Notes for Language Skills Course.

Recommended texts:

Perfect Grammar

Dr Derek Soles

Published by Studymates Ltd, 2008

ISBN 978-1-84285-136-4

This will be referred to during the course.

Also very useful and easy to read is the:

Penguin Guide to Punctuation, by R.L Trask,

Published by Penguin, 1997

ISBN 978-0-14-051366-0

You should also have

Fowler's Modern English Usage,

and a good dictionary. – I recommend an Oxford no smaller than the pocket, and preferably larger.

If you are interested in further reading, I suggest:

Grammar Guide- Grammar made easy. –a thorough text with the grammatical terms clearly explained.

Gordon Jarvie, A&C black Publishers Ltd

2007

ISBN 987-0-7136-8187-1

My Grammar and I (or should that be me). – entertaining yet detailed.

Caroline Taggart and J.A Wines

Michael O'Mara Books Ltd, 2008

ISBN 978-1-84317-310-6

How to write better English.- a more general text of writing, not so much on grammar, but a good resource

Robert Allen

Penguin Books, 2005

ISBN 978-0-14-101676-4

Grammar for Lawyers. Slightly more advanced, not much detail on the grammar basics, but great if you have the basics under control.

Michael Meehan, Graham Tulloch

Butterworths Guides 2007

ISBN 978-0-409-32314-6

Common Errors and Problems in English. An alphabetical list of problem words and common mistakes.

Robert Allen

Penguin, 2008

ISBN: 978-0-141-02821-7

In these notes I will go through the principal parts of speech in some detail, and then I will look at the structure of a sentence – its syntax - and finally punctuation. This is intended as a quick reference for you; for a more thorough discussion you will need to look at the books listed above.

I have also attached a list of words which are commonly misused.

PARTS OF SPEECH

The basic terms:

NOUNS

The noun, in its simplest form, should be known to you all.

Traditionally it is termed a 'naming word'.

There are 6 different types of nouns, which are not mutually exclusive:

Common - things that share a common name, – lawyer, house, court.

Proper - refers to one individual in a wider class, - Chief Justice of Australia, Mary Smith, the High Court.

Collective - a group of things, people or animals, -committee, jury, parliament.

Concrete - something that can be seen or touched, - book, table, pen.

Abstract - something that has no physical existence, - courage, youth, freedom.

Compound nouns – a noun made up of two or more words; either paired, fairy tale; hyphenated, passer-by; or a single word, teapot.

Note the remarks by Brennan J in Theophanous v The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor (1994) 182 CLR 104 at 146 on the use of abstract nouns in legislation:

"Freedom" can be used in several senses and there is a danger in attempting to define a constitutional principle by use of an abstract noun of imprecise meaning, especially when the history of s.92 reveals that the corresponding adjective is extremely troublesome. At the outset, it is necessary to distinguish between an absolute freedom and a freedom which is protected or guaranteed by law.

Nouns can also be divided into countable or non-countable.

Countable nouns are able to be counted. They can be preceded by *a*: a dog

They can be both singular and plural: dog/dogs

They can be counted: one dog, two dogs.

Non-countable nouns will be preceded by *some* rather than *a*: some butter, some flour.

They are not normally counted: two flours, three butters.

Non-countable nouns are generally commodities that are treated as individual objects. So another form of measure is often introduced:

Two cups of flour, three spoons of butter.

Some nouns can be either, depending on the context:

The recipe needs a cup of sugar;

or "one sugar or two?"

PRONOUNS

A pronoun replaces a noun. It takes the same number and case as the noun it replaces.

Pronouns are divided into *persons* as follows:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I	we
2nd person	you	you
3rd person	he/she/it	they

These terms are important when discussing pronouns and also verbs (see below).

You need to be able to identify the different types of pronouns.

Personal pronouns:

These are used to refer back to something or someone already mentioned.

There are three types of personal pronouns:

subject:

I,	we
you,	you
he/she/it,	they

object:

me,	us
you,	you
him/her/it,	them

Possessive pronouns

These pronouns show possession. They are:

mine,	ours
yours,	yours
his/hers/its,	theirs

Also, often referred to as possessive pronouns:

my,	our
your,	your
his/hers/its,	their

However, these pronouns function as adjectives and will be examined in more detail later.

Demonstrative pronouns

These are mainly used to specify a person or thing already mentioned.

They are: this these

that those

This and these refer to something (or someone) nearby or close, whereas that and those refer to something (or someone) further away.

Interrogative pronouns

These introduce a question.

They are:

who whom what whose which

These possessive, demonstrative and interrogative words can also function as adjectives – see below.

Reflexive pronouns

These refer back to a noun or pronoun already referred to in a sentence.

For example:

The child must learn the lessons himself.

The reflexive pronouns are:

myself, ourselves,

yourself, yourselves,

himself/herself/itself, themselves

Reciprocal pronouns

Each other, one another

These show a two way relationship.

Reciprocal pronouns can only be used as the object of a verb or following a preposition.

Indefinite pronouns

These refer to people or things unknown or unspecified

They are: anybody everybody nobody somebody

anyone	everyone	no one	someone
anything	everything	nothing	something

Distributive pronouns

These refer to members of a class.

All both each either neither none

Relative pronouns

These introduce a relative clause. More will be said about relative clauses later.

The five relative pronouns are:

who whom whose that which

ADJECTIVES

An adjective qualifies, or modifies a noun or a pronoun.

For example:

The *tiresome* class...

The *complicated* judgement...

Adjectives can be placed close to the noun: the *noisy* students were removed from the class. These are called attributive adjectives.

Or they can be placed after the verb: The class was *noisy*. These are called predicative adjectives.

Numbers are often used as adjectives:

Five judges sat on Friday.

He was the *third* judge from the left.

Adjectives can follow the noun: the people *concerned* were gathered in the garden.

There are certain fixed expressions which have the adjective follow the noun: Attorney-*General*; Governor-*General*.

When these are made plural, it is the first word – the noun- that is made plural: Attorneys-General; Governors-General.

Comparison of adjectives.

Adjectives compare in three ways: They can compare the qualities up, as equal, or down.

For example:

Comparing up:

The Appellant's submissions were *more* detailed than the Respondent's. (comparative)

The Appellant's submissions were the *most* detailed. (superlative)

They are *older* than the usual Defendant. (comparative)

The *oldest* Defendants were allowed to sit. (superlative)

Equal:

The house was *as* clean *as* a pin.

Comparing down:

Her comments were *less* useful than her sisters.

Her comments were the *least* useful of all.

Regular comparative and superlative adjectives are formed by either adding –er/ -est, or preceding the adjective by more/most. In general, short, one syllable words, use the –er/-est form and words with three or more syllables require the additional word. Words with two syllables can go either way.

Some adjectives do not compare as they have an absolute meaning.

For example:

unique, right, perfect.

Interrogative, demonstrative and possessive adjectives

Interrogative adjectives are what, whose, which. These are used to acquire more information about a noun.

For example:

Which book did you study from?

What subjects did you pass?

Whose car did you drive today?

Note that each question asks for more information about a stated noun.

Compare these to the interrogative pronouns:

Which do you want?

What are these?

Whose is the car in the street?

Note that the adjectives must have a noun which they are qualifying, whereas the pronouns take the place of the noun.

Similarly the *demonstrative adjectives*; this, that, these and those, demonstrate or point out the noun they are qualifying.

For example:

That book was very detailed. (adjective)

That was very detailed. (pronoun)

These classes are very long. (adjective)

These are very long classes. (pronoun)

Note also the possessive adjectives:

my	our
your	your
her/his/its	their

But also:

mine	ours
yours	yours
hers/his/its	theirs

When the adjective is being used attributively, the first set of words is used; *My* book is great.

But when used predicatively the latter are used; The great book is *mine*.

When adjectives precede a noun, it may be necessary to hyphenate them in order to make your meaning clear.

Consider the difference, for example:

Five-year-old boys will be included in the study.

Five year-old boys will be included in the study.

ARTICLES

There are two types of article:

the definite article and the indefinite article.

The definite article restricts the meaning of a noun making it more specific, or definite. The definite article is *the*.

The indefinite article is to show that there is not a specific item of the noun that is indicated. The indefinite articles are *a* before a vowel, and *an* before a consonant.

Goold v Commonwealth of Australia (1993) 114 ALR 135 at 139 -140, Wilcox J:

So far as language is concerned, it is significant that the drafter of the paragraph used the indefinite article "an" rather than the definite article 'the'. The word "an" suggests an intention that it be enough that the intention was to meet the needs of any "acquiring authority"; that is, any entity falling within the defined meaning of that term.

VERBS

Known traditionally as the 'doing' words. In fact they are more accurately described as the 'doing', 'having' or 'being' words. The categories are of some significance because the so-called 'being' verbs: the verbs: to be, to become, to feel, to seem, to appear, to get, to grow and to remain, are copula verbs. These verbs link the two parts of a sentence. More will be said about this below.

Types of verbs

Verbs, in their 'raw' form are called the infinitive. This is when the action of the verb is clear – to run, to jump, but you are not told who is performing this action or when it is performed. These verbs are in the form *to....* When the subject of the verb is known or understood the verb is being used in its finite form. (He) runs, (you) jump. The finite verb has a tense – jump/jumped and agrees with its subject in person and number.

Simple verbs are verbs of only one word; walk, talk, write.

Compound verbs consist of two or more words. The additional word alters the usual meaning of the verb.

For example:

he *washed up* the dishes. They *hand washed* their clothes. He had to *make do* in the circumstances. She *got rid of* the pests.

Many verbs are made up of more than one word. They consist of the 'action' word and an auxiliary word. The main auxiliary verbs are the verb to be, to have and to do. I *am* reading, *do* you read, she *has* read...

A specific and common type of auxiliary verb is the modal verb. These give a range of meanings to the main verb, such as possibility, certainty, instruction, request, want and obligation. The main modal verbs are:

can	could	must	shall	should	be able to
will	would	may	might	have to	

For example:

Possibility – You might study harder.

Request – Could you please study harder?

Obligation – I must study harder if I am to pass the exam.

Tense

The tense of the verb tells when the action of the verb is taking place. In the present and the past tense, there is some inflection of the word: I run, she runs. An inflection is a change to the word which expresses different persons or tenses.

However, a change in tense is often shown by the use of an auxiliary verb, such as:

She runs every day (present tense).

Yesterday she ran (past tense).

Tomorrow she will run (future tense).

There are many tenses in English, and using them correctly is important as tense has a marked effect on meaning.

The most common tenses are:

Present:

This shows an action that is occurring now. Most verbs are regular in form in the present tense:

I work	we work
You work	you work
He/she/it works	they work.

However many of the most common verbs are irregular in their present form:

I am	we are
You are	you are
He/she/it is	they are

Past:

This shows an action that has already occurred.

The past is often formed by adding –ed to the regular verb:

I worked	we worked
You worked	you worked
He/she/it worked	they worked

However, there are many irregular forms of the past:

I was	we were
You were	you were
He/she/it was	they were.

Future:

This shows an action that will occur later. It is formed by adding an auxiliary.

I will work	we will work
You will work	you will work
He/she /it will work	they will work.

I will be	we will be
You will be	you will be
He/she/it will be	they will be

These are the main three divisions of the tenses. However there are many more tenses used to express more precisely the timing of the action.

For example:

Present continuous – she is running along the path.

Perfect – I have studied all night.

Past perfect (pluperfect) - I had studied all night.

Future perfect – By tomorrow, I will have studied all night.

The complete tense is often formed by an auxiliary verb and a participle. There are two kinds of participle:

the present participle of regular verbs is formed by adding *–ing* to the root of the verb,

For example:

draft – drafting

study – studying

run – running.

The tense is shown by the auxiliary and the present participle – The student is studying; the lawyer was drafting the will.

The past participle of regular verbs is formed by adding *–ed* to the verb,

For example:

draft – drafted

study – studied.

Note there are many irregular past participles:

know – knew

say – said.

Participles are used in many ways in a sentence, not just as a part of a compound verb. As with most words the part of speech being employed will depend on the way the word is being used in the sentence.

For example:

The door is opening (participle).

The opened door is a good sign (adjective).

The opening speech was very long (adjective).

The tense used in writing is very important and affects the meaning of the sentence.

Consider the comments by Mason J in considering s 301 of the *Navigation Act 1912* (Cth): *Robinson* v *Western Australian Museum* (1977) 138 CLR 283 at p 334:

The section provides for the receiver ....., to conduct an examination of witnesses on oath in relation to certain matters "Where any ship is or has been wrecked, stranded, or in distress". The use of the perfect as well as the present tense does not indicate that the present tense is intended to signify only those ships which became wrecked, stranded or distressed after the commencement of the Act. The employment of the perfect tense in this section - a usage not repeated elsewhere in the provisions now under consideration - appears to me to be designed to authorize an examination of witnesses in relation to a maritime casualty or emergency which occurred before the commencement of the Act, where the condition of the ship no longer continues to answer the statutory description. No doubt it was considered necessary or desirable to provide for the examination of witnesses to a past maritime casualty or emergency, though it did not result in a ship being wrecked, stranded or in distress after the commencement of the Act, e.g. a ship in distress which was saved before that date.

Transitive and Intransitive verbs.

A transitive verb is one which takes a direct object. (see below for discussion of subjects and objects)

For example:

I study my notes – study is a transitive verb; my notes is the object of the verb.

I hear voices – hear is transitive, voices is the object.

An intransitive verb does not take a direct object.

For example:

The volcano erupted – there is no object.

I listen to the voices – to the voices is an *indirect* object.

Many verbs can function either transitively or intransitively.

I play football (transitive).

I play every day (intransitive).

Note carefully the correct use of *to lay* and *to lie*.

These irregular verbs are very often confused.

To lie is an intransitive verb:

I lie down. (no object)

To lay is a transitive verb:

The hen lays the eggs. (object is eggs)

The confusion arises because of the similarity of the irregular forms of the verbs:

Present tense:	I lie down	I lay the bricks
Past tense:	I lay down	I laid the bricks
Past participle:	I had lain down	I had laid the bricks.

Mood

The mood of the verb tells the attitude of the verb. The three most common moods are: indicative – when the verb is being used in a statement or to state a fact; imperative – when an order is being given; subjunctive – when it is a non-factual statement, such as a wish or supposition.

For example:

Indicative: She speaks very quietly

Imperative: Speak quietly!

Subjunctive: If I were you, I would speak quietly.