

How to Teach Sentence Diagramming

Sentence diagramming can be a useful visual tool to teach students how to identify the different parts of sentences, understand how these parts function, and see how these parts relate to other parts of a sentence. Most students find that the visual image helps them better understand and remember grammatical terms, the parts of a sentence, and the basic rules of grammar. Sentence diagrams take the abstract components of English grammar and make them concrete. With practice, writers can use diagramming to diagnose their own grammatical errors and fix them.

Objectives: Students will learn the how a sentence diagram depicts the subject, predicate, direct object, and indirect object of a sentence. Students will learn the definitions of these parts of the sentence. Students will apply proper nouns, action verbs, common nouns, and object case pronouns to their diagrams.

Lesson #1

1. Draw a simple horizontal line and write a subject on top to the left. Make the subject a proper noun and define the word as “the do-er” of the sentence.

Mark _____

2. Draw a vertical line after the subject and extend it just under the line.

Mark | _____

3. Write a predicate on top of the horizontal line, just to the right of the vertical line. Make the predicate a present tense action verb that will easily lead to a direct object without an article (*a*, *an*, and *the*). Define the predicate as “the action” of the subject and “what the ‘do-er’ does.”

Mark | gives _____

4. Have students replicate the lines and then insert their own subjects (proper nouns only) and predicates (present tense action verbs only). Share examples and discuss, making sure to use the exact language of instruction.

_____ | _____

After these three foundational lessons, I advocate more *recognition* practice and less *application* practice. The teacher should provide partially completed diagrams to promote interactive discussion on a specific lesson focus.

Example

Lesson Focus: Indirect Objects Practice

1. The teacher displays a model sentence and its sentence diagram with a missing indirect object.
2. The teacher asks students to identify and place the indirect object to the right of the vertical line below the horizontal line.
3. The teacher writes the in the indirect object and asks students to explain how the indirect object relates to the other parts of the sentence.
4. The teacher rehearses the definition of the indirect object: *An indirect object tells to whom, for whom, to what, or for what the action of the verb is completed. A sentence with an indirect object must also have a direct object. Usually, the indirect object is found between a verb and a direct object.*

This procedure achieves the instructional objective without making students construct the whole sentence. If you're studying a leaf, you don't have to draw the whole tree.

Hints for Down the Road

On the Horizontal Baseline*

Place all parts of the predicate verb phrase on the horizontal line between the subject and direct object (has been said).

If the object is a predicate noun or adjective, draw a backslash (\) slanting toward the subject (He | is / Tom) (He | is / nice).

Place implied subjects in the subject place within parentheses, for example (You).

Place appositives after the subject or object within parentheses (Tom (the man in red)).

*After the first three lessons, it is best to refer to the horizontal line as the *baseline* because more advanced sentence diagrams may have multiple horizontal lines.

Expanding the Baseline

Compound subjects (Tom and Sue) and compound predicates (talked and shopped) are drawn as multiple horizontal lines stacked vertically and are joined at each end by a fan of diagonal lines. The coordinating conjunction (and) is placed next to a dotted vertical line that connects the left ends of the horizontal lines.

Why not make sense of grammar instruction with a curriculum that will help you efficiently integrate grammar and writing instruction? Throw away your ineffective [D.O.L.](#) or D.L.R. “openers” and last-minute grammar test-prep practice, and teach all the grammar, mechanics, and spelling that most students need in an hour per week. [Teaching Grammar and Mechanics](#) provides a coherent scope and sequence of 64 no-prep [Sentence Lifting](#) lessons that include **Teacher Tips and Hints** for the grammatically-challenged, **simple sentence diagrams**, and both **basic and advanced** rules/skills. The mechanics and grammar skills complement those found in the **72 Grammar and Mechanics Worksheets** and target the diagnostic needs indicated by the [Grammar and Mechanics Diagnostic Assessments](#). Perfect for upper elementary, middle school, and high school students.

For additional grammatical constructions and sentence diagram samples, I highly recommend these sister sites:

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/diagrams2/one_pager2.htm

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/diagrams2/one_pager1.htm

Below the Baseline

Modifiers

Modifiers of the subject, predicate, or object are placed below the baseline. Adjectives (including articles) and adverbs are placed to the right of forward slashes (/), below the words they modify.

Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases (under the tree) are also placed beneath the words they modify. Prepositions are placed to the right of forward slashes (/), below the words they modify and the forward slashes are connected to the horizontal lines on which the objects of the prepositions are placed.

Compound Sentences

Compound sentences (Tom walked home, and Sue followed him) are diagrammed separately with the verbs of the two clauses joined by a vertical dotted line with the conjunction written next to the dotted line.

Subordinate (Dependent) Clauses

Subordinate (dependent) clauses (Although Tom walked home, ...) connect the verbs of the two clauses with a dotted forward slash next to which the subordinating conjunction is written. Subordinate (dependent) clauses form their own subject-verb-object baselines.

Participles and Participial Phrases

A participle (practicing...) is drawn to the right of a backslash, except that a small horizontal line branches off at the end on which the suffix er, _ing, _en, _d, or _ed is written. With a participial phrase, the additional word or words are placed after a vertical line following the participial suffix (practicing soccer).

Relative Clauses

Relative clauses (whom I know) connect the subject or object of the baseline with a dotted line to the relative pronoun (that, who, whom, which) which begins its own subject-verb-object baseline.

Above the Baseline

Gerunds and Gerund Phrases

Gerunds (Running) are placed on a horizontal line, connected to a vertical line descending to the baseline. The _ing is written to the right of a backslash at the end of the horizontal line. With a gerund phrase (Running effortlessly), the additional word or words are connected to the backslash on another horizontal line.

Interjections

Interjections (Hey), Expletives (There), and Nouns of Direct Address are placed on horizontal lines above the baseline and are not connected to the baseline.

Noun Clauses

Noun clauses (What you should know) branch up from the subject or object sections of the baseline with solid lines and form their own baselines with subject-verb-object vertical lines.