



Basic Grammar Terms

This material was prepared for use in orientation sessions at the Loyola Community Literacy Center by Professor Joseph Janangelo of the Department of English, Loyola University Chicago.

Section A lists the eight principal parts of speech.

Section B defines important terms for use in analyzing grammar and syntax.

Section C gives examples of important verb tenses.

Section A. EIGHT PRINCIPAL PARTS OF SPEECH

1. NOUN: The name of a person, place, or thing.

- The cat has sharp claws. · The baby has small fingers.

2. PRONOUN: A word used to refer to a noun, usually used to avoid repetition.

- When my dog was hungry, she would bark. · My roommate knew he forgot his keys.

There are seven categories of pronouns.

A) Demonstrative Pronoun: A pronoun used to identify or point to a noun.

- This, That, These, Those. · Those are the best dressers.

B) An Indefinite Pronoun is a pronoun that refers to a nonspecific person or thing.

All, Another, Any, Anybody, Anyone, Both, Each, Either, Everybody, Everyone, Everything, Few, Many, Neither, Nobody, None, No One, Nothing, One, Some, Somebody, Someone, Something.

- Anyone who gambles is crazy. · Everybody dance now.

C) Intensive or Reflexive Pronoun: A pronoun ending in -self, myself, yourself, himself, herself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves. It often names the receiver of an action.

- Did you hurt yourself? · She calls herself a singer, but she cannot carry a tune.

D) Interrogative Pronoun: A pronoun used to begin a question. Who, Whom, Whose, Which, What.

- What happened at work today? · Which film did you see?

E) Personal Pronoun: Pronouns used to refer to a specific person or thing.

I, Me, You, She, Her, He, Mine, Your, Yours, His, Hers, Its, Our, Ours, Their, Theirs.

- She bores me with her tedious childhood stories. · Theirs is a life of luxury.

F) Possessive Pronoun: A pronoun used to indicate ownership.

My, Mine, Your, Yours, Her, Hers, His, Its, Our, Ours, Your, Yours, Their, Theirs.

- She took a great interest in her career. · Their car is parked too close to ours.

G) Relative Pronoun: One of the following, when used to introduce an adjective clause.

Who, Whom, Whose, Which, That.

3. VERB: A word that expresses action (verb **tenses** treated later).

- They went to the store.
- Many people do not know how to read.

4. ADJECTIVE: A word used to modify (describe) a noun or pronoun.

Adjectives usually answer one of these questions: Which one? What kind of? How many or how much?

- The old dog was barking.
- Her sable coat was on the floor.

5. ADVERB: A word used to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs usually answer the questions: When? Where? How? Why? Under what conditions? To what degree?

- This car rides smoothly.
- He is an unusually good writer.
- She speaks very loudly.

6. PREPOSITION: A word placed before a noun to form a phrase modifying (describing) another word in the sentence. The preposition indicates the relationship between the noun and the word the phrase modifies.

about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, at, before, behind, below, beside, besides, between, beyond, by, down, during, except, for, from, in, inside, into, like, near, next, of, off, on, onto, out, outside, over, past, since, than, through, to, toward, under, unlike, until, up, with, and without.

- Let's put our ideas on the table. Come and sit beside me.

A **prepositional phrase** begins with a preposition which introduces a noun form.

- After the movie, we went home. · Besides being lazy, he is a fool.

A) Correlative Conjunction: A pair of conjunctions connecting grammatically equal elements. Either... or, Neither.. .nor, Whether... or, Not only... but also, and both.. and.

- Either pay me what you owe me or leave. ·Whether you pay me now or later is up to you.
- Not only does she have a job, but she also tutors on weekends.

B) Coordinating Conjunction: Connects two words or parts of a sentence. And, Or, But.

- It wasn't late, but it was starting to rain. Give me liberty or death.

C) Subordinating Conjunction: A word that introduces a subordinate clause and indicates its relation to the rest of the sentence.

After, Although, As, As if, Because, Before, Even Though, If, Since, So That, Than, That, Though, Unless, Until, When, Where, Whether, and While.

- She went into the bank while I waited in the car. · He told me his life story as if he cared.

Reminder: Relative Pronouns (Who, Whom, Whose, Which, and That) also introduce subordinate clauses.

D) Conjunctive Adverb: An adverb used with a semicolon to connect independent clauses. Consequently, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, then, therefore, and thus.

- She swallowed a lot of water; however, the lifeguard got to him quickly.
- He had no money; consequently, he moved back home.

8. ARTICLE: a, an, the (modifies noun); definite article: the book, the tree; indefinite article: a book (could be any book), a tree (could be any tree). NOTE a/an distinction; an is used before a vowel sound

Note: INTERJECTIONS: A word expressing surprise or emotion. Oh· Hey· Wow· (some grammars include them as parts of speech).

ANALYZING GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX

HELPING VERBS (sometimes called " auxiliaries"; modals are another, specialized form): Helping verbs always precede main verbs.

The following words are **helping verbs** when used with a main verb.

Be, Am, Is, Are, Was, Were, Being, Been, Has, Have, Had, Do, Does, Did, Can, Will, Shall, Should, Could, Would, May, Might, Must.

- I am singing.
- You should think before you speak.
- The driver had fallen asleep.

DIRECT OBJECT: A word or word group that receives the action of the verb.

- He read the book. She threw the ball.

INDIRECT OBJECT: A noun or pronoun that names to whom or for whom the actions is done.

- Fate gives us looks.
- My boss threw me a curve (i.e., threw a curve to me). When the preposition is implied but not stated the indirect object is hidden, as in example above, or · He gave her the book = He gave the book (to) her.

MODIFIER: A word, phrase, or clause that describes or qualifies the meaning of a word. Modifiers include adjectives, adverbs, adverbs, prepositional phrases, participial phrases, some infinitive phrases, and adjective and adverb clauses. Problems arise with dangling modifiers where the agent of the action is not clear.

Error: Opening the window to let out a fly, the car swerved into an oncoming car.

Error: After seminary training, women's access to the pulpit has often been denied.

When a verb is in the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. "The student attended class." In the passive voice, the subject receives the action. "The class was attended by the student." The passive voice can be generally boring, e.g., The situation will be taken care of. A decision was reached.

GERUND: A verb form ending in -ing and used as a noun.

- All that laughing made me cry. · Running can be good for you.

PARTICIPLE: A word derived from a verb and having the qualities of both a verb and an adjective; never used as a noun. Present participles end in -ing (I am rushing), past participles in -ed (I was rushed).

SPLIT INFINITIVES:

When a modifier appears between its two parts (to/think) "to carefully think," an infinitive is said to be split. If the split infinitive is awkward, move the modifier to another position in the sentence. Error: The jury was instructed to very carefully review the evidence.

POSITIVE. COMPARATIVE. AND SUPERLATIVE

Most adjectives and adverbs have three forms: the positive, the comparative, and the superlative. (Good / better / best; careful, more careful, most careful)

CONJUGATION: SUBJECTS JOINED BY AND

Compound subjects joined by "and" are nearly always plural.

Error. Maria's natural ability and her love of music has lead her to a singing career.

SUBJECTS JOINED BY OR NOR:

With "or" or "nor," make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer the verb.

Section C. MORE ON VERBS

1. There are three moods in English:

The indicative is used for facts, opinions and questions. (Chicago is in Illinois.)

The imperative is used for orders or advice. (Stop talking. Go to class.)

The subjunctive is used for wishes, conditions contrary to fact, and requests or recommendations. Use the subjunctive mood for wishes and in if clauses expressing conditions contrary to fact. The subjunctive in such cases is the past tense form of the verb; in the case of be, it is always were (not was), even if the subject is singular.

We wish that Kenneth *drove* to school every day (drove is past tense of drive).

If I were a member of President Bush's cabinet [contrary to fact since I am not a member of his cabinet], I would get a new attorney general (were is past tense of was).

Use the subjunctive mode in the clauses following verbs such as ask, insist, recommend, and request. The subjunctive in such cases is the base form of the verb.

2. Verb tenses in English and many other languages are complex. These are the tenses that you should be prepared to identify:

simple present: for habitual action in present (She walks to the store.), general, timeless truths (Ice melts quickly in the summer.), the narrative present (Mighty Casey strikes out).

present progressive: action in progress (He is going to tell her now.), a temporary present activity (I'm studying English at Loyola.), repeated ongoing action (He is always doing that.)

a perfect action (She walked to the store.), a habitual action in the past (He visited his father every day.), a situation in the past now completed (Victoria died in 1901).

past progressive: an action at a specific point in the past (She was walking to the store at 9 this morning.), past action simultaneous with some past event (He was talking on the phone when the storm struck.), repeated action in the on-going past (Sam was talking all during the lecture.).

simple future: action in future time (She will go tomorrow.), a future habitual action or future state (You will study harder next year.), a present situation that will obtain in the future with some termination in sight (He will live on campus until he graduates.).

future progressive: an action that will be in progress at a specific time in the near future (She will be coming home soon.), duration of specific future action (He will be working on the book for years).

Each tense also has a perfect form and a perfect progressive form. Below are the perfect forms:

Present: I have been a teacher for 22 years.

Past: She had already left before I could phone her.

Future: By the time he's finished, he will have been doing that ten years.

From Beene, Lynn & William V. Kopple. (1992). The Riverside Handbook. Houghton-Mifflin: Boston, MA; and Hacker, Diane. (1993). A Pocket Style Manual: Clarity. Grammar Punctuation and Mechanics. Documentation. Usage. and Grammatical Terms. Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press: Boston, MA.
