**Definition of "Noun Phrase"**

A phrase has at least two words and functions as one part of speech. A noun phrase plays the role of a noun. In a noun phrase, the modifiers can come before or after the noun.

**Examples of Noun Phrases**

In normal writing, nouns nearly always feature in noun phrases. It is rare to find a noun functioning by itself (i.e., without any modifiers) in a sentence.

* Man proposes, but God disposes.

(This example features two nouns without any modifiers. That's rare. In other words, there are no noun phrases in this example.) In real life, it is far more common for nouns to feature in noun phrases, i.e., to be accompanied by modifiers. Here is a list of noun phrases. In this list, every noun phrase consists of a head noun and at least one modifier.

## The Function of Noun Phrases

Like any noun, a noun phrase can function as a subject, an object, or a complement within a sentence. In each example below, the noun phrase is in bold and the head noun is underlined.

* **Singing in the bath** relaxes me.

(Here, the noun phrase is the subject of the verb "relaxes.")

* I know **the back streets**.

(Here, the noun phrase is the direct object of the verb "know.")

* She was **the devil in disguise**.

(Here, the noun phrase is a subject complement following the linking verb "was.")

Here are some real-life examples of noun phrases as subjects, objects, and complements:

* **This man** has **a nice smile**, but he's got **iron teeth**.

("This man" is the subject of the verb "has." The phrase "a nice smile" is the direct object of "has." The noun phrase "iron teeth" is the direct object of the verb "got."

I never learned from **a man who agreed with me**.

(The noun phrase "a man who agreed with me" is the object of the preposition "from." Here's the "pronoun test": I never learned from **him**.)

* **Every man of courage** is **a man of his word**. (French dramatist Pierre Corneille)

("Every man of courage" is the subject of the verb "is." The noun phrase "a man of his word" is a subject complement following the linking verb "is." Here's the "pronoun test": **He** is **one**.)

It can get complicated. It's not unusual for nouns and noun phrases to be embedded within noun phrases. Looking at the last example, "courage" and "word" are both nouns, but they are not the head nouns of the phrases. They are both objects of the preposition "of," sitting in prepositional phrases that modify the head nouns.