

## ANALYZING SENTENCES

### READ THE SENTENCE

Read the sentence, close your eyes, look at the picture that the sentence paints in your head.

Often, upstairs in his dirty room, the boarder with that frightening glass eye would beat his computer mercilessly.

### ASK YOURSELF

Ask yourself the following questions in the order in which they are given.

1. Look at the picture in your head. Ask the question,

**"What is happening?"**

ANSWER: would beat

"would beat" is the predicate

2. Take the predicate, put "what" before it, and ask

**"What would beat?"**

ANSWER: the boarder

"boarder" is the subject

3. Take the subject and the predicate, put "what" after them, and ask the question,

**"The boarder would beat what?"**

ANSWER: computer

## SUBJECTIVE COMPLEMENTS AND OBJECTS OF CLAUSES

Now ask the following questions:

1. Is "computer" the same thing as "the boarder" (subject)?

If the answer is yes, you have a noun acting as a subjective complement.

EXAMPLE:        John is a good student.  
                       John is what? student  
                       Is John the same thing as student? yes

Then "student" is a noun acting as a subjective complement.

2. Is "computer" a characteristic of "the boarder"?

If the answer is yes, you have an adjective acting as a subjective complement.

EXAMPLE:        Charlie is feeling well today.  
                       Charlie is feeling what? well  
                       Is "well" a characteristic of Charlie? yes

Then "well" is an adjective acting as a subjective complement.

If the answer to both questions is no (as it is with our original sentence), "computer" is a direct object (the computer receives the blows; it is the object of the action). You may not get an answer when you ask "what?" That's fine. Just remember: an object must be a noun or a noun substitute. Prepositional phrases will never act as an object or a subjective complement.

## ADJECTIVES

Now take every noun (subjects, objects) in the sentence, put a "what" before the noun, ask a question.

**What computer?**

ANSWER:    his

"His" is an adjective modifying the noun "computer."

**What eye?**

ANSWERS:  that eye  
                   glass eye

frightening eye

A noun, you can see, can be modified by more than one adjective.

Adjectives may be:

words	(that, glass, frightening, dirty)
phrases	(with that frightening glass eye)
clauses	(who lives upstairs)

### ADVERBS

When you have examined all nouns, you are ready to look for adverbs.

To find the adverbs, take the subject, a predicate and object (or complement), put a "when," and "how," and/or a "where" behind them and ask a question.

**The boarder beat his computer how?** mercilessly

**The boarder beat his computer when?** often

**The boarder beat his computer where?** upstairs, in his dirty room

Like adjectives, adverbs may be:

words	(often, mercilessly, upstairs)
phrases	(in his dirty room)
clauses	(when he felt like it)

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Nouns do not have to have adjectives; sentences do not have to have adverbs. But you must account for the use of every word or phrase in the sentence. When you have, you have analyzed the whole sentence.

You will notice that the phrases and clauses can be broken down into their parts, but these parts will basically be subjects, predicates, adverbs, and adjectives.

The part of speech of the word with which the phrase begins gives the phrase its name:

"in" is a preposition  
 "in his dirty room" is a prepositional phrase

"In his dirty room" is a prepositional phrase that acts as an adverb modifying the predicate "would beat." But you can break that prepositional phrase down into smaller parts (preposition-adjective-noun acting as object of the preposition).

Prepositions (as well as gerunds, participles, infinitives) will take objects. To find the object, take the first word of the phrase, add "what" and ask a question.

**In what?** room

"room" is the object of the prepositional phrase.

"dirty" is an adjective that modifies the object "room."

It is helpful to put brackets around prepositional phrases in a sentence so that you see them as a unit.

Do not try to analyze a sentence by "spotting" words.

The same word may have different functions in different sentences.

The guest arrived late. Adverb

The late guest dropped his hat at the door. Adjective

Call me tomorrow. Predicate

I did not hear his call. Noun acting as a direct object.

**REMEMBER:**

**When we take sentences apart our interest is not in "labeling" words but rather in determining how individual words FUNCTION in a sentence.**