Definition and Examples of Imperative Sentences

In English grammar, an *imperative sentence* gives advice or instructions; it can also express a request or command. These kinds of sentences are also known as *directives* because they provide direction to whoever is being addressed.

Types of Imperative Sentences

Directives can take one of several forms in everyday speech and writing. A few of the most common uses include:

- **A request**: Pack enough clothing for the cruise.

- **An invitation**: Come by at 8, please.

- **A command**: Raise your hands and turn around.

- **An instruction**: Turn left at the intersection.

Imperative sentences can be confused with other kinds of sentences. The trick is to look at how the sentence is constructed.

(You) Are the Subject

Imperative sentences may seem to have no subject, but the implied subject is you, or, as it is properly called, you understood. The proper way to write the subject is (you) in parenthesis, especially when diagramming an imperative sentence. Even when a proper name is mentioned in an imperative sentence, the subject still is you understood.

Example: *Jim, close the door before the cat gets out!* — The subject is (you), not Jim.

Imperative vs. Declarative Sentences

Unlike a declarative sentence, where the subject and verb are clearly articulated, imperative sentences do not have a readily identifiable subject when written out. The subject is implied or elliptical, meaning that the verb refers directly back to the subject. In other words, the speaker or the author assumes they have (or will have) their subject's attention.

- **Declarative sentence**: John does his chores.

- **Imperative sentence**: Do your chores!

Imperative vs. Interrogative Sentences

An imperative sentence typically begins with the base form of a verb and ends with a period or an exclamation point. However, it can also end with a question mark in some

instances. The difference between a question (also called an *interrogative statement*) and an imperative sentence is the subject and whether it's implied.

- **Interrogative sentence**: Would you please open the door for me, John?

- **Imperative sentence**: Please open the door, would you?

Modifying an Imperative Sentence

At their most basic, imperative sentences are binary, which is to say they must be either positive or negative. Positive imperatives use affirmative verbs in addressing the subject; negatives do the opposite.

- **Positive**: Keep both hands on the steering wheel while you're driving.

- **Negative**: Don't operate the lawnmower without wearing safety goggles.

Adding the words "do" or "just" to the beginning of the sentence, or the word "please" to the conclusion— called *softening the imperative* —makes imperative sentences more polite or conversational.

- **Softened imperatives**: Do your chores, please. Just sit here, won't you?

As with other forms of grammar, imperative sentences can be modified to address a particular subject, follow a proprietary written style, or simply add variety and emphasis to your writing.

Adding Emphasis

Imperative sentences also can be modified to single out a particular person or to address a group. This can be accomplished in one of two ways: by following the interrogative with a tag question or by closing with an exclamation point.

- **Tag question**: Shut the door, would you, please?

- **Exclamative**: Someone, call a doctor!

Doing so in both instances adds emphasis and drama to speech and writing.