

Parts of Speech

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover how to match words with their function, and how to break down a sentence in order to identify the roles each word plays. The specific areas of focus include:

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 govern a language.

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

- Verbs
- Nouns
- Pronouns
- Adjectives



TERMS TO KNOW

Grammar

The rules that govern a language.

Parts of Speech

The jobs or functions that words perform in a sentence.

1a. Verbs

Verbs are words that define actions or indicate a state of being. Some common verbs are “climb,” “talk,” and “sing.”

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.



Read the following two sentences, and ask yourself what types of actions are happening here:

Steven sings all the time. Steven is hungry.

In the first sentence, the action happening here is "sings". 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, such as “is” and “singing.” Make sure to keep an eye out for “be” verbs.



The following are "be" verbs: *am, is, are, was, were, will be*



Verb

A word that defines actions or indicates a state of being.

1b. Nouns

A **noun** is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea. Some common nouns are “president,” “California,” and “happiness.”

You can easily find a noun by asking who or what in a sentence is doing the action described in the verb:

Teachers talk frequently.

In the above sentence, the action is “talking.” Who is doing the talking in this sentence? Teachers. 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.

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. However, “teachers” is still the noun that’s matched with the verb because it’s the only one of those nouns that can talk.



TERM TO KNOW

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, take that same sentence from earlier and make it a little more complex.

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 say “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:* Personal pronouns include “he,” “she,” “it,” “they,” and “we.”
- *Indefinite:* Indefinite pronouns refer more broadly and can include “everyone,” “someone,” “nobody,” and “everything.”

You use a pronoun to replace a specific noun within that 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.



TRY IT

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

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?

*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. Some common adjectives are “small,” “round,” and “difficult.”



TERM TO KNOW

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.

Pause and take a moment to find the verb, the noun, the pronoun, and the adjective in the following sentence:

The dogs played with the big rope as they ran.

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



STEP BY STEP

1. First, you probably asked yourself what the action is in order to find the verb. The action is “played.”
2. Now that you figured out the verb, you likely asked who or what is doing that action. This would be the dogs.
3. Then, since you know that there's a pronoun taking the place of the noun in this sentence, you probably looked to see if there was a word that replaced that noun, or antecedent. That pronoun is “they.”
4. Finally, you were also looking for an adjective. You might have found this by looking for a noun and seeing if there was a descriptive word before it. The noun “dogs” doesn't have any descriptive words in front of it, but the noun “rope” is preceded by 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 should be a breeze.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned about parts of speech, or the jobs each word performs in a sentence. 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 now understand how to **identify those parts of speech within a sentence**.

Good luck!

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