

## Grammar power

### Questions:

- Can you recognize the grammatical categories of different *content* (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and *function* (prepositions, articles, determiners, etc.) words?
- How can grammatical choices influence meaning and effectiveness in the texts you write?

### Parts of speech

- In many languages, it is easy to identify the function of individual words in a sentence because of the endings attached to them or the order in which the words appear in the sentence. In English, it is sometimes quite complicated. What part of speech do you think the word *running* is in the following sentences?
  - o *Running* is good exercise for your heart.
  - o The cabin in the woods has no *running* water.
  - o The dog was *running* through the park.
- **Content words** (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) have actual meaning. You can look them up in the dictionary.
- **Function words** (pronouns, articles, determiners, auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions) are used in combination with other words within a sentence.

### Subjects and verbs

- Knowing how to identify subjects and verbs is important for avoiding errors in subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, punctuation, noun plurals, and verb forms.
- Knowing how to create and vary subject-verb patterns can sharpen your writing style.
- A basic definition of *subject* is “what the sentence is about,” and a basic definition of *verb* is “what the sentence says about the subject.”
- **The subject** of a sentence always consists of a “noun phrase.” Noun phrases can take a variety of forms. For example (the subject noun phrases are in italics):
  - o *Sacramento* is the capital of California.
  - o *This Central Valley town* is known for its rivers and vineyards.
  - o *Cycling* has become very popular in Sacramento because of its beautiful American River Parkway.
  - o *The city* just keeps growing.
  - o *It* competes with San Francisco for attention and respect.
  - o *Having a lower cost of living* is more important than having tourist attractions or expensive restaurants.
  - o *A better quality of life and lower stress* may be more important than glamorous city life.
- **One tool for identifying the boundaries of a subject is the pronoun substitution test:** if you can substitute a single pronoun for the words, then those words function as a subject unit. For example “*Having a lower cost of living*” can be replaced by *it* (“*it* is more important...””) but you could not say “*It* a lower cost of living,” or “*It* of living is more important...”
- Complex and compound sentences contain more than one subject noun phrase. For example: “So, in general, *egg donation* is the transfer of a donor’s eggs to the recipient’s uterus after *they* are fertilized with the sperm of the partner of the recipient.” “*Toronto* is the capital of Ontario, and *it* has been one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada over the past twenty years.”
- In some sentences, the subject noun phrase may be implied or may follow the verb or an auxiliary. For example: “Leave me alone!” (the implied subject is “you”). “Below me were *smashed oranges and bloody bags of meat*.” “Don’t *you* want some lunch?”
- **Verbs** can be marked for tense, number, person, or state of completion. For example: “He *has tried* broccoli but he just *doesn’t like* it” (singular, third person, present perfect/present, completed).

- Remember that verbs often work in conjunction with *auxiliaries* and *modals*, to indicate time, completion, etc. For example (verb in italics, auxiliaries/modals in bold): “He **did** not *try* very hard.” “We really **must** *try* Vietnamese food.” “We **have** *tried* Japanese food but not Thai food.” “We **were** *trying* very hard to come to the party.”

### Phrases, clauses, and sentence types

- A **phrase** is a group of words that forms a **recognizable unit of meaning** within a sentence. Take the following example: “The little boy ran quickly through the park.”
  - o Subject noun phrase: *the little boy*
  - o Verb phrase: *ran quickly through the park*
  - o Prepositional phrase: *through the park*
  - o Noun phrase (object of the preposition): *the park*
- All phrases have the same general structure. The head of the phrase is simply the word whose part of speech names that phrase (for example: an adjective phrase starts with an adjective: “The teacher seemed *tired and angry*”).
- A **clause** is a group of related words that include a subject and a verb. A clause can be a single sentence, a **dependent clause** (which must be connected with another clause), or an **independent clause** (which can stand alone as a sentence).
  - o Clause: *Mechanical engineering science emerged in the 19th century.*
  - o Independent clause: *Computational fluid dynamics is a branch of fluid mechanics* that uses numerical methods to solve problems.
  - o Dependent clause: Fatigue failure occurs *because of imperfections in the object.*
  - o Dependent (relative) clause: CAE analysis programs can model complicated physical phenomena *which cannot be solved by hand.*
  - o Dependent (adverb) clause: Biomechanics is closely related to engineering *because it often uses traditional engineering sciences to analyze biological systems.*
- A **sentence** can be a **simple sentence** (one independent clause), a **compound sentence** (two or more independent clauses linked with a coordinating conjunction), a **complex sentence** (at least one dependent clause and one independent clause), or a **complex-compound sentence** (at least three clauses).
  - o Simple sentence: Biomechanics encompasses the fields of robotics and neuroscience.
  - o Compound sentence: Biomechanics is a rapidly growing field, but there are very few labs which conduct research.
  - o Complex sentence: EMG decomposition is non-trivial, although many methods have been proposed.
  - o Complex-compound sentence: After the melding event, the part shape is essentially set, although it can deform under certain process conditions.

### Rhetorical grammar: effective communication through stylistic choices

- To become a better writer, you need to analyze your own writing choices so that your style is clear, appropriate, interesting, and powerful. Remember that your choices can convey different messages.
- You can choose to provide a clear road map through your ideas and arguments (for example by adding prepositional phrases to add details: “*In the Middle East*, the average earning for a professional *in the construction industry, across all sectors, job types and levels of experience*, is £42,090.”)
- You can emphasize specific information (for example by using the passive or active voice: “The first huts and shelters *were constructed* by hand or with simple tools.”).
- You can keep your reader’s interest (for example by asking questions, alternating between long and short sentences, alternating between sentence types, and considering the placement of new and old information, etc.).