## Getting Started





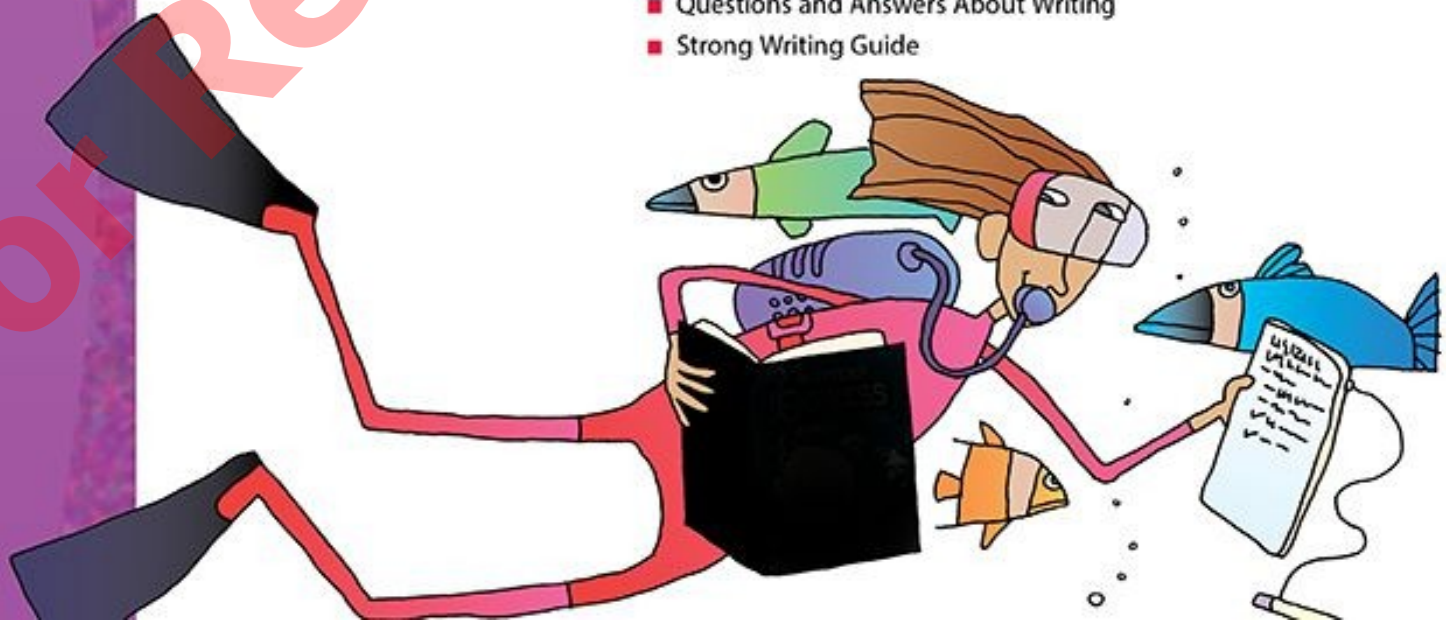
# A Basic Writing Guide

Your *Writers Express* handbook gives lots of good advice about writing. But there is only one way to learn how to write, and that is to do it—every day and everywhere you can. Your handbook gives you suggestions to get started, tips to keep going, and ideas for making your writing as good as it can be. Keep your handbook handy whenever you are writing.

This chapter has questions and answers about writing. The questions are the ones that many writers ask. The answers will help you find your way through the writing process from start to finish.

### What's Ahead

- Questions and Answers About Writing
- Strong Writing Guide



For Review Only

# Common Text Structures

There is not one "official" list of text structures. There are, however, a few that are very common. Here are the ones used most often.

## Sequence: Chronological Order

The chronological structure is organized from one point in time to another.

**Cue/Signal Words:** *not long after, first, then, next, finally, following, during, at last, until, since, when, after, before, as, now.* (Dates and times are also used.)

First . . . _____

Then . . . _____

Next . . . _____

After . . . _____

At last . . . _____

Sometimes at the end of a rainstorm, you will see a rainbow. First the sun appears, and then its white light shines through the raindrops. When this happens, the water breaks apart, or refracts, and that's when you see the colors of the light spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. This is what we call a rainbow.

## Sequence: Process

The process structure is organized in a step-by-step sequence.

**Cue/Signal Words:** *before, after, next, when, as, until, first, following, then, at the same time, finally, during, at last*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

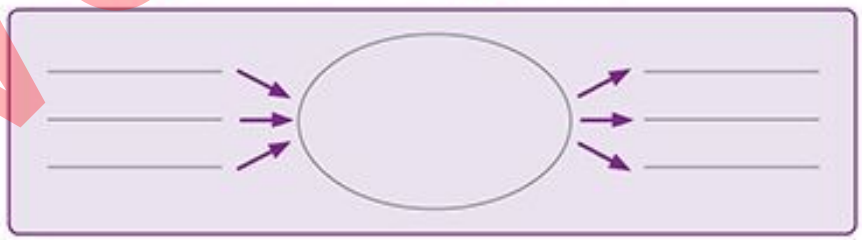
A car wheel is just a simple machine. First, an axle is connected to a pair of wheels. Then the car engine applies force to the axle. This causes the axle to rotate. As the axle rotates, it turns the wheels.

## Cause and Effect

In this text structure, why something happens is the **cause**. What happens because of the cause is the **effect**.

**Cue/Signal Words:** *because, since, therefore, consequently, as a result, so that, accordingly, if . . . then, one reason for, for this reason*

Our planet is pretty restless! Beneath the ground is a zone of very hot liquid called magma. Magma moves constantly, and this movement pushes and pulls the plates that our ground rests on. As a result, we experience earthquakes and volcanoes.



## Problem/Solution

This text structure presents a problem and shows how it can be (or has been) solved.

**Cue/Signal Words:** solve, *problem, solution, effect, because, therefore, for this reason, consequently*

Problem:

Causes of the Problem
- 
- 
- 

Possible Solutions
- 
- 
- 

Dr. Jan Grootenhuis is a wildlife veterinarian based in Kenya. He has been looking for practical solutions to the problem of Africa's vanishing wildlife. Recently, he has been working with the Maasai, an indigenous tribe. Slowly, the tribe has been converting some of its valuable grazing land into wildlife conservation areas.

For Review Only

# Writing to an Explanatory Prompt

Responding to a prompt is different from other writing assignments because you don't have a lot of time to complete your work. So you have to know what you're doing and get right to work. To get started, you need to study the prompt.

## Prewriting Analyzing the Prompt

A prompt gives you the basic directions for your writing. Most prompts—but not all—will tell you what to write about, who your reader will be, and what the overall goal or purpose is. Read the prompt very carefully to identify the parts of your writing task. You can also use the PAST questions listed below to identify these parts:

**P**urpose: *Why am I writing?* What is my goal? When you respond to an explanatory prompt, your goal is to explain or inform. Look for clues or key words (*compare, define, demonstrate*). These words can help you know how to develop your writing.

**A**udience: *Who will be reading my writing?* Look closely at the prompt to see who the reader will be (parent, classmate, principal). If the prompt doesn't say, the audience is probably the tester or your teacher.

**S**ubject: *What am I supposed to write about?* The prompt will name a general subject, but you will need to identify a specific topic related to the subject.

**T**ype: *What type or form of writing should you create (letter, essay, blog post)?* Make sure to organize your writing according to the form.



## Sample Explanatory Prompt

*In an essay, explain to new students how certain things are done at your school (fire drills, recess, clubs or sports teams, the lunchroom, the library). Choose three things you think any new student should know and explain how each one works.*

**Purpose:** To explain
**Audience:** New students
**Subject:** Three things at school
**Type:** Essay

## Sample Explanatory Response

**Beginning**
The first paragraph introduces the topic and focus (underlined).

I am a student at Mitchell School, and I have been attending it since kindergarten. If you are a new student at our school, you will have a lot to learn. You will catch on to most things within a week or two, but there are three things you really need to know about our school.

**Middle**
Each middle paragraph explains a new thing every new student should know.

First of all, you should know about recess because that's one of the great things about our school. Depending upon the weather, you will have two or three choices. You can choose to go to the library to look for books, but you have to stay there until recess is over. You can also go to the small gym where Mr. Phelps will have two or three activities to choose from. And, if the weather is good, you can go outside and use the playground equipment or play games with classmates.

Another thing you should know right away is how to manage the lunchroom. If you bring your

For Review Only

## Sample Persuasive Essay

It is Marah Mehta's opinion that manatees need to be saved. She supports her opinion with valuable information about the problem.

### Help Save Our Manatees

**Beginning**
The writer introduces her topic and states her opinion (underlined).

Manatees are giant marine mammals that live in the rivers that flow into the ocean. There are only about 2,000 of these lovable animals still around. The manatees are in danger and need to be saved.

**Middle**
The middle paragraphs tell why manatees are important, why they are in decline, and what we can do to help.

Manatees are important to both boaters and fishers. They help clear rivers by eating water plants. A 1,000 pound manatee can eat 150 pounds of river-clogging weeds in one day! They also provide recreation to millions of people who just enjoy watching them in Florida's coastal waterways.

Unfortunately, people are the cause of more than two-thirds of all manatee deaths. The most common cause is when boats accidentally hit them. Manatees also die from swallowing fishhooks, old fishing line, and garbage that litters the waterways.

People are part of the problem, and people can be part of the solution, too. People can start by not littering the waterways. They can also make sure none of their fishing gear ends up in the water. They can obey all boating rules, especially in manatee areas. And, finally, people can send emails to lawmakers asking for their help to save manatees.

**Ending**
The writer restates her opinion.

If we all do our part, we can save the manatees, and these rare and beautiful animals will be around for many years to come. It's worth the effort.



# Writing a Persuasive Essay

The sample essay about saving the manatees is a good model of persuasive writing. Here are writing guidelines for you to follow as you create your own essay.

## Prewriting Planning Your Essay

**Choose a Topic** ■ Select a topic that you feel strongly about. It is much easier to develop a strong opinion when you write about something that you really believe in.

**Topic:** Focus on a specific topic, one that's not too general. For example, it would be easier to write about a topic like "Clean up Rainbow Beach" than it would be to write about "Clean up our oceans."

**Audience:** Think about your audience. Choose a topic that will be important to them. For example, "Save our swimming pool" might be more interesting to your classmates than "Save our town hall."

**Voice:** When writing a persuasive essay, be sure that you sound sincere and knowledgeable. You need to assure your reader that you know what you're talking about and that you really do care.

**Think of an Argument** ■ Whatever your topic is, it should have two sides. There is little point arguing for something everyone already agrees with.

The same topic for an explanatory (informative) essay could be changed into a persuasive essay.

| Explanatory Essay | | Persuasive Essay |
|---|---|---|
| Mining in the ocean | → | We shouldn't mine the ocean |
| Animals of coastal waterways | → | Save the manatees |
| Wind energy | → | Use wind, not oil |

For Review Only

# Finding Information

Good research skills help you find the best information. Effective searching starts with knowing what to look for, where to search, and how to find it.

## Knowing What to Look For

The best research starts with the best questions. You can use the *5 W's and H* to focus your research.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Who** do I want to learn about? | or | **Who** is an expert on my subject? |
| **What** do I know about this? | and | **What** do I want to know? |
| **When** did this happen? | or | **When** was it written about? |
| **Where** did this happen? | or | **Where** should I start my search? |
| **Why** did it happen? | or | **Why** do people study it? |
| **How** did it happen? | or | **How** does it work? |

**Example:** I want to know *how* author Norman Bridwell *(who)* invented Clifford the Big Red Dog *(what)*.

## Knowing Where to Search

Finding answers means looking in the best places.

- **Start with search tools:** A search tool helps you find information. (On the next page, you'll learn tips for using search tools.)
- **Check out Web sites:** Most information on the Internet appears in Web sites. Sites are built out of pages—with text, pictures, videos, audios, and other media.
- **Consider ebooks:** Many books are available in digital form. They are searchable to help you find what you need.
- **Search library collections:** Use computer catalogs to find resources available through your library.
- **Ask experts:** At trusted Web sites, you can ask questions of experts. Get permission from your parent or guardian first. Do not post personal information!



## Knowing How to Search

Search tools use *keywords* to find information about your topic. You can brainstorm keywords for your search. Write your topic in the middle of a piece of paper. Then list related words around it.


### Using Keywords

Once you have brainstormed keywords, experiment with them in different groups to find the information you need.

- Searching for the word *kingfisher* by itself brings results for the bird, the city of Kingfisher in Oklahoma, an airline, and more.
- Searching for the words *kingfisher* and *food* brings up the bird and what it eats, but also restaurants named after it.
- Adding a minus sign, *–restaurant*, removes those businesses.
- Using a plus sign focuses on a specific word. Searching for *kingfisher +nest* focuses on nests made by kingfisher birds.
- Quotation marks mean exact words: *"kingfisher habitat"* will find those two words in that order.
- Some search tools have "advanced options" to help you fine-tune your search. ***Example:*** A library catalog may have a form with a space for subject words, another for title, another for author, and another for publisher.


Check your search tool's screen or "Help" file to see if it has any special instructions or advanced search options.

For Review Only

## Avoiding Research Pitfalls

"The trouble with Internet quotations is that many of them are fake."
—Abraham Lincoln

Avoid the following research pitfalls, which can lead you in the wrong directions.

- **Don't rely on Wikipedia.** It makes your research seem lazy. Also, not everything on that site is trustworthy. Remember, good research compares more than one source.
- **Avoid clicking on advertisements and "sponsored" results.** Businesses pay to list those first. Their information may not be what you need. If you search for "Lincoln," you may see a car ad:


- **Don't rely on just the first results that come up.** What you need may be several pages deep. One secret for effective searching is to keep digging until you find the best sources.
- **Don't use the same search terms over and over.** Use your first results to fine-tune your search terms. What you find early on can help focus your search.


Not every source is for all ages. Whether searching online, in a library catalog, or even in an electronic encyclopedia, don't click on anything you're not sure of. Ask an adult for help.



# Staying Safe Online

Imagine living in a glass house. You could see everything outside, but everything and everyone outside could see you, too. The online world is like a glass house. It can show you lots of information, but it can also share secrets. Learn to protect yourself.

This chapter focuses on ways that you can keep yourself safe online. You'll learn about safety habits and rules as well as questionable things to watch for. When in doubt, check with a trusted adult before doing anything online.

### What's Ahead

- Develop Safe Habits
- Follow Safety Rules
- Understand Dangers

For Review Only

# Before Reading

When you read nonfiction, you should always preview the text first. Previewing gives you a general idea of what an article or a book is about. It gets your mind ready for the new information you'll be learning.

## Tips for Previewing

### 1 Review the basic parts of the text.

That means looking at the beginning, middle, and ending. The beginning introduces the topic; the middle gives more information about it; and the ending repeats or summarizes the main idea about the topic.

### 2 Predict what the text is about.

To make an accurate prediction, you need to look at the title and first paragraph. You should also look at the headings, graphs, illustrations, and other cues. (See the sample cue chart below for the article starting on page 326.) Also look over any questions at the end of each chapter.

| Cue | Prediction |
|---|---|
| Title | This article is about Superman. Cool! |
| First paragraph | It talks about comic book superheroes. |
| Headings | • This part must be about how Superman got started.<br>• This part maybe talks about the first Superman comic book.<br>• Here I'll find out why Superman became so popular. |
| Highlighted/ repeated words | The article talks a lot about "comic books" and "superheroes." |
| Last paragraph | The main point is that Superman was and still is a superhero! |

### 3 Brainstorm what you already know about the topic.

Make a list, freewrite, or cluster your ideas about the topic.

Superman helps people. He is strong and brave. Everyone has heard of this guy. His clothes stand out: a blue and red cape with a huge "S" on front. And Superman is an alien from Krypton! He's a two-in-one character: Superman, the superhero; and Clark Kent, the reporter.

# During Reading

As you read your text, read with a purpose. Find the most important information, take notes, and ask, "Do I understand this?"

## Tips for Reading

### 1 Pick out the key sentences in each paragraph.

This sentence gives the topic of the paragraph: Superman's secret identity.

Like other heroes of the period, Superman came with a secret identity. When not leaping over tall buildings, Superman is a timid newspaper reporter named Clark Kent. Clark's character was drawn from the author's own experiences. "The concept came to me that Superman could have a dual identity." He would be a superhero in one identity. But in the other, he would "be meek and mild as I was, and wear glasses, the way I do."

For Review Only

## Reading Product Labels

As you know, many of the food products you buy have a special label listing the "Nutrition Facts" for a serving of their product. If you read the labels closely, you can pick up important information that can help you purchase the product that's right for you.

Look at the "Nutrition Facts" label. Can you find an answer to each of the following questions?

1. How many calories are in each serving?
2. How much fat does each serving contain?
3. What percentage of your daily need of calcium is included?
4. How much protein is contained in each serving?

**Nutrition Facts**

Serving Size 1 cup (110g)
Servings Per Container About 6

| Amount Per Serving | |
|---|---|
| **Calories** 250 | Calories from Fat 30 |
| | **% Daily Value*** |
| **Total Fat** 7g | **11%** |
| Saturated Fat 3g | **16%** |
| *Trans* Fat 0g | |
| **Cholesterol** 4mg | **2%** |
| **Sodium** 300mg | **13%** |
| **Total Carbohydrate** 30g | **10%** |
| Dietary Fiber 3g | **14%** |
| Sugars 2g | |
| **Protein** 5g | |
| Vitamin A | 7% |
| Vitamin C | 15% |
| Calcium | 20% |
| Iron | 32% |

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily value may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

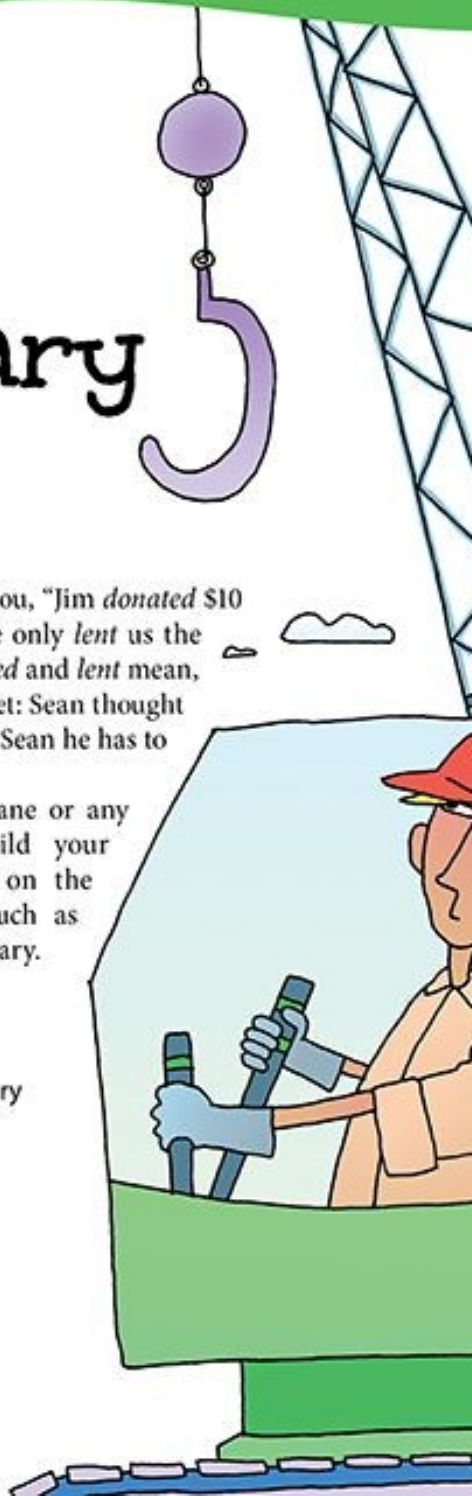
| | Calories: | 2,000 | 2,500 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Fat | Less than | 65g | 75g |
| Saturated Fat | Less than | 10g | 12g |
| Cholesterol | Less than | 1,500mg | 1,700mg |
| Total Carbohydrate | | 250mg | 300mg |
| Dietary Fiber | | 22mg | 31mg |

**Express Yourself** Be on the lookout for questionable graphics in everything you read or see on television or the Internet. Use the questions on the previous page as a helpful guide.

For Review Only



# Building Vocabulary Skills



Suppose your friend Sean says to you, "Jim *donated* $10 for our clubhouse, but now he says he only *lent* us the money!" If you don't know what *donated* and *lent* mean, you won't know why your friend is upset: Sean thought the money was a gift, but Jim is telling Sean he has to pay it back.

Unfortunately, you can't use a crane or any other machinery to help you build your vocabulary. Instead, you must rely on the strategies covered in this chapter, such as reading and keeping a personal dictionary.

### What's Ahead

- Strategies for Building Your Vocabulary
- Prefixes, Suffixes, Roots
- Using Vocabulary Words Correctly

# Strategies for Building Your Vocabulary

## 1 Read and check.

When you are reading and you come to a word you don't know, check the surrounding words (the *context*) to help figure out its meaning. Here are some ways to do this:

- Study the sentence containing the word, as well as the sentences that come **before and after it.**
- Search for **synonyms** (words with the same meaning).

  Because I plan to be an actor, Dad calls me a thespian.
  (A *thespian* is an "actor.")
- Search for **antonyms** (words with the opposite meaning).

  Dad says fishing is tedious, but I think it's exciting.
  (*Tedious* means "boring," the opposite of "exciting.")
- Search for **a definition** of the word.

  We saw yuccas, common desert plants, on our drive to the Grand Canyon. (*Yuccas* are "common desert plants.")
- Search for **familiar words in a series** with the new word.

  In the South, many houses have a veranda, porch, or patio.
  (A *veranda* is a large, open porch.)
- Watch for words that have **multiple meanings.**

  He charged me 50 cents for the candy bar.
  My mom charged the battery on my go-cart.
- Watch for **idioms** (words that have different uses from their dictionary meanings).

  "I'm cutting out." (This phrase is an idiom that means "leaving a place.")
- Watch for **figurative language** like similes and metaphors. (See pages 101–104.)



## 2 Use a dictionary.

You can always use a dictionary to find the meaning of new words. A dictionary can also help you with the following:

**Spelling** ■ If you don't know how to spell a word, try looking it up by how it sounds.

**Capital Letters** ■ A dictionary shows if a word needs to be capitalized.

**Syllable Division** ■ A dictionary shows where you can divide a word. Heavy black dots (•) divide a word into syllables. A hyphen (-) shows that the word is hyphenated.

**Accent Marks** ■ An accent mark (ˈ) shows which syllable should be stressed when you say a word.

**Pronunciation** ■ To remember a word and its meaning, it helps if you know how to say it. A dictionary spells each word phonetically (as it sounds).

**Parts of Speech** ■ A dictionary tells what part of speech (*noun, verb,* etc.) a word is. Some words can be used in more than one way.

**Word History** ■ Some words have stories about where they came from or how their meanings have changed through the years. This information appears inside brackets [ ].

**Synonyms and Antonyms** ■ Synonyms (words that have the same or similar meaning) are listed, and some words are used in sample sentences. Antonyms (words with opposite meanings) may be listed last.

**Meaning** ■ Some words have only one meaning, while other words have several meanings. You will have to choose the best one.


There may be a dictionary and a thesaurus on your computer. When you come to a word you don't know, finish the sentence first. Then, if you're using a computer, go back and check out the "tools" bar. If you're using an e-reader, simply touch the word, select it, and request a definition.

For Review Only

# Understanding Sentences

A sentence is made up of one or more words that express a complete thought. A sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point.


Find more information about sentences in "Writing Basic Sentences," pages 75–80, and in "Combining Sentences," pages 81–84.

## Parts of a Sentence

### Subject

A subject is the part of a sentence that does something.

**Marisha baked a chocolate cake.**

A subject can also be the word that is talked about.

**She is a marvelous cook.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Simple Subject** | A simple subject is the subject without the words that describe or modify it.<br>**Marisha's little sister likes to help.** |
| **Complete Subject** | The complete subject is the simple subject and all the words that describe it.<br>**Marisha's little sister likes to help.**<br>(*Marisha's little sister* is the complete subject.) |
| **Compound Subject** | A compound subject has two or more simple subjects.<br>**Marisha and her sister frosted the cake.** |



### Predicate

A predicate (verb) is the part of the sentence that says something about the subject.

**Marisha baked a cake for my birthday.**
(*Baked* tells what the subject did.)

| | |
|---|---|
| **Simple Predicate** | A simple predicate (verb) is the predicate without the words that modify or complete it.<br>**Marisha baked the cake yesterday.** |
| **Complete Predicate** | The complete predicate is the simple predicate with all the words that modify or complete it.<br>**Marisha baked the cake yesterday.**<br>(The complete predicate is *baked the cake yesterday.*) |
| **Compound Predicate** | A compound predicate has two or more simple predicates, or verbs.<br>**She decorated it and hid it in the cupboard.** |

### Modifier

A **modifier** is a word or a group of words that describes another word.

**My family planned a surprise party.**
(*My* modifies *family*; *a* and *surprise* modify *party.*)

**They hid behind the door and waited quietly.**
(*Behind the door* modifies *hid*; *quietly* modifies *waited.*)

## Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb of a sentence must "agree" with one another. If you use a singular subject, use a singular verb. If you use a plural subject, use a plural verb. (See page 79.)

**Anthony helps Miss Park.**
(The singular subject *Anthony* agrees with the singular verb *helps.*)

**The boys help Miss Park.**
(The plural subject *boys* agrees with the plural verb *help.*)

For Review Only