Phrase

Definition of Phrase

A grammatical term, which is a group of words, functions as a meaningful part or unit within a [clause](#) or [sentence](#) is called phrase. It consists of a headword that determines the grammatical nature of the unit and an optional modifier. A phrase may consist of other phrases as well.

When it becomes difficult to describe something through an [adjective](#) or [adverb](#), there comes a phrase to help the writer. For instance, "It is always the best policy to speak the truth – unless, of course, you are an exceptionally good liar." (*The Idler*, by Jerome K. Jerome). In this sentence, the underlined phrase is an adjective phrase.

Types of Phrase

Based on constructions and functions, phrase is of eight types:

Noun Phrase (NP)

A noun phrase contains a noun as a headword and related words such as determiners (like the, her, a) and modifiers, which modify that noun. It serves as a noun within a sentence.

[Prepositional Phrase](#) (Prep P)

A prepositional phrase contains a preposition, an [object](#) of preposition ([pronoun](#) or noun) and related modifiers. It mostly starts with a preposition and ends with an object of a preposition. It serves as an adjective, or adverb within a sentence.

Adjective Phrase (Adj Ph)

An adjective phrase works as an adjective within a sentence. It contains an adjective, some relevant determiners and modifiers, and a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. The function of this phrase is to work as a

verb, noun, preposition, adverb, or an adjective. The role of the phrase in writing depends upon its construction.

Adverb Phrase (Adv Ph)

It works as an adverb within a sentence. It contains and adverb and other grammatical units such as a verb, noun, preposition, and some modifiers.

Verb Phrase (VP)

It consists of the main verb and auxiliaries or helping verbs within a sentence. According to Transformational generative grammar, verb phrases may contain the main verb, auxiliaries, modifiers, and compliments. It could refer to the whole predicate of a sentence.

Infinitive Phrase (IP)

An infinitive phrase contains an infinitive, which is a combination of (to+ simple verb form), with or without other words, and modifiers associated with that infinitive. It always works as a noun, adjective or adverb within a sentence.

Gerund Phrase (GP)

Gerund phrases contain a gerund, combination of (verb+ing) other words, and modifiers associated with that gerund. In a sentence, it functions as a noun.

Participle Phrase (Part Ph)

Participle phrases contain a present participle, which is (verb+ing), and a past participle, modifiers, or other associated words. They are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas. A participle phrases act as an adjective within a sentence.

Absolute Phrase (AP)

Absolute phrase consists of a noun, pronoun, participle, and associated modifiers. They are also known as nominative phrases. They modify or provide information about an entire sentence. Absolute phrases look like clauses, yet they lack a true finite verb. They are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.

Examples of Phrase in Literature

Example #1: *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* (by Stephen Crane)

"The man stood laughing, <u>his weapons at his hips</u>."

These lines have used absolute phrase as underlined. This phrase has modified the entire sentence, or provided information about a man and his stature.

Example #2: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (by Barbara Kingsolver)

"Humans can be <u>fairly ridiculous</u> animals."

In this example, the underlined words show an adjective phrase modifying noun "humans." It is functioning as an adjective in this sentence.

Example #3: *Life in Motion* (by Misty Copeland)

"Lola walked over, gently grabbed me <u>by the hand</u>, and led me <u>to the front of the class</u>."

Copeland has used prepositional phrase twice in this sentence. Both phrases contain prepositions, object of a preposition (pronoun), and modifiers. These phrases are modifying pronouns.

Example #4: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (by Milan Kundera)

"<u>To laugh is</u> to <u>live profoundly</u>."

This is an instance of infinitive phrase. Both phrases are based on particle "to" and base verbs "laugh" and "live." In the second phrase, "profoundly" is a modifier.

A phrase functions as a verb, noun, preposition, adverb, or an adjective. The role of a phrase in writing depends upon its construction. It expresses an idea in a unit to give additional meanings to the text. If writers use it properly, it makes a written work more concise and professional.