

Sentence structure: Subject – Verb – Object (SVO)

Structuring sentences effectively is a key feature of successful academic writing. If a sentence is easy to read, the meaning of your writing – the point you are trying to make or your argument – will be much clearer. In addition, structuring sentences properly will allow you to write more precisely.

Structuring sentences effectively will give your writing greater clarity and precision.

Writing clearly and precisely is vital if you are to get the highest marks for your work. Academic work is in part assessed on its ability to communicate ideas, information and interpretations in a lucid (i.e. clear) and mature (i.e. confident) way.

In this guide, we are going to look at a basic arrangement of words in a sentence: SVO. If you have this word order in mind when writing, it will help you to communicate your ideas more easily. What follows will therefore be particularly useful if you find academic writing more challenging. You might find it useful to use this guide with the related one on 'Sentences, clauses and phrases'.

What is SVO?

SVO refers to one of the most commonly used word orders in the English language: subject, verb, object. Before looking at an example, let's consider what these elements mean:

Subject

That which performs the action of the sentence.

Verb

The action of the sentence.

Object

That which is acted upon by the subject.

For example, the following sentence has been structured using SVO:

Edwin Chadwick strongly supported the cause of poor people in the nineteenth century.

Here, the elements of the sentence structure are as follows:

Subject

Edwin Chadwick

Verb

supported

Object

the cause of poor people.

'Strongly' is an adverb, qualifying the verb ('supported'), while 'in the nineteenth century' is a prepositional phrase which is also functioning as an adverb.

Here's another example:

It has been argued that social media forms an essential element of an effective marketing campaign (Smith, 2018).

Subject

It

Verb

has been argued

The verb is followed by 'that'. In sentences like this one, 'that' acts as a conjunction, introducing a subordinate clause (see our guide, 'Sentences, clauses and phrases'). This clause consists of everything that comes after 'that'.

This sort of sentence, where you are introducing an idea through a subordinate clause, is quite common in academic writing. 'It' is often used as the subject – or you could be talking about 'The research' or 'A recent study' – while 'argued' is frequently chosen as the verb. Other popular verbs include 'suggested', 'proposed' or 'reasoned'.

Why use it to structure your sentences?

The advantage of using SVO in academic writing is that it will draw the attention of the reader (i.e. your tutor) to the subject of the sentence. This tends to make the meaning of the sentence clearer, in the same way that the use of the active voice does (see our guide on 'Using the active and passive voices'). This, in turn, will ensure that your writing is both clear and precise.

For more information about clauses and phrases, have a look at one of the writing resources we recommend at <http://study.cardiffmet.ac.uk>.