Word Order in Sentences

Sentences in English have a fixed word order: the subject is given first followed by the verb then sometimes an object and an adverbial. Together, the verb, object, and adverbial are also called the “predicate” of the sentence.

Formula for the fixed word order: Subject + Verb + Object + Adverbial

Example: The pianist performed two pieces by Beethoven flawlessly.

The subject tells what or who the sentence is about.

The verb is the action or a state of being (Some verbs such as “is” for instance, do not convey action but existence).

The object receives the action of the verb.

The adverbial is any structure, regardless of its form, that modifies the verb.

Variations of Subject + Verb + Object + Adverbial word order:

Example a sentence with a subject, verb, object, and adverbial:

Maria hit the ball effortlessly.

Some sentences, however, do not have adverbials:

Maria hit the ball.

Not all sentences have objects either:

The baby cried.

Additionally, some sentences without objects might still have adverbials:

The baby cried all night.

For an in depth discussion of English Word Order and the Positions of Adjectives and Adverbs please visit the ELL Resource Library in the KU Writing Center.