

Elements of a Sentence / Syntax / Sentence Types / Parts of a Sentence

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| article | <p>There are three articles in the English language: <i>a, an, the</i>. Articles are placed before nouns and form part of the noun group when referring to either a specific person or thing (<i>the</i>) or a non-specific person or thing (<i>a, an</i>). <i>The</i> is called a definite article; <i>a</i> and <i>an</i> are called indefinite articles.</p> |
| noun | <p>A word used to represent people, places, ideas and things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nouns used to name any one of a class of things are known as <i>common</i> nouns, for example <i>girl, classroom, egg</i>.• Nouns used to name a place, a person or the title of something are known as <i>proper</i> nouns. They are signalled by a capital letter, for example <i>Sam, Wagga Wagga, Olympic Games</i>.• Nouns used to name a group of things are known as <i>collective</i> nouns, for example <i>crowd, swarm, team</i>.• Nouns used to name things that we cannot see but which exist in thoughts and feelings are known as <i>abstract</i> nouns, for example <i>sadness, love, wonder</i>.• <i>Pronouns</i> are words like <i>I, you, them, hers</i> that are used in place of a noun (see pronoun). |
| pronoun | <p>A word that is used in place of a noun. There are different types of pronouns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>personal</i> pronouns represent specific people or things, for example <i>she, it, they, you, we</i>• <i>demonstrative</i> pronouns indicate a thing or things, for example <i>this, these, that, those</i>• <i>possessive</i> pronouns refer to the belonging of one thing, person, etc, to another, for example <i>his, theirs, yours, mine</i>• <i>interrogative</i> pronouns represent the things that we are asking questions about, for example <i>who, whom, what, which</i>• <i>reflexive</i> pronouns refer back to the subject of the sentence or clause. Reflexive pronouns end in <i>-self</i> (singular) or <i>-selves</i> (plural). The reflexive pronoun <i>myself</i> is not a substitute for the personal pronouns <i>I</i> or <i>me</i>• <i>reciprocal</i> pronouns are used when each of two or more subjects is acting in the same way towards the other, for example 'Jack and Jill love <i>each other</i>', 'The footballers were blaming <i>one another</i>'• <i>indefinite</i> pronouns do not refer to any specific person, thing or amount, for example <i>all, another, any, anybody/anyone, anything, each, everybody/everyone, everything, few, many, nobody, none, one, several, some, somebody/someone</i>• <i>relative</i> pronouns introduce a relative clause. They are called relative because they relate to the words they modify. There are five relative pronouns: <i>who, whom, whose, which, that</i>. |
| verb | <p>The verb is perhaps the most important part of the sentence. A verb states what is happening in the sentence. Finite verbs locate the condition or action of the verb in a specific time frame: past, present or future (see finite verbs and tense). Verbs create the relationship between the subject and the object of the verb (see subject-verb agreement). Different types of verbs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>action</i> verbs, for example 'They danced all night.'• <i>relating</i> verbs, for example 'Cows are herbivores.'• <i>thinking</i> verbs, for example 'She forgot his name.'• <i>feeling</i> verbs, for example 'Sarah likes baked beans.'• <i>possessing</i> verbs, for example 'He has a new car.' |

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| finite verbs | Verbs that have a specific tense and a subject with which they grammatically agree (see verb). A complete sentence must contain a finite verb. |
| auxiliary verb | A verb that gives further semantic or syntactic information about a main or full verb. The most common auxiliary verbs are <i>be</i> , <i>do</i> and <i>have</i> . Note that they are only auxiliary verbs when connected to another verb. They can be used as verbs on their own. <i>Will</i> and <i>shall</i> are auxiliary verbs used to express future time. Modal auxiliaries such as <i>shall</i> , <i>could</i> and <i>might</i> also operate to adjust verb meanings. |
| adjective | A word class that describes a noun to add extra meaning. Different types of adjectives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possessive adjectives, for example <i>my</i>, <i>his</i>, <i>her</i> • numbering adjectives, for example <i>two</i>, <i>many</i>, <i>lots of</i> • describing adjectives, for example <i>big</i>, <i>old</i>, <i>yellow</i>, <i>beautiful</i> • comparing adjectives, for example <i>more delicate</i>, <i>best</i>, <i>bigger</i> • classifying adjectives, for example <i>Persian cat</i>, <i>air transport</i>. |
| adverb | A word class that modifies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a verb, for example 'She sings <i>beautifully</i>.' • an adjective, for example 'He is <i>really</i> interesting.' • another adverb, for example 'She walks <i>very slowly</i>.' <p>In English many adverbs have an <i>-ly</i> ending.</p> |
| preposition | A word that begins an adverbial phrase or an adjectival phrase indicating time, place, manner, causality, for example <i>in</i> , <i>on</i> , <i>after</i> , <i>before</i> , <i>by</i> , <i>under</i> , <i>over</i> , <i>of</i> , <i>through</i> . Pronouns following prepositions always take objective case, for example ' <i>between</i> you and <i>me</i> ' (not between you and I). |
| syntax | The way in which sentences and clauses are structured. Syntax is often described in terms of such elements as subject, verb and object, for example 'Christine (subject) munched (verb) the apple (object)'. |
| subject | An element in the structure of a clause usually filled by a noun group, for example 'The dog (subject) was barking'. The subject indicates who or what gives agency or attributes to the finite verb or verb group and is usually found by asking 'who' or 'what' before the verb. In the sentence, 'The dog was barking', asking 'What was barking?' gives the answer, the dog. The normal position of the subject is before the verb group, for example ' <i>The dog</i> was barking', but in most kinds of interrogatives (questions) it follows the first auxiliary verb, for example 'Was <i>the dog</i> barking?', 'Why was <i>the dog</i> barking?' All main clauses and simple sentences must have a subject. |
| verb | The verb is perhaps the most important part of the sentence. A verb states what is happening in the sentence. Finite verbs locate the condition or action of the verb in a specific time frame: past, present or future (see finite verbs and tense). Verbs create the relationship between the subject and the object of the verb (see subject-verb agreement). Different types of verbs include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action verbs, for example 'They danced all night.' • relating verbs, for example 'Cows are herbivores.' • thinking verbs, for example 'She forgot his name.' • feeling verbs, for example 'Sarah likes baked beans.' • possessing verbs, for example 'He has a new car.' |

object The noun, noun group or pronoun in a sentence that is affected by an action. To find the object ask who or what after the verb, for example 'The girl threw *the ball*'. (She threw what? Answer: the ball.)

sentence A unit of written language consisting of one or more clauses that are grammatically linked. A written sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark. A sentence contains a finite verb. There are different types of sentences:

- simple sentence – is a single main clause and expresses a complete thought. It has a subject and a finite verb and may also have an object, for example 'Mary is beautiful.', 'The ground shook.', 'Take a seat.'
- compound sentence – contains two or more clauses that are coordinated or linked in such a way as to give each clause equal status. In the following example *and* is the coordinating conjunction: 'We went to the movies *and* bought an ice cream.'
- complex sentence – contains a main (or independent) clause and one or more subordinate (or dependent) clauses. The subordinate clause is joined to the main clause through subordinating conjunctions like *when*, *while* and *before*, as in the following examples: 'We all went outside *when* the sun came out.', '*Because* I am reading a long book, my time is limited.'

conjunction A word that joins other words, phrases or clauses together in logical relationships such as addition, time, cause or comparison. There are two major types of conjunctions for linking messages:

- coordinating conjunctions link words, phrases and clauses in such a way that the elements have equal status in meaning. They include conjunctions like *and*, *or*, *but*
- subordinating conjunctions introduce certain kinds of subordinate clauses. They include words like *that*, *whether* (or *if*), *while*, *after*, *when*, *because*, *if* (in the conditional sense) and serve to mark the kind of subordinate clause introduced.

clause A clause is a complete message or thought expressed in words. The essential component of a clause is a finite verb or verb group, for example 'She *played* in the sandpit', 'Duc *was running* home'.

- A *main clause* (also known as a principal or independent clause) is a clause that can stand alone as a complete sentence, though it may be joined with other clauses, for example '*The child came first*'.
- A *subordinate clause* (also known as a dependent clause) is a group of words that cannot stand alone or make complete sense on its own. It needs to be combined with a main clause to form a complete sentence. Subordinate clauses will usually be adjectival or adverbial clauses.
- An *adjectival clause* is a clause that provides information which defines the qualities or characteristics of the person or thing named. It usually begins with a relative pronoun and is sometimes called a relative clause, for example 'The child *who had the red top* came first'.
- An *adverbial clause* is a clause that modifies the verb in the main clause, for example 'The child came first *because he was the fastest runner*'.

An adverbial phrase or clause contributes additional information to the main clause. Generally, these will answer the questions:

- how, for example 'They walked to town *very quickly*.'
- when, for example 'She had dinner *after everyone had left*.'
- where, for example 'I spoke with him *outside the house*.'
- why, for example 'Tom felt tired *because he had run a marathon*.'

An adverbial can also contribute evaluative interpersonal meaning to a clause, for example '*Frankly*, I don't care'. Adverbs, adverb groups, prepositional phrases, nouns and noun groups can function as adverbials.

phrase

A group of words that forms part of a sentence and does not include a finite verb (see finite verbs).

- Adjectival phrase – a group of words (usually beginning with a preposition) that gives more information about a noun, for example '*The girl with brown curly hair* sat at the front', 'The flowers *in the vase* were wilting'.
- Adverbial phrase – a group of words that provides information about where, when, with what, how far, how long, with whom, about what, as what, for example 'She swept the floor *with an old broom*', '*Throughout time* people have attempted to halt old age'.

prepositional phrases Units of meaning within a clause that begin with a preposition. They indicate how, when, where or why, for example 'She ran *into the garden*', 'He is available *from nine o'clock*'.

tense

The element that determines when the action or condition of the verb form is located in time. In broad terms the tense will be past, present or future, for example 'Sarah *laughed*', 'Sarah *laughs*', 'Sarah *will laugh*'. Participles (verbs ending in *-ing*) do not locate a verb in time and need a finite component to indicate when the event happens. For example, the participle *running* needs the finite auxiliaries *was running* (past), *is running* (present), *will be running* (future) to indicate when the running occurred.

noun-pronoun agreement

Occurs when a writer or speaker selects the correct pronoun for the noun or noun group to which it is referring, for example '*The boy* was looking for *his* father in the supermarket'. There should be agreement in number and gender. In an effort to avoid sexist statements the plural *their* is sometimes used in place of *his* or *her*, without regard for the rules of agreement.

subject-verb agreement

The form of the verb must agree with the number of its subject, which will be a noun or noun group, for example 'They were not home' (as opposed to 'They was not home'). Confusion can arise when deciding whether the subject is singular or plural, for example 'This group of students *is* very clever', or when there are two subjects, for example 'Ice cream and strawberries *are* delicious' (not '*is* delicious').