Nelson Infant School: Glossary of Terms for Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation

WORDS AT WORK: word classes

We classify words according to the eight different jobs they do in a sentence.   The first four classes listed here are associated with building **noun phrases.** The second four relate to 'what happens' in a clause or sentence, where the focus is on the **verb** and **adverbial** detail.

Noun 'the name of a person, place or thing':

- **common** or **proper,** e.g. *woman/Florence Nightingale; city/Edinburgh; dog/Lassie; doll/Barbie.*
- **singular** or **plural,** e.g. *man/men; city/cities; dog/dogs* (regular plural: add *s/es*)
- **collective**, e.g. *herd, team, army*
- **concrete,** e.g. *pencil, mountain, snow* or **abstract,** e.g. *justice, peace, happiness.*

A **noun phrase** is built around a noun, e.g. *the **lady** with the lamp; the capital **city** of Scotland; an enormous **herd** of cows in the far meadow; the **dog** that saved its owner's life*

Adjective 'tells you more about (modify) a noun':

- adjectives can come before a noun to help form a noun phrase, *e.g. the **pink fluffy** monster*
- they can also refer back to a noun, after a verb such as 'be' or 'feel' (e.g. *The monster was **pink**. It felt **fluffy***)
- as well as the basic 'positive' form, they can be **comparative** (*pinker, fluffier*) or **superlative** (*pinkest, fluffiest*) – the *-er/-est* word-endings are regular **inflections**.

Determiner 'directs you to a noun':

- most noun phrases begin with a determiner, e.g. **the** *lady with the lamp;* **his** *oldest friend;* **this** *question*
- the most common determiners are the two **articles**: the definite article – ***the;*** the indefinite article – ***a/an*** (*a* when the word begins with a consonant sound, e.g. ***a*** *herd*, and *an* when the word begins with a vowel sound, e.g. ***an*** *enormous herd*)
- pronouns can act as determiners (e.g. ***your*** *book,* ***these*** *books*)**,** as can numbers (e.g. ***one*** *book,* ***two*** *books).*

Pronoun 'stands in place of a noun (or noun phrase)':

- **personal pronouns** can be **first**, **second** or **third** person, and **singular** (*I/you/he, she, it*) or **plural** (*we/you/they*)
- the form of the pronoun depends on 'case' which is uncommon in English, e.g. first person ***I*** for the subject of a clause (***I*** *like John,* ***me*** for the object (*John likes **me**).* See SVO, below
- **possessive pronouns** do not need apostrophes (e.g *The dog ate **its** dinner. This is **hers**.*)
- **relative pronouns** (e.g. *who, which, whose, whom, that, where*) refer back to a noun used immediately before, e.g. *The dog <u>that saved its owner's life</u> is called Lassie.* They open a 'relative clause', which is counted as part of the noun phrase (in this case, built around 'dog')
- any word standing in for a noun is a pronoun, e.g. ***I*** *like **this**; **That** makes sense; **Everybody** laughed.*

Pronouns help avoid repetition, and must therefore **agree** (in terms of person, number and gender) with the noun or noun phrase to which they refer (e.g. *I like* <u>*Lassie*</u>. <u>*She*</u> *is a good dog.*) They are an important element in **cohesion**, since they make links between one part of a text and another.

Verb 'tells us what's happening, or what people are doing':

- The verb is the main word around which a sentence is built.
- Verbs have **tense,** shown by in regular verbs by a change to the word ending, e.g. **present tense** *he play**s*** changes to **past tense** *he play**ed**.* However, many English verbs are irregular: e.g. **present tense** *he sings, eats, is* change to **past tense** *he sang, ate, was.*
- There is officially no future tense in English because it cannot be conveyed in a single word, so instead we usually use extra (**auxiliary**) verbs, e.g. *he **will** sing.*
- There are many different verb forms consisting of **auxiliary verb(s) + main verb** (sometimes known as **verb chains**). Two common auxiliaries are *be* and *have,* e.g.
  > **present progressive** – *I am playing;* **past progressive** – *I was playing*
  > **perfect** – *I have played; I had played; I have been playing.*
- A verb must **agree** with its subject (see SV, below) in terms of **person** and **number**, e.g. *I am, you are, he/she/it is; we are, you are, they are* (difference in verb forms is one of the most significant characteristics of **non-standard English**).
- Other important auxiliaries are the **modal verbs** (e.g. *will, would, shall, should, can, could, might**,** must,may*) which suggest degrees of possibility, necessity or ability, including ways of referring to future *actions* e.g. *I might play, I shall play.*
- Verbs can be **active** (e.g. *The Romans **invaded** Britain; The sun **warms** the earth*) or **passive** (e.g. *Britain **was invaded** by the Romans; The earth **is warmed** by the sun*). The **passive** voice is often found in formal writing. In the passive voice the verb is preceded by a passive verb (is, was, has)
- The **subjunctive** form of the verb is also sometimes found in formal language (e.g. ***Were** a Roman soldier to arrive now, we should be astounded*) but rare in modern English.

Adverb 'tells us more about (modifies) a verb, an adjective or another verb, e.g. *how? when? where?*':

- many adverbs are formed by adding *–ly* to an adjective, e.g. *slow – slowly; recent – recently; local – locally* (but many are not e.g. *well, yesterday, everywhere*)
- adverbs can **modify** verbs (e.g. *He moved swiftly*), adjectives (e.g. *She was extremely pretty*) or other adverbs (e.g. *He spoke really slowly*)
- adverbs are the 'roving reporters' of the sentence – they can be moved about, thus affecting rhythm and/or emphasis (*Everywhere, there is chaos* or *There is chaos everywhere*)
- any phrase or clause 'telling more about what happens' in this way is known as an **adverbial –** these often begin with prepositions (see below) or subordinating conjunctions (see below).

Preposition 'comes at the beginning of a phrase, e.g. where? when? how?':

- prepositions (e.g. *at, through, by, of, with)* are often found at the beginning of a phrase
- these phrases often act as **adverbials** answering questions such as 'when?' (e.g. ***for** ages, **at** midnight, **before** lunch*), 'where?'(e.g. ***in** the kitchen, **over** the rainbow*), 'how?' (e.g. ***without** a care in the world, **at** top speed*), 'why?' (e.g. ***because of** the rain*).

Conjunction 'links ideas together':

- **coordinating conjunctions,** such as *and, but, or* and *so,* can link words (e.g. *black **and** white*), phrases (e.g. *over the hills **and** far away*) or clauses (e.g. *I like coffee **but** I hate tea*)
- **subordinating conjunctions** (e.g. *because, when, until, although*) open **subordinate clauses,** linking them to a main clause (e.g. <u>***When** she got home,*</u> *she fell into bed **because** <u>she was exhausted)</u>* – since these are **adverbials** (answering the usual questions) they can be moved around the sentence (e.g. *Because she was exhausted, when she got home she fell into bed*).

SENSE AND SENTENCES – 'Grammar is the study of how we make sentences'

SV The simplest possible **sentence** is a single SV **clause** – S stands for **subject** (<u>a noun, noun phrase or pronoun)</u> and V stands for **verb.** A sentence can be:
- a **statement,** e.g. *You eat. The monster was eating.*
- a **question,** e.g. *Do you eat? Was the monster eating?*
- an **exclamation,** e.g. *You certainly do eat!*
- a **command,** e.g. *Eat!* In a command, the subject (*you*) is omitted. We say it is **understood**.

SVO As well as a subject and verb (which may be a main verb + auxiliary verbs), a clause may have other chunks. An **object** (another noun phrase or pronoun) turns an SV into an SVO sentence (e.g. *We eat <u>cake</u>* or *The monster was eating <u>us</u>*). SVO is the conventional order of chunks in an English clause.

Adverbial chunks **Adverbials** can also be added to a clause, and are mobile e.g. *On Sundays we eat cake in the garden* (which is ASVOA) or *In the garden, on Sundays, we eat cake* (AASVO).

Main clause A clause that make sense on its own is known as a **main clause**. With a capital letter and full stop, it can be a **single-clause sentence**. The accepted grammatical term is **simple sentence,** but when it involves expanded noun phrases and plenty of adverbial detail, a single-clause sentence can carry a lot of information.

Coordination Two or more **main clauses** may be linked together to make a longer sentence, using coordinating conjunctions, such as *and, but, or* and *so.* This is common in both speech and writing, e.g. *The monster was singing **but** the dogs stayed silent.* Both clauses have equal grammatical weight. Without the conjunction, they could both stand as single-clause sentences.

Subordination Some clauses do not make complete sense on their own, so cannot stand as complete sentences. They are called **subordinate clauses** because they are grammatically dependent on (**subordinate** to) another clause. Examples are:
- **adverbial clauses** starting with subordinating conjunctions, such as *because, when, while, unless, although.* They provide adverbial detail about what happens in the **main clause** (e.g. *when? why? on what condition?)*, and can come before or after it, e.g.
   *The monster was singing **because it was happy**.*
   ***When the police arrived,** the monster was singing.*
   *The monster was singing, **although it was tone deaf.***
- **relative clauses** beginning with a relative pronoun, which act as part of an <u>expanded noun phrase</u>, e.g. <u>*The monster, **which was called Walpole**, was singing*</u>. Relative clauses are 'dropped into' another clause, and clearly do not make sense on their own.

From sentence to text Conjunctions and relative pronouns link clauses together *within* sentences. However, to create coherent, **cohesive** texts (that is texts that hold together to make meaning) we also need to make links *between* sentences. Key ways in which this is done are:
- the use of **pronouns** to refer back to specific nouns/noun phrases (e.g. *There was **a man in a raincoat** standing in a doorway. **He** seemed to be watching us.*)
- **adverbials** (words, e.g. *however, also, alternatively*; phrases e.g. *in addition, on the other hand*)

Words and phrases that make clear links within and between sentences (and paragraphs) are known as **cohesive devices.** Sometimes a linking word (or phrase, or clause) is omitted, e.g. *The man [that] I met yesterday has one [of the things I mentioned in the last sentence].* This is known as **ellipsis.**

PUNKING AND CHUNKING: helping make writing make sense

The point of punctuation is (a) to make meaning clear and (b) to indicate how the reader should use intonation and pauses to help convey that meaning.

Full stop marks the end of a sentence. The **question mark** and **exclamation mark** are specialised full stops, indicating how the sentence should be read aloud. Full stops are also used in some lower-case abbreviations (such as *e.g.*) which might otherwise be confused with words.

Commas guide the reader within a sentence, by signalling specific chunks of meaning:
- separating the items in a list, e.g. *eggs, half a pound of butter, a pint of milk and some tea bags*
- signalling **fronted adverbials**, e.g. *On the stroke of midnight, Dracula pounced.*
- separating off direct speech from a **reporting clause**, e.g. *'Yes,' she said. Dad said, 'No!'*
- separating off extra words, e.g. a name: *Sarah, are you ready?* or '**tag phrase**': *It's late, isn't it?*
They often help to avoid ambiguity, e.g. *Let's eat, Grandma!* as opposed to *Let's eat Grandma!*
Commas aren't 'strong' enough to link two main clauses, e.g. *She was really tired, the only thing to do was sleep **X**)*

Inverted commas show the reader to the direct speech within a text. This can be double or single, so long as this remains consistent throughout the passage of writing. It is common to favour double inverted commas for direct speech in order to distinguish it from a quotation.

Colon, semicolon and dash These marks <u>may</u> be used to link main clauses:
- The **colon** suggests that the clauses 'balance' each other in some way: the second may explain or exemplify the first (*She was really tired: the only thing to do was sleep.*)
- The **semi-colon** is like an extra-strong comma (*She was really tired; the only thing to do was sleep*).
- The **dash** signifies a sharp break (*She was really tired – the only thing to do was sleep*). As its name suggests, it's a rather slipshod punctuation mark so should be used with discretion.
[The **colon** is also used to introduce a list, and the **semi-colon** to separate items in a list when commas would be inadequate, e.g. *The spell's ingredients were disgusting: the eye of a newt, plucked at midnight; the toe of a frog, finely sliced; three pints of swamp water and a cowpat.*]

Paired marks for parenthesis When a chunk of information is 'dropped into' a sentence (usually for further clarification), paired punctuation marks show where it begins and ends:
- **commas**, e.g. around a relative clause: *The monster**, which was called Walpole,** sang lustily.*
- **dashes** , e.g. *The dog – a huge, hairy, slavering beast – prowled towards him.*
- **brackets** (also known as **parentheses**) which are often found in informal or technical writing.

Hyphen A hyphen is half the length of a dash, and helps the reader make sense of text by:
- showing when a word has been split into two because it wouldn't all fit on one line
- linking words together to make the meaning clear, e.g. *thirty-two, odd-looking, mother-in-law*
- occasionally linking a prefix to a root word, when there's the possibility of ambiguity, e.g. *re-cover* as opp *recover.*

Apostrophe is used to show:
- that letters have been omitted, e.g. *can't, should've, she's, it's (*when short for *it is) **Apostrophe for omission.***
- possessive **nouns**, e.g. *the cat's tail* (where a singular cat is the possessor of a tail), *the cats' tails* (where plural cats are the possessors of tails) NB *The children's coats, the men's boots. **Apostrophe for possession.***

Bullet points are used when listing complex information, as throughout this handout:
- a colon is used to introduce the bulleted list
- if the bullets are not written as sentences, there's no need for punctuation at the end of each bullet (just a full stop after the last one)
- however, if written as sentences each requires full sentence punctuation (as in Verbs, above).