Basic English Grammar

DailyWritingTips

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Introduction

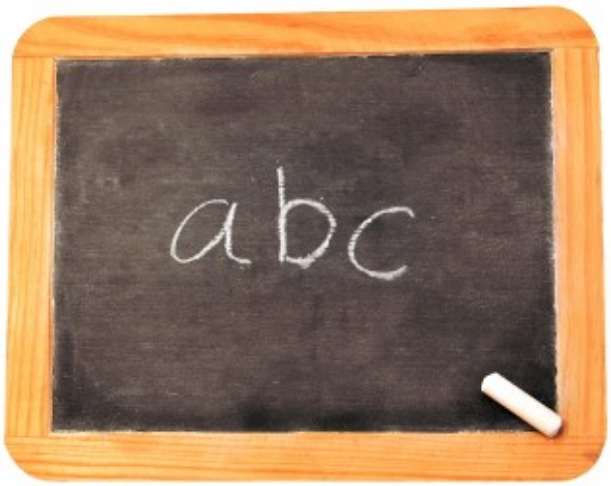
This ebook does not attempt to include every aspect of English grammar found in a traditional school textbook. Its purpose is to present a brief review of grammar terms necessary to an understanding of the most common errors that occur in ordinary, non-academic writing.

Because written language is an arrangement of words, understanding how words work individually and in groups is essential to correct written expression.

The sports fan must understand terms like shortstop, quarterback and center in order to follow the description of a game.

Similarly, those who wish to speak and write standard English must master the concepts that we will cover ahead.

Section 1: The Sentence



The basic unit of speech and writing is the sentence.

A sentence is a series of words that form a complete thought, for example:

Birds fly.
Samuel Johnson's father ran a bookstore.
My two black cats enjoy lazing in the sun.

A complete sentence has two main parts: **subject** and **predicate**.

1.1 The Subject

When we speak or write, we speak or write *about* something. The subject is what is being spoken about. For example:

Birds fly. (the subject is "birds")

Samuel Johnson's father ran a bookstore. (the subjet is "Samuel Johnson's father.")

My two black cats enjoy lazing in the sun. (the subject is "My cats.")

The main word in the subject (usually a noun) is called the simple subject. The main word with all the words that describe it is called the complete subject. For example, in the second sentence above, the simple subject is "father." The complete subject is "Samuel Johnson's father."

1.2 The Predicate

While the subject is what we are talking about, the predicate is what we say about the subject. For example:

Birds fly. ("fly" is what is being said about the birds; it's what they do.)

Samuel Johnson's father ran a bookstore. ("ran" is what the father did; it's what is being said about him.)

My two black cats enjoy lazing in the sun. ("enjoy" is what the cats do; it's what is being said about them.)

The main word in the predicate is a verb. The verb by itself is called the simple predicate. The complete predicate is the verb plus any words or phrases that complete it or tell more about it. The simple

predicate may contain more than one word because some tenses require helping verbs. For example:

The king has ruled the kingdom for seven years.

In this sentence the simple predicate is "has ruled." The complete predicate is "has ruled the kingdom for seven years."

NOTE: Most of the time the verb will denote an action, but not always. Sometimes the verb will denote a state of being or sensing. For example, *Toni Morrison is a celebrated author.* The verb "is" does not convey an action, but it is a complete verb in this sentence. *Edward VI became king at a young age*. The verb "become" does not convey an action, but it is the complete verb.

COMMON ERROR: The predicate always contains a complete verb (one that indicates tense). A common writing fault is treating an incomplete verb as if it were complete. For example:

INCORRECT: *All of us laughing in the water.*
CORRECT: *All of us were laughing in the water.*
CORRECT: *All of us laughed in the water.*

1.3 Phrases and Clauses

A sentence may be as short as one or two words, or much longer. Longer sentences contain words that tell more about the subject or the predicate.

Sometimes the words are single descriptive words;

sometimes they are grouped as phrases and clauses.

A **phrase** is a group of grammatically related words that does not contain a main verb. The words in the phrase act as a unit, usually functioning as a part of speech (we cover the parts of speech in the next section). For example:

The girl is at home today, but tomorrow she is going to the amusement park.

Notice that "at home" and "to the amusement park" are phrases functioning as adverbs of place. "The girl" is a phrase in the sense that the words go together as determiner and noun, but it does not function as a part of speech.

A **clause** is a group of grammatically related words that does contain a main verb.

Some clauses can stand alone as complete sentences. Such clauses are called **main** or **independent clauses**. For example:

The girl is at home today, but tomorrow she is going to the amusement park.

The two clauses in this sentence are “The girl is at home today” and “tomorrow she is going to the amusement park.” The joining word "but" is simply a connecting word; it does not belong to either clause.

Either clause, therefore, can stand alone, expressing

a complete thought:

The girl is at home today. (complete thought)
Tomorrow she is going to the amusement park. (complete thought)

Other clauses are prevented from standing alone because they begin with words that limit their meaning, words like *because* and *when*. Such clauses are called **subordinate** or **dependent clauses**. For example:

The boy quit college because he won a talent show.

“The boy quit college” is a complete thought, and therefore a main clause. “Because he won a talent show” is an incomplete thought and therefore a subordinate clause. The "because" leaves us wondering what went before.

COMMON ERROR: A common writing fault is to separate two independent clauses with a comma (with no conjunction after it).

INCORRECT: *They have a chess class here, the students like it.*
CORRECT: *They have a chess class here. The students like it.*
CORRECT: They have a chess class here, and the students like it.

1.4 The Object

As a part of the sentence, an **object** is a word that receives the action of an action verb. For example, in the sentence *The batter hit the ball*, the action of hitting has a receiver, "ball." The ball receives the action and is therefore called the object of the verb.

There are two kinds: **direct object** and **indirect object**.

The word that receives the action of the verb is called the direct object. When the direct object is passed indirectly to another receiver, that receiver is the indirect object. For example:

My mother writes me long letters.

The direct object is "letters." The indirect object is "me." "Letters" receives the action of writing, while "me" receives the letters. One way to tell the two objects apart is that the indirect object usually comes directly after the verb.

Another way to determine which object is which is to ask these questions about the verb:

1. “Writes” what? Answer: "letters," so direct object.

2. “Writes” to whom or for whom? Answer: "me," so indirect object

Some verbs that often take indirect objects are: *write*, *send*, *tell*, *give*, *buy*, and *sell*.

1.5 The Complement

As noted above, not all verbs are action verbs. Only action verbs can have objects. The other kinds of verb – being or sensing verbs – need a noun or adjective to complete their meaning. These words are called **complements**. They complete the meaning of the verb.

If the "completing" word is an adjective, it is called a **predicate adjective**. If the "completing" word is a noun or pronoun, it's called a **predicate noun** or **predicate pronoun**. For example:

That actor is especially handsome. (predicate adjective; completes the meaning of "is.")

The young prince became king. (predicate noun; completes the meaning of "became.")

Is it she? (predicate pronoun; completes the meaning of "is.")

Section 2: Parts of Speech

Words are just words until they are used in a sentence. Once a word is used in a sentence, it becomes a part of speech. The function the word serves in a sentence is what makes it whatever part of speech it is.

For example, the word “run” can be used as more than one part of speech:

Sammy hit a home run. (Here “run” is a noun, direct object of hit.)

You mustn’t run near the swimming pool. (Here “run” is a verb, part of the verb phrase “must not run”.)

The eight parts of speech are: **noun**, **pronoun**, **adjective**, **verb**, **adverb**, **preposition**,

conjunction and **interjection**.

2.1 Noun

A noun is a word used to describe a person, place, thing, event, idea and so on. Nouns usually function as **subjects** or **objects**.

The most important thing to remember about nouns is that they have "number." That means they can be singular or plural.

COMMON ERROR: A common writing error is to assume that the name of a company acts as a plural noun. The confusion comes from the fact that many employees work for any given company. The name of the company itself however, is a singular noun.

INCORRECT: *Yesterday Microsoft declared that they are going to release a new product.*
CORRECT: *Yesterday Microsoft declared that it is going to release a new product.*

Noun Categories

Proper nouns: Used to describe a unique person or thing, proper nouns always start with a capital letter. Examples include *Mary, India*, and *Manchester United*.

Common nouns: Common nouns are used to describe persons or things in general. Examples include *girl*, *country*, and *team*.

Concrete nouns: Nouns that can be perceived

through the five senses are called concrete nouns. Examples include *ball*, *rainbow* and *melody*.

Abstract nouns: Nouns that cannot be perceived through the five senses are called abstract nouns. Examples include *love*, *courage*, and *childhood*.

Countable nouns: Countable nouns can be counted. They also have both a singular and a plural form. Examples include *toys, children* and *books*.

Non-countable nouns: These nouns (usually) cannot be counted, and they don't have a plural form. Examples include *sympathy, laughter* and *oxygen*.

Forming the Plural of Nouns

The English language has regular and irregular plural forms of nouns. The most common way to make a noun plural is to add -s to the singular, for example: *car/cars*.

Certain terminal letter combinations follow predictable rules:

- nouns ending with -s, -x, -ch, or -sh: add -es: box/boxes; church/churches

- nouns ending with a consonant followed by a -y: change the y to i and add -es: enemy/enemies

- nouns ending in -o: add -es: potato/potatoes

NOTE: many foreign borrowings, especially words from Italian, are exceptions to this rule:

canto/cantos, piano/pianos

- nouns ending in -is: change -is to -es : crisis/crises

- nouns ending in -f: change -f to -v and add -es: wolf/wolves

- nouns ending in -fe, change -f to -v and add -s: life/lives (pronounced with long i)

Some nouns form the plural by changing the internal vowels: foot/feet, goose/geese, mouse/mice, louse/lice, man/men, woman/women, tooth/teeth.

Some nouns from the Latin form their plurals as they do in Latin, with -i, -a, or ae: fungus/fungi, alumnus/alumni, phenomenon/phenomena, stratum/strata, datum/data, alumna/alumnae, antenna/antennae.

NOTE: many of these Latin plurals have been anglicized so that one may also see the forms funguses and antennas. The plural nouns data is commonly used as a singular. When in doubt, consult a dictionary or style guide.

Some nouns are spelled the same in the singular and in the plural: one sheep/two sheep; one deer/two deer; one offspring/many offspring; one series/two series.

2.2 Pronoun

The pronoun is used to replace nouns in order to

avoid repetition. Compare:

Mary didn’t go to school because Mary was sick.

and

Mary didn’t go to school because she was sick.

In the second sentence “she” is a personal pronoun used to replace "Mary."

NOTE: Many grammatical errors arise from not understanding how to use pronouns.

Like nouns, pronouns have number (singular and plural). Unlike nouns, pronouns also have special forms according to whether they are used as subjects or objects.

Personal Pronoun
Subject forms: *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, *they.*
Object forms: *me*, *you*, *him*, *her*, *it*, *us*, *them.*

COMMON ERROR: The most common error in the use of these forms is to use an object form as a subject, or a subject form as an object:

INCORRECT: *Me and my friends like pizza.*
CORRECT: *My friends and I like pizza.*

INCORRECT: *They were very kind to Jack and I.*
CORRECT: *They were very kind to Jack and me.*

Possessive Pronoun
Standard forms: *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *theirs*, *its.*

The possessive pronoun, like the personal pronoun, stands for a noun. At the same time it indicates possession.

This book is mine. ("mine" stands for "book" and tells that the book belongs to the speaker)

This book is yours. ("yours" stands for "book" and tells that the book belongs to the person spoken to.)

NOTE: The possessive pronoun is different from the possessive adjective:

This book is mine. (possessive pronoun)
This is my book. (possessive adjective)

As you can see, the possessive pronoun stands in place of a noun, while the possessive adjective stands in front of a noun.

Reflexive Pronoun
This special class of pronouns is used when the object is the same as the subject of the sentence: *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *ourselves*, *yourselves*, *themselves.* For example:

I managed to cut myself while shaving. (the action reflects back onto the subject)

COMMON ERROR: A common error in the use of the reflexive pronoun is to use it as a subject:

INCORRECT: *Jack and myself bought a house.*
CORRECT: *Jack and I bought a house.*

Interrogative Pronoun
Standard forms: *what, which, who, whom, whose*

These pronouns are used to introduce questions:

What are the odds?
Who left the door open?
Which is mine?

NOTE: The subject pronoun **who** has the object form **whom**.

The tendency for many speakers is to avoid whom altogether and use who as both subject and object. This is no longer viewed as a serious error.

Using whom where the subject form is called for, however, is an error to be avoided at all costs. For example:

ACCEPTABLE: *Who are you calling?*
CORRECT: *Whom are you calling?*

INCORRECT: *Whom is coming with us to the park?*
CORRECT: *Who is coming with us to the park?*

Demonstrative Pronoun
Standard forms: *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*.

These pronouns are used to stand for a noun and separate it from other entities. For example:

Is this the one you wanted?
Hand me those.

NOTE: Generally speaking, use this and these to indicate items near the speaker, and that and those for items farther away.

Notice that demonstrative pronouns *replace* the noun. The same words – *this, that, these*, and *those* – are also used as "demonstrative determiners" or “demonstrative adjectives.” For example:

This house is ugly. (Here "this" is pointing out the noun "house.")

Indefinite Pronoun
As the name implies, indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific thing, place or person. There are many of them, including *anyone*, *anywhere*, *everyone*, *none*, and *someone*. Examples:

Everyone is going to the party.
That's not anywhere I'd want to go.

Relative Pronoun
The relative pronouns are *that*, *who*, *whom*, *which*, *where*, *when*, and *why*.

Like other pronouns, the relative pronoun replaces a noun. Like a conjunction, it serves as a joining word between clauses. For example:

That's the man who climbed Everest.

The word "who" is a relative pronoun. It stands for "man" and it links the main clause "That's the man" to the dependent clause "who climbed Everest."

2.3 Adjective

An adjective is a word that describes a noun. There are two main kinds: **attributive** and **predicative**.

An adjective is used attributively when it stands next to a noun and describes it. For example:

The black cat climbed a tree. (“black” describes the “cat”)

An adjective is used predicatively when a verb separates it from the noun or pronoun it describes. For example:

This soup tastes bad. (“bad” describes how the soup “tastes”)

Verbs that can be completed by predicate adjectives are called **being verbs** or **copulative verbs**. They include all the forms of *to be* and sensing verbs like *seem*, *feel*, and *taste*.

NOTE: certain verb forms may be used as

adjectives:

The man felt a paralyzing fear. (“paralyzing” is used in the present participle to describe "fear")

Flavored oatmeal tastes better than plain oatmeal. (“flavored” is used in the past participle to describe "oatmeal")

The usual place of the adjective in English is in front of the noun. You can have a whole string of adjectives if you like:

The tall thin evil-looking cowboy roped the short, fat, inoffensive calf.

Sometimes, for rhetorical or poetic effect, the adjective can come after the noun:

Sarah Plain and Tall (book title)
This is the forest primeval.

Adjective Classifications

- **qualitative**: *good, bad, happy, blue, French, etc.*
- **possessive**: *my, thy, his, her, its, our, your, their*
- **relative and interrogative**: *which, what, whatever, etc.*
- **numeral**: *one, two, second, single, etc.*
- **indefinite**: *some, any, much, few, every, etc.*

- **demonstrative**: *this, that, the, a (an), such*

Articles

The demonstrative adjectives **the**, **a** and **an** are so important in English that they have a special name: articles.

Some people even consider articles as a separate part of speech. In function, however, they can be grouped with the demonstrative adjectives that are used to point things out rather than describe them.

The is called **definite article**, while **a (an)** is called **indefinite article**.

The definite article is usually used to point out something that has already been introduced. The indefinite article is used to introduce something unspecific, or something being introduced for the first time. For example:

From the top of the rise we could see a house. As we drew nearer, we could see that the house was a Victorian mansion.

The article **a** derives from a word meaning "one." It is used only with singular nouns: *a house*. **The** can be used with either singular or plural nouns: *the boy/the boys*.

The indefinite article has two forms:

A is used before words beginning with a consonant

sound or an aspirated h: *a car, a lamb, a hope, a habit, a hotel*.

An is used before words beginning with a vowel sound: *an ape, an image, an untruth, an honorable man*.

2.4 Verb

The verb is the heart of the sentence. Verb errors can be avoided if one understands the following terms: **principal parts**, **person**, **transitive**, **intransitive**, **tense**, **voice**, and **mood**.

Principal Parts of the Verb
The writer who knows the three principal parts of the verb is able to build any tense.

The three principal parts of the verb are: **present**, **past**, and **past participle**. The past participle form is the form used with *has* or *have*. For example, the principle parts of the regular verb *walk* are:

walk | walked | (have) walked

Most English verbs are regular. That means that they form the simple past and the past participle by adding the -ed ending.

A few English verbs form the past by changes in spelling. For example, the principle parts of the irregular verb *to go* are:

go | went | (have) gone

The few irregular verb forms must be learned individually.

Person
Verbs are said to have person.

First person is the form of the verb used with the subject pronouns **I** and **we**.

Second person is the form of the verb used with the subject pronoun **you**.

Third person is the form of the verb used with the subject pronouns **he**, **she**, **it**, and **they**.

English verb forms are almost completely uniform. Except for third person present singular, the forms are identical in all persons and tenses.

COMMON ERROR: It is with third person present singular that verb errors occur.

INCORRECT: *He don't know when to quit.*
CORRECT: *He doesn't know when to quit.*

Kinds of Verb
English has three kinds of verbs: transitive, intransitive, and incomplete.

1. Transitive Verbs
A verb is transitive when the **action is carried across** to a receiver:

The farmer grows potatoes.

Elvis sang ballads.

The receiver is called the direct object. It answers the question “What?” or “Whom? after the verb. Grows what? *Potatoes*. Sang what? *Ballads*.

2. Intransitive Verbs
A verb is intransitive when the **action stays with the verb**. It is not carried across to a receiver:

Corn grows.
Elvis sang.

NOTE: Adding a prepositional phrase to modify the verb does not change the fact that the action of the verb remains with the subject. For example:

Corn grows in the fields.
Elvis sang all over the world.

The phrases "in the fields" and "all over the world" simply add information about the verbs.

Both transitive and intransitive verbs are **action verbs**.

3. Incomplete Verbs
There are three types of incomplete verbs:

i. being verbs - also called linking or copulative verbs: *to be*, *seem*, *become*, *taste*, *smell*, *sound*, *feel*.

NOTE: Some of these verbs can also be used

transitively. If in doubt, substitute a form of *to be* for the verb. If the sentence still makes sense, the verb is being used as a copulative verb. For example:

He feels depressed. / He is depressed. (The replacement makes sense. "feels" is a linking verb.)

He feels the wall. / He is the wall. (The replacement is nonsense. "feels" is not a lining verb. It's a transitive action verb.)

ii. auxiliary verbs - also called helping verbs: *be*, *have*, *shall*, *will*, *do*, and *may*.

iii. semi-auxiliary verbs - *must, can, ought, dare, need.*

These auxiliary verbs are used to form different tenses, voices, and moods.

Some of them, like *have* and *do*, have other uses as complete verbs. Most of them, like *shall* and *may*, do not exist as complete verbs. For example: one can do something, but one cannot may something.

Voice
English verbs are said to have two voices: **active** and **passive**.

1. Active Voice: the subject of the sentence performs the action. For example:

His son catches fly balls.
Creative children often dream in class.

Verbs in the active voice may be either transitive or intransitive.

2. Passive Voice: the subject receives the action. For example:

The ball was caught by the first baseman.
The duty is performed by the new recruits.
The dough was beaten by the mixer.

Only transitive verbs can be used in the passive voice. What would be the direct object of the verb in the active voice, becomes the subject of the verb in the passive voice.

Active voice: *The dog bit the mailman.* “bit” is a transitive verb. The receiver/direct object is “mailman.”

Passive voice: *The mailman was bitten by the dog.* “bit” is now in the passive voice. The “receiver” has become the subject of the verb.

A passive verb in either present or past tense will always have two parts: some form of the verb to be (*am, is, are, was, were*), and a past participle (verb form ending in -ed, -en, or any form used with have when forming a perfect tense).

NOTE: The mere presence of the verb *to be* does not indicate that a verb is in the passive voice. The test of a verb in the passive voice is the question:

Is the subject performing the action of the verb, or is the subject receiving the action of the verb?

If the subject is receiving the action, then the verb is in passive voice. Sometimes the passive voice is the best way to express a thought. Used carelessly, however, passive voice can produce a ponderous, inexact writing style.

Mood

English verbs have four moods: **indicative**, **imperative**, **subjunctive**, and **infinitive**.

Mood is the form of the verb that shows the mode or manner in which a thought is expressed.

1. Indicative Mood: expresses an assertion, denial, or question:

Little Rock is the capital of Arkansas.
Ostriches cannot fly.
Have you finished your homework?

2. Imperative Mood: expresses command, prohibition, entreaty, or advice:
Don’t smoke in this building.
Be careful!
Don’t drown that puppy!

3. Subjunctive Mood: expresses doubt or something contrary to fact. Modern English speakers use indicative mood most of the time, resorting to a kind of “mixed subjunctive” that makes use of helping verbs:

If I should see him, I will tell him.

Americans are more likely to say:

If I see him, I will tell him.

The verb **may** can be used to express a wish:

May you have many more birthdays.
May you live long and prosper.

The verb **were** can also indicate the use of the subjunctive:

If I were you, I wouldn't keep driving on those tires.
If he were governor, we'd be in better fiscal shape.

4. Infinitive Mood: expresses an action or state without reference to any subject. It does not indicate time. It can be the source of sentence fragments when the writer mistakenly thinks the infinitive form is a fully-functioning verb.

When we speak of the "infinitive," we usually mean the basic form of the verb with "to" in front of it: to go, to sing, to walk, to speak.

Verbs in the infinitive mood include participle forms ending in -ed and -ing. Verbs in the infinitive mood are not being used as verbs, but as other parts of speech. For example:

To err is human; to forgive, divine. ("to err" and "to

forgive" are used as nouns.)

He is a man to be admired. ("to be admired" is an infinitive phrase used as an adjective, the equivalent of "admirable" It describes the noun "man.")

He came to see you. ("to see you" is an infinitive phrase used as an adverb to tell why he came.)

Tense

Modern English has six tenses, each of which has a corresponding continuous tense.

The first three tenses, **present**, **past**, and **future**, present few problems.

The other three tenses, **perfect**, **pluperfect**, and **future perfect**, are formed with the helping verbs *have*, *has*, and *had.*

perfect: used to express an event that has just finished, and to describe an event which, although in the past, has effects that continue into the present. For example:

Queen Elizabeth has reigned for 56 years.

pluperfect (past perfect): used to express an event that took place before another action, also in the past. For example:

I had driven all the way to Oklahoma when I realized my mistake.

future perfect: used to express an event that will have taken place at some time in the future. For example:

As of February 26, I shall have been in this job six years.

2.5 Adverb

Adverbs are used to **describe** or **modify** a verb, adjective, clause, or another adverb. Basically, they modify everything except nouns and pronouns (which are modified by adjectives).

Adverb modifying a verb: *He was running fast.* ("fast" modifies "running")

Adverb modifying an adjective: *She took a very small piece of the cake.* ("very" modifies "small")

Adverb modifying a clause: *The man left the room furtively.* (“furtively” modifies the whole clause)

Usually adverbs answer to the questions “When?” (adverbs of time), “Where?” (adverbs of place), and “How?” (adverbs of manner).

Conjunctive Adverbs
This class of adverb also partakes of the function of the conjunction. Not true conjunctions, they require the addition of a semi-colon after the clause that precedes them:

You broke the law; therefore you must go to prison.

Here is a list of conjunctive adverbs: a*ccordingly, also, anyway, again, besides, certainly, further, consequently, contrarily, finally, furthermore, next, elsewhere, hence, henceforth, however, in contrast, incidentally, indeed, instead, likewise, meanwhile, moreover, namely, nevertheless, nonetheless, now, otherwise, rather, similarly, so, subsequently, still, that is, then, thereafter, therefore, thus, undoubtedly.*

2.6 Preposition

Prepositions are used to **link nouns and pronouns** to other words within a sentence. The group of words that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun is called a **prepositional phrase**. The word that ends the phrase is called the **object of the preposition**.

Usually prepositions show a spatial or temporal relationship between the noun and the object:

The cat is under the table. ("Cat" is the noun. "Under" is the preposition. "Table" is the object.)

Here is a list of words commonly used as prepositions: *about, above, after, among, around, along, at, before, behind, beneath, beside, between, by, down, from, in, into, like, near, of, off, on, out, over, through, to, up, upon, under, and with.*

NOTE: prepositional phrases function as adverbs and adjectives:

ADVERBIAL PHRASE: *The dog was hiding under the porch.* (The prepositional phrase “under the porch” acts as an adverb, specifying where the dog was hiding.)

ADJECTIVAL PHRASE: *The dog in the wagon barked incessantly.* (The prepositional phrase “in the wagon” acts as an adjective, specifying which dog is barking.)

2.7 Conjunction

A conjunction joins words and groups of words.

The two classes of conjunction are **coordinate** (or coordinating) and **subordinate** (or subordinating).

Coordinate conjunctions: *and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.*

We also have a class called correlative conjunctions that works in word pairs: *either...or*, *neither...nor.* Examples:

Mother and Father are driving me to New Orleans. ("and" is a coordinate conjunction joining words of equal significance in the sentence.)

I painted the walls but Jack painted the woodwork. ("but" is a coordinate conjunction joining clauses of equal significance in the sentence. Either clause could stand alone as a sentence.)

Subordinate conjunctions: *that, as, after, before,*

since, when, where, unless, if. Example:

Because you can’t get away, we’ll go without you. ("Because" is a subordinate conjunction joining a less important thought to a more important thought. The main clause, "we’ll go without you," can stand alone as a complete thought. The subordinate clause, "Because you can’t get away," is an incomplete thought. It is dependent upon the main clause for meaning.)

NOTE: The relative pronouns *that*, *who*, *whom*, *which*, *where*, *when*, and *why* are used in the same way that subordinate conjunctions are. The difference is that the relative pronouns serve three purposes at once:

1) they stand for a noun in the main clause,
2) they connect the clauses, and
3) they serve as a subject or object word in the subordinate clause.

Examples:

He is the man who invented the hula hoop. (“who” stands for man and is the subject of invented)

Charles is the boy whom the other children tease. (“whom” stands for boy and is the object of tease)

Give me the piece of string that is waxed. (“that” stands for string and is the subject of is waxed)

The possessive adjective **whose** can also be used to

join clauses:

That’s the bird whose plumage I admire. (“whose” refers to "bird" and describes "plumage")

2.8 Interjection

The word interjection comes from from a Latin word that means “throw between.” It’s a word or phrase that is thrown into a sentence to express an emotion:

Goodness, how you’ve grown!
Darn, I forgot my lunch!
Alas, will he never return?

All the impolite expressions that we call expletives are interjections.

Strictly speaking, an interjection is not a part of speech. It serves no grammatical function but is rather “a noisy utterance like the cry of an animal” (F.J. Rahtz). Interjections express feeling or emotion, not thought, and have been called “the miserable refuge of the speechless.”

If you’ve ever stood lunch duty on a high school campus, you know just how vapid conversation can be when larded with meaningless interjections.