

English Language Lesson: Identifying Parts of Speech

There are eight types of words in the English language. Words fall into different categories based on their functions. In this handout, we will look first at types of words and then see how they can help us further understand the parts of the sentence. [For a diagram of the parts of speech, see the final page of this handout.]

Parts of Speech

There are eight forms of words in the English language, typically called the *parts of speech*. They are *nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections*.

Nouns and Pronouns

Nouns are words that stand for people, places, things, or ideas. A noun can represent something that physically exists (a mountain, a car) or a concept (a memory, love). Pronouns are words that stand in for nouns in a sentence. Pronouns “rename” a noun.

Sample Nouns: Jeremy, freedom, cats

Sample Pronouns: he, it, they

Common noun and pronoun issues and errors are discussed further the handout on nouns.

Verbs

Verbs are words that express action or being. They can be intransitive (complete in themselves) or transitive (requiring a complement to make sense). Transitive verbs can be action or being.

Sample intransitive verbs: sleeps, thrives, lingers

Sample transitive action verbs: carries, gives, shakes

Sample transitive being verbs: is, was, were

Common verb issues and errors will be discussed further in the handout on verbs.

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are modifiers that provide further information about another word. An *adjective* describes a noun. Articles (a, an, the) are categorized as adjectives.

Sample: *the lazy* schoolboy, *the blue* door, *a quick* run

An *adverb* describes or modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

Sample: He swam *rapidly* towards the finish line. (“Rapidly” modifies the verb “swam” tells us how he swam)

The *deep* red sweater sat on the table. (“Deep” modifies the adjective “red” telling us just how red the sweater is.)

The choir sang *very loudly*. (“Loudly” modifies the verb “sang” describing how the singing occurred. “Very” modifies “loudly” describing to what degree the choir was loud.)

Adjective, adverbs, and modifiers will be discussed further in the handout on modifiers.

Prepositions and Conjunctions

Prepositions and conjunctions make connections between groups of words. A *conjunction* is a word that connects words or groups of words. There are three types of conjunctions: coordinating

conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, and subordinating conjunctions. *Coordinating conjunctions* connect groups of grammatically similar words. There are seven coordinating conjunctions: and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet. *Correlative conjunctions* use pairs of coordinating conjunctions. *Subordinating conjunctions* connect an adverb or a noun to the main clause.

Example: The canary *and* the parrot were sitting in the tree. (*“And” is a conjunction connecting the two nouns “canary” and “parrot”*).

Example: I will go to the store, *or* you will go for me. (*“Or” is a coordinating conjunction connecting the two equal halves of the sentence.*)

Example: *Because* I forgot my homework, the professor failed me. (*“Because” is a subordinating conjunction joining the clause discussing homework to the main sentence. It gives the reason why the failing occurred.*)

Example: *After* I went to the store, I checked out a book. (*“After” is a subordinating conjunction joining the clause discussing the store to the main sentence. It gives the time when the checking on occurred.*)

Using conjunctions are discussed further in the handout on phrases and clauses.

A *preposition* links a noun or pronoun to other words in the sentence. Prepositions are often used to show relationships (often in logic, space, or time) between the noun and the rest of the sentence. The group of words that the preposition connects is called *the prepositional phrase*. The phrase often acts as a modifier (an adjective or adverb) phrase.

Sample - adverb: The dog crawled *under* the sofa. (*The preposition “under” connects the verb “crawled” to the noun “the sofa.” “Under” begins the prepositional phrase that tells us where.*)

Sample-adverb: The road runs *past* the windmill. (*The preposition “past” connects the verb “runs” to the noun “windmill.” “Past” begins the prepositional phrase that tells us where.*)

Sample-adjective: Get the yoghurt *underneath* the cheese. (*The preposition “underneath” connects the noun “yoghurt” to the noun “cheese.” “Underneath” begins the prepositional phrase that tells us which.*)

Common prepositions: in, on, beside, to, over, throughout. Preposition usage is discussed in more detail on the handout on prepositions.

Note: Some words can serve as both prepositions and conjunctions. A preposition can *only* be followed by a noun, while a subordinating conjunction can be followed by a noun or by a clause.

Example: *After* supper, we will go to the park. (*Preposition: followed by a noun*).

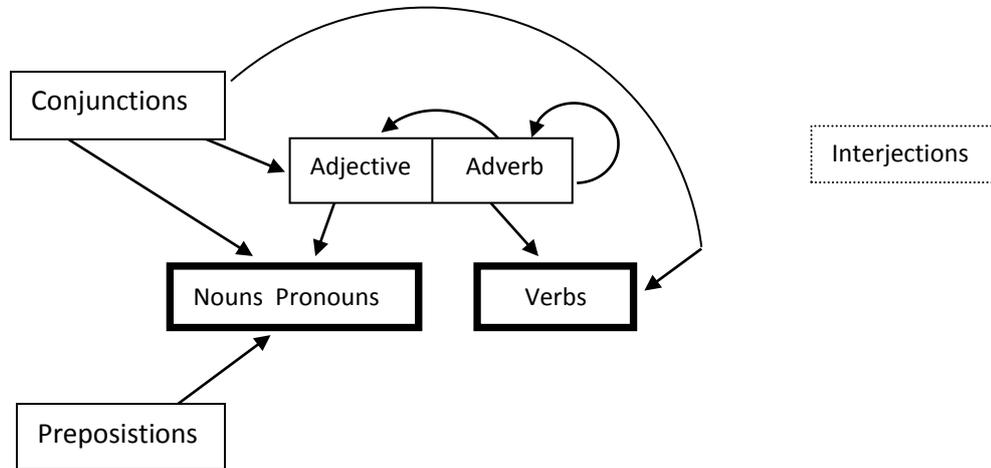
After we lost the playoffs, we went home and cried. (*Sub. conj: followed by a clause*).

Interjections

Interjections are words used to express strong emotion. They have no grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence and are rarely found in academic or formal writing.

Sample interjections: Hey! Ouch! Damn! Pow!

Note: In the last lesson, we identified words based on function. A noun may also be a predicate nominative, or it may be a direct object, etc.

Parts of Speech -Overview

- Nouns/Pronouns (Things) + Verbs (Action/Being) make a sentence.
- Adjectives modify nouns. Adverbs modify verbs, adverbs, and adjectives.
- Prepositions link a noun or pronoun to the rest of the sentence.
- Conjunctions join each part of speech or of a sentence to similar parts.
- Interjections express strong emotion.