

Words, phrases, and clauses

This video will review the basics of sentence structure. You will find it useful if you want to improve your grammar and would like to refresh your memory of some grammar terms and how we construct accurate sentences.

So, to begin. Take a look at this image and consider these questions. Who do you see and where are they? What are they doing? Imagine you need to write a description of this image. What would you say?

Now, in this table, you can see a range of different elements that you could use to describe the image. Pause here and try this task. Use these elements to create sentences to describe the image. How many sentences can you make? What's the shortest? What's the longest? Pause here and have a go.

Alright. I hope you've been able to make at least 10 sentences from these elements. Compare your ideas with these? Did you think of different ones?

Let's turn now to the elements you used to build your sentences. Here you can see some of them classified into three groups. Pause here and compare the three. How are they different?

So, as you probably guessed, group 1 are words. Group 2 and 3 may have taken a bit more thought. Group 2 are phrases and group 3 are clauses. Now, we are going to explore these elements further.

We can think of these elements as the building blocks, or the foundation of our essays. We combine words to make phrases and combine phrases to make clauses and combine clauses to make sentences and so on.

First, we'll revise words. You may remember from school days that there are different types of words. Look at these groups of words on the screen. Does this remind you of some of the different word types? Pause here and think.

- **First**, *happiness* and *library* are nouns. These are words that name things and concepts. They express *who* or *what*.
- **Second**, *happy* and *brown* are adjectives. These are words that describe nouns.
- **Third**, *stop*, *be* and *meet* are verbs. You may have learnt that they are called *processes* at school. These words describe an action, or they link things.
- **Fourth**, *happily*, *very* and *frequently* are adverbs. These are words that describe verbs and sometimes adjectives. They express *when*, *where*, *how* or *why*.
- Finally, you may also know of **prepositions**, which tell us when or where, **pronouns** which can replace nouns, **determiners** which identify which thing we are discussing and **conjunctions** that link things and ideas.

These are the major categories. Other types do exist, but these categories are the most important for you to be aware of.

Next, we'll look at phrases. Phrases can be categorised like words. Look at the examples on the screen. Can you identify the types of phrases? Pause here and think. Okay.

- **The first group** are noun phrases. They are groups of words that name or identify something.

- **The second group** are verb phrases. They are groups of words that express an action.
- **The third group** are prepositional and adverbial phrases. These phrases are very similar. They are groups of words that express *when, where, how* or *why*.

So, we can define phrases as groups of words that act as a unit. They are units that express one concept. Like words, other types do exist, but these categories are the most important for you to be aware of.

Finally, we'll look at Clauses. Clauses can be categorised like words and phrases.

- **Adjectival** clauses – also known as relative clauses – describe a noun.
- **Adverbial** clauses express when, where, how or why
- **And Noun** clauses name or identify something.

Importantly, every clause has a subject and a verb. We will look at these in video two.

To recap, it helps to be familiar with the different types of words. Look at these examples in this sentence.

- **First**, nouns name things and concepts. They express *who* or *what*.
- **Second**, adjectives are words that describe nouns.
- **Third**, verbs describe an action.
- **Fourth**, adverbs describe verbs and sometimes adjectives. They express *when, where, how* or *why*.
- **Fifth**, prepositions, expresses relationships between things
- **Sixth**, pronouns can replace nouns. We say 'they' instead of repeating 'the students'
- **Seventh**, determiners identify which thing we are discussing
- and **finally**, conjunctions link things and ideas.

Turning now to phrases, they can perform similar functions to words.

- **Noun phrases** name things and concepts. They express *who* or *what*.
- **Verb phrases** describe an action.
- **And finally, prepositional or adverbial** phrases express relationships between things. They may give information about *when, where, how* or *why*.

Clauses can also behave in the same way, but this will be explored in more detail later.

So, we've revised words, phrases and clauses. In the next video, we will look at sentences. Before you move to the next video, work through the materials on this page to put this learning to practice.

And if you need more help, get in contact with the Language and Learning advisors at the library.