

# Sentence Structure Help for Greek Students

## Basic Sentence Structures

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**Noun:** A noun is a word used to name a person, animal, place, thing, or abstract idea.

**Verb:** A verb asserts something about the subject of the sentence and expresses an action, event, or state of being.

Depending on the form of verb in the sentence, nouns and verbs can be combined into just a few basic sentence structures:

### 1. Transitive Verbs

A Transitive Verb is incomplete without a Direct Object. This is because the subject acts *upon* something else:

The **man hit**.

This is an incomplete thought. If you try to find a context where this sentence works, I guarantee you will have to imagine the man hitting *something*. This is because you can't just "hit;" you have to hit *something*.

The **man hit** the **ball**.

The **man hit** his **brother**.

The **man hit** rush hour **traffic**.

The **man hit** a **road block**.

The verb "hit" just screams out for a Direct Object in order to complete the thought – it points toward something else that's needed in the sentence (►). The basic sentence structure here is very simple, if we look at the types of words used:

*Noun*  
**man**

*Verb*  
**hit**

*Noun*  
**traffic**

Each of these words can be described by the role that it plays in the sentence:

*Subject*  
**man**

*Transitive Verb ►*  
**hit**

*Direct Object*  
**traffic**

You can add all sorts of additional descriptive words and phrases without changing the basics of this sentence:

The **man**, who had been born in Des Moines in the deepest and coldest part of winter rather than in Galveston in the summer, and whose name happened to be Gerald, **hit** rush hour **traffic** of the sort that can only be understood if you yourself have ever left a tattoo parlor on 59<sup>th</sup> Street in Chicago at precisely 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon just prior to a weekend that includes a national holiday.

Here are some other examples of sentences with Transitive Verbs:

The **penguin wore** a **bathing suit**.

**Harriet dropped** her ceramic **wombat**.

**I like** sauerkraut **pie**.

The mischievous green **leprechaun booby-trapped** the **outhouse**.

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## 2. Intransitive Verbs

An Intransitive Verb is complete *without* a Direct Object. This is because the subject *does not* act upon something else:

**The woman arrived.**

This is a complete thought without anything else. You might choose to include some other explanatory phrase (...at the train station), but this is not a Direct Object. You don't "arrive something" in the same way that you "hit something". The basic sentence structure here is even simpler than with the transitive verb! The intransitive verb completes the thought by itself; it doesn't point toward anything else that's needed (**I**).

*Noun*  
**woman**

*Verb*  
**arrived**

Each of these words can be described by the role that it plays in the sentence:

*Subject*  
**woman**

*Intransitive Verb ]*  
**arrived**

Once again, you can add all sorts of additional descriptive words and phrases without changing the basics of this sentence:

The highly-traveled and well-read **woman** with the blue hair, large flowery sunbonnet, and white tea gloves that seemed to reach nearly to her shoulders, finally **arrived** at the backyard garden party with a flourish and an entrance that would have made the queen mother herself envious.

A lot of additional information is given, but the subject and verb haven't changed, and the verb is still intransitive. She didn't "arrive something". She simply "arrived." It's true that she did arrive "at" something, but that's a prepositional phrase, not a Direct Object.

Here are some other examples of sentences with Intransitive Verbs:

**He ran** through the quagmire.

**Bill thought** about his alien encounter for approximately 9 seconds.

**Edwina descended.**

The hulking **gargoyle crouched** on the birdbath.

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## 3. Linking Verbs

A Linking Verb links a subject to another noun or adjective that further describes or identifies it. In English grammar, these words are sometimes called Predicate Nominatives (further identifying the subject) or Predicate Adjectives (further describing the subject). But in both situations, the Linking Verb is like an equals sign in math – it indicates that what comes after the verb points back to the subject. Your textbook uses the term “Complement” to describe both the Predicate Nominative and the Predicate Adjective.

A Linking Verb indicates a state of being. Common Linking Verbs are forms of “is, am, are”, and verbs like “become” or “seem.”

**She is a police officer.**  
**Janice became an iguana.**  
**Fred seemed combative.**  
Her **doctor** at the clinic **was Ima Medic.**

In each case, you can see that you could nearly write an equals sign (=) in place of the verb and still be able to understand the gist of the sentence.

**She = police officer.**  
**Janice = iguana.**  
**Fred = combative.**  
**Her doctor = Ima Medic.**

The basic sentence structure here is:

<i>Noun</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Noun or Adjective</i>
Janice	became	iguana
Fred	seemed	combative

If we described the role each plays in the sentence, it would be:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Linking Verb =</i>	<i>Complement</i>
doctor	was	Ima Medic

You can add all sorts of additional descriptive words and phrases without changing the basics of this sentence:

As she emerged unannounced from her hiding place beneath the kitchen sink, thereby surprising the green three-tailed alien who had paused to sample her mustard casserole, **Janice**, choosing transformation rather than annihilation, **became an iguana** through the power of her secret weapon, the vinyl hairbrush, which had been a family heirloom for generations.

# Sentence Structure Help for Greek Students

## Why This Matters in Greek

**English uses word order** to indicate how words function in a sentence, but **Greek is different**. Because Greek is an “inflected” language, your primary clue to a word’s function in a sentence will be **changes in the form of the word** itself. There are some other signals that you must be aware of – the presence or absence of the definite article, context, and when all else fails, word order – but by far the most important is the **form** of the words. That means the author can move the subject around and you should still be able to find it.

Things will get a little more complicated when we begin to consider all the descriptive phrases, clauses, modifiers, verbal forms, etc. that one encounters in Greek, but here’s how you can identify the basic sentence structure

### 1. Subjects (Nominative Case)

Greek has a case (an inflectional form) that is used to express the Subject of any sentence. That case is called the **Nominative Case**. Most nouns in your vocabulary lists through chapter 3 use **—ς** (final sigma) as their Nominative Case ending.

		Subject	Verb	
Transitive Verb	▶	ὁ ἄνθρωπος	γεωργεῖ	τὸν κλῆρον. (DO)
Intransitive Verb	]	ὁ δοῦλος	σπεύδει.	
Linking Verb	=	ὁ κλῆρος	ἐστίν	μακρός. (C)

One other clue to identifying the subject of the sentence is the presence of the Definite Article (ὁ, ἡ, τὸ). In English, our Definite Article is the word “the.” Greek, however, has more uses for the Definite Article than English does, so you can’t always just translate the Definite Article as the word “the.” Sometimes its function is to **point out the subject**. It is also used sometimes with the same sense as our possessive (his, her, its). If you have more than one noun in the nominative case in your sentence, check to see if the Definite Article is being used to tell you which one is the subject.

### 2. Complements (Nominative Case)

Greek has one additional use for the **Nominative Case**: it is used for the Complement following a Linking Verb. It makes sense that the Complement should be in the same case as the Subject, because both words refer to the same thing.

		Subject	Verb	
Transitive Verb	▶	ὁ ἄνθρωπος	γεωργεῖ	τὸν κλῆρον. (DO)
Intransitive Verb	]	ὁ δοῦλος	σπεύδει.	
Linking Verb	=	ὁ κλῆρος	ἐστίν	μακρός. (C)



## Sentence Structure Help for Greek Students

### 3. Direct Objects (Accusative Case)

Greek has a case (an inflectional form) that is normally used to express the Direct Object of any sentence. (There are some exceptions that will come up later in your study of Greek.) That case is called the **Accusative Case**. Most nouns in your vocabulary lists through chapter 3 use **-ν** (final nu) as their Accusative Case ending.

	Subject	Verb	
Transitive Verb ►	ὁ ἄνθρωπος	γεωργεῖ	τὸν κλῆρον. (DO)
Intransitive Verb ]	ὁ δοῦλος	σπεύδει.	
Linking Verb =	ὁ κλῆρος	ἐστίν	μακρός. (C)

- A noun with an Accusative Case ending CANNOT be the Subject of the sentence
- A noun with a Nominative Case ending CANNOT be the Direct Object of the sentence.

### 4. Agreement

A word that modifies a Noun (an adjective or an article) MUST agree with it in Case, Gender and Number. (Thus far we haven't really encountered different genders or numbers, but we have had 2 cases.) So if the Noun is Accusative, any adjective or article that modifies it must be in the Accusative, as well. Examples:

(Acc) (Nom)  
τὸν ἄνθρωπος  
(Nom) (Nom)  
ὁ ἄνθρωπος

✗ WRONG: mixed cases

✓ CORRECT

(Nom) (Acc) (Nom)  
ὁ μικρόν κλῆρος  
(Nom) (Nom) (Nom)  
ὁ μικρός κλῆρος

✗ WRONG: mixed cases

✓ CORRECT

(Nom) (Acc) (Acc)  
ὁ ἰσχυρόν δοῦλον  
(Acc) (Acc) (Acc)  
τὸν ἰσχυρόν δοῦλον

✗ WRONG: mixed cases

✓ CORRECT

### 5. Other Uses of the Cases

- As we encounter the other cases, you'll learn that each case conveys a specific meaning (Subject/Complement, possession/agency, indirect Object, Direct Object, etc.). In English, we use other means to convey these ideas.
- Also be aware that prepositions "govern" (require) specific cases: εἰς requires a noun in the Accusative case, whereas πρὸς can take nouns in the Genitive, Dative, or Accusative, depending on the desired meaning.