A Brief Rundown on the Parts of Speech

These descriptions of the parts of speech are more from a linguist’s point of view (as opposed to a grammarian’s) so they might not match up with what you have seen in the past in your English classes. However, you might find these descriptions more useful because they are a little more consistent and able to be identified grammatically rather than semantically. There are fewer exceptions to confuse you.

**Noun:** Any member of a class of words that can function as the subject of a sentence.

How do you determine what a noun is? Run the test:

1. Can it be made plural
2. Can be made possessive
3. Can be made both plural and possessive

Example: government
1. governments (plural)
2. government’s (possessive)
3. governments’ (plural possessive)

**Verb:** Can be inflected with suffixes that change the form.

Example: criticize
1. criticizes
2. is criticizing
3. has criticized
4. criticized

(You could not use these suffixes on the noun: governmented, governmenting, governmenten, ect.)

**Adjective:** Modifies a noun.

1. Can be compared using degree suffixes (closer, closest)
2. Can form adverbs with addition of –ly suffix (soft – softly)
3. Can form a noun with addition of –ness suffix (soft – softness)
4. Can be compared using more and most (more childish, most childish)
**Adverb:** Modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

1. May be compared using more or most (more suddenly, most suddenly)
2. May be compared using degree suffixes (faster, fastest)

**Sentence:** A syntactically related group of words that must contain at least one independent clause. It performs one of the following functions: assertion, question, command, wish, exclamation.

**Clause:** Part of a sentence that contains the elements of a whole sentence (i.e., subject and predicate). It can be an independent clause (able to stand alone as a sentence) or a dependent (subordinate) clause (unable to stand alone as a sentence).

*The green dog was cute.* (independent clause)

The green dog was cute *although it was missing a tail.* (independent and dependent clause)

**Phrase:** A syntactic unit that that is a part of a sentence or a clause. It lacks either a subject or a predicate; therefore it cannot stand alone. It holds together as a meaningful unit on its own and adds meaning as a whole to that which it modifies.

*Running through the sky, the green dog jumped over the moon.* (participial phrase)

*the green dog* (noun phrase)

*jumped over the moon* (verb phrase)

*Note: there is a particular kind of phrase that contains a subject and a predicate. However, it cannot stand alone because the verb is not in a conjugated relationship with the subject. In other words, the subject and verb don’t match each other. This kind of phrase is called an **absolute phrase.**

*Her face scowling,* she turned and left.

Face is the subject and scowling is not a complete sentence. If the subject and verb were in a conjugated relationship with each other, it would be *Her face scowled."

**Article:** modifies nouns
Articles are small words that help give more information about the nouns they modify. They can be categorized into two types: indefinite articles and definite articles. An indefinite article (a, an) indicates that the noun it follows is not a specific one that is known to the reader. A definite article (the) indicates that the noun is specific or known to the reader.

*A dog jumped over the moon.* (Could be any dog)

*The dog jumped over the moon.* (A particular dog)
**Conjunction:** Joins words or groups of words. They can be categorized into two groups: coordinating conjunctions (which join words of equal value) and subordinating conjunctions (which shows inequality between groups of words.)

*The dog jumped over the moon, and it ate the moon.* (**And** is a coordinating conjunction, and it joins two independent clauses, which are considered equal in rank)

*The dog jumped over the moon** although it was missing a leg.**

(*The dog jumped over the moon* is an independent clause, and **although it was missing a leg** is a subordinate clause. It is identified as such by the subordinating conjunction **although**. This word makes it so that the subordinating conjunction cannot stand alone and thereby reduces it in rank.)

**Preposition:** Describes relationship between other words in a sentence. Prepositions can be grouped into a couple of categories: prepositions of time and prepositions of place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before lunch</td>
<td>Before the desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On time</td>
<td>On the chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>During the class</td>
<td>In class</td>
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