

Grammatical Analysis

See Spot Run

A very short story

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Divide the sentence into a subject and predicate group.

The subject is the person, place, thing, or idea which is the main focus of the sentence and is or is doing something. Find the subject of the sentence together with all the words describing the subject.



Sam is doing something.

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

Subject Group

rolls out of bed.

Predicate Group

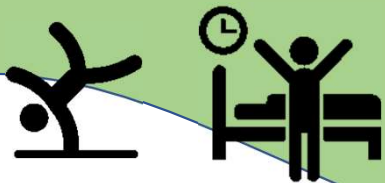
Sam is the name of a unique individual: a proper noun.
There is no other description of our subject.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Divide the sentence into a subject and predicate group.

The predicate describes what the subject is or is doing.
Find the predicate of the sentence together with all the words describing the predicate.



What is Sam doing?
He rolls. Where?
Out of bed.

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

Subject Group
What or who ...
which one, how many,
what sort of?

rolls out of bed.

Predicate Group
is or is doing what?
how, where, when, with what?

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Separate adjectives from the subject and adverbs from the predicate.

An adjective – a single word or group of words – describes or modifies a noun. Adjectives answer which, which one, how many, what sort of?

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of bed.

Adjectives: No descriptions of Sam are provided.
We only know his name.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Separate adjectives from the subject and adverbs from the predicate.

An adverb – a single word or group of words – describes or modifies a verb. Adverbs answer is what, does what, to what, how, how often, how much, when, where, from/in which direction?

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of bed.

Adverbs: [From] out of bed.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Separate adjectives from the subject and adverbs from the predicate.

When a group of words describe a noun or verb, we call the group a phrase or, if the group includes a verb, a clause.

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of bed.

Adverbial Phrase: [From] out of bed.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Separate adjectives from the subject and adverbs from the predicate.

A prepositional phrase is a special kind of phrase. It consists of a preposition, which describes direction, and the object to/from which one is directed. The object is a person, place, thing, or idea: noun.

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of bed.

(Adverbial) Prepositional Phrase: [From] out of bed.

Preposition: out of + Object: bed

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

For each phrase, divide the group of words by function.

A prepositional phrase is a special kind of phrase. It consists of a preposition, which describes direction, and the object to/from which one is directed. The object is a person, place, thing, or idea: noun.

Sam rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of bed.

Sam

rolls

out of

bed.

subject

noun

proper noun

Sam

predicate

verb: to roll

present tense

rolls

adverbial phrase

prepositional phrase

preposition + object

out of

bed.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

A compound-complex sentence has at least two main clauses joined together with the conjunction, and at least one subordinated clause.

A main clause can stand alone as a sentence and still make sense. Two or more main clauses can be joined to form a compound sentence.

He grabs his hair gel.
He runs downstairs ...

He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

main clause

and

conjunction

[he] runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

main clause

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

A subordinated clause is a group of words containing a verb, and acting as a noun, adverb, or adjective.

A subordinate clause does not make sense alone as a sentence. There are two in this sentence:

Purpose: [in order] to join Dad,
About Dad: who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs

[in order] to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

main clause

conj.

main clause + 2 subordinate clauses

The sentence is formed by joining two main clauses. The second main clause includes 2 subordinate clauses.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

A subordinated clause is a group of words containing a verb, and acting as a noun, adverb, or adjective.

The sentence includes a subordinate clause which includes another inner subordinate clause.

Purpose: [in order] to join Dad,
About Dad: who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs

[in order] to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs

[in order] to join Dad,

who is leaving for work.

main clause conj. main clause + 2 subordinate clauses

We have divided the sentence into 4 separate clauses. For each clause, we can break down the group of words into parts of speech.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
The fog on the glass.

Break down the first main clause: He grabs his hair gel.

He (Sam)

grabs

gel

hair

his (Sam's)

gel

Subject: He

-----	Predicate Group	-----
Verb: to grab		direct verb object
Present tense		grabs what?
grabs		gel

Adjectives describing object (noun)

Possessive pronoun: Who's gel? **his** / Sam's gel.

Adjective: What kind of gel? hair gel.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad's hair fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

Break down the 2nd main clause: (He) runs downstairs.

Subject: Who [He] (Sam)

You can reduce the sentence by not repeating the subject in the second clause: it is implied.

Predicate: is doing what? runs
Adverb: where? downstairs

[he] runs downstairs

[he]

(subject)

runs

(predicate

downstairs

adverb)

Subject: [he]

Subject carries forward from the first clause.

----- Predicate Group -----	
Verb: to run	adverb modifying run
Present tense	runs where?
runs	downstairs

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

The sentence contains a subordinate clause describing why Sam is running downstairs and this subordinate clause includes a subordinate clause describing the object of the first clause: Dad.

We use the term clause (not phrase) when a group of words includes a verb.

to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

[in order] to join Dad

who is leaving for work

(preposition of purpose) (adjective describing the object Dad)

Preposition of purpose or cause:

A prepositional phrase or clause can describe purpose or cause on an action. One such preposition is: in order to, followed by a verb. We reduce this preposition: to verb.

[in order] to join (Dad, who is leaving for work.)
preposition verb object

Why is Sam running downstairs? He is running downstairs to join Dad.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)
Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence

Break down the inner subordinate clause.

When a clause describes a noun, we call it an adjective or adjectival clause.

Clarity: Which version do you prefer?
and runs downstairs to join Dad before he leaves for work.

to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

[in order] to join Dad

who is leaving for work

(preposition of purpose) (adjective describing the object Dad)

Subject, relative pronoun: who

Refers to Dad (not Sam)

Verb: is leaving

Tense: present participle

Prepositional (Cause) Phrase: for work

[why is he leaving: in order to go to work]

Preposition: for

Prepositional object: work.

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad fogs the glass.

Compound-Complex Sentence Versus Clarity

This sentence is very complex. Do you think the meaning is clear? Is the writer packing too much information into a single sentence? Is the paragraph well designed?

Does it need revision?

He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

He grabs his hair gel

and

[he] runs downstairs to join Dad, who is leaving for work.

Revision, revision, revision

Sam rolls out of bed. He grabs his hair gel and runs downstairs to join Dad before he leaves for work.

--- Uhm --- again.

The alarm rings! Sam springs out of bed and grabs the hair gel. He races downstairs. Dad is getting ready for work. Sam wants to help.

We will revise the whole story in another exercise.

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad sighs. His breath fogs the glass.

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel through his fingers, smoothing down Dad's hair. Dad applies gel to his hair. Dad has styled hair.

Ah! A simple sentence.

Separate the sentence into its parts.

When do words like *dad* get capitalized? When a word like dad is used in place of a proper noun – name – we use a capital letter: Yesterday, **Dad** drove to the store. Otherwise, do not capitalize the word: My **dad** is tall.

Dad looks in the hall mirror.

Dad

looks

in the hall mirror.

in

the hall mirror

the

hall

mirror

(Subject) (Predicate group)

Subject: Dad, proper noun.

Verb: looks, present tense of verb: to look.

Adverb/Prepositional Phrase: in the hall mirror.

Preposition: in (looks where?)

Object of the preposition: mirror (in what?)

Adjective of object/noun: hall (what kind of mirror?)

Adjective/definite article: the (which one?)

Dad looks in the hall mirror. **He straightens his tie and looks again.** A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad sighs. His breath fogs the glass.

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel through his fingers, smoothing down Dad's hair. He applies gel to his hair. He combs his hair. He styles his hair. He has styled hair.

Compound sentence

The conjunction *and* joins two simple clauses.

Often compound sentences are reduced. The subject is frequently dropped rather than repeated.

He straightens his tie and looks again

He straightens his tie

and

[he] looks again.

(clause 1)(conjunction)(clause 2)

Subject: He (refers to Dad)

Verb: to straighten

Tense: present tense

Object phrase

Object: tie (what?)

Possessive pronoun: his (Dad's)

Subject: implied, same

Verb: to look

Tense: matches

Adverb: again

(at what frequency?)

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad sighs. His breath fogs the glass.

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel into his hair, brushes it, smoothing down Dad's hair. Sam applies gel to his hair. Dad has styled hair.

Simple sentence

Finally we have a modified subject. (Too few adjectives may indicate an over-focus on action.)

A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head.

A tuft of hair

(subject group)

Subject: tuft

Indefinite Article: a

Prepositional Adjective Phrase: Prepositional Adverb Phrase:

Preposition: of

Object: hair (of what?)

is sticking up at the back of Dad's head.

(predicate group)

Verb: to stick (up - helper)

Tense: present participle

Prepositional Adjective Phrase: Prepositional Adverb Phrase:

Preposition: at

Object: the back (where?)

Prepositional Adjective Phrase:

Preposition: of

Object: head (back of what?)

Adjective: Dad's (whose head?)

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad sighs. His breath fogs the glass.

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel through his fingers, smoothing down Dad's hair. Sam applies gel to his hair. Dad has a tuft of unruly hair.

(Simple sentence)

We know from the parenthesis, the writer is adding some information: off topic/aside.

(It sticks up every morning.)

It

sticks up every morning.

(subject group)

(predicate group)

Subject: It
Pronoun refers to 'tuft'
from previous sentence.

Verb: to stick (up)
Present tense.

Preposition of time:
Preposition: every
Object: morning
When/how often/at
what frequency?

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)

Dad sighs. His breath fogs the glass.

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel out of the tube, washes his face, brushes his teeth, rinses, smooths down Dad's hair, applies gel to his hair. Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.)

Could it be simpler? No.

The simplest English sentence has a subject and verb: two words.

Dad sighs.

Dad

sighs.

(subject)

(predicate)

Dad looks in the hall mirror. He straightens his tie and looks again. A tuft of hair is sticking up at the back of Dad's head. (It sticks up every morning.) Dad sighs. **His breath fogs the glass.**

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad. He squeezes gel on his fingers, smoothing, smooths down Dad's hair. Sam applies gel to his hair. Dad has a well-behaved hair.

Simple sentence

I think you get the idea. Let's analyse the next paragraph and stop.

If you were the composer, you would then begin the next level of revision – analysing the text for clarity, flow, arrangement, effectiveness, word choice, etc., and making the necessary changes: polishing it up.

His breath fogs the glass.

His breath

fogs the glass.

(subject group)

(predicate group)

Subject: breath

Possessive pronoun: his (Dad's)

Verb: to fog

Tense: present

Object: glass

Definite Article: The

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad.

Sam

stands

on a chair

beside Dad

subject group

predicate group

Subject: Sam
Proper name

Verb: to stand
Tense: present

Prepositional Phrase 1
Preposition: on
Object: chair
Indefinite article: a

Prepositional Phrase 2
Preposition: beside
Object: Dad

He squeezes gel on his hand and, stretching, smooths down Dad's hair.

He squeezes gel on his hand

and

[while] stretching, [he] smooths down Dad's hair.

He

squeezes

gel

on his hand

and

[while] stretching,

[he]

smooths down

Dad's hair

subject group

predicate group

Subject: Sam
Proper name

Verb: to stand
Tense: present

Prepositional Phrase 1
Preposition: on
Object: chair
Indefinite article: a

Prepositional Phrase 2
Preposition: beside
Object: Dad

Sam stands on a chair beside Dad.

Sam

stands

on a chair

beside Dad

subject group

predicate group

Subject: Sam
Proper name

Verb: to stand
Tense: present

Prepositional Phrase 1
Preposition: on
Object: chair
Indefinite article: a

Prepositional Phrase 2
Preposition: beside
Object: Dad

He squeezes gel on his hand and, stretching, smooths down Dad's hair.

He squeezes gel on his hand

and

[while] stretching, [he] smooths down Dad's hair.

He

squeezes

gel

on his hand

and

[while] stretching,

[he]

smooths down

Dad's hair

first clause

conjunction

second clause

Subject: He (Sam), pronoun.

Verb: to squeeze, present tense

Object: gel (what?)

Prepositional phrase: on his hand

Subject: He (Sam), pronoun, implied.

Verb: to smooth, with verb helper: down.

Object: hair (what?), modifies object: Dad's (whose?)

Subordinate clause: while stretching (as he stretches)

Verb: to stretch, present participle tense

Implied conjunction: while

Observations and conclusions

Whew. Enough.

Now you see how to analyze grammar and break down a sentence. Why might you do such a thing? For the same reason cross country runners might do some strength exercises.

By learning to carefully examine a sentence, you can evaluate its meaning and clarity. Maybe some words should be swapped around or substituted to improve the sentence. Maybe sentences within the paragraph should be shifted or revised to make the meaning clearer or the flow of information smoother. This kind of revision is vital when composing.

Although the spelling, punctuation, and grammar are correct, this story could use some revision.

An abundance of adverbs but few adjectives indicates the story is too focused on the action and not focused enough on describing the people and places.

Some complex sentences should be revised to unpack information and smooth out the flow of the narration. Paragraphs could be better planned and connected.

Review the *Composing* section for revision tips and read a revised version of this story.