

Overview of the Parts of Speech

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to match words with their functions, and how to break down a sentence in order to identify the role each word plays. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Four Essential Parts of Speech

1a. Verbs

1b. Nouns

1c. Pronouns

1d. Adjectives

2. Finding Parts of Speech in a Sentence

1. Four Essential Parts of Speech

Each word in a sentence performs a function or job; these jobs are called the parts of speech. When trying to build sentences that are clear, well-organized, and grammatically correct, it's really helpful to know how to recognize those parts of speech. In fact, the parts of speech are essential to **grammar**, which is the set of rules that governs a language.

There are many different parts of speech in English, but in order to prepare to write really effective sentences, your main focus for now should be on the four most important and basic parts of speech:

- Verbs
- Nouns
- Pronouns
- Adjectives



TERM TO KNOW

Grammar

The set of rules that governs a language.

1a. Verbs

Verbs are words that define an action or indicate a state of being. A state of being refers to the existence of something, or what something "is" or "is not." Verbs are great clues to tell you what's going on in a sentence, so when you're identifying the parts of speech, always start by finding the verb in that sentence.

In order to find the verb, look for the action.

↪ EXAMPLE *Steven sings all the time.*

↪ EXAMPLE *Steven is hungry.*

In the second sentence, the action is a "be" verb. It can be easy to miss those "be" verbs because sometimes they're paired with other verbs.



Make sure to keep an eye out for the following "be" verbs: *am, is, are, was, were, will be.*



Verb

A word that defines an action or indicates a state of being.

1b. Nouns

A **noun** is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea. You can easily find a noun by asking who or what in a sentence is doing the action described in the verb.

↪ EXAMPLE *Teachers talk frequently.*

In the above sentence, the action is "talking." Who is doing the talking in this sentence? The teachers are doing the talking, so "teachers" is the noun.

When you're identifying nouns and verbs, start by finding the action. You'll then be able to match it with the noun that's doing that action. You'll even notice that verbs often come right after nouns in a sentence.

However, not all sentences have only one noun. More complex sentences may have multiple nouns.

↪ EXAMPLE *Teachers talk about grammar in the classroom at lunch.*

In the above sentence, there are four nouns. The teachers are one, the classroom is another, grammar is a third, and lunch is the fourth. Yet "teachers" is still the noun that's matched with the verb because it's the only one of those nouns that can talk.



Noun

A word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

1c. Pronouns

Pronouns are words that take the place of a noun in a sentence. To see how these work in action, we can take that same sentence from earlier and make it a little more complex.

↪ **EXAMPLE** *Teachers always talk about grammar because they think grammar is fun.*

In the first half of the sentence, the noun is "teachers." In the second half, we could repeat the noun by saying, "because teachers think grammar is fun," but we can also replace "teachers" with "they," which is a pronoun.

There are two kinds of pronouns:

- Personal
- Indefinite

Personal pronouns include "he," "she," "it," "they," and "we." Indefinite pronouns refer more broadly, and can include "everyone," "someone," "nobody," and "everything."

You use a pronoun to replace a specific noun within a sentence; that noun is called the antecedent. Pronouns therefore work just like nouns, and you can find them in the same way. They even tend to come before a verb, just like a noun does.

Just as you did when you found the noun, ask yourself what the action is in the following sentence, and who's doing it.

↪ **EXAMPLE** *My dog barks when she wants something.*

You know that "barks" is the verb that the dog is doing. What pronoun replaces "my dog?" "She."



TERM TO KNOW

Pronoun

A word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence.

1d. Adjectives

Adjectives are words that modify nouns. This means that adjectives add more detail about a specific noun.

What if the previous sentence gave you more information about the situation?

↪ **EXAMPLE** *My brown dog barks when she wants something.*

Now you know that the dog is brown, giving you a more detailed picture of her. "Brown" is an adjective modifying the noun.

Adjectives are easy to find because all you have to do is look for the noun and point out words that offer extra information about that noun. Usually, adjectives come right before nouns.



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Adjective

A word that modifies a noun.

2. Finding Parts of Speech in a Sentence

Now that you know about the four essential parts of speech, you can practice breaking down a sentence and finding each part of speech inside of it.

→ EXAMPLE *The dogs played with the big rope as they ran.*

Consider the steps you might take to identify those parts of speech.



STEP BY STEP

1. First, you can ask yourself what the action is in order to find the verb. The action is "played."
2. Now that you've figured out the verb, you can ask who or what is doing that action. This would be the dogs.
3. Then to determine if there's a pronoun in this sentence, you can look to see if there is a word that replaces the noun "dogs." That pronoun is "they."
4. Finally, you can look for an adjective. You might find this by looking for a noun and seeing if there is a descriptive word before it. The noun "dogs" doesn't have any descriptive words in front of it, but the noun "rope" comes after the word "big," which is your adjective.

As you can see, there will probably be more than one noun in many sentences. You might end up finding sentences with more than one verb or more than one adjective as well. But now that you know how to break a sentence down, finding the parts of speech can be a little bit easier.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that there are **four essential parts of speech: verbs, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives**. Verbs describe an action, nouns describe who is doing the action, pronouns take the place of nouns, and adjectives modify nouns. You also learned how to **find the parts of speech in a sentence** by looking for the action, the person or thing performing the action, and any additional descriptive words.

Best of luck in your learning!



TERMS TO KNOW

Adjective

A word that modifies a noun.

Grammar

The set of rules that governs a language.

Noun

A word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Pronoun

A word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence.

Verb

A word that defines an action or indicates a state of being.