

How to figure out a sentence

1. Insert missing clause markers
 - *that* (in *that*-clause complements)
 - *which/who/that* (non-subject relatives)
 - *which/who/that is/are/was...* (*Whiz*-deletion)
 - *for* (and other prepositions)
 - *to* (with infinitives)
2. Identify and discard auxiliary verbs
(Modals, *be*, *have*, get, *do*; these are part of VP and don't form clauses)
3. Count the remaining verbs. This is the number of clauses.
Each verb determines a clause, and each clause – except the main clause – is related to some other clause in the sentence; figuring out the relations of a subordinate clause is understanding that clause. Figuring out **all** the clauses is understanding the sentence.
4. Identify the type of each clause:
 - Main clause : always tensed
(**1** main clause per sentence, unless compounded with *and* or *or*)
 - Adverb subordinate clauses: tensed **or** untensed
 - tensed clauses marked with a subordinating conjunction
 - untensed (infinitives, participles) usually without marker
 - may modify V, VP, or S
 - no special location in S (though the end is preferred for heavy clauses)
 - Adjective subordinate clauses : modify nouns; mostly tensed, occasional infinitive.
Four types (all special-purpose, except restrictive relatives):
 - **Restrictive** relative clause (by far the most common kind)
The man (whom/who/that) we saw told the woman who/that told us.
 - **Non-restrictive** relative clause (aka *parenthetical* clauses)
The President, whose popularity is slipping, didn't say much.
 - **Relative infinitives** (usually a missing should in meaning)
The man to see is Harry. (Obj; *the man that you should see*)
The man to do it is Harry. (Subj; *the man that should do it*)
 - **Noun complements** (modifies nouns like *story* with clausal content)
The story that the Attorney General will resign is still only a rumor.
 - Noun clauses: Complements; function as nouns, usually Subject or Object.
Four types (which type gets used depends in each case on the matrix predicate):
 - Infinitive clause (**non**-finite, many varieties, heavy-duty syntax)
 - Gerund clause (**non**-finite, often confused with other -ing words)
 - That-clauses (finite, essentially any sentence with *that* in front; recursive)
 - Embedded questions (mostly finite, w/o S/V inversion; some infinitives)
5. Identify the subject (and object, if any) of every clause.
(Note which subjects are indefinite, which are actually present in the clause, which are absent and are to be inferred, and what inference is necessary.)
6. Identify any syntactic rules constructions, or alternations (like Passive, Extraposition, Dative Movement, Question Formation, etc) and unwind them.