The following tests help us to determine whether a string of words forms a constituent.

**Key:** Constituents are underlined. Non-constituents are wavy-lined.

**Warning:** Not all tests will work for all constituent types!

**Fragment Answers**

Only a constituent can **answer a question**, while retaining the meaning of the original sentence.

- **That is my brother.** → **Q:** Who's that? **A:** My brother.
- **He is making a mess.** → **Q:** What's he doing? **A:** Making a mess.
- **The keys are on the table.** → **Q:** Where are the keys? **A:** On the table.
- **I want two of those apples.** → **Q:** How many apples do you want? **A:** *Two of.
- **He's preserving in wax the earwigs I gave him.** → **Q:** What's he doing with the earwigs?  
  **A:** *Preserving in wax.
- **I gave the dog the keys.** → **Q:** What did you do with the keys? **A:** *Gave the dog.

**Coordination**

Only constituents (of the same type) can be **coordinated using conjunction words** like *and, or, and but.*

- **Her friends from Peru went to the show.** → **Mary and her friends from Peru went to the show.**
- **We peeled the potatoes.** → **We peeled the potatoes and shucked the corn.**
- **Should I go through the tunnel?** → **Should I go through the tunnel or over the bridge?**
- **The doughnuts were full of jelly.** → **The doughnuts were full of jelly but slightly disappointing.**
- **Her friends from Peru went to the movies.** → *Her friends from and two guys interested in Peru went...*
- **We peeled the potatoes.** → *We peeled the and washed the potatoes.
- **Should I go through the tunnel?** → *Should I go through or I go around the tunnel?*
- **The doughnuts were full of jelly.** → *The doughnuts were full but didn't smell of jelly.

**Pro-Form Substitution**

Only constituents can be **substituted with pro-forms** like *it, that, them, then, there, do that, that way, ...*

- **A man with dark glasses is following us.** → **He** is following us.
- **We watched a movie about cheese-making last week.** → **We did that** last week.
- **Annette went away to Brazil.** → **Annette went there.**
- **Some of them seemed rather tall for their age.** → **Some of them seemed that way.**
- **A man with dark glasses is following us.** → *He* with dark glasses is following us.
- **We watched a movie about cheese-making last week.** → *We did that about cheese-making last week.
- **Annette gave away her last CD.** → *Annette gave it/there/that.
- **Some of them seemed rather tall for their age.** → *Some of them seemed that way for their age.
Topicalization

Only a constituent can be relocated to the beginning of the sentence.
(Note, topicalization sometimes requires a special type of supporting context.)

He sold the record player to the thrift store. → The record player, he sold to the thrift store.
We're going snowboarding over the break. → Over the break, we're going snowboarding.
I've always enjoyed going fishing with my dad. → Going fishing with my dad, I've always enjoyed.

He sold the record player to the thrift store. → *The record player to the thrift store, he sold __.
We're going snowboarding over the break. → *Going snowboarding, we're over the break.
I've always enjoyed going fishing with my dad. → *Fishing with my dad, I've always enjoyed going.

Clefting

Only a constituent can appear in the frame “____ is/are who/what/where/when/why/how …”

They put the bodies in the basement. → In the basement is where they put the bodies.
We'll talk about the answers to the HW next. → The answers to the HW are what we'll talk about next.
They made us look like amateurs. → Made us look like amateurs is what they did.
She seemed incredibly lucky to me. → Incredibly lucky is how she seemed to me.

They put the bodies in the basement. → *Put the bodies is what they did in the basement.
We'll talk about the answers to the HW next. → *About the answers is what we'll talk to the HW next.
They made us look like amateurs. → *Made us is what they did look like amateurs.
She seemed incredibly lucky to me. → *Incredibly lucky to me is how she seemed.

Intuitive Unit

When all else fails, turn to your intuition. Does the string of words feel like it goes together as a complete unit, and has some meaning on its own, independent of the rest of the sentence? If so, it's probably a constituent. If not, it's probably not.