



SENTENCE DIAGRAMMING 101

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LESSON #2

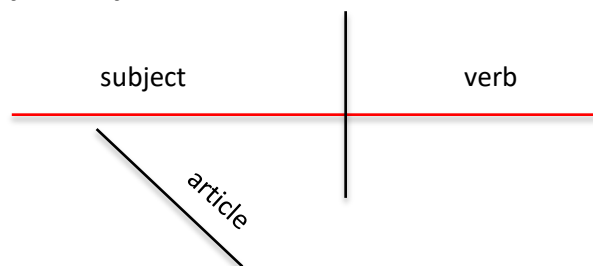
Diagonal Lines

In Lesson 1, we learned how to diagram the major parts of a sentence that appear on the main line of the diagram—subjects, verbs, and complements. In Lesson 2, we'll learn how to diagram the descriptive words that appear on diagonal lines beneath the main line.

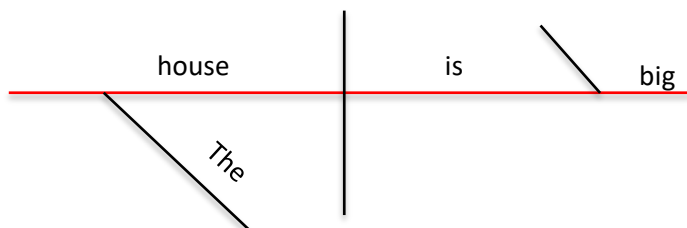
Descriptive words that modify nouns include articles, attributive adjectives, possessive adjectives, and nouns acting as adjectives. Descriptive words that modify verbs are adverbs.

Descriptive words are essential sentence elements, but writers tend to overuse them. Most authors of writing-craft books advise minimal use of adjectives and adverbs. As an editor, advise authors to use precise descriptive words that clarify and augment meaning. For example, *football* player clarifies; *large* football player, on the other hand, is vague.

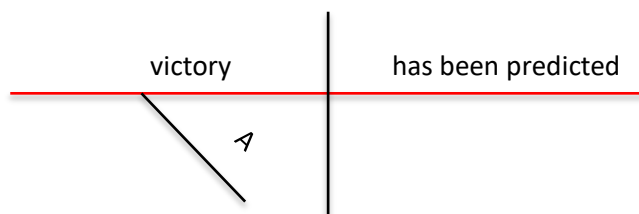
1. Articles. The English language has one definite (*the*) and two indefinite articles (*a, an*) that limit or individualize a noun. In a diagram, they're placed on a slanted line directly beneath the noun they modify.



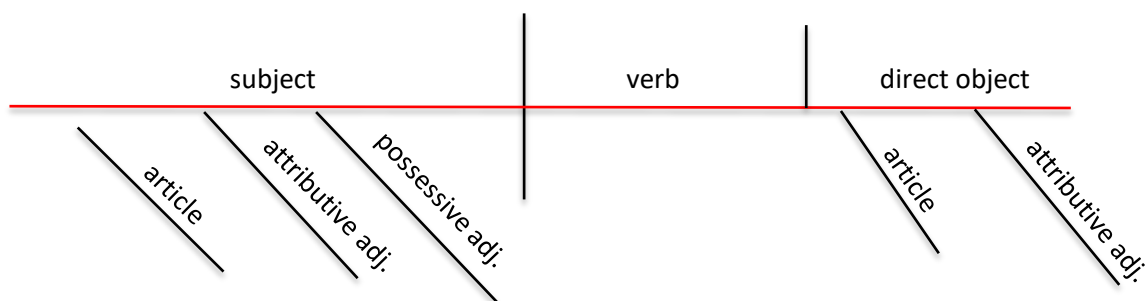
The house is big.



A victory has been predicted.

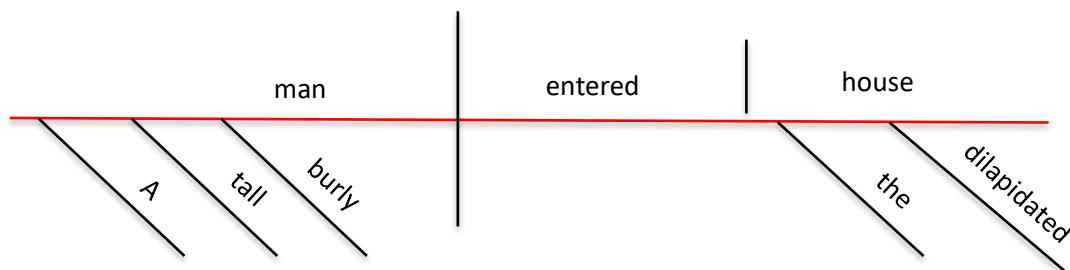


Other kinds of adjectives (attributive and possessive) are diagrammed in a similar way:



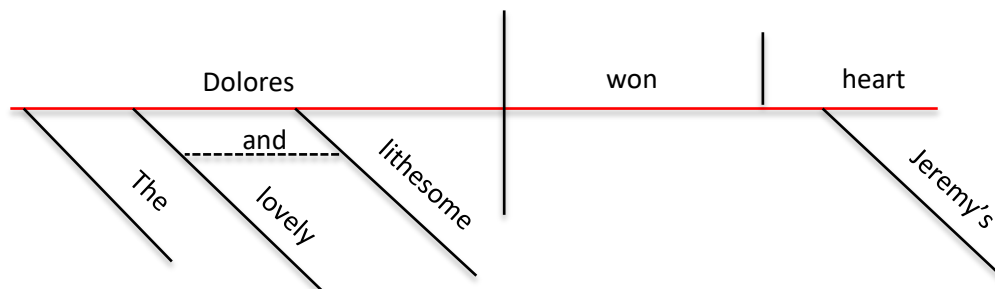
2. Attributive Adjectives. Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns; in other words, adjectives limit or qualify nouns and pronouns. They answer these questions: *what kind? which one? how many?* Attributive adjectives appear directly in front of the word they modify. Place them in the order they appear. Sometimes a noun acts as an attributive adjective: The *car* salesman approached us.

A tall, burly man entered the dilapidated house.



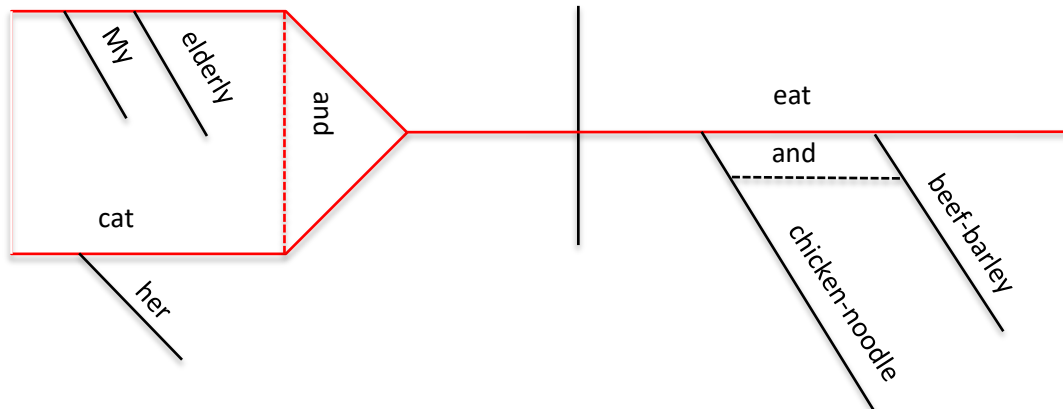
When a word has a compound modifier, connect the two modifiers with a dotted line and place the coordinating conjunction on the dotted line.

The lovely and lithesome Dolores won Jeremy's heart.



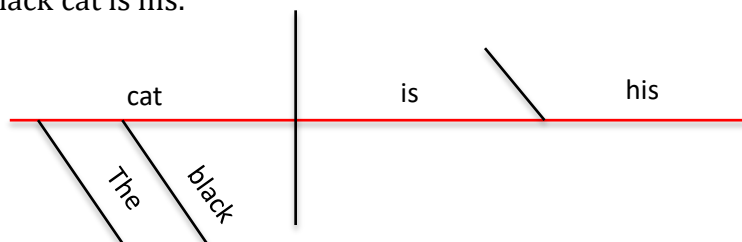
3. Possessive Adjectives. These possessive pronouns are used as adjectives—*my, your, his, her, its, our, and their*. They appear in front of the nouns they modify. In a diagram, you treat them as attributive adjectives.

My elderly aunt and her cat eat chicken-noodle and beef-barley soup.

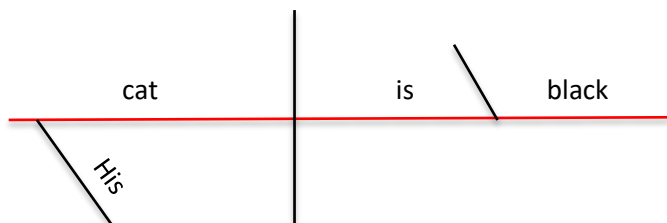


Note: Some possessive pronouns are used as both adjectives and nouns, such as *his*. When they are used as adjectives, you diagram them as adjectives; when they are used as nouns, you diagram them as nouns.

The black cat is his.

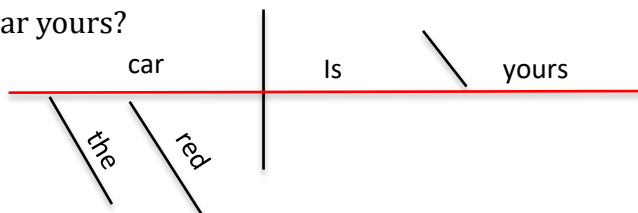


His cat is black.

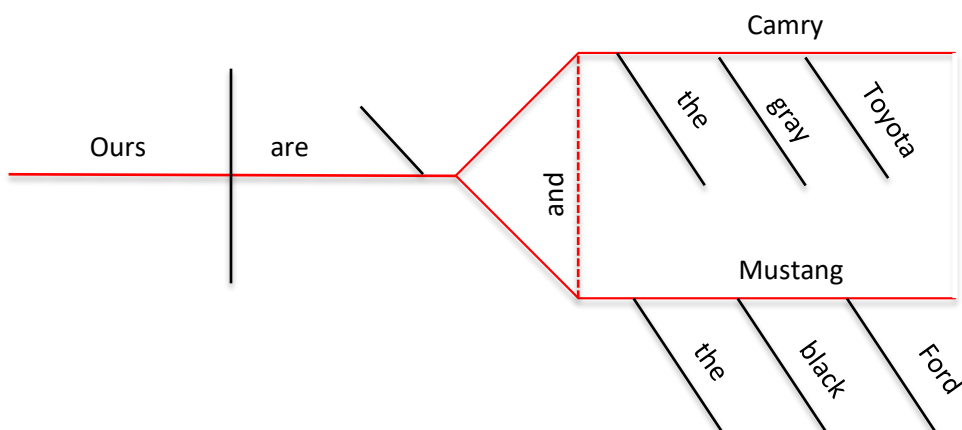


4. Possessive Nouns. The forms of these pronouns indicate that they're being used as nouns—*mine, yours, hers, ours, and theirs*. Therefore, you diagram them as nouns.

Is the red car yours?

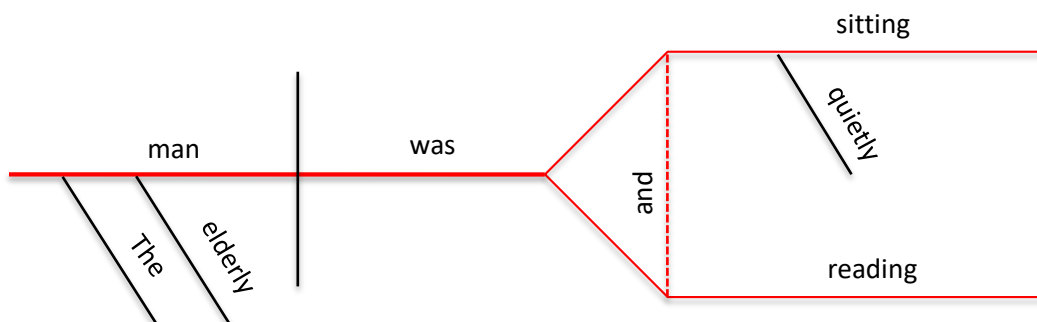


Ours are the gray Toyota Camry and the black Ford Mustang.

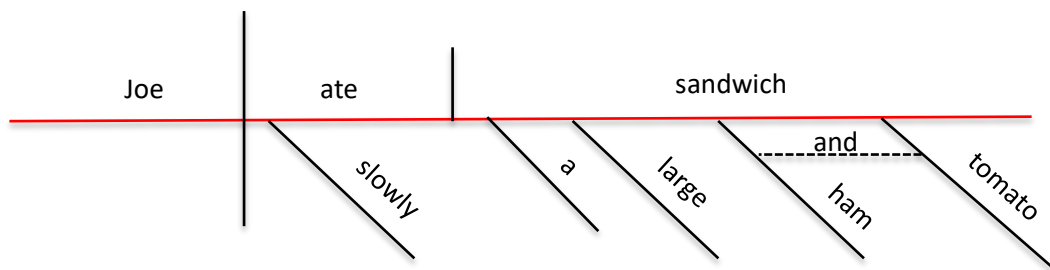


5. Adverbs. Words that modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs are called adverbs. They answer these questions: *how? when? where? to what extent or degree?* They're placed under the word they modify just as adjectives are placed under the word they modify.

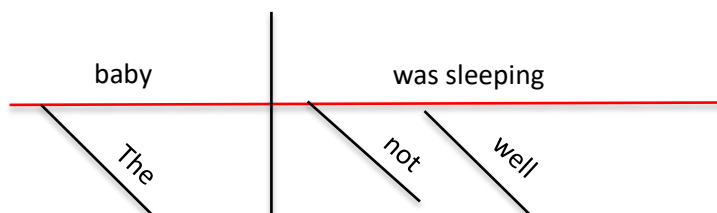
The elderly man was sitting quietly and reading.



Joe slowly ate a large ham and tomato sandwich.

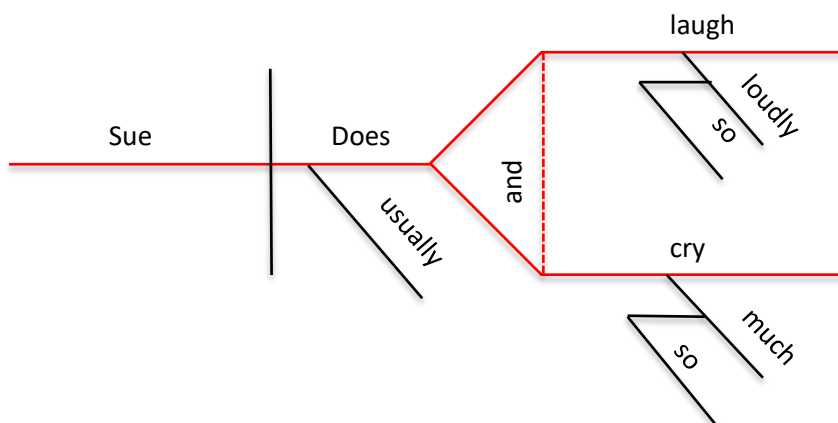


The baby was not sleeping well. (Note: The adverb *not* isn't part of the verb phrase.)



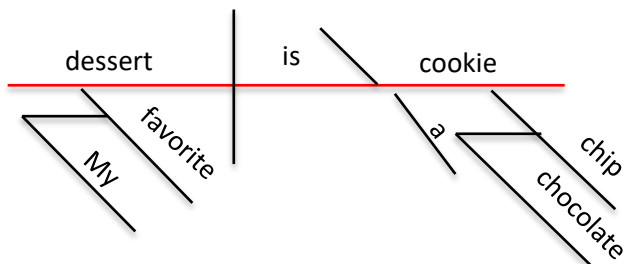
When an adverb modifies an adjective or another adverb, it's connected to that word on a diagonal line, as in the sentence below.

Does Sue usually laugh so loudly and cry so much?



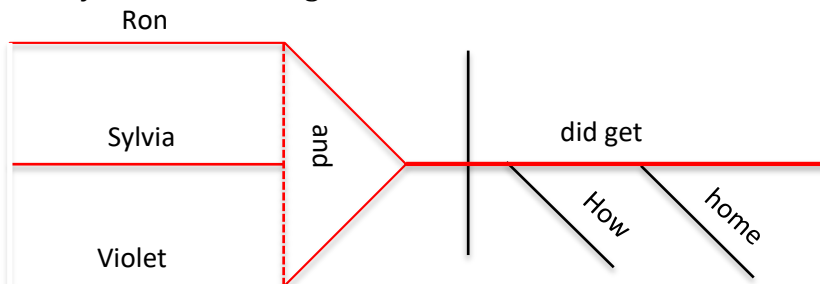
Occasionally, an adjective is also diagrammed beneath an adjective. Note that the meaning of the sentence would change if *my* was connected to *dessert* instead of *favorite*.

My favorite dessert is a chocolate chip cookie.

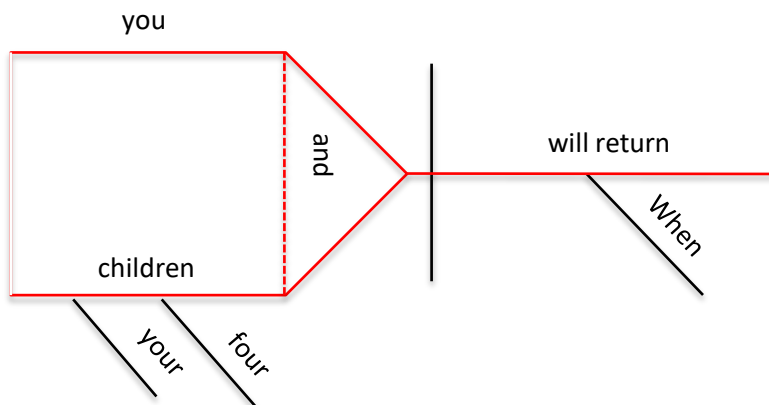


6. Interrogative Adverbs, Adjectives, and Pronouns. Interrogative words such as *how*, *when*, *where*, and *why* are adverbs. *What*, *which*, and *whose* can be interrogative adjectives or nouns, depending on whether they precede a noun or replace a noun in a sentence. Note: *Home* can be an adverb (answers the question *where*).

How did Ron, Sylvia, and Violet get home?



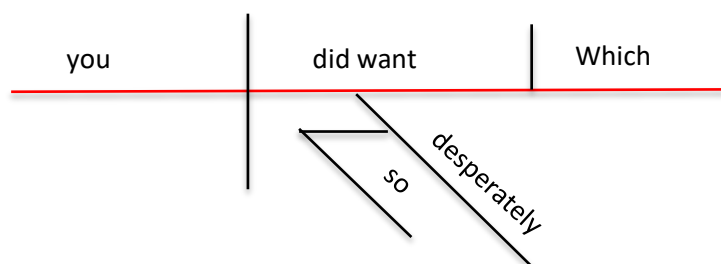
When will you and your four children return?



Which television did you buy yesterday?



Which did you want so desperately?



Lesson Review:

- A variety of words act as modifiers. Some modify nouns and pronouns; others modify adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. They appear on diagonal lines beneath the word they modify.
- Multiple adjectives for one word are placed on successive diagonal lines beneath the word they modify.
- An adverb that modifies an adjective or another adverb is placed on a diagonal line beneath the word it modifies.
- Multiple modifiers joined by a coordinating conjunction are connected with a dotted line. The conjunction is written on the dotted line.

Lesson #2 Assignments

To receive a Certificate of Completion you must successfully complete all assignments.

Assignment #1

Diagram these sentences.

- A. Kristen was the best writer and the most accomplished speaker.
- B. The itchy-bitsy, teeny-weeny yellow polka-dot bikini was not available.
- C. The roast beef and the mashed potatoes smell delicious.
- D. Have you ever been this hungry or tired?
- E. The yellow and the white daffodils were cut yesterday.

Assignment #2

Most sentences, of course, are more complex than the ones you diagrammed in number one. Finding the subject, verb, complement, and modifiers can be tricky. Study the sentences below. Find the subject, verb, complement, and modifiers, then diagram them. Don't try to include every word in the diagram. Eventually, we'll learn how to diagram the rest of the words in sentences like these.

- A. How much money do you have in the bank now?
- B. Helen finally bought a flat-screen TV but didn't buy the warranty that went with it.
- C. While sitting on the porch after dinner, my paternal grandfather often told humorous stories.
- D. That unusually quiet boy seated by the green bookshelf is normally quite active and attentive.
- E. More aggressive behavior may open or may close the additional doors of opportunity you seek.

Assignment #3

Choose one or two sentences from a manuscript you are editing. Find the subject, verb, complement, and modifiers. You may not be able to place every word in the sentence(s) on your diagram yet.

Remember: You may want to post the definitions of adverbs and adjectives as well as the questions they answer on your computer monitor or some other highly visible place. Having that information handy may help you as we move on to prepositional phrases, verbals, and clauses in future lessons.