

# Key grammatical terms

## Parts of speech

**Noun** = a word referring to (groups of) people, other living and inanimate things, places, concepts, activities etc. (e.g. dog, Finland, psychology, jogging)

**Pronoun** = a word that often takes the place of a noun.

*personal* (I, we, you, it, he, her, they),

*reflexive* (myself, yourself, itself, himself, herself, themselves etc.),

*possessive* (my, his, its etc.)

*relative* (that, which, who, whose, whom),

*demonstrative* (this, that, these, those)

*interrogative* (what, which)

**Verb** = a word denoting an action or state (e.g. run, attempt, stagnate, happen). Grammarians discuss verbs in terms of tense, aspect, mood and voice. English verbs have (strictly speaking) two tenses: past and present. In turn, they have four aspects: simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous. Then, they have four moods: indicative, imperative, subjunctive and infinitive. Finally, they have two voices: active and passive. In the sentence 'We **have been struggling** with this task,' the verb 'struggle' is in the present tense, the perfect continuous aspect, the indicative mood and the active voice. By contrast, in the sentence 'the project **was finished** on time', the verb is in the past tense, the simple aspect, the indicative mood and the passive voice.

*Auxiliary verb* = a verb that helps in the construction of another verb form. For example, the perfect aspect is formed with the help of the auxiliary verb 'have' (e.g. we **HAVE** seen the film) and the continuous aspect is formed with the help of the auxiliary verb 'be' (e.g. we **ARE** watching the film).

*Modal auxiliary verb*. A verb that adds conditionality to another verb (would, could, might, may, etc.)

*Phrasal verb* (multi-word verb). A verb consisting of a short verb and a preposition or adverb particle (e.g. look up, put down, kick out, put off, etc.).

**Adjective** = a word that describes a noun or pronoun (e.g. 'a **FANTASTIC** party,' 'a **TERRIBLE** idea')

**Adverb** = a word that modifies/describes a verb or adjective (e.g. 'he ran **SLOWLY**,' 'she spoke **LOUDLY**,' 'the campus is **AMAZINGLY** cool')

**Preposition** = a functional group of words that help show the spatial or temporal relationship between things or combine with certain verbs (e.g. on, of in, off, on etc.)

**Conjunction** = a word that joins clauses in a sentence

*Coordinating conjunctions* (for, and, nor, but, or, yet). Coordinating conjunctions join clauses of equal grammatical weight (independent clauses).

*Subordinating conjunctions* (after, although, as, as if, because, before, even though, if, since, so that, than, that, though, unless, until, when, where, whereas, whether, and while). Subordinating conjunctions begin a dependent (subordinate) clause.

### Other important terms related to grammar and syntax

**Subject** = noun (phrase) indicating who or what performs an action. The canonical word order in an English sentence is SVO: subject, verb, object.

**Object** = noun (phrase) that is the target of a particular action. Verbs that require objects are termed transitive verbs. The verb 'conduct' is one such verb ('We conducted an experiment.').

↑ subject    ↑ verb    ↑ object

By contrast, verbs that do not demand an object are termed intransitive verbs. The verb 'succeed' is one example of this group of verbs ('We succeeded.')

↑ subject    ↑ verb

**Phrase** = a group of words that work together as a grammatical unit.

*Noun phrase*: noun phrases are groups of words formed around a single noun, called the noun head (e.g. 'She bought him A BEAUTIFUL BLACK ITALIAN SUIT.')

*Verb phrase*: verb phrases consist of a main verb plus any auxiliary verbs used to create a certain verb form (e.g. 'He MIGHT HAVE LOST it all').

**Clause** = a group of words that have, at the very least, a grammatical subject and a tensed verb (e.g. 'The man laughed')

*Independent (main) clause*: a group of words containing a grammatical subject and a tensed verb and constituting a complete thought. An independent clause has all the elements necessary for it to be a sentence. However, a sentence may consist of two or more independent clauses. These are joined with a coordinating conjunction or a semi-colon (e.g. 'The man laughed, and he rolled his eyes').

↑ independent clause 1    ↑ independent clause 2

*Dependent (subordinate) clause*: a group of words that contains a subject and a verb but does not constitute a complete thought and therefore cannot stand alone as an independent sentence (e.g. 'The man laughed when he saw what had happened').

↑ independent clause    ↑ dependent clause

Dependent clauses usually begin with a subordinate marker, such as a subordinating conjunction (as in the example) or a relative pronoun.