

Describing Language



To learn and teach any language both a student and the teacher need to know how it works. If the students and the teacher are not on the same page, learning cannot occur. Hence the need to describe what is being taught in the same terms. This session will provide you with a quick reference of language terminology that you can use with your classes.

The parts of Speech

The parts of Speech	Definition	Examples of nouns (red)
noun	a word which names a person, place or a thing	John went to see a movie . Children love books .
pronoun	a word that is used instead of a noun	She went to a park. John knows her .
adjective	a modifier that gives more information about a noun or a pronoun	This is a big house. His car is new . He is taller than John.
verb	a word that describes an action or helps a structure that describes an action	He loves books. She is reading a book now. He has finished it.
adverb	a modifier that gives more information about the verb, adjective or another adverb	He drives slowly . The meeting is in an hour . She runs fast .
preposition	a word which shows relationships among other words in the sentence	The cat is under the table. She is in the park. John went to Vancouver.
conjunction	a word that connects to sentences, words, phrases or ideas	John and Tom are friends. He studied hard; yet , he failed.
interjection	a word added to a sentence to express emotion	Wow , that's a nice car! Ouch , that hurts.

Nouns

A **NOUN** is a word used to name a person, animal, place, thing, and abstract ideas. Not only are nouns the first words that we learn as small children but they are also essential building blocks in the second language acquisition. It is important to divide them further into:

Possessive Nouns	a noun that describes a possession	This is John's car.
Proper Nouns	a noun represents the name of a specific person, place, or thing; they always start with a capital	He does not want to fly to Vancouver on Friday this June .
Common Nouns	a noun referring to a person, place, or thing in a general sense	This sign says Toronto.
Concrete Nouns	a noun which names anything that you can perceive through touch, sight, taste, hearing, or smell	The teacher handed the notebook to the student .
Abstract Nouns	a noun which names anything which you cannot be perceived through the five physical senses	He had a nice childhood .
Countable Nouns	a noun with both a singular and a plural form that we can count	There are three chairs here.
Non-Countable Nouns	a noun which does not have a plural form and we usually cannot count it	Sears sells nice furniture .
Collective Nouns	a noun that counts either the individual members of the group or the group as a whole	The crew cleaned the ship.

Verbs

VERBS are often defined as words that show action or a state of being. Because every sentence must have a verb, verbs are essential for understanding the meaning of a sentence. Verbs are classified into the following categories:

Main Verbs	are verbs that carry the main meaning	John has a car.
Auxiliary Verbs	are verbs that help specific grammar structure	I have already eaten. He must have been late.
Modal Verbs	are verbs that express modality; such verbs express possibility, requests, suggestions, prohibition, etc.	I should study tonight. I may go with him. He could have passed.
Phrasal Verbs	are verbs that consist of a verb and one or two prepositions; they are sometimes called two-word verbs and can be transitive - require an object or intransitive - do not require an object	I am fed up with it. He picked it up . She put it on . He looked up . Vs. He looked it up .
Causative Verbs	are verbs that describe that one party pushed another party to do something	He made me do it. You had better go there.
State Verbs	are verbs that do not form a	It belongs to me now.

	continuous form under regular circumstances.	He's been seeing Joanna. I hear you now.
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Pronouns

PRONOUNS are words that usually take the place of a noun or a noun phrase. Here are the basic types of pronouns:

	Type	Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive
Singular	first person	I	me	mine	myself
	second person	you	you	yours	yourself
	third person	he	him	his	himself
		she	her	hers	herself
it		it	its	itself	
Plural	first person	we	us	ours	ourselves
	second person	you	you	yours	yourselves
	third person	they	them	theirs	themselves

Do not confuse possessive pronouns with possessive adjectives!

Possessive adjectives	Possessive pronouns
my	mine
your	yours
his	his
her	hers
its	its
our	ours
your	yours
their	theirs



Adjectives

ADJECTIVES are called modifiers because they give more information about nouns. They can be placed before and after nouns. Adjectives can be changed to show a degree. These kinds of adjectives are comparative and superlative. Examples of comparative adjectives are *bigger*, *easier* and *more interesting* and examples of superlative adjectives are *the biggest*, *the easiest* and *the most interesting*.

More than one adjective before a noun has to be placed in a specific order.

Order of ADJECTIVES before a NOUN :

determiner article	opinion	size	shape	age	colour	nationality	religion	material
a	nice	big	oval	ancient	blue	Thai	Buddhist	ceramic

The Verb Tenses

The **Verb Tenses** describe the time and what is happening. The verbs are further characterized by **time**, **aspect** and **tense**. The problem is that the time and tense do not have to agree in English. Consider the following example: *Shawn is leaving on Friday*. In this example the tense is *present continuous* and time is *future*. The terminology can also vary slightly, for instance, some substitute the word *continuous* with *progressive*.

Here are all English Verb Tenses:

The Simple Tenses

Simple Past	Simple Present	Simple Future
S + regular Verb / irregular Verb	S + Verb(s)	S + will/be going to + Verb
I studied / drove last night.	I study every day.	I will/be going to study tonight.

The Continuous/Progressive Tenses

Past Continuous	Present Continuous	Future Continuous
S + was/were + Verb-ing	S + am/is/are + Verb-ing	S + will be + Verb-ing
I was studying when he called.	I am studying now.	I will be studying tonight.

The Perfect Tenses

Past Present	Present Perfect	Future Perfect
S + had + past participle	S + have (has) + Past Participle	S + will + perfect participle
I had dusted before I vacuumed.	I have eaten already.	I will have finished it by five.

The Perfect Continuous Tenses

Past Perfect Continuous	Present Perf. Continuous	Future Perf. Continuous
S + had + been + Verb-ing	S + have (has) + been + Verb-ing	S + will have + been + Verb-ing

I had been living in France before I came to Canada.	I have been working here for ten years.	By the end of this week I will have been working for ten years .
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The verb tenses have specific tense markers that help students to identify which tense is appropriate. These markers, sometimes called key words, are not a rule but rather a guideline.

Tenses	Simple	Continuous	Perfect
Past	yesterday, ago, last (year, date, etc.) the day before yesterday	while, from, from - to, between (one and two)	before, after, never, ever, yet, already, for, since, twice (3 times, etc.), lately, recently, till/until, so far
Present	always, usually, seldom, occasionally, sometimes, every (day, month, etc.)	now, right now, at the moment, presently,	never, ever, yet, already, for, since, twice (3 times, etc.), lately, recently, till/until, so far
Future	tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, in future	tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, in future	by, by the end (of), by then, by that time, by the 20th

There are also specific rules about combining the tenses. Here some basic rules on the Sequence of the Tenses:

Present	I think that it will snow.	Future	Past	I ate so much that I was fat.	Past
Past	I thought that it would snow.	Condition	Pres. Perf.	I have done all that I need.	Present
Present	I see that he has left.	Pres.Perf.	Past Perf.	I had done all that I needed.	Past
Past	I saw that he had left.	Past Perf.	Present	He says he is going to go.	Pres. Cont.
Present	I eat so well that I am healthy.	Present	Past	He said he was going to go.	Past Cont.

Sentence Structure

Here are some examples of the sentence structure:

S= subject O=object

S + Verb	John drives.
S + Verb + Object	John drives a van.
S + Verb + Complement	John is an electrician.
S + Verb + Indirect O + Direct O	John gave her flowers.
S + Verb + Object + Complement	John left the class open.



Exercise:

Based on the above table, give your own example for each sentence structure in the table below.

S + Verb	
S + Verb + Object	
S + Verb + Complement	
S + Verb + Indirect O + Direct O	
S + Verb + Object + Complement	

Conditionals

Conditional 1 - Real /Future		
Non-conditional sentence	It may rain this afternoon	so I will take a coat.
Can it happen?	Yes – it is a real conditional	
When is this happening?	future	future
Conditional	If it rains this afternoon,	I will take an umbrella.

Conditional 1 - Real /Present

Non-conditional sentence	When it rains	I take an umbrella.
<i>Can it happen?</i>	<i>Yes – it is a real conditional</i>	
When is this happening?	general statement	present
Conditional	If it rains,	I take an umbrella.

Conditional 2 - Unreal /Present

Non-conditional sentence	I don't have any money	so I will not buy a car.
<i>Can it happen?</i>	<i>No – I can only imagine it. This is an unreal conditional.</i>	
When is this happening?	Present	It's a present imagination.
Conditional	If I had money, <i>...but I don't have money</i>	I would buy a car. <i>so I cannot buy a car</i>

Conditional 2 - Real /Present – verb 'to be'

Non-conditional sentence	I'm not a millionaire	so I cannot buy a plane.
<i>Can it happen?</i>	<i>No – I can only imagine it. This is an unreal conditional.</i>	
When is this happening?	Present	It's a present imagination.
Conditional	If I were* a millionaire <i>...but I'm not a millionaire</i>	I would buy a plane. <i>so I will not buy a plane</i>

** It is allowed to use 'was' in spoken English.*

Conditional 3 - Unreal /Past

Non-conditional sentence	It rained this morning	so I stayed in bed.
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Can it happen?	<i>No – I cannot change the past I can only imagine the change. This is an unreal conditional.</i>	
When is this happening?	Past	It's a past imagination
Conditional	If it had not rained this morning <i>...but it rained this morning</i>	I wouldn't have stayed in bed. <i>so I stayed in bed</i>

Exercise:

Now, it's time to take a short exam.
