

**Grammar Terms**  
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**Verb:** A verb is a word or group of words that shows either the “action” or the “being” of the subject or subjects in a sentence. Verbs tell time by changing their form (tense) and can be more than one word.

Features of a verb:

- a.) Verbs change their form to tell time. For example: He (is, was, will be) late.
- b.) A verb can be more than one word. For example: He has been walking a lot.
- c.) A verb can show an action (He is walking) or a state of being (He is nice.)

\* All verbs in the above examples are underlined twice. For practice, see if you can change the form of these verbs and thus change time in the sentences.

**Verbal:** A verbal is a word that looks like a verb but cannot change form to tell time and still make sense in the sentence in which it appears. Verbals include infinitives, present participles, and past participles.

For example, the word “**defeated**” can act as a verb or a verbal depending upon the sentence in which it appears. In the sentence, the army defeated its enemy, the word “defeated” can change form to tell the time of the action. The army defeats its enemy; the army will defeat its enemy. Compare the use of “defeated” in the following sentence. The **defeated** army left town. In this sentence, the word “**defeated**” is a verbal because, instead of showing an action, it acts like an adjective describing the noun “army.” For examples and explanations of different types of verbals, see my handout on phrases.

**Noun:** A noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea

**Pronoun:** A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. Remember, there are thousands of nouns in the English language but only a few pronouns to replace all those nouns; hence, we must be very careful when using pronouns, always making sure our reader knows exactly which nouns we are replacing.

**Subject:** A subject is a noun, pronoun, or word functioning like a noun that is in a direct relationship with a verb in a sentence. A subject is the word or words that are “doing” or “being” in the sentence. **Example:** John and Mary walk to the lake every evening. In this sentence, “John” and “Mary” are subjects because they are in direct relationship with the verb “walk.” They are the “doers.”

**Example:** John is a writer. Mary is nice. In these two sentences, John and Mary are the subjects of the verb “is.” They are not doing anything, but they are “being” the subjects of the verb, “is.”

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**Object:** An object is a noun or a pronoun that is not in direct relationship with a verb. Objects are not doing or being but are instead being done unto. **Example:** John and Mary walk to the lake every evening. In this sentence the nouns “lake” and “evening” are objects because they are not in direct relationship to a verb. They are not the “doers.” **Example:** I like you. In this sentence, the pronoun “I” is the subject of the verb “like,” and the pronoun “you” is an object.

**Clause:** A clause is a group of words containing at least one subject and at least one verb.

**\*Independent Clause:** An independent clause contains a subject and a verb and does not begin with a subordinating word; thus, an independent clause can stand alone as a sentence.

**\*Dependent Clause:** A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb and also begins with a subordinator. Subordinate clauses can never express a complete idea and must be connected to an independent clause to form a complete sentence. Below are three types of dependent clauses.

**\*\*Adverb Clause:** An adverb clause is always a subordinate clause, usually modifies the verb in an independent clause and always begins with a subordinating conjunction.

**\*\*Adjective Clause:** An adjective clause is always a subordinate clause, always modifies a noun or pronoun in an independent clause, and begins with a relative pronoun or sometimes the word “when” or “where.” Sometimes the relative pronoun is implied not stated.

**\*\*Noun Clause:** A noun clause begins with a relative pronoun, but instead of acting like an adjective, this clause replaces an idea of thought. For example: “I think **that we should study a little harder**”

**Sentence:** A sentence is a group of words containing at least one independent clause.

**Sentence Variety:** The way you juxtaposition the following four types of sentences in your writing allows you to create your own unique rhythm.

**\*Simple Sentence:** A simple sentence is a sentence with only one independent clause and no dependent clauses. A simple sentence may, however, have many phrases and be quite long.

**\*Compound Sentence:** A compound sentence is a sentence with more than one independent clause but no dependent clauses.

**\*Complex Sentence:** A complex sentence is a sentence with only one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

**\*Compound-complex Sentence:** A compound-complex sentence is a sentence with more than one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

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**Conjunction:** A conjunction joins two parts of a sentence.

**Coordinating Conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):** “FANBOYS” is a useful acronym to help you remember these words. Coordinating conjunctions connect two or more equal or parallel parts of sentences.

**Parallel Structure:** Parallel structure means that a coordinating conjunction has been used to connect parts of a sentence that are equal or parallel. **Example:** I like reading, cooking, and going to the beach. “And” is connecting three gerunds: reading, cooking, and going. If I write, “I like reading, cooking, and to go to the beach,” I have committed a **parallel structure error** because I am trying to connect the infinitive “to go” to two gerunds. (Infinitives and gerunds are two types of verbals. For a complete description of verbals, go to my handout on phrases.)

**Transitional words and phrases (aka conjunctive adverbs):** Transitional words and phrases are words that create a relationship between ideas. These words create relationships in many ways including connecting two independent clauses, introducing an independent clause, or interrupting the second independent clause. These words can also provide a transition/relationship between paragraphs. (A list of the most common of these words can be found at the end of this handout.)

**Subordinator:** A subordinator is either a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun. Subordinators indicate the relationship between the dependent clause and the independent clause.

**Subordinating Conjunction:** A subordinating conjunction is a word that connects two clauses, subordinating one of them and making it dependent upon an independent clause to complete its meaning. Most subordinating conjunctions and their clauses act like adverbs, modifying the verb of the main clause. (A list of the most common of these words can be found at the end of this handout.)

**Relative pronoun:** A relative pronoun is a word that subordinates a clause turning it into an adjective which modifies either a noun or a pronoun in the independent clause. Relative pronouns can be either the subject or object of their subordinate clause, but they can never be the subject of an independent clause. (A list of the most common of these words can be found at the end of this handout.)

**Sentence Fragment:** A sentence fragment is a group of words that has no independent clause even though it is punctuated as if it were a complete sentence.

**Fused Sentence (aka Run-on or RO):** A fused (RO) sentence is an error that occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined without a coordinating conjunction and without

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punctuation. The independent clauses are, therefore, “run together.”

**Comma Splice:** A comma splice is similar to a fused sentence. It is an error that occurs when two or more independent clauses are connected with only a comma.

**Modifiers:** Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that limit, describe, intensify, or otherwise alter the meaning of other words.

**Adjective:** Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns.

**Adverbs:** Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

**Preposition:** A preposition is a word such as “in, at, beneath, on” that relates a noun or pronoun to some other word in the sentence. For example: The cat sleeps on the couch. In this sentence the preposition “on” is relating “couch” to “sleeping.” (A list of the most common of these words can be found at the end of this handout.)

**Phrase:** A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a verb or a subject. (See my handout on phrases for a complete description of phrases.)

**\*Prepositional Phrase:** A prepositional phrase is a group of words that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun or pronoun. All other words in the prepositional phrase will be modifiers or coordinating conjunctions. A prepositional phrase never has a verb; therefore it never has a subject. All nouns or pronouns in the phrase are **objects** of the preposition.

**\*Infinitive Phrase:** An infinitive phrase begins with the word “to” and is followed by the base form of a verb such as “walk, talk, be, feel.” These verb forms no longer function as verbs because they cannot change form to indicate time. For example, in the sentence, “I love to walk with my dog” the word “love” is the verb because it can change form to “loved, will love, have loved, etc. In the above sentence “walk” cannot change form to indicate time. You would never write: I love to walked to the store.

**Present Participle Phrase:** A present participle phrase begins with the “ing” form of a verb, such as “walking, talking, smiling, being.” These words do not function as verbs because they do not have a helping verb to indicate time. Hence, “walking to the store with my dog” has no subject and no verb, but instead functions as an adjective phrase. For example: Walking to the store with my dog, I noticed a flock of geese. “Walking to the store with my dog” modifies the pronoun “I.”

**Gerund:** A gerund is a present participle functioning as a noun. For example: Walking to the store with my dog makes me feel good. In this sentence “walking” is the “thing” that makes me feel good and is the subject of the verb “makes.”

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**Past Participle Phrase:** A past participle phrase begins with a past verb form, but like in a present participle phrase, this verb form does not function as a verb; instead, it usually functions as an adjective. Hence, “defeated by the other team” has no subject or verb, but will actually function as a modifier for another part of the sentence. For example: Defeated by the other team, the Lions left the field.

**Misplaced Modifier:** A misplaced modifier is a sentence error that occurs with a modifying word, phrase, or clause is in the wrong place. **Example:** **The dog bit the boy *who has rabies*.** The dog has rabies and the adjective clause, “who has rabies,” is misplaced. It should be placed immediately after the noun it is modifying. **Example:** She *only* wanted three pieces of pizza. The word “only” is modifying wanted in this sentence. This means she didn’t “need” the pizza; she only “wanted” it. The correct placement is, “She wanted only three pieces of pizza. Now, “only” is modifying how much pizza she wanted and is in the correct place.

**Dangling Modifier:** A dangling modifier is a sentence error that occurs when a modifying phrase does not have an object to modify. **Example:** *Driving to the store, my car ran out of gas.* The phrase “driving to the store” is an adjective clause, but there is no noun for it to modify, so it is left dangling.

**Common Prepositions**

about	above	across	<b><u>after*</u></b>	among	around	<b><u>as*</u></b>
at	because of	<b><u>before*</u></b>	behind	below	beneath	beside
between	by	during	except	<b><u>for***</u></b>	from	in
in spite of	into	<b><u>like**</u></b>	near	of	on	onto
over	past	<b><u>since*</u></b>	through	till	to	toward
under	<b><u>until*</u></b>	up	upon	with	without	

\*These words, **after**, **as**, **before**, **since**, and **until**, are sometimes used as prepositions and sometimes used as subordinating conjunctions. (See your Grammar Terms Handout for a definition of Subordinating Conjunctions.)

\*\*This word, like, can also be a verb as in “I really like you.” When used as a preposition, like, means similar to as in “She smells **like** a rose.”

\*\*\*This word, **for**, can also be used as a coordinating conjunction, which connects two clauses. (See your Grammar Terms Handout for a definition of Coordinating Conjunctions.)

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**Coordinating Conjunctions**

For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

**Transitional Words and Phrases**

Also  
As a result  
At the same time  
Besides  
Certainly  
Consequently  
Finally  
For example  
Furthermore  
Hence  
However  
In addition  
Incidentally  
Indeed  
Instead  
Likewise  
Meanwhile  
Moreover  
Nevertheless  
Next  
Nonetheless  
Now  
On the other hand  
Otherwise  
Similarly  
Still  
Then  
Thereafter  
Therefore  
Thus  
Undoubtedly

**Relative Pronouns**

Who, whom, which, that, whose, whoever,  
whomever

**Common Subordinating Conjunctions**

After  
Although  
As  
As far as  
As if  
As soon as  
As though  
Before  
Because  
Even if  
Even though  
In case  
If  
In order that  
In that  
Now that  
Once  
Provided that  
Since  
Though  
Unless  
Until  
When  
Whenever  
Whether  
Where  
Wherever  
While