

PARTS OF SPEECH

When we talk about “parts of speech” we are talking about words and the work they do, **or** the function of a word in a sentence. That means we cannot identify a part of speech or word class unless we see what its function is in the context of a sentence.

The following list shows the nine parts of speech:

noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction, interjection and the article

We will look at each part of speech, mention its function and give examples of how each is used in a sentence.

NOUNS

A noun is a part of speech that names a person, place, thing, idea, action or quality.

There are several different types of nouns, as follows:

Common Nouns, Proper Nouns, Concrete Nouns, Abstract Nouns, Collective Nouns, Count Nouns and Mass nouns

More information on each type of noun is available on our website.

VERBS

A verb is a word that is used to describe an action, state or feeling.

Examples:

- You **go** to school.
- We **eat** food.
- We **play** hockey and they **enjoy** it.

In the given examples the words written in bold: **go, eat, play** and **enjoy** are verbs.

Classification of verbs

Verbs may well be classified according to their function as well as their formation.

Classification according to function

(i) Transitive Verbs require an object to pass over the action from the subject to the object.

E.g. We wrote a test. “test” is the object of the verb “wrote”.
They enjoy music. “music” is the object of the verb “enjoy”.

(ii) Intransitive Verbs do not require an object to pass over the action from subject to object.

Examples:

- He played.
- We slept.
- The lady laughed.

Classification according to formation

(i) **Regular Verbs** are verbs that form their past tense and past participle by adding -d or -ed (or in some cases “t”) to the base form as in the following examples:

Present	Past	Past Participle
carry	carried	carried
work	worked	worked

(ii) **Irregular Verbs**

These are verbs in which the past tense is not formed by adding the usual -ed ending for the Past Simple and Past Participle forms. Irregular verbs have no rules for conjugation. These can only be learnt in context.

Examples:

Present	Past	Past Participle
awake	awoke	awoken
go	went	gone
write	wrote	written

The verb “to be”

The verb “to be” is a verb in its own right and its different forms are frequently used in speech and writing. It changes its form more often than most verbs, according to the **person** and the **tense**.

Auxiliary/ Helping Verbs

An auxiliary verb is a helping verb used to express tense, mood or voice.

There are two groups – primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries.

Primary Auxiliaries: The primary auxiliaries are: be, have, and do.

Examples:

I **am** eating bread.

They **have** eaten bread.

You **do** eat bread.

Modal Auxiliaries : The modal auxiliaries are: will, shall, may, might, can, could, must, ought to, should, would, used to, need

Examples: I can drive a car.

You may leave the room.

I must study hard.

The Infinitive

An infinitive is a verbal consisting of the word “to” plus a verb (in its simplest “stem” or base form) functioning as a noun, adjective or adverb. The term “verbal” indicates that an infinitive is based on

a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. An infinitive is easy to locate because of the “to +” verb form.

Because an infinitive is not a verb, you can never add **s**, **es** or **ed** to the end.

Example:

To wait seemed foolish when a decisive action was required. (subject)

Everyone wanted to go. (direct object)

Participles

A participle is a verbal. The term verbal indicates that a participle is based on a verb and therefore expresses an action or a state of being. They function as adjectives and form part of the verb. Participles on their own are not verbs.

There are two types of participles – present participles and past participles.

Present participles end in “ing” . Past participles end in various forms (as indicated in the table below).

A present participle is formed by adding “-ing” to the verb as in “reading”.

For example: He is reading the newspaper now.

Although **Present participles** are mainly used to form continuous tense forms, they can also act as **adjectives**.

For example:

He is wearing his **jogging** shoes. (“jogging” is used as an adjective as it describes the noun “shoes”).

Past Participles are used for all perfect tense forms of the verb and are used to form the verb in the passive voice.

The following are examples of perfect tense forms of the verb showing the use of past participles:

Present Perfect: She has not finished her work yet. I have written a letter to all the parents.

Past Perfect: Peter was ill because he had eaten too many chocolates.

Future Perfect: He will have gone by the time you arrive.

Past participles are also used to form the **Passive Voice**.

Example:

The West coast of the USA was struck by torrential rain last night.

Past Participles as adjectives: As with present participles, past participles can also be used as an adjective in front of a noun:

Examples: The stolen baby was found by the police.

The boy’s broken arm was set in plaster by the doctor at the hospital.

ADJECTIVES

The simplest definition of an adjective is that it is a word that describes, qualifies or clarifies a noun. Adjectives describe nouns by giving some information about an object's size, shape, age, colour, origin or material.

Example:

It is a big table. (size)

It is a round table. (shape)

ADVERBS

An adverb is a word that is used to change or modify the meaning of an adjective, a verb or another adverb.

Traditionally considered to be a single part of speech, adverbs perform a wide variety of functions, which makes it difficult to treat them as a single, unified category. Adverbs normally carry out these functions by answering questions such as:

When? She always arrives early.

How? He drives carefully.

Where? They go everywhere together.

In what way? She eats slowly.

To what extent? It is terribly hot.

He plays tennis extremely well. (He knows how to play tennis so well that he wins often.)

PRONOUNS

A pronoun is a word that is used instead of a noun or noun phrase. Pronouns refer to either a noun that has already been mentioned or to a noun that does not need to be named specifically. There are a number of other types of pronouns.

These are:

(i) Personal Pronouns

A personal pronoun is used in the place of the name of a person or a thing.

Examples: he, they, I, it, we, you

(ii) Possessive Pronouns

A pronoun that is used to show possession over something is called a possessive pronoun.

Examples: mine, yours, his, hers, theirs, its

That computer is hers.

This computer is mine.

(iii) Demonstrative Pronouns

A demonstrative pronoun is used to point out a noun or nouns.

Examples: this, that, these, those

John brought **this**. (Used for a singular subject or object)

These look good. (Used for a plural subject or object.)

(iv) Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun is used to connect a subordinate clause to the main clause and is related to the noun or pronoun preceding it.

Examples:

who, whom, that, which, whoever, whomever, whichever

- People **who** speak two languages are called bilingual.
- This is the book **which** I bought from the market.

(v) Indefinite Pronouns

A pronoun that does not refer to a particular noun but refers to an unspecified noun or nouns.

Examples: few, some, any, someone

(vi) Reflexive Pronouns

A reflexive pronoun is used when the subject and the object of the sentence are the same or the action passes back to the subject.

Examples: myself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves

(vii) Reciprocal Pronouns

A reciprocal pronoun is used in order to indicate persons or things mutually affected. There are two reciprocal pronouns: **each other, one another**

- The students in this classroom cooperate with one **another**.
- Both the friends like **each other**.

(viii) Interrogative Pronouns

An interrogative pronoun is used to ask a question.

Examples: who, whose, whom, what, which

- **Who** is this man?
- **Whose** shoes are those?
- **Whom** have you seen?

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions are the words which are used to connect the different nouns, pronouns and phrases in a sentence. The preposition usually indicates the relation between the words it is connecting. It tells

whether the words are connected in actual space or a place, or related through time or are they part of a thought or process.

Prepositions can be tricky for English learners. There is no definite rule or formula for choosing a preposition. In the beginning stage of learning the language, you should try to identify a preposition when reading or listening in English and recognize its usage.

to the office
at the desk
on the table

in an hour
about myself

A preposition is used to show direction, location, or time, or to introduce an object.

CONJUNCTIONS

A conjunction is a word which connects two words or clauses or sentences and shows the relation between them. They are used to avoid making the text seem like bullet points and to make the text flow. E.g. Jack saw a dog on the road. He decided to adopt the dog. Jack brought the dog home.

Jack saw a dog on the road **and** decided to adopt the dog, **so** he brought it home.

Here '**and**' and '**so**' are conjunctions which are used to join the sentences and show the relation between them.

There are three main categories of conjunctions:

Coordinating Conjunctions

These conjunctions are used to link or join two words or phrases that are equally important and complete in terms of grammar when compared with each other.

There are seven main coordinating conjunctions -

for and nor but or yet soon

Subordinating Conjunctions

These conjunctions are used to join a dependent or incomplete clause with an independent clause that relies on the main clause for meaning and relevance. The dependent clause cannot exist on its own as a sentence and often does not make sense without the main or independent clause.

For example: "Because it was raining" is a dependent clause and does not make sense on its own. It needs a main or independent clause such as, "The student came late" to give it meaning.

Therefore, we join the dependent clause to the main clause as follows: The student came late **because** it was raining.

Other subordinating conjunctions are - **although, as, before, once, though, until, whether, etc.**

INTERJECTIONS

An interjection is a part of speech that shows the emotion or feeling of the author. These words or phrases can stand alone or be placed before or after a sentence. Many times an **interjection** is followed by a punctuation mark, often an exclamation mark. The importance of interjections lies in the fact that they can convey feelings that may sometimes be neglected in the sentence.

For example:

Ahh, that feels wonderful!

Alas! I'm lost in the wilderness.

Oh dear! I don't know what to do about this mess!

ARTICLES

Articles are words that define a noun as specific or unspecific. Basically, an article is an adjective. Like adjectives, articles modify nouns.

English has two articles: **the** and **a/an**. **The** is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; **a/an** is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. We call **the** the **definite** article and **a/an** the **indefinite** article.

For example, if I say, "Let us read **the** book," I mean a specific book. If I say, "Let us read **a** book," I mean any book rather than a specific book.

Using a or an depends on the sound that begins the next word. So...

a + singular noun beginning with a consonant: **a** boy; **a** car; **a** bike; **a** zoo; **a** dog

an + singular noun beginning with a vowel: **an** elephant; **an** egg; **an** apple; **an** idiot; **an** orphan

Omission of Articles

Some common types of nouns that don't take an article are:

Names of languages and nationalities: *Chinese, English, Spanish, Russian* (unless you are referring to the population of the nation: "**The** Spanish are known for their warm hospitality.")

Names of sports: *volleyball, hockey, baseball*

Names of academic subjects: *mathematics, biology, history, computer science*