

# A Language Arts Basics

## LAB 1: PARTS OF SPEECH

We use words, of course, to communicate. Of the hundreds of thousands of words in an unabridged dictionary, each can be classified as one of just eight parts of speech: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, or interjection. These eight parts of speech are illustrated in the sentence below:

Interjection Pronoun Adverb Verb Preposition Adjective Noun Conjunction Noun  
Oh, I eagerly waited for new computers and printers.

Many words can act as different parts of speech, depending on how they are used in a sentence. (A *sentence* is a group of words that contains a subject and predicate and that expresses a complete thought.)

Consider, for example, the different parts of speech played by the word *following*:

We agree to do the *following*. (*noun*)

I was only *following* orders. (*verb*)

We met the *following* day. (*adjective*)

*Following* his remarks, he sat down. (*preposition*)

All words do not serve more than one function, but many do. *Following* is a brief introduction to the eight parts of speech.

**1.1 Nouns** A *noun* is a word that names something—for example, a person, place, thing, or idea:

Person: employee, Mr. Watkins

Place: office, Chicago

Thing: animal, computer

Idea: concentration, impatience, week, typing

The words in *italics* in the following sentences are all nouns.

Olaf promoted his *idea* to the *vice president* on *Wednesday*.

*Problem solving* is just one of the *skills* you'll need as an *intern*.

How much does one *quart* of *water* weigh on our bathroom *scales*?

The animal *doctor* treated my *animal* well in *Houston*.

If you were asked to give an example of a noun, you would probably think of a *concrete noun*—that is, a *physical* object that you can see, hear, feel, taste, or smell.

An *abstract noun*, on the other hand, names a quality or concept and not something physical.

Concrete Noun	Abstract Noun
book	success
stapler	patience
computer	skills
dictionary	loyalty

A *common noun*, as its name suggests, is the name of a *general* person, place, thing, or idea. If you want to give the name of a *specific* person, place, thing, or idea, you would use a *proper noun*. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

Common Noun	Proper Noun
man	Rodolfo Escobar
city	Los Angeles
car	Corvette
religion	Judaism

A *singular noun* names one person, place, thing, or idea. A *plural noun* names more than one.

Singular Noun	Plural Noun
Smith	Smiths
watch	watches
computer	computers
victory	victories

**1.2 Pronouns** A *pronoun* is a word used in place of a noun. Consider the following sentence:

Anna went to Anna's kitchen and made Anna's favorite dessert because Anna was going to a party with Anna's friends.

The noun *Anna* is used five times in this awkward sentence. A smoother, less monotonous version of the sentence substitutes pronouns for all but the first *Anna*:

Anna went to *her* kitchen and made *her* favorite dessert because *she* was going to a party with *her* friends.

The words in italics in the following sentences are pronouns. The nouns to which they refer are underlined:

Angélica thought *she* might get the promotion.

None of the speakers were interesting.

Juan forgot to bring *his* slides.

**1.3 Verbs** A *verb* is a word (or group of words) that expresses either action or a state of being. The first kind of verb is called an *action verb*; the second kind is known as a *linking verb*. Without a verb, you have no sentence because the verb makes a statement about the subject.

Most verbs express action of some sort—either physical or mental—as indicated by the words in italics in the following sentences:

Iram *planted* his garden while Lian *pulled* weeds.

I *solved* my problems as I *baked* bread.

Jeremy *decided* he should *call* a meeting.

A small (but important) group of verbs do not express action. Instead, they simply link the subject with words that describe it. The most common linking verbs are forms of the verb *to be*, such as *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, *were*, and *will*. Other forms of linking verbs involve the senses, such as *feels*, *looks*, *smells*, *sounds*, and *tastes*. The following words in italics are verbs (note that verbs can comprise one or more words):

Rosemary *was* angry because Ivanov *looked* impatient.

If Franz *is having* a party, I *should have been* invited.

Jason *had* already *seen* the report.

**1.4 Adjectives** You can make sentences consisting of only nouns or pronouns and verbs (such as “Dogs bark.”), but most of the time you’ll need to add other parts of speech to make the meaning of the sentence clearer or more complete. An *adjective* is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. Adjectives answer questions about the nouns or pronouns they describe, such as *how many?*, *what kind?*, and *which one?* (Articles are a special group of adjectives that include the words *a*, *an*, and *the*.)

As shown by the words in italics in the following sentences, adjectives may come before or after the nouns or pronouns they modify:

*Seventeen* applicants took the *typing* test.

The interview was *short*, but *comprehensive*.

She took the *last* plane and landed at a *small* Mexican airport.

**1.5 Adverbs** An *adverb* is a word that modifies a verb (usually), an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs often answer the questions *when?*, *where?*, *how?*, or *to what extent?* The words in italics in the following sentences are adverbs:

Please perform the procedure *now*. (*When?*)

Put the papers *here*. (*Where?*)

Alice performed *brilliantly*. (*How?*)

I am *almost* finished. (*To what extent?*)

The *exceedingly* expensive car was *very carefully* protected.

In the last sentence, the adverb *exceedingly* modifies the adjective *expensive* (how expensive?) and the adverb *very* modifies the adverb *carefully* (how carefully?).

Many (but by no means all) adverbs end in *-ly*, such as *loudly*, *quickly*, *really*, and *carefully*. However, not all words that end in *-ly* are adverbs; for example, *friendly*, *stately*, and *ugly* are all adjectives.

**1.6 Prepositions** A *preposition* is a word (such as *to*, *for*, *from*, *of*, and *with*) that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and some other word in the sentence. The noun or pronoun following the preposition is called the *object* of

the preposition, and the entire group of words is called a *prepositional phrase*. In the following sentences, the preposition is shown in italics; the entire prepositional phrase is underlined:

- The ceremony occurred *on* the covered bridge.
- The ceremony occurred *under* the covered bridge.
- Lucia talked *with* Mr. Hines.
- Lucia talked *about* Mr. Hines.

**1.7 Conjunctions** A *conjunction* is a word (such as *and*, *or*, or *but*) that joins words or groups of words. For example, in the sentence “Ari and Alice are brokers,” the conjunction *and* connects the two nouns *Ari* and *Alice*. In the following sentences, the conjunction is shown in italics; the words it joins are underlined:

- Francesca *or* Teresa will attend the conference. (*joins two nouns*)
- Chang spoke quietly *and* deliberately. (*joins two adverbs*)
- Harriet tripped *but* caught her balance. (*joins two verbs*)

**1.8 Interjections** An *interjection* is a word that expresses strong emotions. Interjections are used more often in oral communication than in written communication. If an interjection stands alone, it is followed by an exclamation point. If it is a part of the sentence, it is followed by a comma. You should not be surprised to learn that some words can serve as interjections in some sentences and as other parts of speech in other sentences. In the following sentences, the interjection is shown in italics:

- Good!* I’m glad to learn that the new employee does good work.
- Oh!* I didn’t mean to startle you.
- My,* I wouldn’t do that.
- Gosh,* that was an exhausting exercise. *Whew!*

Application

Note: For all LAB application exercises, first photocopy the exercise and then complete the exercise on the photocopied pages.

**Directions** Label each part of speech in Sentences 1–8 with the abbreviation shown below.

adjective	<i>adj.</i>
adverb	<i>adv.</i>
conjunction	<i>conj.</i>
interjection	<i>interj.</i>
noun	<i>n.</i>
preposition	<i>prep.</i>
pronoun	<i>pron.</i>
verb	<i>v.</i>

1. Oh, don't tell me I missed my flight.  
 interj v pron pron  
 v/adv pron v n
2. My, your new chair is comfortable.  
 interj adj v  
 pron n adj
3. When I received your package, I was relieved. Whew!  
 adv v n adj v interj  
 pron pron pron v
4. Gosh! I could not believe the depth of the raging water in the river.  
 interj v v n adj n adj  
 pron adv adj prep adj prep n adv
5. When the quail and her chicks came into the yard, the hen carefully  
 adv n pron v adj adj prep n n  
 adj conj n prep  
 checked the area for predators.  
 v n n
6. Alas! By the time he received her report, the decision had been made.  
 interj adj pron pron adj v v  
 prep n v n n v
7. I was disappointed we missed your input to the decision-making process,  
 pron adj v n adj n  
 v pron pron v pron prep n adj  
 but I hope you can meet the deadline next time.  
 conj v v adj adj adj  
 n adj adj v prep conj
8. Valerie Renoir, the major conference speaker, was delayed at O'Hare and  
 n n adj n n v n  
 adv prep n n  
 did not arrive at the hall until 2 p.m.  
 v v adj prep

## LAB 2: PUNCTUATION—COMMAS

Punctuation serves as a roadmap to help guide the reader through the twists and turns of your message—pointing out what is important (italics or underscores), subordinate (commas), copied from another source (quotation marks), explained further (colon), considered as a unit (hyphens), and so on. Sometimes correct punctuation is absolutely essential for comprehension. Consider, for example, the different meanings of the following sentences, depending on the punctuation:

What's the latest, Dope?

What's the latest dope?

The social secretary called the guests names as they arrived.

The social secretary called the guests' names as they arrived.

Our new model comes in red, green and brown, and white.

Our new model comes in red, green, and brown and white.

The play ended, happily.

The play ended happily.

A clever dog knows it's master.

A clever dog knows its master.

We must still play Michigan, which tied Ohio State, and Minnesota.

We must still play Michigan, which tied Ohio State and Minnesota.

"Medics Help Dog Bite Victim"

"Medics Help Dog-Bite Victim"