



The subject complement is the noun, pronoun, or adjective that is linked into an equation with the subject by a linking verb.

Subject complement: A subject complement is a noun, subject pronoun, indefinite pronoun, or adjective that complements the subject; it is **linked to the subject by a linking verb**. The subject complement, in a sense, renames the subject. *Shelley was Byron's **friend***. Notice that the subject complement does precisely what its name implies; it complements (completes) the subject because it makes our knowledge of the subject more complete than it would otherwise have been. Subject pronouns can be subject complements because a subject is a subject.

Remember that the main linking verb is *to be*, but there are other tricky linking verbs that look like action verbs at first: *It **smells** acrid. The grapefruit **tastes** sweet. He **seems** melancholy.*

When the subject complement is a noun or pronoun, we call it a **predicate nominative**; when the subject complement is an adjective, we call it a **predicate adjective**. In this text, however, we will focus on the main term **subject complement** to reinforce the use of subject pronouns.

- subject complement noun:** The painting is a **landscape**.
- subject complement pronouns:** The soloists in the song are **he** and **I**.
- subject complement pronoun:** It is **something** in the trees.
- subject complement adjective:** I am **excited** about the celebration.



An Equation

An equation: We touched on the equation principle in the section about verbs, but let us now return to it. The key to understanding subject complements is to see a subject complement as part of an equation, with the linking verb as the equals sign. **The subject complement equals the subject.** The subject complement *is* the subject re-expressed. **Linking verbs link**, so the left term is the same as—is equal to—the right term.

A	=	B
subject	linking verb	subject complement
Roosevelt	was	the President.
I	am	she.
Freedom	is	invaluable.
Someone	felt	benevolent.
Everything	smelled	musty.

This logic seems obvious when you first examine it, but it can be tricky if you do not focus on the equation. Which of the sentences below does not contain a subject complement?

The sheets smelled **fresh**.

The painter is my old **friend**.

We suddenly became **aware** of the situation.

Frederick has a baby **rabbit**.

Eleanor looks more **enthusiastic** now.

The fourth sentence is the only one that does not have a subject complement. The sentence does not mean that Frederick *is* a rabbit. It is not an equation. The verb *has* is not a linking verb, even though it is short and ends in *s*. *Has* does not link. *Frederick* is not linked to *rabbit*; they are not the same thing. If you do not mean that Frederick **IS** a rabbit, then *rabbit* is not a subject complement. The other four sentences have linking verbs and subject complements.



Object complement: There is another element that we should note because it is sometimes mistaken for one of the main parts of sentence: the **object complement**. An object complement is a noun, object pronoun, or adjective that completes the meaning of the direct object. *She called him **father**. He painted the room **white**.*

The Boolean (if, then) logic of sentence analysis: When you analyze the parts of a clause, begin by looking for a one-two thought: a subject/predicate set. Find the subject and its verb. Is the verb action or linking? *If* the verb is an action verb, *then* there might be a direct object. (You need not look for a subject complement because subject complements go only with linking verbs.) *If* there is a direct object receiving the verb's action, *then* look between the direct object and the action verb for an indirect object. *If* the verb is a linking verb, *then* there might be a subject complement. (You need not look for a direct object because direct objects go only with action verbs.) Once you have completed analyzing the clause, proceed to the next clause, and repeat the process. Notice that everything hinges on whether the verb is action or linking.

MCT sentence models: Rather than use traditional diagrams, we can model sentences this way, emphasizing both the simplicity of sentence structure and the dichotomy in a sentence between the subject and the predicate.

Example: **Archimedes carefully inscribed a hexagon.**

