

## 23. WHAT IS A PREDICATE?

A sentence can always be divided into two parts: the subject and the predicate (the way to identify subjects is discussed in detail in **What is a Subject?**, p. 70). To put it simply, a predicate is everything in a sentence except the subject; it defines or describes the subject.

A **predicate** can be just one word, a verb for instance, or a group of words containing it. The core of the entire predicate is called the **main predicate** (textbooks often use the terms “predicate” when referring to the “main predicate”). In the examples to follow, the predicate is in *italics* and the main predicate in ***bold italics***.

Mary *walked*.  
 subject predicate → main predicate

Mary *walked to school yesterday morning*.  
 subject main predicate

predicate

Although in many languages (including English) verbs are the only class of words that can be a main predicate, in other languages (including Japanese) other classes of words can also play that role. In the grammar of such languages, the term “predicate” is a convenient cover term that encompasses all the classes of words that “behave like verbs.”

To establish the predicate of a sentence, first find the subject by asking *who* or *what* before the verb. Note that a subject can be more than one word; i.e., a noun and its modifier. Once you have identified the subject, you will know that the rest of the sentence is the predicate.

Those people *play tennis two hours every day in the park*.  
 subject predicate

Subject: Who plays tennis? → those people

(*People* is a noun and *those* is its modifier.)

Predicate: play tennis two hours every day in the park

Main predicate: play

Sometimes there are two or more subjects and two or more predicates in a sentence. In order to identify them you have to group words together by meaning. Each unit of a subject + predicate is called a **clause** (see **What are Sentences and Clauses?**, p. 89).



