

The bike is a concrete image of how sentences work. This presentation, given at ATEG's 2006 conference, shows you how to use the bike to teach sentence structure. The slides are examples of the kind of instruction found in

An Easy Guide to Writing

by Pamela Dykstra

Prentice Hall, 2006

ISBN: 0 -13 -184954 - 9

A CONCRETE IMAGE OF HOW SENTENCES WORK



What's a sentence?

- Here are three sentences:
 - He smiles.
 - Autumn leaves twirled gently to the ground.
 - The park district will open an outdoor ice skating rink in November.

Length does not determine what is and is not a sentence. Regardless of how long or short a group of words is, it needs two parts to be a sentence: a subject and a predicate.

- The subject tells us *who or what*.
- The predicate tells us *what about it*.

Who or what?

What about it?

He

smiles.

Autumn leaves

twirl gently to the ground.

The park district

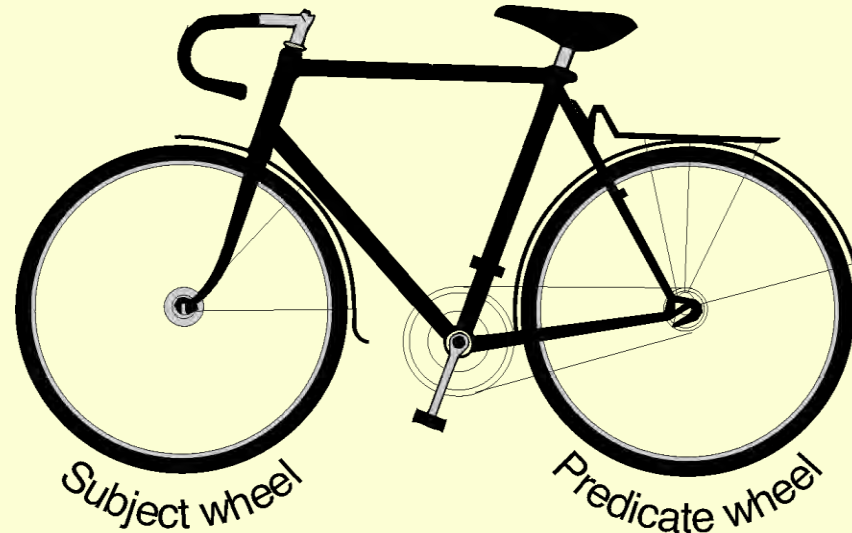
will open an outdoor ice
skating rink in November.

These two parts connect to form a basic sentence, also known as an independent clause.

Another way to describe a sentence is to compare it to a bike...

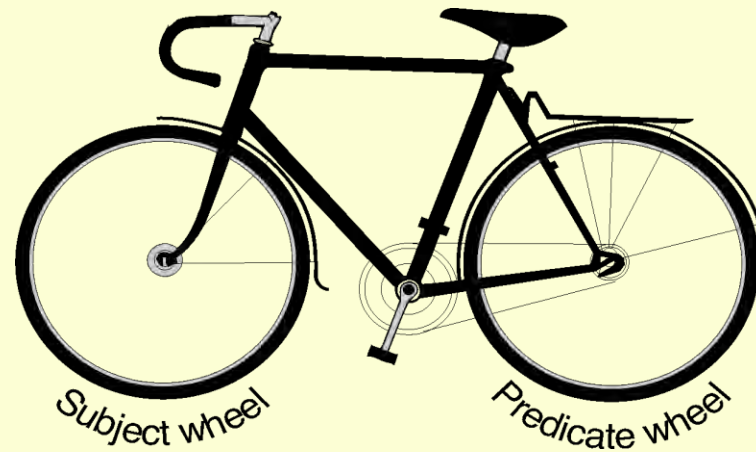
The subject is one wheel;

the predicate is the other wheel.



These two parts connect to form a stable structure.

We can have just one word in each wheel...



Children play.
Students studied.

But most of the time our ideas include more details.
We add extra words to the wheels.



The neighborhood **children play** basketball at the
community center.

Students in the biology lab **studied** cells under
an electron microscope.

We can expand the wheels by adding adjectives:

Old magazines are stacked under the kitchen table.

The weekend seminar explains how to start a small business.

Meditation helps create a peaceful mind and healthy body.

We can expand the wheels by adding adverbs:

Airline employees worked **diligently** to reschedule our flights.

We **carefully** loaded the van with furniture.

The driver realized **immediately** that he had missed the exit.

We can also add prepositional phrases:

The windows rattled **in the winter storm**.

We loaded our hamburgers **with ketchup, mustard,
and onion**.

Some car dealers make most **of their profit on
parts and services**.

Regardless of how much detail we add, the wheels give the same kind of information. The subject tells us *who or what*. The predicate tells us *what about it*.

Who or what?

What about it?

Randy

loves pizza.

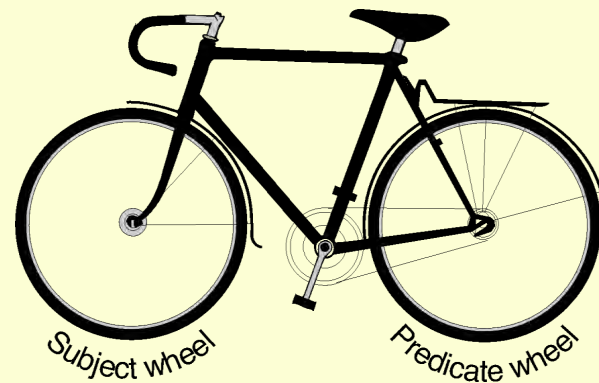
Companies

benefit from customer loyalty.

Efficient train service

will decrease traffic congestion.

Subjects and predicates connect directly. Do not separate them with a comma.



Incorrect. Carlos and his family, showed me that honor is more important than winning.

Correct. Carlos and his family showed me that honor is more important than winning.



Taking Stock

The bike with its subject and predicate wheels gives students a solid foundation of how sentences work.

Concrete image

Students see that a sentence has two parts

- that these two parts can be expanded
- that they connect to form a sentence.



Meaning-centered definition

Students understand (remember, apply) “*who or what*” and “*what about it.*”

- gives them a sentence test: “Do I have a *who or what* and a *what about it?*” -- rather than trying to identify parts of speech
- fits wide variety of sentences
- connects them to the purpose of writing: creating and communicating meaning



Moving Forward

Students have gained sense of sentence boundaries.

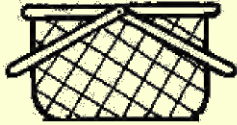
- A sentence is not determined by length (2 wheels, expandable)
- Writers mark end of *who or what* and *what about it* with a period.

Knowing what a sentence is, students are better able to understand dependent clauses.

Dependent clauses

Dependent clauses cannot stand alone. They are like baskets that need to be attached to a basic sentence.

One kind of dependent clause begins with a subordinating conjunction.



When the music began



Everyone started to dance.



When the music began,
everyone started to dance.

Here are some more dependent clauses:

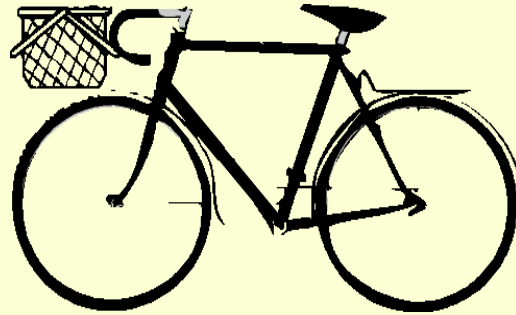


As soon as it stopped raining

Because I registered early

When we need a quiet place to study

We can place these baskets on the front of a bike.

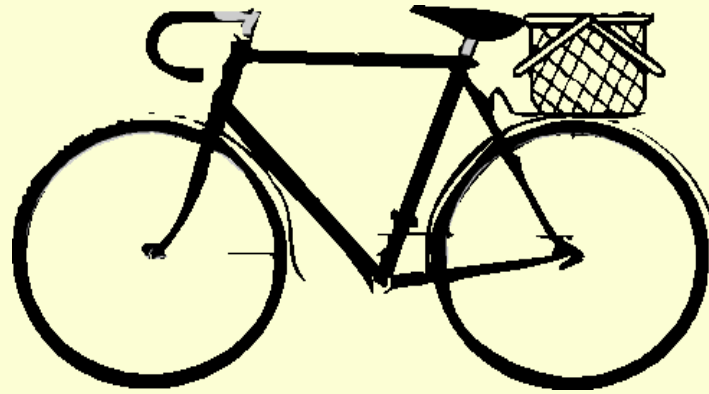


As soon as it stopped raining, we saw a double rainbow.

Because I registered early, I got the classes I wanted.

When we need a quiet place to study, we go to the library.

We can also place them on the back of a bike.



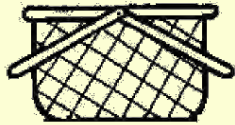
We saw a double rainbow as soon as it stopped raining.

I got the classes I wanted because I registered early.

We go to the library when we need a quiet place to study.

More Dependent Clauses

Another kind of dependent clause begins with the relative pronouns *who*, *which*, and *that*.



who works part-time

which includes a swimming pool

that is parked in my driveway

These clauses are not sentences. They are like baskets that need to be attached to a bike.

These baskets go after the word they describe.
Sometimes they're in the middle of the bike.

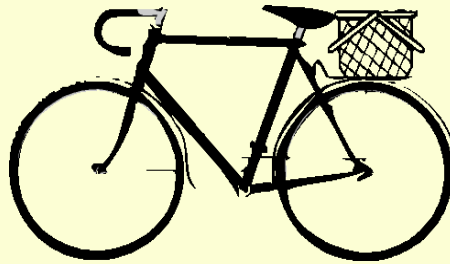


Frank, **who works part-time**, will be our guide.

The new fitness center, **which includes a swimming pool**, will open in February.

The car **that is parked in my driveway** is Henry's.

Sometimes they are on the back of the bike.



We are making pasta for the Richardsons, **who do not eat meat.**

I have tickets to the jazz festival, **which begins at noon.**

Karen likes books **that have a happy ending.**



Sentence Support

Regardless of what kind of basket we add, we need a basic sentence to support it.

Example: The new fitness center, which includes a swimming pool, will open in April.

Basic sentence: The new fitness center will open in April.

Basket: which includes a swimming pool



Taking Stock

The baskets help students see that

- dependent clauses are not sentences
- they need to be attached to a sentence

Moving Forward

The basket is also useful when explaining fragments and sentence variety.

Fragments

A fragment is just a part of a sentence. It may lack a subject or a predicate. Often it's a disconnected basket.



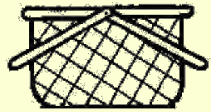
Disconnected dependent clauses

As soon as I understood the problem. I thought of a solution.

I was not responsible. When I was sixteen.

The village will enlarge the parking lot. Which serves weekday commuters.

Let's rent the same movie. That we saw last weekend.



Disconnected description and detail

It was an easy task. Especially for someone so small.

The corporation provides employees with benefits.
Like medical insurance and a pension.

We have ordered everything on the menu. Except
fried buffalo wings.

We put an ad in the Lake Norman Times. Our local
newspaper.



Disconnected *-ing* and *-to* fragments

I sprinted down the street. **Trying to catch the train.**

The scientists continued their research. **Hoping to find a cure.**

To celebrate their anniversary. They are going to Asheville for the weekend.

We walked up sixteen flights of stairs. **To prove to ourselves we could do it.**

We can correct these fragments by attaching them to the sentence.



As soon as I understood the problem, I thought of a solution.

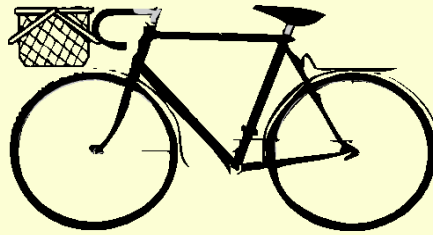


I sprinted down the street, trying to catch the train.

Sentence Variety

Baskets are excellent ways to create sentence variety. Once we have a stable structure, we can add a variety of baskets on the front, in the middle, or on the back.

We can add a variety of baskets on the front.



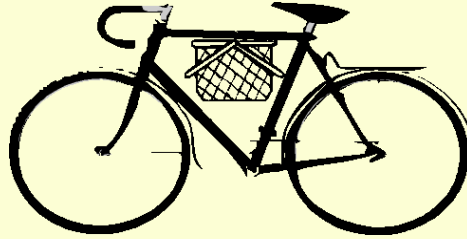
Earlier this spring, the viaduct was closed because of flooding.

Eight months ago, we bought a truck.

By the time we got home, it was dark.

Irritable after a long day at work, we took a nap before studying.

A variety of baskets in the middle:



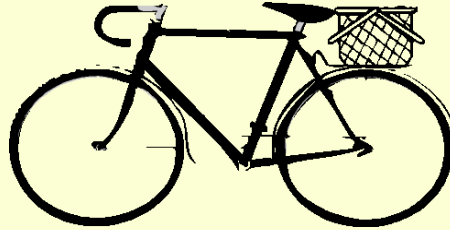
My little brother, **unable to sleep**, turned on the light.

The elderly couple, **walking slowly up the driveway**, waved at their grandchildren.

A modern art gallery, **funded by a million dollar grant**, is under construction.

John Jackson, **a friend since grade school**, is my math tutor.

And a variety of baskets on the back:



Jeff wants a hybrid, his best hope for good gas mileage.

A gentle rain fell throughout the night, lulling us to sleep.

We are building a home with Habitat for Humanity, a national volunteer program.

Everyone wants to leave at noon, even my sister.

The Logic of Punctuation

Readers are looking for the *who or what* and *what about it* of a sentence, the main idea. Commas help them see that main idea.

- If you begin a sentence with a basket, use a comma to show readers where the addition ends and the basic sentence begins.

According to the weather report, tomorrow will be hot and humid.

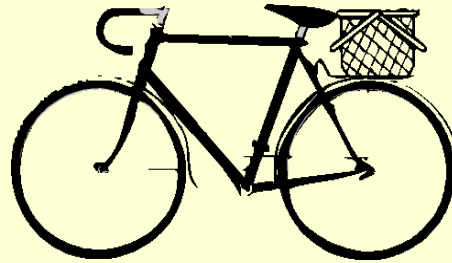
If we go to the early movie, we can save money.



If the basket interrupts the sentence, use commas to show readers where the addition begins and ends.

The art gallery, which opens this weekend, features local artists.

Ruby, my sister's best friend, will loan me her car.



If the basket is attached to the end of the sentence, the comma shows readers where the addition begins.

The award was given to James Johnson, the most respected person in our town.

They are living in the present, not the past.

SUMMARY

The bike helps illustrate how sentences work

- how the whole communicates meaning
- how the parts relate to the whole
- how punctuation signals these connections.

A CONCRETE IMAGE OF HOW SENTENCES WORK

