

ELG Handout 1, Words & Sentences

Thinking about Grammar

Any study of grammar begins with discussion of the principal parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections. Definitions of these principal parts define grammatical function at the **word** level.

Grammarians must also understand the function of words (and groups of words) at the **sentence** level. You must be able to identify parts of a sentence: subjects, predicates, objects, complements, phrases, independent clauses, and dependent clauses.

A *Subject* is a noun, pronoun, or *noun group* about which something is said.

A *predicate* is the part of the sentence that makes a statement about the subject.

Objects & Complements, usually a part of the predicate, complete the meaning of the sentence. They are nouns, pronouns, or adjectives (in the case of predicate adjectives and some object complements). They function as direct objects, indirect objects, and object complements (always with action verbs) and as subject complements (predicate noun or adjective, always with a linking verbs).

Subject complements:

A *predicate adjective* follows a linking verb and modifies the subject, not the verb.

The cat was green.

A *predicate noun* follows a linking verb and renames the subject.

The cat is a hunter.

In general, if a subject complement is introduced by an article or other adjective, it is considered a predicate noun.

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A *direct object* receives the action indicated by a *transitive* verb. It is always in the objective case.

The cat pawed the toy mouse.

An *indirect object* receives the action of the verb indirectly. It is always in the objective case. The subject (through the verb) acts on the direct object, which in turn has an effect on the indirect object. Indirect objects tell to whom or for whom (or what) something is done.

The cat passed Tom the toy mouse.

You might rearrange the sentence to read:

The cat passed the toy mouse to Tom.

When the preposition (*to*, *above*, or *for*) is understood, the word is an indirect object. When the preposition is expressed, the word is an *object of a preposition*.

Don't forget about *objective complements* which can accompany direct objects. They can modify the object or rename it.

The dog pronounced Tom bald.

The cat pronounced Tom his caretaker.

Identify the part of speech and the function of the underlined words.

1) Tom woke (*with* a start) and sat up (*in* the cold, dark house.)

Tom = noun / subject ; start = noun / object of the preposition "with"; house = noun / object of preposition "in."

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2) A batting sound and a crash had disturbed him.

sound = noun/subject; crash = noun/subject; him =
noun/direct object.

3) He slowly crept (toward the hall), and then, still (in the dark), slipped
(into the living room).

hall = noun/object of preposition; dark =
noun/object of preposition; Living room = compound noun/
object of preposition

4) On went the lights, and he spied Mug Mug, Pike, Alley, Deirdre, and
one-eyed Kelsey.

lights = noun/subject; Mug Mug, Pike, Alley, Deirdre, Kelsey =
nouns/proper names of cats/all acting as direct objects.

5) Where the others were he did not know.

"where" is an interesting word; it can
be an adverb or conjunction. In this
instance, it is acting as a subordinate
conjunction introducing the dependent clause.

6) But this group was quite happy.

group = noun/subject; happy = adjective/predicate adjective.

7) A mouse sat (amidst the crew).

mouse = noun/subject; crew = noun/object of
preposition

8) Pike eyed it curiously.

Pike = noun/proper name/subject; it = pronoun/
direct object

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9) Identify the parts of speech in italics. I believe they are all the same.

They are all prepositions.

10) Identify the part of speech of **On** in the fourth sentence. You may want to pull out your good dictionary.

It is an adverb modifying how the lights "went."

A *phrase* is a group of words that does not have both subject and predicate. The words in a phrase lock together and operate like an individual part of speech; phrases also have an identifiable internal grammar. Some important kinds of phrases include: verb phrases, prepositional phrases, and verbal phrases.

The main verb and its auxiliary verbs are called a *verb phrase*:

were spitting,
will be splitting
are proven
have been proven

Verbs such as *is, was, were, shall be, are, may be, and have* can be auxiliary verbs and are often called "helping" verbs.

Prepositional phrases arise from the combination of a preposition and a noun or pronoun functioning as its object. Prepositional phrases modify other words in the sentence, that is they act as modifiers.

Cats(*of many sorts*) / live(*with Tom.*)
(adjectival prep. phrase) / (adverbial prep. phrase)

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Identify the prepositional phrases in the following sentence (place parentheses around each).

(In the old days,) canoes were paddled (by skilled woodsmen) who ate pounds (of highly salted jerky) and drank water (from free flowing streams.) High blood pressure and giardia did not concern them.

A *clause* is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate. Clauses are either *independent* or *dependent* (if dependent, then *relative* or *subordinate*).

An *independent clause* can stand alone grammatically and form a complete sentence. Two or more independent clauses in one sentence can be joined by coordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, semicolons, etc.

Dependent clauses fall into two categories, *relative* or *subordinate*. Relative clauses, when viewed as a unit of meaning, function as nouns or adjectives. Subordinate clauses function as nouns or adverbs. Unlike independent clauses, dependent clauses do not express a complete thought in themselves.

That the fat old cat could run rapidly was little known.
(subordinate clause used as a noun – the subject)

Few people knew *that the fat old cat could jump file cabinets*.
(subordinate clause used as noun – a direct object)

The cats *who caught the mouse* were castigated.
(relative clause used as adjective – modifying the subject *cats*)

When dusk comes the herd jumps to life.
(subordinate clause modifying the simple predicate *jumps*)

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Identify the following clauses as dependent or independent; if they are dependent, identify the way they function within the sentence (as a noun, adjective, or adverb).

① [When the heavy snows come,] ② [the cats retreat to the kitchen,]
③ [and I know] ④ [that our family is still intact.]

- ① dependent / adverbial, modifying the verb "retreat."
- ② independent
- ③ independent
- ④ dependent / noun / direct object.