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**
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—alloud 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.