

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, 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.