

Primary Grammar Glossary

Abstract noun

An abstract noun is a feeling or concept that you cannot touch, such as happiness or education.

Adverbial phrase

A phrase is a small group of words that does not contain a verb. An adverbial phrase is built around an adverb and the words that surround it, for example: very slowly, as fast as possible.

Active voice

A sentence is written in active voice when the subject of the sentence is performing the action (for example, "The cat chased the mouse.")

Adjective

An adjective is a word used to describe and give more information about a noun, which could be a person, place or object.

Adverb

An adverb is a word which modifies a verb, which means that it tells you how, when, where or why something is being done.

Apostrophe

Apostrophes are punctuation marks used to show possession and to show contraction (also known as omission).

Article

Articles are words which tell us whether a noun is general (any noun) or specific. There are three articles: 'the' is a definite article and 'a' and 'an' are indefinite articles.

Clause

Clauses are the building blocks of sentences, groups of words that contain a subject and a verb. Clauses can be main or subordinate.

Common noun

A common noun describes a class of objects (car, friend, dog); unlike proper nouns it does not have a capital letter (Honda, Jenny, Smudge).

Comparative

The comparative form of an adjective or adverb is used to compare one person, thing, action or state to another.

Examples of comparatives: sadder, lighter, more famous, worse, more angrily. The comparative is usually formed by adding the suffix -er.

Complex sentence

A complex sentence is formed when you join a main clause and a subordinate clause with a connective.

Compound sentence

A compound sentence is formed by joining two main clauses with a connective.

Concrete noun

A concrete noun is something you can touch, such as a person, an animal, a place or a thing. Concrete nouns can be common nouns (man, city, film) or proper nouns (Mr Edwards, London, Gone with the Wind).

Conjunction

A conjunction is a type of connective ('connective' is an umbrella term for any word that connects bits of text). Coordinating connectives include the words and, but and so; subordinating connectives include the words because, if and until.

Connective

A connective is a word that joins one part of a text to another. Connectives can be conjunctions, prepositions or adverbs.

Contracted words or contractions

Contracted words are short words made by putting two words together. Letters are missed out in the contraction and replaced by an apostrophe, for example I'm (I am) or it's (it is).

Determiner

A determiner is a word that introduces a noun and identifies it in detail. Determiners can be articles (a, an, the), demonstratives (this, that), possessives (your, his), quantifiers (some, many), numbers (six, sixty).

Direct and indirect speech

Direct speech is a sentence in which the exact words spoken are reproduced in speech marks (quotation marks or inverted commas). Indirect speech or reported speech is when the general points of what someone has said are reported, without actually writing the speech out in full.

Embedded clause

An embedded clause is a clause used in the middle of another clause. It is usually marked by commas.

Fronted adverbials

Fronted adverbials are words or phrases at the beginning of a sentence, used like adverbs to describe the action that follows.

Homophone

Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings. Some homophones are pronounced the same way and spelled the same way but have different meanings; others are pronounced the same way but are spelled differently and have different meanings.

Irregular verbs

While most verbs form their different tenses according to an established "formula", some verbs do not form their tenses in a regular way and are called irregular verbs.

Modal verbs

A modal verb is a special type of verb which changes or affects other verbs in a sentence. Modal verbs are used to show the level of possibility, indicate ability, show obligation or give permission.

Multi-clause sentence

A multi-clause sentence is another term for a complex sentence.

Non-Standard English

Non-Standard English is the vocabulary and sentence structure used in informal English; Standard English is the "correct" form of the language used in schools and in written communication.

Noun

A noun is a naming word. It is a thing, a person, an animal or a place. Nouns can be common, proper, abstract or collective.

Noun phrase

A phrase is a small group of words that does not contain a verb. A noun phrase includes one noun as well as words that describe it, for example: the red shoe.

Object

The object of a sentence is the thing or person that is involved in an action, but does not carry it out ("The cat chased the mouse.").

Passive voice

A sentence is written in passive voice when the subject of the sentence has something done to it by someone or something. For example: "The mouse was being chased by the cat."

Past continuous (or progressive)

The past continuous is the verb tense we use to describe actions that continued for a period of time in the past (I was walking / I was singing).

Past perfect

The past perfect is the verb tense we use to describe actions that were completed by a particular time in the past.

Personal pronoun

A personal pronoun is a word which can be used instead of a person, place or thing: I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, him, her, us and them.

Phrase

A phrase is a small group of words that does not contain a verb.

Possessive pronoun

Possessive pronouns are used to show ownership. Some can be used on their own (mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, whose); others must be used with a noun (my, your, his, her, its, our, their, whose).

Prefix

A prefix is a string of letters that are added to the beginning of a root word, changing its meaning.

Preposition

Prepositions are linking words in a sentence. We use prepositions to explain where things are in time or space.

Prepositional phrase

A phrase is a small group of words that does not contain a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a preposition, for example: on the mat, in the morning, under the chair, during the film.

Present continuous (or progressive)

The present continuous is the verb tense we use to describe actions that continue for a period of time (I am walking/ I am singing).

Present perfect

The present perfect is the verb tense we use to describe actions that are completed by the present.

Pronoun

A pronoun is a word used to replace a noun. Examples of pronouns are: he, she, it, they. Pronouns can be personal and possessive.

Proper noun

A proper noun identifies a particular person, place, or thing (for example, James or Brazil or Monday or Glasgow). Proper nouns always start with a capital letter.

Relative clause

A relative clause is a type of subordinate clause that adapts, describes or modifies a noun by using a relative pronoun (who, that or which).

Root word

A root word is a basic word with no prefix or suffix added to it. By adding prefixes and suffixes to a root word we can change its meaning.

Sentence

A sentence is one word or a group of words that makes sense by itself (a grammatical unit). Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation point. Sentences usually contain a subject (doing something) and a verb (what is being done).

Simple sentence

A simple sentence has a subject and one verb. A compound sentence is formed when you join two main clauses with a connective. A complex sentence is formed when you join a main clause and a subordinate clause with a connective.

Standard English

Standard English is the usual "correct" form of English, taught in schools and used in formal written communication.

Subject

The subject of a sentence is the thing or person who is carrying out the action described by the verb ("The cat chased the mouse.").

Subjunctive

The subjunctive is a verb form used to express things that could or should happen, for example: If I were to go... / I demand that he answer!

Subordinate clause

A subordinate clause needs to be attached to a main clause because it cannot make sense on its own, although it contains a subject and a verb.

Suffix

A suffix is a string of letters that go at the end of a word, changing or adding to its meaning. Suffixes can show if a word is a noun, an adjective, an adverb or a verb.

Superlative

The superlative form of an adjective or adverb is used to compare one person, thing, action or state to all the others in its class. Examples of superlatives: saddest, lightest, most famous, worst, most angrily. The superlative is usually formed by adding the suffix -est.

Time connectives

Time connectives are words or phrases which tell the reader when something is happening. They can also be called temporal connectives.

Verbs and powerful verbs

A verb expresses a physical action, a mental action or a state of being. Powerful verbs are descriptive, rich words.

Verb tense

Verb tenses tell us the time when an action took place, in the past, the present or the future.