1. Words and phrases

Tip: In English there are lots of verbs that we can use as nouns in expressions such as have a look, make a copy and do a search (=> 47).

There are eight-word classes in English, sometimes called ‘parts of speech’.

Verb: be, bring, decide, look, must, take, write.

Noun: car, dog, idea, London, sadness, time.

Adjective: big, different, high, natural.

Adverb: badly, often, probably, soon.

Determiner: a, every, my, the, this.

Pronoun: him, myself, something, you.

Conjunction: and, because, but, if.

Preposition: at, by, to, with.



Some words belong to more than one-word class. Here are some examples.

Promise(verb):

I promise I won’t be late.

Promise (noun):

I won’t be late and that’s promise.

Human(noun)

When did humans first land on the moon?

Human(adjective):

We’re defending our human rights.

That (determiner):

Look at that poster.

That (pronoun):

This is the car that I’d like.

That (conjunction):

I just know that it’s true.

There are five kinds of phrase.

A verb phrase has an ordinary verb.

There can also be one or more auxiliaries in front of the ordinary verb.

Was, arrivers, can see, don’t know, have been thinking.

A noun phrase (=>84) has a noun. There can also be a determiner and /or an adjective in front of the noun.

Music, some money, a good game.

An adjective phrase is often just an adjective. There can also be an adverb of degree (-> 127) in front of the adjective.

Great, very old, most ridiculous.

An adverb phrase is often just an adverb. There can be an adverb of degree (-> 127) in front of the adverb.

Sometimes, very carefully.

A prepositional phrase is a preposition + noun phrase. (=> 135A-b).

On the road, by Friday, for a long time.

1. The simple sentence

These are the possible structures in a simple sentence.

A

Subject + verb

The visitors have arrived.

The old man died.

A verb in this structure is called a intransitive verb e.g. arrive, die, rise, wait.

B

Subject + verb + Object

The kids have eaten all the sandwiches.

The shop sells computers.

A verb in this structure is called a transitive verb. E.g. eat, sell, take, wear.

C

Subject + verb + complement

This jacket is nice.

The song became a big hit.

A verb in this structure is called a linking verb, e.g. be, become, get, look, seen. The complement can be an adjective phrase (nice) or a noun phrase (a big hit).

D

Subject + verb + adverbial

The match is tomorrow.

We got on the bus.

The meetings are every month.

An adverbial can be an adverb phrase (tomorrow), a prepositional phrase (on the bus) or a noun phrase (every month).

E

Subject + verb + Object + object.

We should give the children presents.

Sarah sent me a text message.

Here there is a direct object (a text message) and an indirect object (me) (=>3).

F

Subject + verb + object + complement.

The project kept everyone very busy.

All the publicity made the song a big hit.

Here the complement (a big hit) relates to the object of the clause (the song).

G

Subject + verb + object + adverbial

I put my mobile in my pocket.

The police got the car out of the river.

Here the adverbial (out of the river) relates to the object (the car).

H

We can add extra adverbials to any of the clause structures.

The visitors have just arrived.

To my surprise, Sarah actually sent me a text message right away.