



What's in a Sentence? Getting to Know the Parts of Speech

We all know that sentences are made up of words, but do we all know the functions of those words? Seven different types of words, or parts of speech, are explained below. Once you understand how each of these parts functions within a sentence, you will be on your way to crafting your own clear, concise, and grammatically correct sentences.

Verbs

Verbs are the meatiest part of a sentence; they show the action or condition of the other words in the sentence. There are two different types of verbs: action verbs and linking verbs. Action verbs show action or movement. You can think about action verbs this way: they *activate* a sentence. Here are some common action verbs:

jump	fly	stammer	walk
crave	drive	pull	play
eat	protect	swim	sleep

Linking verbs, as opposed to action verbs, show condition; that is, they link words together. Linking verbs help define or describe other words in a sentence by connecting, or *linking*, the main subject with its description. You can think about linking verbs this way: they *tell us more* about the main subject of a sentence. Here are some common linking verbs:

am	was	seem	are
is	were	appear	become

Nouns

Nouns name the people, places, and things in a sentence. They provide readers with concrete images or pictures. For example, the verb “runs” is not concrete; readers cannot picture the *action* itself. However, when we write “the girl runs” or “the leopard runs,” the reader is given a concrete image of a running girl or a running leopard. Here are a few nouns:

dog	Paris	family	morality
Martha	turtle	Mother	pirate
Formica	moon	birth	happiness

Pronouns

Pronouns are merely substitutions for nouns; they replace nouns that have been previously introduced, e.g. The *pizza delivery boy* was embarrassed because *he* forgot the *pizza* at the restaurant. In the sentence above, the pronoun *he* is substituted for the noun *pizza delivery boy* in order to shorten the sentence by removing unnecessary words. Here are some other recognizable pronouns:

I	me	my	mine
we	us	our	you
your	they	them	their
she	he	her	him
hers	his	it	its

Adjectives



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Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns. They can explain the color, shape, size, type, or number of a noun. Here are just a few adjectives:

fishy	rude	saucy	blue
few	round	rakish	fervent
pearly	campy	many	small

Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or entire sentences. For example, in the sentence “Rita charged *wildly* around the room”, the adverb *wildly* modifies the verb *charged*; it tells us *how* Rita charged around the room. Here is a handful of adverbs:

here	today	very	quickly
there	yesterday	too	jauntily
near	tomorrow	also	diligently
far	then	just	hauntingly

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that show the time, place, direction, or position of nouns. Here are some common prepositions:

to	from	for	in
on	without	above	around
at	under	through	after

Conjunctions

Conjunctions connect clauses, phrases, and items in lists. There are three types of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and correlative conjunctions.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions connect clauses, phrases, and items in lists. The mnemonic device *fanboys* can help you remember the seven most common coordinating conjunctions:

for	and	nor	but
or	yet	so	

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions introduce a subordinate, or dependent, clause and connect it with an independent clause:

after	once	unless	whereas
because	since	until	wherever
before	though	when	while

Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions connect pairs of words, phrases, or clauses that are of equal importance:

both...and	either...or	if...then	not only...but also
not...but	neither...nor	as...as	whether...or

Parts of Speech Exercise



1. Read each word in parentheses aloud to your partner. (Don't read the story aloud!)
2. Ask your partner to give an example of that part of speech, and then write it in the preceding blank.
3. Once you have filled in all the blanks, read the entire story--not including the words in parentheses--aloud to your partner. You may find that some of the words don't quite make sense grammatically; however, they sure are funny!

_____ (adjective) Mary _____ (action verb) a little lamb, and this lamb was _____ (adverb) white. When Mary took it walking, the _____ (plural noun) pointed and _____ (action verb). One day, the lamb followed Mary _____ (preposition) school. This, of course, _____ (linking verb) against all school rules and _____ (plural noun), _____ (coordinating conjunction) Mary's teachers were _____ (adjective). _____ (subordinating conjunction) the lamb _____ (action verb), the teachers and the _____ (plural noun) all tried _____ (adverb) to _____ (action verb) the lamb. Mary, who was _____ (adjective), _____ (adverb) gathered up her _____ (plural noun) and led her _____ (adjective) lamb back _____ (preposition) her _____ (noun).

Some of the words you or your partner chose may not make sense in your sentences. Why is this? Consider how word choice affects your writing. Remember that even though you may use the right part of speech, you have to consider the context in which the word is used!

Read through this poem Lewis Carroll (Charles L. Dodgson) published in his novel, *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). You might not recognize some of the words--Lewis Carroll was notorious for creating his own words. However, considering context, how many parts of speech can you identify?



Jabberwocky

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought--
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One two! One two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.