

Parts of Speech

Purpose: Talking about how to construct a paper can be difficult without the correct knowledge of terminology. This handout is meant to help define confusing parts of speech and their functions in order to help writers develop an understanding of how to refer to a specific function in a sentence.

Articles: The three articles — **a, an, the** — are a kind of adjective. **The** is called the definite article because it usually precedes a specific or previously mentioned noun; **a** and **an** are called indefinite articles because they are used to refer to something in a less specific manner (an unspecified count noun).

Examples: The Statue of Liberty is a famous monument located on Ellis Island in New York City.
I saw a statue on an island.

Complements: A complement (notice the spelling of the word) is any word or phrase that completes a subject, an object, or a verb. As you will see, the terminology describing predicates and complements can overlap and be a bit confusing. Students are probably wise to learn one set of terms, not both.

A Subject Complement follows a linking verb; it is normally an adjective or a noun that renames or defines in some way the subject.

Examples: A glacier is a huge body of ice.
Glaciers are beautiful and potentially dangerous at the same time.

An Object Complement follows and modifies or refers to a direct object. It can be a noun or adjective or any word acting as a noun or adjective.

Examples: The convention named Dogbreath Vice President to keep him happy. (The noun "Vice President" complements the direct object "Dogbreath"; the adjective "happy" complements the object "him.")

A Verb Complement is a direct or indirect object of a verb.

Examples: Granny left Raoul all her money. (Both "money" [the direct object] and "Raoul" [the indirect object] are said to be the verb complements of this sentence.)

Conjunctions: A conjunction is a joiner, a word that connects (conjoins) parts of a sentence. Conjunctions can join two independent clauses following a comma. Conjunction words are often remembered by the **FANBOYS: FOR, AND, NOR, BUT, OR, YET, SO**.

Example: He went to the baseball game. He caught a foul ball where he was sitting.
With a conjunction: He went to the baseball game, and he caught a foul ball where he was sitting.

Modifier: A modifier is a word that can change the entire meaning of a phrase or sentence.

MISPLACED MODIFIER: Some modifiers, especially simple modifiers — “only,” “just,” “nearly,” “barely” — have a bad habit of slipping into the wrong place in a sentence. In the sentence below, what does it mean to “barely kick” something?

Confusing: He barely kicked the ball twenty yards.
Fix: He kicked the ball barely twenty yards

DANGLING MODIFIER: When a modifier improperly modifies something, it is called a “dangling modifier.” This often happens with beginning participial phrases, making “dangling participles” an all too common phenomenon.

Confusing: Changing the oil every 3,000 miles, the car seemed to run better.
Fix: Changing the oil every 3,000 miles, Fred found he could get much better gas mileage.

Squinting Modifier: This is an unfortunate result of an adverb's ability to pop up almost anywhere in a sentence; structurally, the adverb may function fine, but its meaning can be obscure or ambiguous.

Confusing: Students who seek their instructor's advice often can improve their grades
Fix: Students who often seek their instructor's advice can improve their grades **or** students who seek their instructor's advice can often improve their grades.

Noun: A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Whatever exists, we assume, can be named, and that name is a noun.

A **proper noun**, which names a specific person, place, or thing (Carlos, Queen Marguerite, Middle East, Jerusalem, Malaysia, Presbyterianism, God, Spanish, Buddhism, the Republican Party), is almost always capitalized. A proper noun used as an addressed person's name is called a noun of address.

A **common noun** names everything else and refers to things that usually are not capitalized (e.g. dog, cat, building, etc.).

Object: A **direct object** is the receiver of action within a sentence, as in “He hit the ball.” The direct object of the sentence is the ball.

An **indirect object** identifies to or for whom or what the action of the verb is performed. The direct object and indirect object are different people or places or

things. The direct objects in the sentences below are in boldface; the indirect objects are in italics.

The instructor gave his *students* **A's**.
Grandfather left *Rosalita and Raoul* **all his money**.
Jo-Bob sold *me* her **boat**.

Subject: The subject of a sentence is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something. You can find the subject of a sentence if you can find the verb. Ask the question, "Who or what 'verbs' or 'verbed'?" and the answer to that question is the subject.

For instance, in the sentence "The ball rolled toward the wall," the verb is "rolled." What rolled toward the wall? The ball.

Verb: Verbs carry the idea of being or action in the sentence; they define the actions in the sentence.

Example: I **walk** to the kitchen. **Walk** is the verb because it is the action that the subject in the sentence, I, is taking to get to the kitchen.

Verbs are classified in many ways. First, some verbs require an object to complete their meaning: "She gave _____ ?" Gave what? She gave money to the church. These verbs are called **transitive**. Verbs that are intransitive do not require objects: "The building **collapsed**."

A **linking verb** connects a subject and its complement. Linking verbs are often forms of the verb "to be" but are sometimes verbs related to the five senses (look, sound, smell, feel, taste) and, sometimes, verbs that reflect a state of being (appear, seem, become, grow, turn, prove, remain). What follows the linking verb will be either a noun complement or an adjective complement:

Examples: Those people **are** all *professors*.
Those professors **are** *brilliant*.
This room **smells** *bad*.

The **verb tense** signifies the time the action is happening.

Present: I **walk** to the store.
Past: I **walked** to the store.
Present progressive: I **am walking** to the store.
Past progressive: I **was walking** to the store