

## Parts of Speech

Just like if we were going to talk about horses, it would be helpful to know what the various parts of a horse are called, we're going to start our discussion of grammar talking about *parts of speech*. You may think you don't know about parts of speech but in fact you use them every day!



- |                                      |                   |                         |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Muzzle and parts about the muzzle | 6. Chest.         | 12. Haunch or Quarters. | 18. Shoulder-bone or Scapula. |
| 2. Gullet.                           | 7. Girth.         | 13. Thigh.              | 19. Elbow.                    |
| 3. Windpipe.                         | 8. Back.          | 14. Hock.               | 20. Fore-arm.                 |
| 4. Crest.                            | 9. Loin.          | 15. Shank or Cannon.    | 21. Knee.                     |
| 5. Withers.                          | 10. Ilium or Hip. | 16. Fetlock.            | 22. Coronet.                  |
|                                      | 11. Croup.        | 17. Pastern.            |                               |

These are simply **the names we give to different categories of words**.

For instance, the words we use to refer to things or people or animals (animal, vegetable or mineral) are nouns.

The words we use to describe actions (things we do) are called verbs.

It is helpful to know what these different parts of speech are because as we go forward, we will be referring to these words and the roles they play in sentences by their names -- and if we want to figure out what role a word is playing in a sentence, we need to be able to identify its category. For instance, is this word what is being *done*? Or the *thing* that is doing?

### Noun –

The noun is very common defined as “naming” a person, place, or thing (which also includes ideas). Nouns are the words for all the things in the world and out of the world, both real, idealistic and imaginary. (So if you're reading a science fiction book about Zorc from Zorcatron shooting evil Blanistrians with his Zwifel gun ... all the imaginary beings and things are nouns, too.)

Nouns have a couple other special features. One is that for the most part, they can be pluralized -- that is, you can talk of one of them, or two of them, or three of them or a gazillion of them. Regular nouns are made plural by adding an *s* on the end (not 's!). For example,

Regular: the way something is done *regularly*. The "regular" way.

Singular	Plural (more than 1)
Cat	cats

Building	Buildings
Computer	Computers
Noun	Nouns

You see how that works? Easy isn't it? Now, you try it. Write in the plurals of the following nouns:

Singular	Plural (more than 1)
Car	
Dog	
Mother	
Book	

But not all nouns are regular -- some are *irregular*. That is, they don't form plurals in the "regular" way (by adding s). These nouns aren't even irregular in any predictable way. Some change the endings like

child	children
antenna	antennae

Some change in the middle, such as

man	men
goose	geese

**Irregular:** the way something is done that is not usual. It might be 'one of a kind.' Nobody else does it this way.

And some don't change at all; for example,

deer	deer
fish	fish

But one thing that all nouns can do is "take" an *article*-- *a the* or *an* (*an* if it begins with a vowel). So, for instance,

a book / the book  
a car / the car  
a documentary / the documentary  
an artichoke / the artichoke

No other part of speech takes an article. That makes nouns *special* in this sort of way.

Nouns have one other property: a descriptive word can precede them. We call these descriptive words adjectives:

The *big* dog  
A *colorful* banner  
The *terrible* movie

<b>Modifier:</b> a word that "modifies" or describes, or changes, or adds more information to another word
--

You see how these descriptive words (called modifiers) add to our information about the thing we're naming: not just any old dog, but a *big* dog. Not just a regular banner, but a *colorful* banner. Not just your run-of-the-mill movie, but a *terrible* one!

**Proper nouns:** these are nouns that **name** a specific person, place or thing:

Not just any girl, but *Mary*.  
Not just any city, but *London*.  
Not just any company, but *General Motors*.

You'll note that the first letter of a proper noun is capitalized. (For the most part -- some companies, such as ebay.com insist on unconventional formatting of their names.)

## Verb

The verb describes or names an *action* or a state of *being*. So, first, if you can *do* it, or something can *do* it -- the word that describes the *doing* is a **verb**.

I ran five miles yesterday.

I study hard for finals.

I bought a car.

Also, verbs describe a state of being, such as

I am a student.

She is a teacher.

This is my home.

They are my friends.

You are late.

Verbs also perform another function: sometimes they "help" other verbs:

I have done this before (main verb = done)

I had gone to bed. (main verb = gone)

We were playing. (main verb = playing)

As with nouns, verbs have a special attribute (a "trick," if you will - a "thing"): they tell time! Or, in other words, verbs take *tense*. We can signal whether the act we are discussing has happened, is happening or will happen:

I took the test

I am taking the test

I will take the test

Without knowing any other details, you can tell approximately when the taking of the test took place.

Now, you try it - give tense (change) to the verbs in the sentences below according to the time indicated:

verb	sentence
Run	Yesterday, I _____.
Study	Tomorrow, I _____.
Work	Right now, I _____.

## Pronoun

The pronoun takes the place of a noun. Examples of pronouns include

I, he, she, they

them, him, her, me

their, my, her, his

Pronouns serve a handy function -- they save us the problem of repeating ourselves endlessly. For instance, if *Andy* didn't know about pronouns, this is how he might sound:

Bob is a good friend of Andy's. Bob came over to Andy's house last night.

When Bob came inside, Bob asked Andy if he could borrow a cup of sugar because Bob's wife was making a cake for Bob's wife's self.

Instead, Andy could write (or say):

Bob is a good friend of mine. He came over to my house last night. When he came inside, he asked me if he could borrow a cup of sugar because his wife was making a cake for herself.

You see how handy pronouns are. They not only save a lot of repetition, but they allow us to compact information. For instance, if the Dean of the college where I teach asked me how my students are doing, I am saved having to say,

Well, Dean Jones, Tom, Fred, Sally, Jose, Shanikra, Seumas, Alan, Susan, Maria, McKenzie ... (and so on and so forth for a hundred more students) ... are doing fine.

Because I have use of pronouns (unlike Andy above), I am able to say.

Well, Dean Jones, they are doing fine.

Pronouns can be considered as types of nouns because they take the same roles in sentences as nouns do. For example,

**Bob** called me yesterday.

**He** called me yesterday.

**Jose** gave Sally a bouquet of roses.

**He** gave Sally a bouquet of roses.

Keeping up with the Joneses -- or in this case, verbs and nouns, pronouns also have a "super power" -- they change *case*! Now, we'll learn more about that this means when we concentrate specifically on pronouns, but for now, observe how the same person (the *I* in the sentence below) is referred to by a different word depending on how the word is being used.

I heard the dog bark before it bit me on my leg.

In each case (no pun!), the *I*, *me* and *my* refer to the same person (poor me!), but depending on how the word is being used in the sentence, it changes.

There are some things that pronouns can't do (that nouns can):

1. Pronouns cannot "take" an article (*the, a, an*). In other words, you cannot write or say:

\*The *he* swam across the English Channel.

An **asterisk (\*)** in front of a sentence or phrase means that it cannot occur, that is, that it is "wrong."

2. Also, pronouns **cannot** be modified by an adjective, as nouns can:

\*The fast *she* won the race.

However, there are such idiomatic phrases such as

*Silly old me!* I forgot where I put my keys.

Pronouns also take different forms to indicate the *possessive* -- that is, ownership.

*my* computer

*her* dress

*their* house

*our* horse

### Special classes of pronouns:

**Interrogative pronouns** are pronouns that are used to ask questions such as

*Who* won the game?

*Which* color do you prefer?

*Whom* did you invite to the party?

*When* do we have the final exam?

*What* did he say?

### Indefinite pronouns:

So called because they are not definite -- the speaker is not specifying exactly who or what is being referred to:

*Somebody* broke into the store last night.

Has *anybody* seen my keys?

*Nobody* wants to take responsibility.

## Adjective:

The adjective describes noun (technically, this is called "modifying"). This means that instead of saying just

dog

You might say

big dog.

Or, perhaps, it was a

big, brown dog

In this latter case, you can see that adjectives can be combined -- that is, they can be "piled up" -- theoretically infinitely, but there are practical limits -- how many adjectives can your reader process. But still,

the big, lame, ill-tempered, smelly, old, brown dog.

could work.

Another way that adjectives work is as what is called a *subject complement*. In non-technical language, the subject complement is on the "other side" of the verb to be (is, am, are, etc.). For instance,

The man is tall.

The girl is beautiful.

The boy is not smart.

The woman is brilliant.

The town is far.

If you wish to test the *adjective-ness* of the word, try putting into more familiar adjective position:

The tall man

The beautiful girl

The smart boy  
The brilliant woman  
The far town

See if you can spot the adjectives in the following sentences. If you have trouble, remember to identify the noun and then see if anything is modifying it:

1. We drove down the long street that dark night and did not stop until we came upon the huge, spooky mansion.
2. I was supposed to meet my good friend at the restaurant that had received splendid reviews but I was late.
3. With his long sword in his firm grip, the brave hero crept up on the horrible monster.

## Adverb

The adverb has two functions. First, it modifies a verb. It tells how, or in what manner, or when an action is performed:

He walks *slowly*  
The baby sleeps *soundly*  
The sprinter ran *quickly*  
I wasn't born *yesterday*.



The second function of the adverb is that it modifies an adjective or another adverb, as in each of these cases below:

the very big, dark brown, loudly barking, viciously belligerent bull dog ...  
walk very slowly  
sleep extremely soundly  
late yesterday

See if you can pick out the adverbs in the following sentence:



**Exercise 1:**

We slowly drove down the unendingly long street that spookily dark night and did not stop until we finally came upon the immensely huge, ghostly mansion.

## Conjunction

The **conjunction** connects words, phrases and clauses. It is a connector between words, phrases, and clauses.

The coordinating conjunctions *are for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

Conjunctions join words:



**Remembering:** the coordinating (putting in equal order) conjunctions can be remembered by the acronym **FANBOYS** (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

I want ice cream and cake.

I like tea but not coffee.

Conjunctions join phrases:

Little Red Riding Hood skipped through the woods and over the bridge.



**Remembering:** Conjunction forms a "junction" (like a train junction) -- from the word *join* or *conjoin*.

Conjunctions join clauses:

The boy hit the ball, and he ran to first base.



**Factoid Alert:** **Subordinating** means to *put below in order ...* from the words *sub* (as in the word submarine - the ship that goes under water, not the sandwich!) and *ordinate*, (or to put in order)

There is another kind of conjunction, too - one we call a "**subordinating**" conjunction. This class of conjunctions includes such words as *when, while, although, because, if, though, till, until*.

Although Freddy hit the ball, we still lost the game.

We lost because Tommy was tagged out at first.

Now you try it: Identify the conjunctions in the following sentences:

- We traveled to London and saw the Queen.
- Until I heard her sing, I didn't think a person could really imitate a cat being tortured.
- The World Series game was postponed because it was raining.



**Remembering:** the subordinating conjunctions can be remembered by the acronym **WABIT** (when, while, after, although, before, if, till, though) -- this isn't all the conjunctions of this sort and some of the words do "double duty" as other parts of speech, but it will get you started.

## Preposition

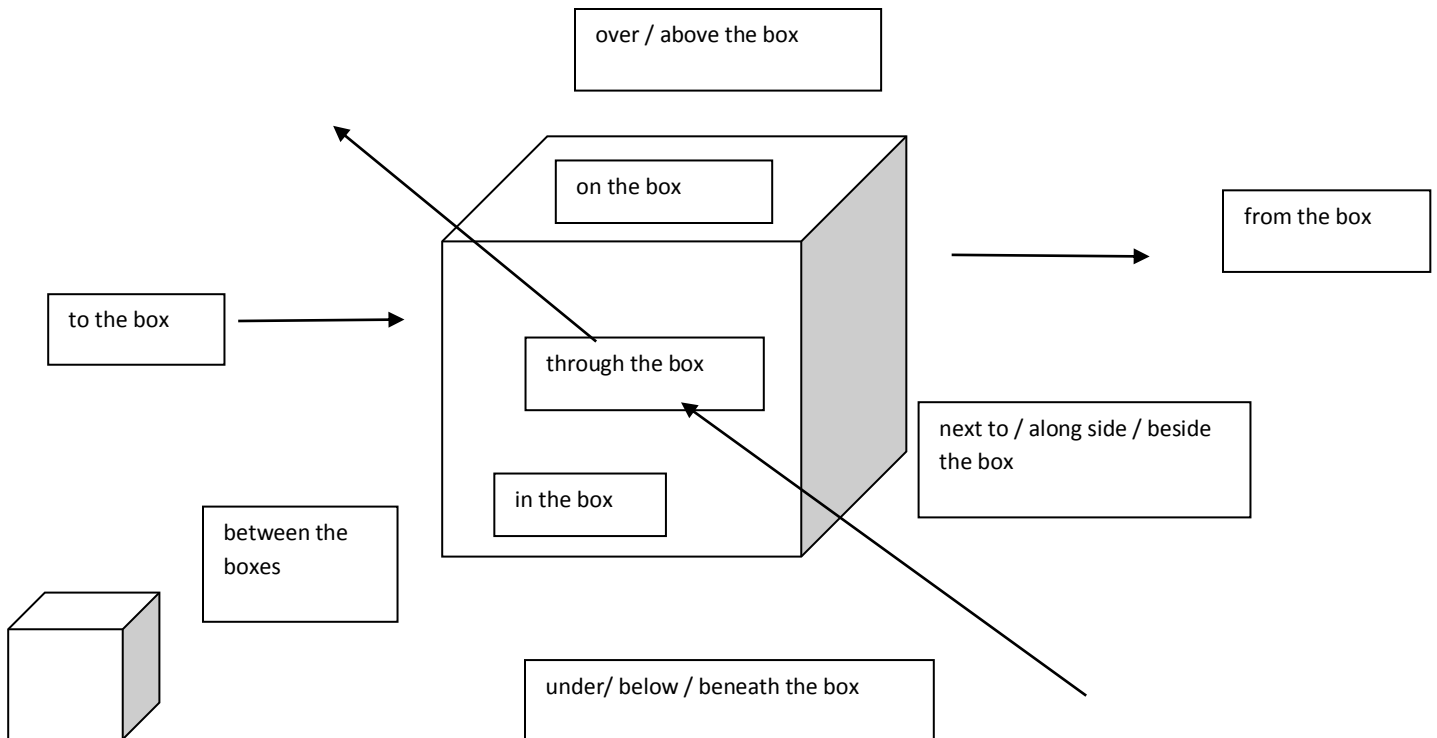
The preposition is also a connecting word, but in a different way from a conjunction. A preposition shows relationship and always exists within a phrase -- (often a prepositional phrase):

one of your problems ...

far from home ...

through the woods to grandmother's house by the river in the next county

One of the ways to remember prepositions is that they show you where you are in relationship to the box - the **preposition box**:



## Article

The words *a*, *an* or *the* are articles; also, *this*, *that*, *those*, when they precede nouns.

a cat / the cat / this cat / that cat

a computer / the computer / this computer / that computer

an aardvark / the aardvark / this aardvark / that aardvark

**This is just an overview** of the parts of speech. We will deal more extensively with each one of these concepts in the chapters to follow.

**Remembering:** Throughout the text, from time to time, I will supply you with a *mnemonic* (memory) device - in other words, a memory 'trick' that helps you remember ... like the proverbial string around the finger.



These devices are very helpful in learning. Some well-used mnemonic devices are

- Every good boy does fine: the keys for the musical scale (EGBDF)
- My very eager mother just served us nachos: the planets in the solar system (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune ... this was originally, *My very eager mother just served us nine pizzas*, but, alas, Pluto was demoted and kicked out of the *club*.)
- Please excuse my dear Aunt Sally: the order of operations in mathematics (parenthesis, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction)
- King Phillip cuts open five green snakes: the hierarchy of the taxonomic system (kingdom, phylum, class, order, family genus, species)
- Homes: the five Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- Roy G Biv: the colors of the spectrum and their order (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet).

Sometimes, mnemonics rhyme:

- In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue (the year Columbus sailed for America).
- I before E, except after C (a handy spelling rule)
- Red sky at night, sailor's delight; Red sky in morning, sailors take warning (a weather-related mnemonic).
- Lefty loosey, righty tighty (how to turn a bolt to tighten it or loosen it).

## Exercise 2:

In each of the sentences below, identify the parts of speech.

N = noun

V = verb

pron = pronoun

adj = adjective

adv = adverb

conj = conjunction

prep = preposition

art = article

The following sentences are adapted from Mark Twain's novel, *Tom Sawyer*. Identify as many parts of speech as you can:

[illegible]

2	She	looked	perplexed*	for	a	moment.					
3	She	went	to	the	open	door	and	stood	in	it	
		and	looked	out	among	the	tomato	vines	and	weeds.	
4	She	then	said,	not	fiercely,	but	still	loud	enough	for	the
		furniture	to	hear:	"Tom!"						

\*perplexed = puzzled

**Fun!** (at least *I* think it's fun).

One of the remarkable things about these parts of speech is that we recognize them as "belonging" even when we might not know the meaning of the word.

First read the following nonsense poem from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*:

## *Jabberwocky*

`Twas\* brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought --  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

Twás = *It was*  
(an old form of the  
contraction)



And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

"And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.

For our exercise, we'll go back to the first stanza (what you call a "paragraph" in poetry).

**Exercise 3:** identify the parts of speech in the following:

*(Hint: In the first line, "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves" -- (It was) brillig ... we know from above that this kind of contraction ... He is tall, She is brilliant -- the word on the other side of the verb "is" should be either a noun or an adjective, and since a noun would probably have an article (a or the) in front of it, this should be an adjective. We don't know what a "slithy tove" is but slithy looks like it is modifying toves, which would make this an adjective-noun combination.)*

**'Twas (It was) brillig, and the slithy toves**

**Did gyre and gimble in the wabe**

1. brillig
  - a. adjective
  - b. noun
  - c. verb
2. slithy
  - a. verb
  - b. noun
  - c. preposition
  - d. adjective
3. toves
  - a. preposition
  - b. noun

- c. adverb
- d. verb

4. did gyre

- a. verb
- b. noun
- c. adverb
- d. adjective

5. wabe

- a. preposition
- b. adverb
- c. noun
- d. verb

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## Answer Key

Exercise 1 (adverbs underlined):

We slowly drove down the unendingly long street that spookily dark night and did not stop until we finally came upon the immensely huge, ghostly mansion.

Exercise 2:

The following sentences are adapted from Mark Twain's novel, Tom Sawyer. Identify as many parts of speech as you can:

1	The	old	lady	pulled	her	spectacles	down	and	looked	over	them.
	Art	Adj	Noun	Verb	Pron	Noun	Adv	Conj	Verb	Prep	Pron
2	She	looked	perplexed*	for	a	moment.					
	Pron	Verb	Adj	Prep	Art	Noun					
3	She	went	to	the	open	door	and	stood	in	it	
	Pron	Verb	Prep	Art	Adj	Noun	Conj	Verb	Prep	Pron	
		and	looked	out	among	the	tomato	vines	and	weeds.	
		Conj	Verb	Prep	Prep	Art	Noun	Noun	Conj	noun	
4	She	then	said,	not	fiercely,	but	still	loud	enough	for	the
	Pron	Adv	Verb	Adv	Adv	Conj	Adv	Adv	Adv	Prep	Art
		furniture	to	hear:	"Tom!"						
		Noun	Prep	Verb	noun						

\*

Exercise 3:

**Twas (It was) brillig, and the slithy toves**

**Did gyre and gimble in the wabe**

1. brillig
  - a. adjective xxx
  - b. noun
  - c. verb
2. slithy
  - a. verb

- b. noun
- c. preposition
- d. adjective xxx

3. toves

- a. preposition
- b. noun xxx
- c. adverb
- d. verb

4. did gyre

- a. verb xxx
- b. noun
- c. adverb
- d. adjective

5. wabe

- a. preposition
- b. adverb
- c. noun xxxx
- d. verb