EXPLETIVES

a.k.a. the NULL SUBJECT, the DUMMY SUBJECT, or the EXISTENTIAL SUBJECT

The grammatical structure called an expletive is more often described by its function—the null subject, the dummy subject, or the existential subject—because it takes the part of subject in a sentence, referring to a real subject used later in the sentence.

It is a rhetorical device that is not really a part of speech because it carries no meaning itself.

The expletives *there* and *it* are used with a form of the verb *be* to postpone the subject until after the verb; however, avoiding the expletive is possible and usually preferable since revision will eliminate verbosity and passive diction.

Additionally, few people use the expletive on purpose so the sentence sometimes will have no exact subject at all! Revising the expletive out in this case actually fixes a grammatical error too, since IT would have no antecedent.

BEFORE: *It is* having the right skills that matters. [DELAYED SUBJECT—*having the right skills*]
AFTER: Having the right skills matters. [3 FEWER WORDS, NO PASSIVE DICTION, NO PRONOUN ERROR]

BEFORE: *It is* sad that no one listens to the teacher. [NO SUBJECT—OR ANTECEDENT-- AT ALL!]
AFTER: Sadly, no one listens to the teacher. [3 FEWER WORDS, NO PASSIVE DICTION, NO PRONOUN ERROR]

BEFORE: *There* were eighty people at the meeting last night. [DELAYED SUBJECT—*eighty people*]
AFTER: Eighty people attended the meeting last night. [2 FEWER WORDS, NO PASSIVE DICTION]

      TRY IT! Can you revise the expletive out of these sentences? *(pun <u>definitely</u> intended!)*

1.   It is strange how you look at him.
2.   It is the way you never blink that freaks everyone out.

3.   It is my advice that you should find a new way to let him know you like him.

4.   There are so many ways you can try to get his attention.

5.   It is possible to get him to see you without scaring him.

6.   It is widely known that he loves his English class.

7.   He also thinks it is fun to write essays.

8.   Maybe it would be a good idea to write an essay about him and read it to your class?

9.   Of course, maybe it would backfire and you'd look even weirder.

10.   It might be best just to back off for a while and think about whether it is really a good idea to go

after a boy who loves to write essays anyway.

PHRASAL VERBS & CLICHÉS

a.k.a idiomatic expressions or two-part verbs

A phrasal verb is a group of words that works together grammatically as one action (one verb).

English contains hundreds of these verbs so avoiding them altogether is unnatural and difficult.

However, many of these verbs are idiomatic, casual, even clichéd.

> BEFORE: The crowd needs to cut it out with the screaming if they expect someone to listen.
> AFTER: The crowd needs to stop screaming if they expect someone to listen.
>
> BEFORE: The author never clears it up about how the first character dies.
> AFTER: The author never clarifies how the first character dies.
>
> BEFORE: She needs to write it down if she expects to study her notes later.
> AFTER: She needs to record her notes to study later.
>
> **TRY IT! Can you revise the cliché/phrasal verb out of these sentences?**

1. I want to come with you, but I don't see how I can work it out to leave at 5:00.

2. If you're willing to try it out, you'll learn the steps quickly.

3. He has to think it through before he can answer the proposal.

4. The writer played it down a lot, but the first scene still matters most.

5. She made it clear that she no longer wanted to stay.

6. The students found it odd that the teacher had arrived in her pajamas.

7. The storm made it hard to get to school on time.

8. He finds it as a challenge when you suggest he may not make it through the test.

9. No one thinks it's funny when the coach makes fun of the last runner in.

10. After the reader adds it all up, the character's crimes are clear.