

## Parts of speech

### subject:

The subject of a sentence is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something. You can find the subject of a sentence if you can find the verb.

- The really important issue of the conference, stripped of all other considerations, is the morality of the nation.

### objects:

A **direct object** is the receiver of action within a sentence.

- He hit the ball.

The **indirect object** identifies to or for whom or what the action of the verb is performed. The direct object and indirect object are different people or places or things. The direct objects in the sentences below are in **boldface**; the indirect objects are in *italics*.

- Grandfather left *Rosalita and Raoul* **all his money**.

### nouns:

A **noun** is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Whatever exists, we assume, can be named, and that name is a noun. A **proper noun**, which names a specific person, place, or thing (Carlos, Queen Marguerite, Middle East, Jerusalem, Malaysia, Presbyterianism, God, Spanish, Buddhism, the Republican Party), is almost always capitalized. A proper noun used as an addressed person's name is called a **noun of address**. **Common nouns** name everything else, things that usually are not capitalized.

### pronouns:

Generally (but not always) pronouns stand for (*pro* + noun) or refer to a noun, an individual or individuals or thing or things (the pronoun's antecedent) whose identity is made clear earlier in the text.

- This new car is mine.
- You and Carlos have deceived yourselves.

### adjectives:

Adjectives are words that describe or modify another person or thing in the sentence. The **Articles** — *a*, *an*, and *the* — are adjectives.

- the tall professor
- the lugubrious lieutenant
- a solid commitment
- a month's pay
- a six-year-old child
- the unhappiest, richest man

### verbs:

**Verbs** carry the idea of being or action in the sentence.

- I am a student.
- The students passed all their courses.

### adverbs:

Adverbs are words that modify

- a verb (He drove slowly. — How did he drive?)

- an adjective (He drove a very fast car. — How fast was his car?)
- another adverb (She moved quite slowly down the aisle. — How slowly did she move?)

**conjunctive adverbs:**

A conjunctive adverb is an adverb that indicates the relationship in meaning between two independent clauses. Unlike a conventional adverb, which usually affects the meaning of only a single word or phrase, the meaning of a conjunctive adverb (or conjunct) affects the entire clause of which it is a part.

- Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise, they won't go to yours.

**conjunctions:**

A conjunction is a **joiner**, a word that **connects** (conjoins) parts of a sentence.

- Coordinating Conjunctions: and, but, or, yet, for, nor, so
- Ulysses wants to play for UConn, but he has had trouble meeting the academic requirements.

**prepositions:**

A preposition describes a relationship between other words in a sentence.

- You can walk toward the desk.

**prepositional phrase:**

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, a noun or pronoun that serves as the object of the preposition, and, more often than not, an adjective or two that modifies the object.

- The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white.

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>

## Making plural nouns

The plural form of most nouns is created simply by adding the letter *s*.

- more than one snake = snakes
- more than one ski = skis
- more than one Barrymore = Barrymores

Words that end in *-ch*, *x*, *s* or *s-like* sounds, however, will require an *-es* for the plural:

- more than one witch = witches
- more than one box = boxes
- more than one gas = gases
- more than one bus = buses
- more than one kiss = kisses
- more than one Jones = Joneses

Note that some dictionaries list "busses" as an acceptable plural for "bus." Presumably, this is because the plural "buses" looks like it ought to rhyme with the plural of "fuse," which is "fuses." "Buses" is still listed as the preferable plural form. "Busses" is the plural, of course, for "buss," a seldom used word for "kiss."

There are several nouns that have irregular plural forms. Plurals formed in this way are sometimes called **mutated (or mutating) plurals**.

- more than one child = children
- more than one woman = women
- more than one man = men
- more than one person = people
- more than one goose = geese
- more than one mouse = mice
- more than one barracks = barracks
- more than one deer = deer

And, finally, there are nouns that maintain their Latin or Greek form in the plural. (See media and data and alumni, below.)

- more than one nucleus = nuclei
- more than one syllabus = syllabi
- more than one focus = foci
- more than one fungus = fungi
- more than one cactus = cacti (*cactuses* is acceptable)
- more than one thesis = theses
- more than one crisis = crises\*
- more than one phenomenon = phenomena
- more than one index = indices (*indexes* is acceptable)
- more than one appendix = appendices (*appendixes* is acceptable)
- more than one criterion = criteria

A handful of nouns appear to be plural in form but take a singular verb:

- The news is bad.

- Gymnastics is fun to watch.
- Economics/mathematics/statistics is said to be difficult. ("Economics" can sometimes be a plural concept, as in "The economics of the situation demand that . . .")

Numerical expressions are usually singular, but can be plural if the individuals within a numerical group are acting individually:

- Fifty thousand dollars is a lot of money.
- One-half of the faculty is retiring this summer.
- One-half of the faculty have doctorates.
- Fifty percent of the students have voted already.

And another handful of nouns might seem to be singular in nature but take a plural form and always use a plural verb:

- My pants are torn. (Nowadays you will sometimes see this word as a singular "pant" [meaning one pair of *pants*] especially in clothing ads, but most writers would regard that as an affectation.)
- Her scissors were stolen.
- The glasses have slipped down his nose again.

When a noun names the title of something or is a word being used as a word, it is singular whether the word takes a singular form or not.

- *Faces* is the name of the new restaurant downtown.
- *Okies*, which most people regard as a disparaging word, was first used to describe the residents of Oklahoma during the 1930s.
- Chelmsley Brothers is the best moving company in town.
- *Postcards* is my favorite novel.
- The term *Okies* was used to describe the residents of Oklahoma during the 1930s. (In this sentence, the word *Okies* is actually an appositive for the singular subject, "term.")

## Forming Possessives

Showing possession in English is a relatively easy matter (believe it or not). By adding an apostrophe and an s we can manage to transform most **singular nouns** into their possessive form:

- the car's front seat
- Charles's car
- Bartkowski's book
- a hard day's work

Some writers will say that the -s after Charles' is not necessary and that adding only the apostrophe (Charles' car) will suffice to show possession. Consistency is the key here: if you choose not to add the -s after a noun that already ends in s, do so consistently throughout your text. William Strunk's *Elements of Style* recommends adding the 's. (In fact, oddly enough, it's Rule Number One in Strunk's "**Elementary Rules of Usage**.") You will find that some nouns, especially proper nouns, especially when there are other -s and -z sounds involved, turn into clumsy beasts when you add another s: "That's old Mrs. Chambers's estate." In that case, you're better off with "Mrs. Chambers' estate."

There is another way around this problem of klunky possessives: using the "of phrase" to show possession. For instance, we would probably say the "constitution of Illinois," as opposed to "Illinois' (or Illinois's ??) constitution."

To answer that question about Illinois, you should know that most words that end in an unpronounced "s" form their possessive by adding an apostrophe + s. So we would write about "Illinois's next governor" and "Arkansas's former governor" and "the Marine Corps's policy." However, many non-English words that end with a silent "s" or "x" will form their possessives with only an apostrophe. So we would write "Alexander Dumas' first novel" and "this bordeaux' bouquet." According to the New York Public Library's *Guide to Style and Usage*, there are "certain expressions that end in s or the s sound that traditionally require an apostrophe only: for appearance' sake, for conscience' sake, for goodness' sake" (268). Incidentally, the NYPL *Guide* also suggests that when a word ends in a *double s*, we're better off writing its possessive with only an apostrophe: the boss' memo, the witness' statement. Many writers insist, however, that we actually hear an "es" sound attached to the possessive forms of these words, so an apostrophe -s is appropriate: boss's memo, witness's statement. If the look of the three s's in a row doesn't bother you, use that construction.

When we want the possessive of a pluralized family name, we pluralize first and then simply make the name possessive with the use of an apostrophe. Thus, we might travel in the Smiths' car when we visit the Joneses (members of the Jones family) at the Joneses' home. When the last name ends in a hard "z" sound, we usually don't add an "s" or the "-es" and simply add the apostrophe: "the Chambers' new baby."

A Frequently Asked Question about linking verbs concerns the correct response when you pick up the phone and someone asks for you. One correct response would be "This is he [she]." The predicate following the linking verb should be in the nominative (subject) form — definitely *not* "This is him." If "This is he" sounds stuffy to you, try using "Speaking," instead, or "This is Fred," substituting your own name for Fred's — unless it's a bill collector or telemarketer calling, in which case "This is Fred" is a good response for everyone except people named Fred.

## Linking Verbs

A **linking verb** connects a subject and its **complement**. Sometimes called *copulas*, linking verbs are often forms of the verb *to be*, but are sometimes verbs related to the five senses (*look, sound, smell, feel, taste*) and sometimes verbs that somehow reflect a state of being (*appear, seem, become, grow, turn, prove, remain*). What follows the linking verb will be either a noun complement or an adjective complement:

- Those people are all professors.
- Those professors are brilliant.
- This room smells bad.
- I feel great.
- A victory today seems unlikely.

A handful of verbs that reflect a change in state of being are sometimes called **resulting copulas**. They, too, link a subject to a predicate adjective:

- His face turned purple.
- She became older.
- The dogs ran wild.
- The milk has gone sour.
- The crowd grew ugly.

## Action verbs

Action verbs are quite simply, something that a person or thing can do.

- I **cleaned** the windows yesterday.
- I **took** my baby to the clinic.
- We **hunt** rabbits

<http://www.examples-help.org.uk/parts-of-speech/action-verbs.htm>