WRITING CENTER

Parts of Speech Overview

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PARTS OF SPEECH

Words are grouped into eight classes or parts of speech, according to their function, place, meaning, and use in a sentence. The parts of speech are:

- **Nouns**
- **Pronouns**
- **Verbs**
- **Adjectives**
- **Adverbs**
- **Prepositions**
- **Conjunctions**
- **Interjection**

FORM VS. FUNCTION

Many words are not confined to one part of speech, but may function in several capacities. Consider the word "light" in the following contexts:

- As you **light** the candle, say a prayer. (verb)
- The **light** glowed at the end of the pier. (noun)
- Use a **light** touch when you pet the frightened cat. (adjective)
- When packing for a long trip, be sure to pack **light** to save space. (adverb)

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NOUNS

A **noun** names a person, place, thing, or idea.

> **Example:** **Repetition** does not transform a **lie** into **truth.**

Nouns:

- Often appear with an article (**a** spoon, **an** apple, **the** newspaper).
- Can usually be made plural (one **kitten**, two **kittens**).
- Can usually be made possessive (the **kitten's** paw).
- Can be a **subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, object complement,** or **object of a preposition.**

PROPER NOUNS AND COMMON NOUNS

Proper nouns are the names of specific persons, places, and things. All other nouns are **common nouns.**

Proper Nouns	Common Nouns
Book of Jeremiah	a book
Father John	a priest
Lake Superior	a lake
Declaration of Independence	a treaty

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

A **collective noun** stands for a group of people, animals, or things.

- **Collective nouns** can work with either singular or plural verbs, or pronouns, without changing their form.
- If a collective is a single unit, it takes a singular verb or singular pronoun to refer to it.
- If the individuals are working separately, the noun takes plural verbs or pronouns.

> **Examples:** The **jury agreed** on its verdict. (The **jury** is acting as a single unit, so the noun needs a singular verb.)
>
> The **jury were arguing** about their views. (Individuals on the **jury** are arguing, so the noun is treated as plural.)

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Common Collective Nouns

audience	Congress	group	team
class	faculty	herd	troop
crew	family	jury	U.S. Senate
committee	flock	mob	

POSSESSIVE NOUNS

Possessive nouns are noun forms that show ownership, possession, or similar relationships. To show possession:

- Add an apostrophe before the last "s" if the word is singular.
- Add an apostrophe after the "s" if the word is plural.

> **Examples:** Incorrect: The boys foot hurt after he took a long hike.
>
> Correct: The boy's foot hurt after he took a long hike.
>
> Correct: The boys' feet hurt after they took a long hike.

PRONOUNS

A **pronoun** is a word used in place of a noun. The pronoun usually substitutes for a specific noun, known as its **antecedent** ('the words before").

Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in *number* (she or they), in *person* (I, you, him), and in *gender* (he, she, it).

COMMON PRONOUNS

Subject of a sentence (Nominative)		Object of a verb (Objective)		Ownership of the antecedent (Possessive)	
I	it	me	it	my, mine	its
you	we	you	us	your, yours	our, ours
he	they	him	them	his	their, theirs
she		her		her, hers	

TYPES OF PRONOUNS

- Demonstrative: Refers to things (**this, that, these, those**)
- Intensive: Ends in self, selves (**myself, itself, herself, himself, yourself)**

- Indefinite: Indefinite reference to nouns (**each, one, all, anybody, some, everyone**)
- Interrogative: Used in questions (**who, which, what, whose, whom**)
- Personal: Refers to people or things (**I, you, he, she, it, we, they**)
- Possessive: Does not take an apostrophe (**its, her, theirs**)
- Reciprocal: Refers back to individual parts of plural terms (**each other, one another**)
- Reflexive: Intensifies nouns they refer back to (**yourselves, themselves**)
- Relative: Relates dependent clause to a noun (**who, which, that, what, whom**)

ADJECTIVES

An **adjective** is a modifier that describes nouns and pronouns. It may appear before or after the word it modifies.

An adjective usually answers one of these questions: **Which one? What kind of? How many?**

> **Examples:**   The **tame** elephant. (**Which** elephant?)
>
>   Her **rare, valuable, old** stamps. (**What kind of** stamps?)
>
>   These **sixteen** candles. (**How many** candles?)

TYPES OF ADJECTIVES

- Descriptive (**gray** sky, **beautiful** garden)
- Proper (**Buddhist, Italian**)
- Limiting or possessive—these adjectives do not describe qualities, but instead identify or specify the words they modify **(this** sky, **my** garden, **its** name)

Note: Adjectives do not change form based on number: **new** student (singular); **new** students (plural).

ADJECTIVE FORMS

Adjectives (and adverbs) appear in three forms: **positive, comparative**, and **superlative**. The positive, or **simple**, form is the form most common in speech and writing. Use the comparative and superlative forms to make comparisons:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
hungry	hungrier	hungriest

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small	smaller	smallest
good	better	best

VERBS

A **verb** is a word that indicates action or existence, expressing what a subject does or is.

FORMS OF A VERB

Person
First person: I walk.
Second person: You walk.
Third person: He/She/It walks.

Number
Singular: It walks.
Plural: They walk.

Tense
Past: I walked outside.
Present: I walk outside.
Future: I will walk outside.

Voice
Active voice: The fans watched the game.
Passive voice: The game was watched by the fans.

Mood
Imperative: Listen!
Indicative: You are listening.
Subjunctive: I wish you would listen.

PRIMARY VERB FORMS

All English verbs, with the exception of **be**, have five primary forms:

Base Form	Present Tense	Present Participle	Past Tense	Past Participle
look	looks	looking	looked	looked
walk	walks	walking	walked	walked
watch	watches	watching	watched	watched

1. The **base form** is used for the present tense when the subject of the verb is **I, you, we, they,** or a plural noun.

    Example: I **talk** and you **listen.**

2. The **present tense** indicates action in the present when the subject is third-person singular (**he, she, it** or a **singular noun).**

    Example: He **walks** while she **talks**.

3. The **present participle** indicates continuing action, created by adding -**ing** to the base form of the verb. In order to function as the main verb in a sentence, a participle must be accompanied by a form of the verb **be.**

   > **Example:** Mary **is looking** for a large apartment.

   A **gerund** is a present participle functioning as the subject or object in a sentence.

   > **Examples:** **Swimming** is good exercise. (**Swimming** is the subject.)
   > Jonathan liked **fishing**. (**fishing** is the direct object of **liked.**)

   A present participle can also be an adjective.

   > **Example:** He gave **supporting** evidence. (**supporting** modifies **evidence.)**

4. The **past tense** indicates action that occurred in the past. A verb's past tense can often be recognized by its **-d** or **-ed** ending. The past tense does not change form to show person or number.

   > **Examples:** [His parents] or [Richard] **agreed** with her.
   > [His parents] or [Richard] **traveled** to Paris and **saw** the Eiffel Tower.

5. The **past participle** is identical to the past tense form of the verb (except in some irregular verbs). Like the present participle, the past participle must be accompanied by a form of the verb **be** to function as the main verb in the sentence. It does not change form to indicate person or number.

   The past participle can also function as an adjective.

   > **Examples:** Nearly everyone **was helped** at the scene. (passive voice verb)
   > I never eat an **overcooked** steak. (adjective)

IRREGULAR VERBS

Verbs that form their past tense in other ways than adding a **–d** or **–ed** at the end are called **irregular** verbs.

> **Examples:** I **see** the birds. (perfect tense)
> I **saw** the birds. (past tense)

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AUXILIARY VERB FORMS

Some verbs do not make sense without an **auxiliary verb** (or a **helping verb**). The most common auxiliary verbs are **be, have, do.**

Forms of **be, have, do**

Base Form	Present Tense	Present Participle	Past Tense	Past Participle
be	I **am** he/she/it **is** we/you/they **are**	**being**	I/he/she/it **was** we/you/they **were**	**been**
have	I **have** he/she/it **has** we/you/they **have**	**having**	I **have** he/she/it **had** we/you/they **had**	**had**
do	I **do** he/she/it **does** we/you/they **do**	**doing**	**did**	**done**

LINKING VERBS

A **linking verb** joins the subject of a sentence to a sentence complement, which describes or renames the subject. Linking verbs usually describe states of being, not actions.

> **Examples:**   Alex Gordon **was** a baseball player for the Kansas City Royals.
>
> Salvador Perez **remained** confident that the Royals would succeed.

Linking verbs include all forms of the verb **be: am, is, was, are, were, be, being, been.**

ADVERBS

An **adverb** is a word that describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs add to action verbs; they show how, when, where or why actions are done. Adverbs often end in **–ly**.

> **Examples:**   The pastry chef **carefully** spread raspberry frosting over the cake. (The adverb **carefully** describes the verb **spread**.)
>
> That lamp shines **very brightly**. (The adverb **very** describes the adverb **brightly**.)

Note: Be careful to use an **adverb—**not an **adjective**—after an action verb.

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Examples: *Incorrect*: The boss sneezed **loud** at his desk. (**Loud** is an **adjective**)

Correct: The boss sneezed **loudly** at his desk.

Incorrect: Speak **slow** during your lecture. (**Slow** is an **adjective**)

Correct: Speak **slowly** during your lecture.

PLACEMENT OF ADVERBS

Adverbs modifying verbs can appear in various positions: at the beginning or end of the sentence, before or after the verb, or between a helping verb and its main verb.

Examples: **Slowly**, we drove along the rain-slick road

Mary handled the china dish very **carefully**.

Martin **always** wins our tennis matches.

An adverb cannot appear after the verb, because the verb is followed by the direct object.

Incorrect	**Correct**
Mother wrapped **carefully** the gift.	Mother wrapped the gift **carefully**.
	Mother **carefully** wrapped the gift.
	Carefully, Mother wrapped the gift.

WORDS INTRODUCING ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

Words that introduce adverbial clauses are **subordinating conjunctions**:

Common Subordinating Conjunctions

after	although	as	as if	because	before	if
rather	since	so that	that	than	though	unless
until	when	whether	where	while		

ADVERBIAL WORD GROUPS

Adverbial word groups can appear nearly anywhere in a sentence. They usually answer a question: **When? Where? How? Why? Under what conditions? To what degree?**

Examples: Do not judge a book **by its cover**. (Do not judge a book **how**? By its cover.)

Tyranny will **in time** lead to revolution. (Tyranny will lead to revolution **when**? In time.)

To the ant a few drops of rain are a flood. (A few drops of rain are a flood **under what conditions**? To an ant.)

USING IRREGULAR COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE FORMS OF ADVERBS

Some adverbs (and adjectives) change form to indicate their comparative and superlative degrees.

Examples:	Positive	Comparative	Superlative
	badly	worse	worst
	ill	worse	worst
	well	better	best

ADVERB CLAUSES

Adverb clauses modify verbs and may appear nearly anywhere in a sentence. They tell **when, where, why, under what conditions,** or **to what degree**.

> **Examples: When the well is dry**, we know the value of water.
>
> Venice would be a fine city **if the canals were only drained**

Unlike adjective clauses, the adverb clause can move within the sentence without affecting the meaning of the sentence:

> **Examples:** We know the value of water **when the well is dry**.
>
> **If the canals were only drained**, Venice would be a fine city.

USING GOOD/WELL AND BAD/BADLY

Don't confuse the adjective **good** with the adverb **well**, or the adjective **bad** with the adverb **badly**.

Use the adjectives **good** and **bad** to modify nouns or pronouns:

> **Examples:** a **good** time; a **bad** play.

Use the adverbs **well** and **badly** to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs:

> **Examples:** she sings **well**; he hears **badly**.

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AVOID DOUBLE NEGATIVES

A **double negative** is a nonstandard form that uses two negatives when only one is necessary, i.e. "I **don't** have **no** money."

The adverbs **barely**, **scarcely**, and **hardly** and the preposition **but** (meaning **except**) are negative and should not be used with other negatives.

Examples:	Faulty:	We **couldn't hardly** see the band. Their music **didn't never** reach the back rows of the stadium.
	Revised:	We could hardly see the band. Their music never reached the back rows of the stadium.
	Revised:	Their songs would never have been heard in the back rows of the stadium.

PREPOSITIONS

A **preposition** is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to form a phrase that modifies another word in a sentence.

> **Examples: in** the house, **to** the store, **over** the hill.
> A journey **of** a thousand miles begins **with** a single step.

COMMON PREPOSITIONS

about	but	into	over	toward
above	by	inside	past	under
after	concerning	like	plus	underneath
among	considering	near	regarding	unlike
at	despite	next	respecting	until
before	down	off	round	unto
behind	during	on	since	up
below	except	onto	than	upon
beside	for	opposite	through	with
between	from	out	throughout	without
beyond	in	outside	to	

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MULTIPLE-WORD PREPOSITIONS

according to	away from	in back of	in spite of	together with
ahead of	because of	in case of	on top of	
along with	except for	in front of	other than	
apart from	in addition to	inside of	out of	

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases may contain two or more nouns or pronouns, plus a conjunction. Nouns at the end of prepositional phrases can never function as the subject of a sentence:

Example: One of the boys wants pizza. (**Boys** is not the subject because it is the object of the preposition **of**. Therefore, the subject is **One**.)

CONJUNCTIONS
COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

A **coordinating conjunction** is a small word that connects **independent** clauses to create a compound sentence. To decide whether a word can function as a coordinating conjunction, try using it to join two short sentences:

Examples: She studies English constantly. She knows it better every day.
She studies English constantly, **and** she knows it better every day.

I went to the store. I couldn't find what I wanted.
I went to the store, **but** I couldn't find what I wanted.

Common Coordinating Conjunctions

for	nor	or	so
and	but	yet	

Tip: Use the acronym **FANBOYS** to remember the coordinating conjunctions.

SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

Subordinating conjunctions join one subject-verb combination to another subject-verb combination, making one part **subordinate** to or **dependent** upon the other—called a **subordinate** or **dependent clause.**

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Common Subordinating Conjunctions

after	as soon as	for	in order that	than	when
although	because	how	provided that	that	whenever
as	before	if	since	unless	wherever
as if	even if	in case that	so that	until	while

Note: When they are not linking sentences, some of these words can function as prepositions.

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

Correlative conjunctions are paired words that join equal words, phrases, or clauses. One conjunction comes before one part and the second conjunction come before the other part.

Common Correlative Conjunctions

Not only...but also	Either...or
Both...and	Neither...nor

INTERJECTIONS

Interjections are words or small groups of words that are used before exclamation points to express strong feeling of any kind.

> **Example:**   Wow**!** Hooray**!** Way to go**!**

An interjection should be written separately from the main sentence.

> **Examples:**   Congratulations! You've just won the lottery!

Overuse diminishes the value of the exclamation point, so use it sparingly. A comma or period is often better after mildly exclamatory expressions.

> **Example:**   He said maybe.

IMPERATIVES

An **imperative** is a request or command. Either a period or an exclamation point could be appropriate, depending on the context.

> **Examples:**   Refuse the offer.
>
>   Refuse the offer!