

Bare Minimum Grammar

This handout explains the bare minimum you'll need to know about grammar in order to correct the most common mistakes.

Example Sentence:

While plans were in progress, the administrators assigned to the project considered every step carefully.

1. What are the main subject and verb of a sentence?

- A. Ask yourself: Who did what to whom, when? The “who” is the subject. The “did what” is the verb.
Who = “*The administrators assigned to the project*” = *subject*
Did what = “*considered*” = *verb*
- B. Substitute pronouns into the sentence. If you have a very long subject, see if you can substitute a pronoun for it—this will help you figure out where the subject starts and stops.
“The administrators on the project” = *they*
While plans were in progress, they considered every step carefully.
- C. Add a tag question onto the sentence, then try to answer the tag question. This will help you determine if you have the correct subject and verb.
While plans were in progress, the administrators assigned to the project considered every step carefully, didn't they?
Didn't they? Didn't who do what? Didn't the administrators consider

2. Which part of the sentence is independent?

- A. Turn the phrase into a question without leaving any words out. If you can do this, then this part of the sentence is independent.
* *Were plans in progress while?* = Not a coherent question
Did the administrators assigned to the project consider every step carefully? = A logical question
- B. Try the “stare” test. If you don't get a stare in response, that part of the sentence is independent. Walk up to someone in the student union and say, “*While plans were in progress.*” If the person stares at you, waiting for you to complete your thought, you are probably using the dependent part of a sentence. If the person responds and doesn't stare, it's probably an independent part of the sentence.
- C. Try to fit the phrase fit into this frame sentence: “They refused to believe the fact that _____.” If they fit, that part of the sentence is independent.
* *They refused to believe the fact that while plans were in progress.* = doesn't make a sentence
They refused to believe the fact that the administrators assigned to the project considered every step carefully. = a correct sentence