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What's in a sentence?

The mobile phone

Manuela is a teacher. She lives in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Last week she was presented with a 'Teacher of the Year' award by the director of her school. The prize was some money and some flowers.

Manuela teaches teenagers at a large secondary school and at the weekends she gives private English classes. She is married to a man she met when she was skiing in Bariloche. Bariloche is a famous ski resort in Argentina.

Yesterday was Manuela's wedding anniversary. In the morning her husband gave her a beautiful necklace. She was very happy. She cried! She gave him a new mobile phone. He thanked her enthusiastically, even though he had bought himself the same phone the previous day. He wonders when he will tell her, but he thinks today is not the right time.



Parts of speech

- In the story about Manuela there are quite a few **NOUNS**, such as *Manuela, Buenos Aires, Bariloche, teacher, school, husband* and *award*. Nouns are the names of people, places or things. We look at nouns in →12.
- There are also **PRONOUNS** (which take the place of nouns), such as *she, he* and *her*. We look at pronouns in →12.
- The **ADJECTIVES** in the text include *famous, beautiful* and *happy*. Adjectives describe nouns. We look at adjectives in →15.
- The text above also has a number of **VERBS** (which describe actions, states and events), such as *is, lives, was awarded, teaches, gave, had bought*, etc. We look at verbs in →4.
- The word *enthusiastically* is an **ADVERB** (it describes the verb); there are **ADVERBIAL PHRASES** in the text, too, such as *last week* and *in the morning*. We look at adverbs in →11.
- There are two **ARTICLES** in the text: the **INDEFINITE ARTICLE** *a* and the **DEFINITE ARTICLE** *the*. The word *some* is a **QUANTIFIER** (it tells us 'how much'). We look at articles in →13 and quantifiers in →14.
- **PREPOSITIONS**, such as *in* and *of*, show how other words are connected. We look at **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES** in →16.
- The **CONJUNCTIONS** *and* and *but* connect **SENTENCES** and clauses.

Sentence elements

How do we know where to put the parts of speech to make a sentence? What are the **ELEMENTS OF A SENTENCE** and what order should they go in?

- Many sentences consist of some or all of the following: a **SUBJECT** (*She*) + a verb (*teaches*), an **OBJECT** (*teenagers*) and an adverb or an adverbial phrase (*at a large secondary school*).
- Sometimes sentences have more than one object. In the sentence *Her husband gave her a beautiful necklace*, *a beautiful necklace* is the **DIRECT OBJECT** (it is the thing that was given) and *her* is the **INDIRECT OBJECT** (she was the one who benefited from the action).
- Some sentences do not have an object. Instead they have a subject (*she*), a verb (*was*) and a **COMPLEMENT** (*happy*).
- Sometimes we only use a subject and a verb (*She cried*) →4.
- Sometimes we make more complicated sentences by joining together a number of **CLAUSES**. *She is married to a man / She met the man when she was skiing / She was skiing in Bariloche* becomes *She is married to a man she met when she was skiing in Bariloche*. We look at clauses in →2.

Getting things in the right order

The basic sentence elements (subject, verb, object, complement) are the spaces into which we place words. But we have to be careful which words we put into these spaces. For example, we can put pronouns (*she, he, they*, etc.) or **NOUN PHRASES** (*the young woman, the director, her husband*, etc.) into the subject space, but the sentence would not work if we put an adjective or an adverb there. For example, we cannot say *Angry is a teacher* or *Seriously is a student*. Similarly, we cannot put nouns or adjectives where verbs go, etc.

The sentence elements have to be arranged in correct sequences. For example, we can say *Manuela is a teacher* (SVC), or we can change the order to make a question: *Is Manuela a teacher?* (VSC). But we cannot say *Is a teacher Manuela* because we do not use the sequence VCS.

However, sometimes we re-arrange the order of the SVO elements and put the (indirect) object in the subject position. This is because we want to focus on who 'receives' the action (or because we don't know who did the action). For example, instead of using the **ACTIVE VOICE** and saying *The director of her school (1) presented her (2) with a 'Teacher of the Year' award*, we can use the **PASSIVE VOICE**: *She (2) was presented with a 'Teacher of the Year' award by the director of her school (1)*. We look at an activity to teach the passive voice in →7.

Teaching ideas: word order

We often get students to reorder words to make sentences. This makes them think carefully about syntax (the correct sequence of sentence elements). For example, we can say:

Put the following words in order to make correct sentences:

- Manuela's / was / wedding anniversary / yesterday*
- a / at / Buenos Aires / teenagers / in / large / Manuela / secondary school / teaches*
- bus / by / go / I / school / to / usually*

We can also ask the students to put in punctuation, such as **CAPITAL LETTERS, FULL STOPS** (periods), **QUESTION MARKS, INVERTED COMMAS** (quotation marks), etc. →31

An enjoyable variation is to have the students hold the words on cards above their heads (so they can't see their own words). The other members of the class have to tell them where to stand to make a correct sentence **DVD1**.