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SSC - 245

Parts of Speech

Overview: The different parts of speech in English represent the classifications for words in the language. Each language uses different classifications to segregate and define its words. English has nine different classifications, and these parts of speech and the rules that govern each make up the building blocks for our sentences. It is important to understand how each part of speech functions in a sentence because, combined with proper punctuation, the use and misuse of words create the meaning in your writing.

Nouns are people, places, or things. They often function as the subjects and objects in sentences.

Nouns are classified in several different ways:

Proper nouns: Jennifer Lawrence, California, Chipotle	Concrete nouns: desk, house, tree, computer
Common nouns: computer, classroom, essay	Abstract nouns: peace, happiness, loneliness
Collective nouns: family, team, jury, herd	

In the example sentence below, The Writer’s Resource Lab is a noun acting as a subject (the noun performing the action), and individualized writing instruction is a noun acting as an object (the noun receiving the action).

- *The University Writing Center regularly offers individualized writing instruction.*

A **verb** is an action performed or a state of being. Below, *offers* is the verb, the action being performed.

- The University Writing Center regularly *offers* individualized writing instruction.

An **adverb** is a word that modifies a verb or sometimes adjectives and other adverbs. Adverbs usually end in –ly. In the example sentence below, *regularly* is an adverb because it describes the verb “offers.”

- The University Writing Center *regularly* offers individualized writing instruction.

Adjectives are words that modify (describe) nouns or pronouns. **Attributive adjectives** appear before the noun. **Predicative adjectives** appear in the predicate of a sentence and are not followed by nouns; instead, they are complements of the copula be function that links predicative adjectives to nouns using helping verbs.

- The University Writing Center regularly offers *individualized* writing instruction.

In the example above, *individualized* is an **attributive adjective** because it describes and precedes “writing instruction.” In the example below, however, *individualized* is a **predicative adjective** because it appears after the noun it describes.

- Writing instruction at the University Writing Center is *individualized*.

Similar to adjectives, **articles** modify nouns. Articles are, in fact, often considered a special type of adjective; however, instead of simply modifying a noun like an adjective does, articles indicate the type of direct or indirect reference being made by the noun. The **definite article**, *the*, indicates a specific noun while the **indefinite articles**, *a* and *an*, refer to a any member of a collective of nouns.

Definite article = the	Indefinite articles = a, an
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In the first example sentence below, *the* is a **definite article** because “Writer’s Resource Lab” is a specific place while in the sentence below it, *a* is an **indefinite article** because “writing lab” is one out of a collective group of many countable writing labs.

- *The* University Writing Center regularly offers individualized writing instruction.
- Like many other universities, Cal State Long Beach has *a* writing center.

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of and refers back to a noun.

<p>Personal pronouns = I, me, you, she, her, he, him, it, we, us, you, they, them</p> <p>Possessive pronouns = my, mine, your, yours, her, hers, his, its, our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs</p> <p>Interrogative pronouns = who, whom, whose, which, what</p> <p>Intensive and Reflexive pronouns = myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves</p>	<p>Indefinite pronouns = someone, anyone, everyone, anything, everything, something, some, none, many, one, few, nobody, etc.</p> <p>Demonstrative pronouns = this, that, these, those</p> <p>Relative pronouns = who, whom, whose, which, that</p> <p>Reciprocal pronouns = each other, one another</p>
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Review the examples of pronoun usage below. For a more thorough explanation of these examples, review our pronoun handout.

- *Who* will be at the party?
- *These* are for my research paper.
- *Everyone* writes at some point in *their* education.
- The essay *that* is about gun control will be due next week.

Prepositions are words that, when coupled with a noun or pronoun, create a phrase to modify another word. These prepositional phrases almost always act as adjectives or adverbs. Commonly used prepositions include: *about, before, down, into, next, out, through, to, in, on, up*.

- The textbook *on the table* contains many useful grammar exercises.
- The assignment *before this essay* proved to be difficult.

Prepositions often indicate location and time. Whereas the prepositional phrase *on the table* clarifies the location of “the textbook,” *before this essay* describes the time that “the assignment” was completed.

Conjunctions are terms that join words, phrases, or clauses.

Coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) join two independent clauses (complete sentences) while **subordinating conjunctions** (if, while, although, since, because, whereas, etc.) join subordinate clauses and clarify the relationship between the ideas.

- Writing requires much time and effort, *yet* I enjoy learning how to express my thoughts clearly.
- *Because* I am an English major, I write essays frequently.

Interjections are words or phrases used to show an exclamation or a dispute or give a command. Depending upon their intended emotion, interjections either stand alone marked by an exclamation point as in the first example below or set off from the rest of a sentence by a comma.

- *Wow!* You earned an A on your essay.
- *Oh,* I don’t agree with your discussion of global warming.

Practice: Understanding the function of the parts of speech will help you to not only improve the clarity of your writing but be able to discuss and understand your writing with tutors during your sessions at the WRL.