Subjects

Take a look at the following incomplete sentences. They are each pulled from student essays. Do they seem incomplete to you? What seems missing?

Was born in El Salvador, with nothing but the clothes on my back.

Should have never taken the chance that I did.

Wanted to make his parents proud.

Tried to tell them not to make the same mistakes I did.

Each of the above sentences is missing a subject. The subject of the sentence is its most important noun—it’s the person, place or thing that the rest of the sentence is about. The subject noun of the sentence usually occurs early on and engages the action in a sentence.

Consider the sentence: David takes his dog to the vet.

There are three nouns in the sentence above: David, dog, and vet. Which of these nouns is the subject of the sentence?

If you answered, David, then you’re correct. David is the noun doing the action in the sentence; he is taking his dog to the vet.

Many times, the subject of a sentence is a pronoun. A pronoun takes the place of a noun in a sentence. The subject pronouns are: I, you, he, she, it, we, and they.

Fill in the missing pronouns in the sentences below:

1. David takes his dog to the vet. _____ learns that his dog must have surgery.
2. Martha decides to take a course at Cabrillo College. _____ wants to study art.
3. I would like to travel around the world. ____ have always wanted to see Italy.
4. Take a course in culinary arts. _____ will not regret it.
5. My family and I are saving our money. _____ plan to travel to Egypt in the fall.
6. Juan and Jorge are great students. _____ always study hard for exams.

Note that in example # 6 above, there are two subjects: Juan and Jorge. We call this a compound subject.

Now go back to the student examples at the top of the page and correct each one by adding a subject noun or pronoun.
There is perhaps only one other word more important to a sentence than its subject. That is the verb. The verb tells us what the subject is doing, or it may give us information about the subject. A sentence may have more than one verb. Can you underline the verbs in the sample sentences above?

Note that example # 4 begins with a sentence that doesn’t have a subject. *Take a course in culinary arts* is a command.

Commands do not require subjects because the subject (person being commanded) is the person the speaker or author is talking to. However, commands do require verbs. In example # 4, the verb is *take*.

Go back to the first page of this lesson. You may notice that the very first sentence doesn’t have a subject because it is a command.

To review, every sentence unless it is a command, requires a subject noun or pronoun.

Now take a look at the following paragraph. Some of its sentences are missing subject nouns. Fill in the subject nouns where necessary.

Born in El Salvador, with just the clothes on my back. Not knowing who my parents were. My young life was filled with brutality. Then, coming to the United States. I met my friends who have become like my new family. One of my friends became my wife. Have three beautiful children. They don’t need to struggle to survive like I did. Don’t need to wonder how they will eat or where they will sleep.