

### More on Sentences (or Moron Sentences, if it makes us feel better about them)

There are three types of sentence structures:

- Simple sentence, with one independent clause: the cat ate the cheese off the basement floor
- Compound sentence, with at least two independent clauses, joined by conjunctions or semi-colons: I saw the cat, but then I had to go paint the house. In Chicago, there are many skyscrapers; I've never seen a skyscraper.
- Complex sentence, with at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause: Because the train was late, I had to walk all the way to the other side of the city to see the cat.

There are four types of sentences that rely on different verb structures:

- Declarative, a statement: The cat ate the cheese (the cat's becoming quite fat, thanks to these handouts)
- Interrogative, a question: Did the cat eat the cheese? (Yes-no, or polar, question); What kind of cheese did the cat eat? (content, or wh-, question); Did the cat eat the cheese or the mouse innards? (choice-type, or dichotomous, question); Am I my brother's keeper? (rhetorical—the answer is assumed to be known, but I find it worthwhile to consider the possibilities as an exercise in critical thinking)
- Imperative, a command: Don't let the cat eat the cheese; Stop it!
- Exclamatory, indication of some kind of strong emotion: How fat the cat has become!

According to the usual approach to English, there are two types of sentences that rely on different verb voices, but I vote for four:<sup>1</sup>

- Active voice: the subject does the action of the verb—the cat ate the cheese; we will need to buy more cheese.
- Passive voice: the doer of the action of the verb is backgrounded—the cheese was eaten (by the cat); more cheese was bought (by us).
- Middle voice: the doer doesn't really do (things happen sometimes)—the ship sank; the vase broke.
- Medio-passive voice:<sup>2</sup> the doer does for itself in some way—the poem scans easily; the motorcycle drives loudly.

Word-order can be messed with for rhetorical or poetic purposes; these are called inverted sentences. The subject still does or is, so find that element to find the subject.

- Never has the cat not eaten the cheese (the cat is still the one eating the cheese)
- Not only is the cat fat, but the cat is also smelly (the cat is fat and smelly)
- Weeee, weeeee, weeeee, squealed the little piggy, all the way home (the pig is the one who squeals)

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<sup>1</sup> Voice is primarily a property of verbs, so check out that page for more information.

<sup>2</sup> My favorite voice, because it comes loaded with options: deponent, autocausative, reflexive, reciprocal, intensive... depending on the language involved.