

Parts of Speech

The basic building blocks for English are the parts of speech. Recognising them, and understanding the rules that govern them, will help you to avoid the most common grammatical errors. There are eight of them:

Nouns

Noun is the name given to the words that describe a thing. e.g. Bat, water, computer, cup, tractor. These are also known as common nouns. If you can put the word 'the' in front of the word, then you are dealing with a noun.

Proper nouns describe a person or place and always start with a capital letter. e.g. London, Tom or Canada.

There is a tendency, particularly in business English, to turn verbs into nouns. This process is known as nominalization and should be avoided.

For example: the board will reduce spend by 10%. This should be spending.

Similarly, there is a growing tendency to turn nouns into verbs. e.g.

Podium to podiuming
Medal to medaling

Pronouns

Pronouns are short words that stand in for nouns.

I you he she it we they one him her us
them.

They enable us to avoid torturous writing like this:

Nicola Soames went to ASDA to buy some food. Nicola Soames selected several items and then Nicola Soames went to the incorrectly labelled 'ten items or less' checkout. Nicola Soames looked in Nicola Soames's purse for Nicola Soames's money and took out the only ten pound note Nicola Soames had. Nicola Soames gave Nicola Soames's money to the checkout person. The checkout person gave Nicola Soames Nicola Soames's change and said "have a nice day".

The same version using pronouns could look something like this:

Nicola Soames went to ASDA to buy some food. She selected several items and then went to the incorrectly labelled 'ten items or less' checkout. She looked in her purse for

her money and took out the only ten pound note she had. She gave her money to the checkout person who gave her the correct change and said "have a nice day".

Miraculously, we know what they all mean.

Some pronouns are used to show who owns something. These are called **possessive pronouns**.

mine yours his hers ours theirs its

meaning: belonging to me, belonging to you and so on.

Be careful with **reflexive pronouns** as they can only be used if they look back at the subject of the sentence.

e.g.

I posted that letter myself.

He fell out of the tree and hurt himself

I hate myself

'Please contact either John or myself' is commonly seen and is wrong. It should be 'Please contact either John or me'.

Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns.

Short long tall new blond blonde

They are usually placed next to the noun they are describing.

John bit into the juicy apple.

Verbs

A verb is a 'doing' or 'being' word.

Conjunctions

Joining words. Words that link two parts of a sentence.

And but because so although when if while as
Before unless where after since whether that

There is a convention that says you should never start a sentence with and or but. But, if to do so makes your meaning clearer, then please do so.

Adverb

Rough guide to adverbs. If you can add 'ly' (85% of the time) to an adjective it becomes an adverb and is subject to a different rule. I.e. it must be placed next to the verb it qualifies.

Tom ran quickly down the hill – not - Tom ran down the hill quickly.

Preposition

A preposition describes the position of something. For example:

At, in, for, on, by, to, about, before, under, into ... and so on.

There is a convention that you should never end a sentence with a preposition. e.g.

“...which you may rely on”. Should be: “... on which you may rely”.

Interjection

A word, or short group of words, evoking an emotion or feeling: e.g.

“Ouch, that hurt”.

Hyphenated words

The top forty most frequently used words with hyphens are:

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|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. long-term | 15. twenty-five | 28. well-being |
| 2. video-taped | 16. large-scale | 29. first-class |
| 3. co-operation | 17. south-east | 30. decision-making |
| 4. no-one | 18. Hewlett-Packard | 31. socio-economic |
| 5. so-called | 19. north-west | 32. MS-DOS |
| 6. full-time | 20. twenty-four | 33. right-hand |
| 7. part-time | 21. vice-president | 34. up-to-date |
| 8. post-war | 22. co-operative | 35. X-ray |
| 9. north-east | 23. south-west | 36. right-wing |
| 10. well-known | 24. one-third | 37. co-operate |
| 11. middle-class | 25. would-be | 38. long-standing |
| 12. make-up | 26. co-ordination | 39. five-year |
| 13. old-fashioned | 27. middle-aged | 40. set-up |

Words borrowed from other languages

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Automatic (Greek) | Judo (Japanese) | Safari (Swahili) |
| Banana (West African) | Khaki (Urdu) | Tea (Chinese) |
| Curry (Tamil) | Limerick (Irish) | Ukulele (Hawaiian) |
| Pyjamas (Hindu) | Mattress (Arabic) | Vodka (Russian) |
| Gingham (Malay) | Piano (Italian) | Yacht (Dutch) |
| Hamburger (German) | Robot (Czech) | Zebra (Bantu) |