BASIC GRAMMAR: SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A complete sentence MUST contain both a subject (un sujet) and a verb (un verbe). The most basic sentence structure is S V (Subject Verb):

Je parle.
Tu danses.
Philippe voyage.
Le chien mange.
Le professeur écoute.
Nous dormons.
Mes amis écrivent.

A. SUBJECTS (un sujet)

A subject is a NOUN (un nom or un substantif) or a PRONOUN (un pronom)

1. NOUNS can be PROPER NOUNS (un nom propre) (capitalized names of people, places or things):

   Victor Hugo  Mme Dupont  Paris  la Maison blanche

2. Other nouns are COMMON NOUNS (un nom commun):

   le professeur  la ville  les croissants  la maison

   COMMON NOUNS are usually accompanied by an ARTICLE (un article) or an ALTERNATIVE (See information on ARTICLES here)

   mon professeur  cette chaise  trois croissants
   quelle voiture?

3. A PRONOUN is a SUBSTITUTION for a NOUN. Use the SUBJECT PRONOUNS (je, tu, il, elle, on, nous, vous, ils, elles) in the subject position.

   Watch for common confusions in agreement:

   X et moi > nous  X et toi> vous
   toi et moi> nous  X et Y > ils/elles
   la famille> elle  une personne> elle
B. VERBS. Verbs express actions (parler, dormir, manger) or states (être).

1. VERBS that accompany nouns are CONJUGATED (conjugué). That is, they change in both PERSON and NUMBER to correspond with their subject.
   - Je finis.
   - Nous finissons.
   - Elles finissent

Most modern English verbs have only two conjugated forms: one form for the "he/she/it" conjugation, and another form for all the rest:

- I eat we eat
- you eat you eat
- he/she eats they eat

The closest thing we have in English to a verb conjugated the way French verbs are is the verb "to be," at least in the first-person forms, which are all different:

- I am we are
- you are you are
- he/she is they are

2. The INFINITIVE (un infinitif) form of the verb (the non-conjugated, base form: parler, finir, être, avoir, vendre...) is used:
   a. as a subject:
      - Dormir est nécessaire. (“Sleeping is necessary”/ “It is necessary to sleep”)
      - Finir est impossible.
   b. as a direct object of another verb (with no prepositions between):
      - Je veux dormir.
      - Tu peux danser.
      - Nous n’aimons pas regarder la télévision.
   c. following a preposition:
      - Je viens d’arriver.
      - Il agit sans réfléchir.
      - Il est important de regarder le texte.
      - En mangeant, on grossit!
C. **OBJECTS.** Sentences may also contain nouns as **OBJECTS** (*un objet*). There are three types of objects:

- **DIRECT OBJECTS** (*un objet direct*)
- **INDIRECT OBJECTS** (*un objet indirect*)
- **OBJECTS OF A PREPOSITION** (*un objet d’une préposition*)

1. **A DIRECT OBJECT** (*un objet direct*) is a noun that follows a verb **WITHOUT A PREPOSITION**:

   - Je parle français.
   - Tu danses le tango.
   - Nous regardons Georges.
   - Le chien mange sa nourriture.
   - Le professeur écoute les étudiants.

   The DIRECT OBJECT receives the action of the verb **DIRECTLY**. Several verbs take **INDIRECT** objects in English and **DIRECT** objects in French. The French version is more logical here. (Why? Because there is nothing between your eyes and the TV when you are watching it, for example).

   - Nous regardons la télé. = We are looking at the TV. (watching)
   - Je cherche mon livre. = I am looking **for** my book.
   - J’écoute la radio. = I listen **to** the radio.
   - Tu attends le bus = You wait **for** the bus.

2. **An INDIRECT OBJECT** (*un objet indirect*) receives the action of the verb **INDIRECTLY**. There is "something" between our senses and the object. In French, the indirect object is signaled by the preposition "à" + person/animal. ("à" plus a non-person/animal is considered the object of a preposition, see below)

   - Je parle à Paul. (I'm speaking something--words, French--to Paul)
   - Nous écrivons **au** professeur. (We are writing something—a postcard, a letter, a check—to the professor)
   - Je donne une chaussure **à** mon chien.

3. **An OBJECT OF A PREPOSITION** (*un objet d’une préposition*) follows the verb, like the direct and indirect objects, and is preceded by **ANY PREPOSITION OTHER THAN “à”** for a person/animal, and any **préposition** for a non-person.

   - J’habite avec Claude.
   - Nous parlons des vacances. (de + les =des)
   - Je veux sortir avec mes amis.

4. **Multiple objects** in a sentence usually go in the following order:

   **OBJET DIRECT**     **OBJET INDIRECT**     **OBJET D’UNE PRÉPOSITION**

   - J’ai posé une question **au** professeur.
   - Tu donnes un cadeau **à** ta mère. ("You give your mother a gift.")