

# The Parts of Speech

Understanding how words function will help you to write better sentences. Words can be divided into eight groups. These are called the **parts of speech**.

Nouns, pronouns, and verbs are the building blocks of sentences. Used alone, they can form a complete sentence: *We left. The cat meowed. A truck was speeding.*

**Nouns** are the names of persons, places, and things. They can also be qualities such as *honesty*, and ideas such as *freedom*; these are called abstract nouns. Proper nouns, names of specific people, places, and things such as *Dr. Li*, *New York*, and *Lake Erie*, are capitalized. Common nouns, which name everyday things, are not capitalized.

**Pronouns** take the place of nouns. There are different kinds of pronouns: personal pronouns such as *I*, *you*, *he*, *we*, and *them*; interrogative pronouns such as *who* and *what*; and relative pronouns such as *which* and *that*.

**Verbs** give information about the subject. They tell what the subject does, is, or seems to be.

**Articles** are often attached to nouns. There are only three of them: *a*, *an*, and *the*.

**Adjectives** describe nouns. They can give information about size, shape, color, taste, smell, sound, and many other things.

**Adverbs** describe verbs. They tell how, when, or where something happens and often end in *-ly*.

**Prepositions** are short words that come at the beginning of phrases, such as *to the moon*, *after the storm*, and *in a hurry*.

**Conjunctions** are joining words, such as *and*, *but*, and *or*.

**Interjections** are words that express strong feeling or emotion, such as *ouch*, *help*, or *quick*. These are often followed by an exclamation point.

If there are only eight parts of speech, why are they often a problem to identify? One of the difficulties is that a word can be used as different parts of speech, depending on its context.

## Exercise

In the exercises below, read each sentence. Then decide how the underlined word functions in each sentence. Write its part of speech on the line. The first one has been done for you.

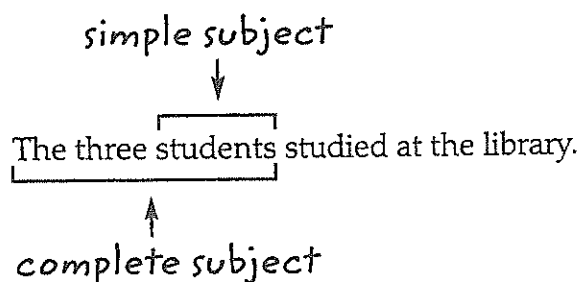
1. noun I caught a fish.  
verb They will fish tomorrow.  
adjective We enjoyed a fish dinner.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Put the book away.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Book the tickets today.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Our school had a book fair.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Light the candles.  
\_\_\_\_\_ A light breeze stirred the leaves.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Stop at the light.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ They left the party early.  
\_\_\_\_\_ She writes with her left hand.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The director cast the play.  
\_\_\_\_\_ The doctor put a cast on the boy's leg.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ They went to the ball park.  
\_\_\_\_\_ They danced at the ball.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ We saw the play on Broadway.  
\_\_\_\_\_ The children play in the yard at recess.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Sound the trumpets!  
\_\_\_\_\_ You can hear the sound of the sea in this shell.  
\_\_\_\_\_ The foundation of the house is strong and sound.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ She sings well.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Bring some water from the well.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Hurry! The bus will be here any minute.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I am in a such a hurry; I don't have time to eat breakfast.

# Subjects

Writing skills depend on sentence skills. The exercises in this book are designed to help you write sentences that are both interesting to read and varied in structure.

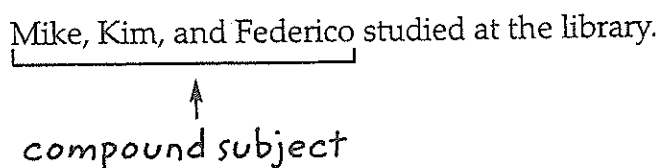
A complete sentence expresses a single idea. It must have a **subject**, which contains a noun or a pronoun, and a verb. Usually the subject comes at or near the beginning of a sentence.

The noun in a subject is called a **simple subject**. Sometimes a subject uses other words to describe the noun or the pronoun. These are called the **complete subject**.



*The three students* is the complete subject. *Students* is the simple subject.

A subject may also have more than one noun. These are called **compound subjects**.



# Pronouns

A **pronoun** takes the place of a noun. You will use pronouns to avoid repetition in your writing.

Unlike nouns, pronouns do not use apostrophes to show possession. When a pronoun has an apostrophe, it is a contraction. For example, *its* shows possession, but *it's* is a contraction that means "it is."

Look at these examples.

Don't judge a book by *its* cover.  
*It's* a small world.

The dog wagged *its* tail.  
*It's* going to rain tomorrow.

## Exercise 1

Improve this paragraph by replacing nouns with pronouns. Cross out the noun you wish to replace and write the pronoun above it. You will not be able to replace every noun. Read the paragraph aloud; it will help you decide which nouns you should replace with pronouns.

Amelia Mary Earhart was ten years old when Amelia saw Amelia's first plane at a state fair. The plane was made of wood and the plane's wings were made of rusty wire. The plane did not interest Earhart. Earhart did not become interested in planes until she saw stunt pilots fly almost ten years later. Earhart and Earhart's friend were watching the planes when one pilot swooped down on Earhart and Earhart's friend. "I did not understand it at the time," Earhart said, "but I believe that little red airplane said something to me as it swished by."

## Exercise 2

Write ten sentences using the following pronouns. Notice that if you use *he*, *she*, or *it* as the subject, you may need to add -s or -es to the verb. For instance: *We go*, but *she goes*; *I work*, but *it works*.

I we he she who they it you anybody nothing

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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