



The Parts of Speech

There are 8 parts of speech, meaning 8 basic roles a word can play in a sentence. The same word can play different roles in different sentences, or even in different parts of the same sentence.

Here's an example: Rock can be a noun that names a hard mineral item like a piece of granite. Rock can also be an adjective helping to describe something, as in "a rock wall." Rock can also be a verb describing a particular kind of action, as in "rock the boat."

Joe picked up a rock while skating and listening to rock music, which made his skateboard rock.

What are the 8 roles words can play in sentences?

Noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, and interjection.

WHY IS IT GOOD TO KNOW ABOUT THE PARTS OF SPEECH?

The basic reason to learn the parts of speech is to get better grades. Just kidding! Seriously, by knowing how sentences are built, you can read more easily – and you can read continually harder stuff – and you can also learn to write more clearly.

Sold? Got to know the parts of speech now? How do you remember the parts of speech? Click on each one to find out! (The numbers are just there for convenience; there's no standard order for the parts of speech.)

1. NOUN

Noun sounds a little like name, so think of a noun as a word being used to name someone or something. Because very simple sentences can be complete with just a noun and a verb (Joe runs), it's easy to think of a noun as being the subject or main actor in a sentence, but that is not always what a noun is doing in a sentence.

Joe picked up a rock.

In that sentence, Joe and rock are both nouns, but Joe is the one doing the action. In this case, rock is a noun being used as an object, that is, the word that is having something done to it, in this case, it's being picked up by Joe.



Joe, by the way, is what is called a proper noun because it names a specific person, Joe. This is true even though there are a lot of people called Joe. The name of a city is another kind of proper noun. Even though New York is two words, it's one proper noun when it's referring to the large city with the Empire State Building in it. Oh yeah, the Empire State Building is a three-word proper noun!

Rock in the sentence above is a common noun because it doesn't name a specific "named" rock, like Plymouth Rock, but just a regular rock you might find while you're skateboarding.

2. PRONOUN

A pronoun is a word, like he, she, or it, that is used to "stand in" for a noun. These are useful words. Just think of a sentence like this:

Mary had Mary's best coat on when Mary's mother took Mary to Mary's piano lesson.

Even if you like the name Mary, having it five times in a short sentence like this is a mess. That's why you'd use pronouns and write:

Mary had her best coat on when her mother took her to her piano lesson.

Much more comfortable!

3. VERB

Verbs are sometimes called the "action words" in a sentence, which is fine, but sometimes they don't make the idea of "action" jump into your mind!

Inez was asleep.

Was is the main verb in that sentence, and asleep is an adjective telling you about Inez. A more "action word" type of verb might be:

Inez jumped over the speeding train.

Okay, maybe that's too much action, but you get the idea.

Closely related to the role of Verb is the idea of the predicate of a sentence. The predicate can sometimes be just one word – the verb in a simple sentence, for example.



But the predicate includes all the words that relate to the "action" of a sentence. So let's look at the speeding train sentence again:

Inez (okay, this is a proper noun and the subject of this sentence) jumped (got it: the action word) over the speeding train (what is this part? Okay, it tells you where Inez jumped, so it's part of the predicate).

In the speeding train sentence, then, Inez is the only word that is not part of the predicate. But let's rewrite that sentence and look again:

Inez, the super-powerful alien from the planet Quiznot, jumped over the speeding train.

You guessed it: "the super-powerful alien from the planet Quiznot" is part of the subject of this new sentence, because it tells you about Inez, not about her action of jumping.

Compound Verbs

Sometimes a verb is more than one word, but is formed by adding a "helping verb" to a verb. This is usually to make the time of the sentence clear.

Inez was sleeping.

Notice that this is different from "Inez was asleep." Sleeping is a verb – it describes an action. Asleep is an adjective – it describes the person. The helping verb was tells you that the sleeping was taking place in the past.

4. ADJECTIVE

An adjective is a word that tells more about a noun or a pronoun (no, not more grammar, more information!). Like:

The amazing Spider-Man crawled up the wall.

Amazing in that sentence tells you something about Spider-Man. OK, his crawling up the wall tells you even more, but that's the predicate.

One twist with adjectives is that sometimes words that are used as pronouns in some sentences are used as adjectives in others. Here's a sentence where the word many is used as a pronoun:



Many disliked the movie.

Here's a sentence where the word many is used as an adjective, giving you more information about the word people:

Many people disliked the movie.

See the difference? Well, it's no different for the movie because it's hated in both sentences. But for the word many, it's the difference between being the subject of the sentence and being only part of the subject of the sentence.

5. ADVERB

An adverb is a word used to tell more about a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or a phrase or clause (a phrase is a group of words that function as a unit in a sentence but doesn't include subject and predicate; a clause is a group of words that function together in a sentence and that does include a subject and predicate). Here's an example of each one. First, an adverb that tells more about a verb:

The dog ran slowly.

-- In this, the word slowly tells you how the dog ran – not fast. Adverb tells more about verb.

The very old dog ran slowly.

-- In this, the word very tells us more about just how old the dog is. Adverb tells more about adjective.

The very old dog ran very slowly.

-- In this, the second very tells us more about the slowness of the dog. Adverb tells more about adverb.

Unfortunately, the weather was wintry.

-- In this, the word unfortunately tells us that the wintry weather was not a good thing – it tells us more about the whole clause "the weather was wintry."



Adverbs formed from adjectives often have the ending –ly, which can make those adverbs easy to spot as adverbs. But don't depend on that clue. "Very" is a common adverb that doesn't end in –ly.

6. CONJUNCTION

A conjunction is a linking word like and or but. Oh, don't we wish it were that simple!

Okay, get ready to forget the following terms, but try hard to remember the ideas behind them: There are three main kinds of conjunctions – a coordinating conjunction, a subordinating conjunction, and a correlative conjunction. I know those terms make you want to give up on conjunctions completely, but hold on. It's not as hard as it sounds.

A coordinating conjunction is your basic conjunction that joins two parts of a sentence – maybe just two words, maybe two whole independent clauses. It is easiest to understand how it's different from the next type, a subordinating conjunction by looking at a comparison:

The door burst open, and the crowd screamed wildly.

As opposed to:

After the door burst open, the crowd screamed wildly.

In the first sentence, and is a basic coordinating conjunction simply joining the two ideas – the door opening and the crowd screaming.

In the second sentence, notice that the word after sets up a different relationship between those two ideas. Notice that the first half of the sentence – After the door burst open – wouldn't make any sense without the second half, about the crowd screaming. In grammar terms, what has happened is that the first half of the sentence has become a dependent clause. It's "dependent" on the second half of the sentence, because without the second half, the sentence is incomplete.

That's what a subordinating conjunction does – it makes one of the things it joins together "subordinate," or dependent, upon the other thing.

Common coordinating conjunctions are and, but, or, nor, for, and yet, and common subordinating conjunctions include after, although, as, because, before, how, if, once, since, though, until, when, where, whether, and while.



Oops – Third Type of Conjunction

Almost forgot it, sorry. This is called a "correlative conjunction" because it "correlates" or lines up two or more ideas in a sentence. These conjunctions are actually pairs of words, and, again, the best way to show how they work is by example:

Both my sister and my brother were confused about grammar.

Neither their teachers nor their friends could help them learn about conjunctions.

Not only was this embarrassing, but also a big drag on their grades.

7. PREPOSITION

A preposition is a word that "prepares" you to know about the "position" of another word relative to the rest of the sentence: not its literal position, of course, in being the 10th word or anything like that, but the "position" of its meaning.

Here's a sentence we'll study to see how a preposition works.

Janet went to Florida during vacation.

The words to and during are very common prepositions, and the words they introduce – Florida and vacation – are called the "objects" of those prepositions. Those are the words whose meaning the prepositions indicate, relative to the rest of the sentence. In this particular sentence, to indicates that Florida is the place where Janet went, and during indicates that vacation is the time she went there.

A prepositional phrase includes the preposition itself plus any adjectives, adverbs, or other words that also contribute these meanings to the object of the preposition. Take the sentence, for example:

Janet went to sunny Florida during the long summer vacation.

In this sentence, to sunny Florida and during the long summer vacation are both prepositional phrases, with the adjectives sunny, the, long, and summer all thrown in to give us yet more information about where Janet went and when she went there.

Aside from probably being all you want to know about Janet's vacation (which I'm already getting tired of hearing about), let's just notice a couple more interesting things: One, the articles the, a, and an are considered adjectives; two, the word summer here



plays the role (part of speech) of an adjective, though it can also be used, obviously, as a noun, as in the following sentence:

Janet never stopped talking about that summer.

Common prepositions include about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, at, before, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, but, by, despite, down, during, except, for, from, in, inside, into, like, near, of, off, on, onto, out, outside, over, past, since, through, throughout, till, to, toward, under, underneath, until, up, upon, with, within, and without.

8. INTERJECTION

An interjection is a word used to add more noise to a sentence. Here are some sentences with and without interjections:

Hey! You're stepping on my toe!
You're stepping on my toe.

Oh, no! I forgot the exam was tod

ay.
I forgot the exam was today.

Five dollars? Wow, that's a lot for an ice cream cone!
Five dollars? That's a lot for an ice cream cone.

Unbelievable! That's all there is to interjections? Please!

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