

## THE USING OF SYNTAX IN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The article provides information about syntax. First of all, there is information about what is syntax. Secondly, readers can find information about significance of syntax in literature. There are reader can understand why syntax in literature with examples from novels, as well as, works.

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Syntax refers to the formation of sentences and the associated grammatical rules. Syntax skills help us understand how sentences work—the meanings behind word order, structure, and punctuation. By providing support for developing syntax skills, we can help readers understand increasingly complex texts"<sup>1</sup>

Syntax refers to the rules governing creating meaningful and grammatical sentences. Sentences in English need a subject, a verb and an idea. They might also contain single independent clauses or multiple clauses. Writers use syntactic conventions like sentence length and requirements, along with word order, tense, and number agreement, to create pieces of poetry or prose.

In linguistics, **syntax** (/ˈsɪntæks/) is the set of rules, principles, and processes that govern the structure of sentences (**sentence structure**) in a given language, usually including word order. The term *syntax* is also used to refer to the study of such principles and processes.<sup>2</sup>

When used correctly, syntax can be a powerful literary device. Famed 20th-century poet e.e. cummings, demonstrates a keen awareness of this fact in his works. The syntax is one tool that writers use to create meaning in their work. It refers to the conventions that dictate word order in a sentence and what constitutes a complete sentence in that language.

Syntax in literature refers to the way in which words and sentences are placed together. Usually in the English language the syntax should follow a pattern of subject-verb-object agreement but sometimes authors play around with this to achieve a lyrical, rhythmic, rhetoric or questioning effect. It is not related to the act of choosing specific words or even the meaning of each word or the overall meanings conveyed by the sentences.

Syntax is clearly quite necessary in literature, and yet writers often take more liberties with syntax than other language users. Poets are especially known for playing with syntax, rearranging words into unusual orders. Syntax has also changed over time, and what was once common is now obscure, such as

<sup>1</sup> <https://lvp.digitalpromiseglobal.org/content-area/literacy-pk-3/factors/syntax-literacy-pk-3/summary>

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, Noam (2002) [1957]. Syntactic Structures. p. 11.

the form “wert thou” instead of “were you.” Literature has thus helped linguists study syntax across cultures and time periods, leading to greater understanding of how people think.

Syntactic development progresses through several stages, beginning with **one word** ("happy"); then **simple sentences** ("The dog is happy."); to forming and comprehending **complex sentences**, such as sentences with embedded clauses ("The boy, *who licked a lollipop*, was happy.") and wh-questions ("Why are you happy?").

- ✓ **Expressive Syntax** is the Syntax a student can produce and use.
- ✓ **Receptive Syntax** is the Syntax a student can understand.

Writers alter the syntax of their sentences according to the **purpose** of their work. In English, there are several main syntactic conventions:

- To be considered complete, sentences in English must contain a subject, a verb and express a complete thought.
- There should generally be one idea per sentence. Introducing a new idea requires some kind of punctuation to separate it (periods, commas, even semicolons, depending on how related the ideas are).
- English word order, like that of many other languages, including French and Spanish, follow Subject Verb Object word order. e.e. cummings wrote "the syntax of things" (s) "will never wholly kiss" (v) "you" (o). If he had written "You will never wholly kiss the syntax of things," that would have dramatically altered the meaning of the sentence.
- English sentences are made of two types of clauses: dependent and independent. Clauses, like sentences, require both a subject and a verb. An independent clause is one that can stand on its own; it does not need additional context to have a clear meaning. "I like cake, and I like tea," is an example of a sentence with two independent clauses. When considered alone, both ideas, "I like cake" and "I like tea," make sense and contain meaning. On the other hand, dependent clauses rely on independent clauses to make sense and contain meaning. "Because he took my cookie" contains some information (someone took a cookie), but it needs more information to fully make sense. The complex sentence "I hit my brother because he took my cookie," uses both an independent clause "I hit my brother" and a dependent clause "because he took my cookie" to create meaning. In the poem "since feeling is first," the opening line is a dependent clause.
- Syntax in writing is not restricted to word order or clauses. It also refers to a subject-verb agreement like "I am a writer," vs "I is a writer," for example; and when to use subjective or objective pronouns (also known as case), or reflexive pronouns. For example, "Me (object pronoun) and Christi like to watch horror movies," versus "Christi and I (subject pronoun) like to watch horror movies." Moreover, the sentence "My baby can already feed herself," utilizes the reflexive pronoun "herself." "My baby can already feed her," uses the object pronoun "her" and is not as clear or precise a sentence.
- The rules of syntax also apply to using tense and aspect in sentences to give readers a sense of time and duration of actions. Tense places the reader at a certain time, like "We *walked* around the neighborhood yesterday." Aspect gives us additional information like how long the action lasted or whether it was repeated. "We *were walking* around the neighborhood all afternoon.'~.'

Here some examples syntax in literature.

The sentence “The man drives the car” would follow normal syntax in the English language. By changing the syntax to “The car drives the man”, the sentence becomes awkward.

Love will not be constrain'd by mastery.

When mast'ry comes, the god of love anon  
 Beateth his wings, and, farewell, he is gone.  
 Love is a thing as any spirit free.

(*The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer)

This syntax example comes from a translation of Geoffrey Chaucer's Middle English masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, even though it is modernized it still carries hints of the Middle English syntax. For example, we can see the agreement of the subject "the god of love" and the verb "beateth." The final line has an unusual arrangement of words: "Love is a thing as any spirit free." However, Chaucer has still chosen an arrangement that makes sense to an English-speaking reader. He is saying that love is like a free spirit, but in a more poetic way.

ARIEL: Full fathom five thy father lies.  
 Of his bones are coral made.  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes.  
 Nothing of him that doth fade,  
 But doth suffer a sea-change  
 Into something rich and strange.

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell

(*The Tempest* by William Shakespeare)

This example of syntax comes from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The first line "full fathom five thy father lies" is a unique inverse of what a person might say in normal speech—"Your father is buried at sea five fathoms down." The way the Shakespeare wrote it, however, creates both alliteration of the "f" sound as well as assonance between "five" and "lies." This arrangement also puts the stress on almost every syllable, making it sound very rhythmic and strong. The rest of the excerpt contains interesting syntactical choices, such as the inverse arrangement in "Of his bones are coral made." Shakespeare's syntax is a key part of what makes his works so poetic and so memorable.

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glass on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

'They look like white elephants,' she said.

'I've never seen one,' the man drank his beer.

'No, you wouldn't have.'

'I might have,' the man said. 'Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything.'

("Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway)

Ernest Hemingway was famous for his short, declarative sentences. He rarely even used adjectives and almost never used adverbs. In this famous story, "Hills Like White Elephants," an unnamed man and girl sit talking. The entire story seems very straightforward, and yet there is a very serious subtext. Hemingway's choice to use the most basic construction of sentences belies the seriousness of the subject about which the man and girl are speaking.

Now there is one thing I can tell you: you will enjoy certain pleasures you would not fathom now. When you still had your mother you often thought of the days when you would have her no longer. Now you will often think of days past when you had her. When you are used to this horrible thing that

they will forever be cast into the past, then you will gently feel her revive, returning to take her place, her entire place, beside you. At the present time, this is not yet possible. Let yourself be inert, wait till the incomprehensible power ... that has broken you restores you a little, I say a little, for henceforth you will always keep something broken about you. Tell yourself this, too, for it is a kind of pleasure to know that you will never love less, that you will never be consoled, that you will constantly remember more and more.

(1907 letter from Marcel Proust to his friend Georges de Lauris)

Compare the syntax of this letter with Hemingway's syntax in Example #3. While Hemingway was known for short and simple sentences, Marcel Proust's works were famously obtuse and ornate. This letter that Proust wrote to a friend after the death of the friend's mother is indicative of his syntactical style. He writes of more abstract concepts in longer sentences that contain several clauses. However, it is just as easy to understand his meaning as in the Hemingway example.

I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,  
 And what I assume you shall assume,  
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
 I loafe and invite my soul,  
 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.  
 ("Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman)

As like many poets, Walt Whitman bends the rules of straightforward syntax to create more interesting lines. For example, the third line in this poem uses an interesting word order: "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." Of course, in this example, he means, "belongs to you as well," but has transformed the usage just enough to make this line stand out to the reader. Throughout his long poem "Song of Myself," Whitman continues to play with syntax so that his lines require more thought and contain more beauty.

Syntax is the set of rules that helps readers and writers make sense of sentences. It's also an important tool that writers can use to create various rhetorical or literary effects. When writing, syntax can be manipulated to create different rhetorical or artistic effects. It can be used to give the piece of writing a sense of pace, mood or atmosphere. Modernist prose writer William Faulkner is famous for using extremely long sentences to reflect the circular thinking patterns of his characters. On the other hand, e.e., cummings is famous for using elements of syntax to create an atmosphere of playfulness/rebellion.

Syntax differs between writing purposes. In "A Tale of Two Cities," Charles Dickens uses long sentences that follow traditional grammatical rules. In contrast, E.E. Cummings uses words in nontraditional and innovative ways to form a sense of playfulness and poetic expression. Authors alter syntax to accommodate the purpose of their work.

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