Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics

Parts of Speech

Every word in the English language can be defined as one or more of the following eight parts of speech:

**Adjective:** A word that modifies a noun or pronoun  
*Ex: small, big, pretty, ugly, white*

**Adverb:** A word that modifies a verb, adjective, or another adverb  
*Ex: quickly, easily, very, well*

**Conjunction:** A word that connects words, phrases, clauses, or sentences  
*Ex: and, but, as, because*

**Interjection:** A word that shows emotion and is connected to a sentence with a comma or exclamation point  
*Ex: Wow!, Yes, . . .*

**Noun:** A word that names a person, place, thing or idea  
*Ex: student, school, pencil, knowledge*

**Preposition:** A word that connects a noun or pronoun to another word, phrase, or clause  
*Ex: under, above, of, with*

**Pronoun:** A word that takes the place of a noun  
*Ex: I, me, she, we, it*

**Verb:** A word that either shows a state of being or an action  
*Ex: State of being: is, are, be  
Action: jump, give, run*

Other Commonly Used Grammatical Terms of Interest

**Agreement:** Nouns and pronouns should *agree* with the verb in a sentence.  
*Ex: The boy walks.  You walk.*

**Appositive:** A noun or phrase placed next to another noun, set off by commas, that explains it  
*Ex: The student, *Johnny*, read the book.*
**Articles:** *the, a, and an.* *The* is a definite article identifying a particular noun, *a* and *an* are indefinite, referring to no specific noun.

**Clause:** A clause is a part of a sentence that contains a subject and a verb. An independent clause can stand on its own as a sentence, a dependent clause cannot.

*Ex: The girl smiles. (Independent clause)*
*If the girl smiles (Dependent clause)*

**Coordinating Conjunctions:** A conjunction that joins together two independent clauses in a sentence, accompanied by a comma. The coordinating conjunctions are as follows: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* (F.A.N.B.O.Y.S.)

*Ex: The cat meowed, and the dog barked.*

**Dangling Modifiers:** A modifier that is misplaced in a sentence, thereby making it difficult to determine what element is being modified.

*Ex: Having difficulty with homework, the radio helped me concentrate.*

Is the phrase “having difficulty with my homework” referring to “the radio” or “me”?

**Direct Object:** A noun or pronoun that receives or is affected by the action of a verb.

*Ex: Billy threw the ball.*

**Ellipsis:** Three dots representing missing text.

*Ex: “Four score and seven years ago our forefathers brought forth... a new nation...”*

**Gerund:** A verb that acts like a noun and ends in *-ing*

*Ex: Running is good exercise.*

**Homonyms:** Words that have the same pronunciation but have different meanings and may have different spellings.

*Ex: “Mail” is what you get from the post office.
“Male” is a boy.
Ex: “tie” is a verb meaning to fasten two things together
“tie” is a noun referring to a man’s formal neck accessory*

**Imperatives:** Verbs used to give orders

*Ex: Hand me that pen, please.*
**Indirect Objects**: Words that do not directly receive the action of a verb, but receive the direct object.  
*Ex: The girl threw **Billy** the ball.*

**Infinitives**: Verbs preceded by the word “to” that have no specific person or tense. The “to” should never be separated from the verb in a sentence.  
*Ex: I want to **sing**.*

**Intransitive Verb**: A verb that does not receive an object.  
*Ex: He **walked**.*

**Linking Verb**: A verb that connects the subject of a sentence to a complement; shows state of being.  
*Ex: She is **tall**.*  
*The rose smells **good**.*

**Numbers**: Numbers zero through one hundred and any round numbers above that should be written out in words. All other numbers should be written as numerals.  
*Ex: I have thirty-three dollars.*  
*She has 125 stamps.*

**Participle**: A word formed from a verb and used as an adjective or a noun.  
*Ex: The sleeping man (present participle)  
Ex: buttered toast (past participle)*

**Phrase**: A group of words that goes together but is not a complete sentence  
*Ex: in the dark*

**Possessives**: Words that show ownership  
*Ex: his, mine, hers, John’s*

**Predicate**: the verb/verb phrase that tells something about the subject the subject.  
*Ex: The teacher **checked the student’s work**.*
**Punctuation:** See below

**Sentence:** A group of words, beginning with a capital letter, that contains a subject and verb, expresses a complete thought, and ends with a period, exclamation point, or question mark.

*Ex: The teacher checked the student’s work.*

**Subject:** The key noun or pronoun that tells what a sentence is about.

*Ex: The teacher checked the student’s work.*

**Transitive Verb:** A verb that takes an object.

*Ex: The woman opened the door.*

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**PUNCTUATION MARKS**

**Period:** Use to end a statement

*Ex: The teacher gave homework.*

Use in an abbreviation

*Ex: Mr. Smith gave us homework.*

**Question Mark:** Ends a direct question

*Ex: Where is your pencil?*

**Exclamation Point:** Use to express a strong emotion

*Ex: Wow! I won the lottery!*

**Comma:** Use to separate elements of a list

*Ex: I am studying English, math, and science.*

Use to separate two sentences along with a coordinating conjunction

*Ex: John went to the movies, and Steve went to the game.*

Use in letter salutations

*Ex: Dear Uncle Steve,*

Use after a dependent clause when it comes first in a sentence

*Ex: When I turn sixteen, I will have a party.*
Use before or after quotes
Ex: “I love peaches,” Sarah said.

Use in addresses and dates
Ex: Philadelphia, PA
Ex: 400 Race St., Philadelphia, PA
Ex: July 4, 1776

**Semicolon:** Use in a list when commas are included in the list itself
Ex: I’ve lived in South Brunswick, NJ; Albany, NY; and Cleveland, OH.

Use in place of a comma and coordinating conjunction to join sentences
Ex: John went to the movies; Steve went to the game.

**Colon:** Use after an introductory remark
Ex: The quote was this: “Four score and seven years ago . . .”

Use to introduce a list
Ex: My favorite fruits are the following:
   Apples
   Oranges
   Watermelon

**Quotes:** Use in citing another’s work
Ex: “Four score and seven years ago . . .”

Use in dialogue
Ex: John said, “I went to the movies.”