

SKILL 1: BE SURE THE SENTENCE HAS A SUBJECT AND A VERB

You know that a sentence in English should have a subject and a verb. The most common types of problems that you will encounter in structure questions on the TOEFL test have to do with subjects and verbs: perhaps the sentence is missing either the subject or the verb or both, or perhaps the sentence has an extra subject or verb.

Example 1 from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests

_____ was backed up for miles on the freeway.

- (A) Yesterday
- (B) In the morning
- (C) Traffic
- (D) Cars

In this example you should notice immediately that there is a verb *was*, but there is no subject. Answer (C) is the best answer because it contains the singular subject *traffic* that agrees with the singular verb *was*. Answer (A), *yesterday*, and answer (B), *in the morning*, are not subjects, so they are not correct. Although answer (D), *cars*, could be a subject, it is not correct because *cars* is plural and it does not agree with the singular verb *was*.

Example 2 from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests

Engineers _____ for work on the new space program.

- (A) necessary
- (B) are needed
- (C) hopefully
- (D) next month

In this example you should notice immediately that the sentence has a subject *engineers* and that there is no verb. Because answer (B), *are needed*, is a verb, it is the best answer. Answers (A), (C), and (D) are not verbs, so they are not correct.

Example 3 from the Paper and Computer TOEFL® Tests

The boy _____ going to the movies with a friend.

- (A) he is
- (B) he always was
- (C) is relaxing
- (D) will be

This sentence has a subject *boy* and has part of a verb *going*; to be correct, some form of the verb *be* is needed to make the sentence complete. Answers (A) and (B) are incorrect because the sentence already has a subject *boy* and does not need the extra subject *he*. Answer (C) is incorrect because *relaxing* is an extra verb part that is unnecessary because of *going*. Answer (D) is the best answer; *will be* together with *going* is a complete verb.

The following chart outlines what you should remember about subjects and verbs:

SUBJECTS AND VERBS
A sentence in English must have at least one <i>subject</i> and one <i>verb</i> .

EXERCISE 1: Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice in each of the following sentences. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- I 1. Last week went fishing for trout at the nearby mountain lake.
- C 2. A schedule of the day's events can be obtained at the front desk.
- ___ 3. A job on the day shift or the night shift at the plant available.
- ___ 4. The new computer program has provides a variety of helpful applications.
- ___ 5. The box can be opened only with a special screwdriver.
- ___ 6. The assigned text for history class it contains more than twenty chapters.
- ___ 7. The papers in the wastebasket should be emptied into the trash can outside.
- ___ 8. Departure before dawn on a boat in the middle of the harbor.
- ___ 9. Yesterday found an interesting article on pollution.
- ___ 10. The new machine is processes 50 percent more than the previous machine.

SKILL 2: BE CAREFUL OF OBJECTS OF PREPOSITIONS

An object of a preposition is a noun, pronoun, gerund or noun clause that comes after a preposition, such as *in*, *at*, *of*, *to*, *by*, *behind*, *on*, and so on, to form a prepositional phrase.

(After his *exams*) Tom will take a trip (by *boat*).

This sentence contains two objects of prepositions. *Exams* is the object of the preposition *after*, and *boat* is the object of the preposition *by*.

An object of a preposition can cause confusion in structure questions on the TOEFL test because it can be mistaken for the subject of a sentence.