durunee both ate and drank a lot last night.
- ⊙ Peter is admired not only for his generosity but also for his calmness.

In case of an imperative sentence, the subject “you” will be hidden and left as understood. What we see is only the predicate; for example:

- ⊙ Turn off the light!
- ⊙ Close your book!
- ⊙ Read carefully!

The following are the examples of predicate telling what the subject does and what it is like.