Parts of Speech

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

The most common parts of speech are nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions. This handout will provide only a basic overview of each. For further information, see the UVU Writing Center’s handouts on these specific topics.

Nouns
A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Proper Nouns
Proper nouns name specific people, places, things, or ideas and should be capitalized.

**EXAMPLES:** Dr. Johns, The Library of Congress, the Golden Gate Bridge

Common Nouns
Common nouns are general types of nouns or any nouns that are not proper.

**EXAMPLES:** doctor, library, bridge

Pronouns
Pronouns replace nouns to avoid repetition. They usually replace nouns that directly precede them.

**EXAMPLES:** Mike crashed his car the day he got it. (He and his refer to Mike; it refers to car.)
The paper is not Sarah’s; hers is about rainforests. (Hers replaces Sarah’s.)

Relative Pronouns
Relative pronouns relate clauses to the word (or words) the clauses modify. That and which are used with things, and who, whom, and whose are used with people.

**EXAMPLES:** The girl who took Lisa’s class loved it. (The phrase who took Lisa’s class modifies girl.)
He sold the computer that broke. (That broke describes computer.)

Possessive Pronouns
Possessive pronouns show ownership. They include words such as my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, and theirs.

**EXAMPLE:** Yuki is annoyed because her husband just lost his keys. (Her refers to Yuki; his refers to her husband.)

Indefinite Pronouns
Indefinite pronouns take the place of nouns that have not been named at all. They refer to non-specific things. Some common indefinite pronouns are all, any, anybody, anyone, each, everyone, few, neither, none, no one, one, several, and something.

**EXAMPLE:** Someone moved everything out of the living room.

Adjectives
Adjectives are words that modify nouns or pronouns. They answer questions such as What kind?, How many?, Which one?, or Whose?

**EXAMPLES:** blue-green cars, hard rock, young man (What kind?)
ten apples, some people, many shirts (How many?)
the smartest student, that backpack (Which one?)
Jamal’s house, the baby’s toy (Whose?)
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Prepositions
Prepositions often describe time or space relationships and are almost always followed by a noun (the object of the preposition).

EXAMPLES:
- They left in the morning. (The phrase in the morning modifies the verb left.)
- Brian stood outside the door. (The phrase outside the door modifies stood.)

Verbs
Verbs express action or show a state of being. There are three types of verbs.

Action Verbs
Action verbs show some kind of activity, either physical or mental.

EXAMPLES:
- Kathy lifted the book and began to read.
- I like to think about the time I flew to Hawaii.

Linking Verbs
Linking verbs connect the subject to a noun, pronoun, or adjective that describes it.

EXAMPLES:
- That man was my boss.
- The plant looked wilted.

Helping Verbs
Helping verbs work with other verbs to form a complete verb phrase or to show tense.

EXAMPLE:
- Will you be going to the party tomorrow? (Will be helps going.)
- I could have won the game. (Could have helps won.)

Adverbs
Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They answer questions such as How?, When?, Where?, and To what extent? Often, they can be recognized by an -ly ending.

EXAMPLES:
- Paolo skis more gracefully than Peter. (How?)
- Take out the trash now. (When?)
- You ran upstairs. (Where?)
- Xiao plays the guitar very well. (To what extent?)

Conjunctions
Conjunctions are words that join or connect other words, phrases, and clauses within a sentence.

Coordinating Conjunctions
Coordinating conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses that are equally important.

EXAMPLES: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS)

Correlative Conjunctions
Correlative conjunctions also connect words, phrases, and clauses that are equally important, but these conjunctions are always used in pairs.

EXAMPLES:
- Both Becky and Laurissa were busy.
- Neither Utah nor Wyoming was mentioned.

Subordinating Conjunctions
Subordinating conjunctions show relationships of time, reason, purpose, or condition between two parts, or clauses, of the sentence.

EXAMPLES:
- When I went to Disneyland, I took a picture of Mickey. (Time relationship)
- Keisha was upset because her boyfriend moved away. (Cause or reason)