Sentences by Modality

Knowing the words is not the same as knowing how they combine.

Language structure is the architecture of meaning: syntax, morphology, and the way words lock together. It is what tells you **who did what to whom**. Two sentences can share every word and mean opposite things.

Reading

Structure, not just the words, tells a reader who did what to whom: “the dog bit the man” and “the man bit the dog” share every word and mean opposite things. When sentences grow long or nest clause inside clause, a reader can know every word and still lose the thread, because holding the structure together taxes working memory.

Writing

A writer arranges structure to steer meaning, using order, subordination, and rhythm to mark what matters and how ideas relate; the same words in a different frame make a different point. Pile up clauses or bury the subject, and the reader has to work to reassemble the sentence; keep the structure clean, and the meaning arrives without friction.

Listening

A listener parses grammar on the fly, using word order, inflections, and the rise and fall of the voice to sort a rushing stream of sound into who did what. There is no rereading a sentence you hear, so tangled or heavily nested structures overload working memory fast, and the words pile up before their meaning comes clear.

Speaking

A speaker has to build sentences a listener can parse as they arrive, which is why talk leans on simpler, more linear structures than writing can afford. Mark the structure well, with order, pauses, and intonation, and a listener follows effortlessly; let it break, and fluent words in a broken frame still leave them untangling who did what.

Structure is what turns a heap of words into a sentence that means.

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