Clause Structure, Complements and Adjuncts
(based on Chapter 4 of Huddleston and Pullum 2005)

1. Introduction
This class is devoted to the structure of canonical clauses, i.e. clauses that have a head element with the form of a verb phrase (VP).

2. Predicates and predications
The two major elements in the clause are called subject and predicate. In the example below the NP girls is subject and the VP like flowers is predicate.

(1) Girls like flowers.

The predicate represents what is predicated of the referent of the subject. The head of the VP in the predicate is sometimes referred to as the predicator.

Q: Let’s represent the structure of the clause in (1) in a way that our diagram expresses information about the function and category of the various constituents.

The predicator is crucial in determining what can occur in a clause.

Q: Let’s use the data in (2) to illustrate this.

(2) a. John danced.
b. *John danced Mary.
c. John liked Mary.
d. *John liked.
e. John put the book on the table.

3. Complements and adjuncts
The dependents of the predicator are of two main kinds: complements and adjuncts. Complements have to be licensed by their head. The data in (3) illustrate both types of dependent.

(3) a. Kate used the computer in the office.
b. Kate used the computer. (the PP adjunct can be left out)
c. *Kate used. (the object complement is obligatory)
Objects are a common type of complements, but subjects are also a kind of complement since they satisfy the licensing requirements referred to above. Consider (4).

(4) a. Whether we will finish on time depends primarily on the weather.
   b. *Whether we will finish on time ruined the afternoon.

Although subjects satisfy the condition for being complements, they differ from objects by virtue of being positioned outside the VP. Thus, the former are often referred to as external complements, whereas complements internal to the VP are called internal complements.

4. The subject

Some distinctive syntactic properties:

(i) The basic position of the subject is before the V.

(5) a. Sue loved Daniel.

(ii) There is an inflectional distinction of case that separates subjects from most non-subjects.

(6) a. She loves him.
    b. He loves her.

Q: How does this argument work if there is a non-pronominal subject in the clause?

(iii) All verbs other than the modal auxiliaries agree with the subject in the present tense.

(7) Peter loves Mary.

Q: Are there signs of agreement in the preterite?

(iv) In a number of constructions the subject appears after rather then before the verb.

(8) a. Does John know Sue?
    b. Are you hungry?

Subjects are often incorrectly characterized based on semantic properties. The following two observations illustrate this:

(i) In canonical clauses that describe an action, the subject of the clause normally corresponds semantically to the performer of the action.

(ii) The subject NP commonly identifies a topic for the clause.

Q: Can you think of counterexamples to the above claims?

5. The object

Some distinctive syntactic properties:
(i) It must be licensed by the verb.

(ii) The object typically corresponds to the subject of an associated passive clause.

(iii) The basic object position is immediately after the verb.

Q: Can you think of other syntactic properties?

There are two types of object: direct and indirect object. The data in (9) illustrate each.

(9)  
a. John gave May a photo.
    b. John sent Mary an email.

Q: What do you think motivates the terminological distinction between the two types of object?

Q: What other word order is compatible with the above examples?

There are important syntactic differences between direct and indirect objects.

(i) When both occur within the VP, the indirect object precedes the direct object.

(10)  
a. Charles gave Max the photo.
    b. *Charles gave the photo Max.

(ii) The direct object readily undergoes fronting in various non-canonical constructions, whereas the direct object is quite resistant to it.

(11)  
a. Everything else, she gave him.
    b. %Him, she gave everything else. (grammatical in some dialects only)

6. Predicative complements

A predicative complement commonly has the form of an NP, and in that case it contrasts directly with an object. Consider (12).

(12)  
a. Mary is a nice person.
    b. Mary met a nice person.

Q: How are the NPs underlined different semantically?

A few verbs can take either a predicative complement or an object, but with differences in meaning. This is shown in (13).

(13)  
a. She proved good.
    b. She proved the theory.

Predicative complements and objects are different syntactically in several ways:

(i) Predicative complements can have the form of AdjP.

(14)  
a. He seemed very nice.
    b. *He met very nice.
(ii) Predicative complements can have the form of a bare role NP.
(15)  a. She became president.
      b. *She knew president.

(iii) Predicative complements do not correspond to the subject of a passive clause.
(16)  *Sue was become president.

(iv) Predicative complements can have the form of a nominative pronoun.
(17)  a. It was he who said it.
      b. *They accused I of saying it.

Homework: Exercises 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 in Chapter 4 of Huddleston and Pullum (2005)