

Breaking a sentence into its parts of speech

Here is a short introduction to the eight different parts of speech. Every word in any sentence fits into one of these categories. Throughout this book we will be using these categories, and discussing in more detail what they mean.

nouns – words for people, places, things and ideas, such as ‘Sipho’, ‘Soweto’, ‘car’ and ‘love’

pronouns – little words such as ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘it’ that stand in the place of the full names of people, places and things

determiners – little words such as ‘the’ and ‘a’ that come in front of some nouns

adjectives – words that describe nouns, such as ‘little’ or ‘green’

verbs – words that describe actions, such as ‘talk’ or ‘visit’, or show that something exists, such as ‘is’

adverbs – words that give more information about a verb – how it happened or when it happened – such as ‘quickly’ or ‘now’

prepositions – little words that show where things are in relation to each other, such as ‘in’ and ‘to’

conjunctions – words that join different ideas in a sentence, such as ‘because’ and ‘and’



This page and opposite:
 Siphiso Ndlovu, otherwise known as Brickz

Not all sentences contain all parts of speech, as is clear in the following example.

noun	verb	verb
Sipho	is	smiling.

- 1 Break up the following sentences into individual words and write them in the appropriate place in the table. (Don't worry if you find this difficult. We will be looking at each part of speech again later.)
- a Siphon Ndlovu was born in Soweto.
 - b He is now called Brickz and he is a singer.
 - c He drives a little green car.
 - d He does not live in Soweto now, because he has moved to Roodepoort.
 - e Brickz regularly visits friends in Soweto.



Parts of speech	Sentence a	Sentence b	Sentence c	Sentence d	Sentence e
nouns					
pronouns					
determiners					
adjectives					
verbs					
adverbs					
negatives					
prepositions					
conjunctions					

- 2 Now write a sentence of your own by using some of the words from the table you have filled in. Circle each word and label it according to what part of speech it is.

Types of nouns

Nouns are words that refer to people, places, things or ideas. Nouns are usually categorised in the following way.

Concrete nouns		Abstract nouns
Proper nouns	Common nouns	

In this table there are two main sections: concrete nouns and abstract nouns. Concrete nouns, such as 'dog', 'Mr Smith' or 'rainbow' are nouns you can sense (touch, smell, hear, taste or see). Abstract nouns, such as 'love' or 'hate', cannot be sensed with the five senses, yet we know that they still exist.

Concrete nouns are further divided into proper nouns and common nouns. Proper nouns are usually the names of people, places and important things. We make the first letter of a proper noun a capital letter to show respect. Common nouns are simply things, and there is no reason to spell them with a capital letter.

1 Categorise the following nouns according to the table above.

Soweto
 Elle
 Roodepoort
 status
 fame
 Siphon
 album
 love
 South Africa
 brick
 actress
 music
 journalist
 child
 water

Exercise 3

Diminutive nouns and nouns with gender

Diminutive nouns

Many languages have word endings that show that a speaker is talking about a small version of something. We call the new nouns that are created this way ‘diminutives’. As a language, English does not usually use diminutives. Normally, English speakers simply use the adjective ‘small’ before the noun. However, here are a few nouns that do have diminutive forms.

statue – statuette *novel – novella*
play – playlet *cake – cookie*
book – booklet

- 1 Insert the correct diminutive from the list above into each of the following sentences.
 - a I was trying to write a novel but when I finished my story it was very short, so I guess it is just a _____.
 - b Although most people were impressed by the big statues, I preferred the _____ at the back of the museum.
 - c We couldn’t afford to buy a birthday present for our mother, so we wrote and acted out a little _____ instead.
 - d When we bought the non-stick frying pan it came with a little _____ that explained how to take care of it properly.

Only those words that share the same root word as the noun for the parent animal are really ‘diminutives’.

We use special nouns to refer to some baby animals. These include:

duck – duckling *ox – calf*
goose – gosling *fish – fry*
chicken – chick

Nouns with gender

Sometimes we use different nouns when we talk about the male form of something and the female form of something. For example, the noun ‘actor’ refers to a man or boy, while the noun ‘actress’ refers to a woman or a girl. In this case the masculine and feminine nouns share the same root word, but this is not always the case.

- 2 In the following table, match the masculine forms on the left with their feminine equivalents on the right.

Masculine nouns	Feminine nouns
a man	aunt
b boy	woman
c father	grandmother
d grandfather	waitress
e uncle	mother
f son	manageress
g husband	daughter
h manager	wife
i waiter	girl
j chairman	cockerel
k hen	chairwoman



These days some people prefer to use neutral words (for example, using ‘chairperson’ instead of ‘chairman’ or ‘chairwoman’), where a neutral form exists.

Plural nouns

Regular noun plurals

Some single nouns can be made into plurals to show that there is more than one of them. The word 'album' is a single noun that can be made into the plural noun 'albums'. Adding 's' is the most common way of changing a single noun into a plural noun. This is the regular pattern we should follow unless there is a reason not to.

1 Change these single nouns into plural nouns by adding 's'.

- | | |
|--------|---------|
| a car | c award |
| b hand | d star |

If a singular noun ends in 's' already, we have to add 'es' to the end of it to change it into a plural. Otherwise, when we said this word, we would not be able to hear that it was now a plural noun. For example, say 'actress' aloud. Now say 'actresss' and 'actresses' aloud. When we say 'actresses' aloud we can hear it is a plural because it sounds different from the singular form 'actress'. But 'actresss' would sound the same as 'actress', and so would not let us show that it was a plural.

If a singular noun ends in 'ch' or 'sh', we usually also add 'es' to the end of it to change it into a plural. If a singular noun ends in 'f', we have to remove the 'f' and add 'ves' to the end of it to change it into a plural. These rules all help us to pronounce the plural nouns more easily.

2 Change these single nouns into plural nouns by adding an 'es'.

- | | |
|------------|---------|
| a actress | d loaf |
| b princess | e beach |
| c business | f leash |

Irregular noun plurals

A few nouns are made into plurals in different (irregular) ways. These are often very old-fashioned ways of making singular nouns into plural nouns, and they are used on old words, mostly for people and animals.

There are so few of these irregular plural nouns that it is simplest to learn them one by one without trying to learn the old rules behind how they are formed.

Singular noun	Plural noun
man	men
woman	women
child	children
ox	oxen
mouse	mice
louse	lice
goose	geese
fish	fish (or 'fishes' in old-fashioned English)
sheep	sheep

As shown in the last two rows, some irregular plural nouns are the same words as their singular forms.

- 3 Complete the following sentences by changing the words in brackets into plural nouns.
- The meeting place was filled with (man), (woman) and (child).
 - While I was looking after the (goose) last week I saw the (mouse) that our cat has been unable to catch.
 - We put the yoke over the necks of the (ox) before we took them to plough the field.
 - If you want to catch some big (fish) you will need a big hook.

Sometimes nouns have irregular plurals because both the singular form and the plural form come from another language. For example the singular noun 'memorandum' (a written note of things the writer must remember to do) comes from Latin. The plural form of this noun is 'memoranda' because this is how the plural is formed in Latin.

Uncountable nouns

The above examples of nouns can all be counted. We can see if there is one of them or more than one of them, which is why we call them countable nouns. Some nouns cannot be counted, such as 'water' or 'love'. We call this type of noun an uncountable noun, and we never change it into a plural.

- 4 Complete these sentences by filling in uncountable nouns from the list on page 10 in the spaces.
- I poured out the _____ from both buckets.
 - Her _____ made the actress think she was special.
 - I cannot measure the _____ I feel for you.
 - I could hear _____ coming from the houses on either side of me.

Collective nouns

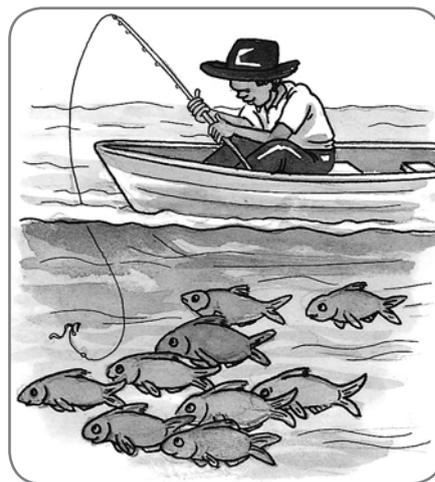
Collective nouns are singular nouns that refer to a group of things. When we use a collective noun we often use a plural noun in the same phrase. For example, the phrase 'a group of islands' contains the collective (singular) noun 'group' and the plural noun 'islands'.

- 5 Complete the following phrases by using the collective nouns in the box.

gaggle	school	litter	bunch
--------	--------	--------	-------

- a _____ of puppies
 - a _____ of geese
 - a _____ of flowers
 - a _____ of fish
- 6 Complete the following sentence using a collective noun from the box above.

As the _____ swam past my boat I hooked one fish, but it got away.



Ordering adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe nouns. They can come in front of nouns or behind verbs and nouns. Colours are some of the most commonly used adjectives. For example, in the following two sentences 'green' is an adjective that describes the noun 'car'.

The *green* car went fast.

The car was *green*.

1 Use the correct adjectives from this list in the following sentences.

blue turquoise green purple maroon
 pink yellow scarlet black grey
 orange brown silver gold bronze

- a Car wheels usually have _____ tyres and _____ rims.
 b Unripe bananas are usually _____ but ripe bananas are usually _____.
 c Sometimes magazines use fancy words to describe the shades of particular colours. For example, they might write about _____ cars instead bright blue cars, _____ shirts instead of dark purple shirts, _____ dresses instead of deep red dresses, and _____ sofas instead of light brown sofas.

Note that colours can also be nouns, as in the sentences 'You look good in white' and 'I think your outfit needs a dash of red.'

If you want to, you can use lots of adjectives before or after one noun, but they must be arranged in the following order.

Type of adjective	Opinion	Size	Age	Shape	Colour	Origin	Material
Examples	nice beautiful bad repulsive	little medium big huge	young middle-aged old ancient	round circular square rectangular	blue orange grey gold	English French Latin South African	metal wooden woollen plastic

- 2 For each of the following sentences, insert the words in brackets into the correct places.
- a The singer wore a _____, _____ T-shirt. (orange, big)
 b He sung a _____, _____ song. (French, beautiful)
 c The _____, _____ boy made a _____, _____ car. (South African, young, little, wooden)
 d Our family sits at a _____, _____ table when we eat supper. (round, metal)

Possessive adjectives are discussed on page 28 and compound adjectives are discussed under compound words on page 79.

Exercise 6

17

Adjectives of degree

We can use adjectives to show degree. For example, Matthew might be *kind*, but Mark may be *kinder*, and Luke could be the *kindest* person you have ever met. The comparative degree is used when two people or things are being compared. The superlative degree is used when more than two people or things are being compared.

The following table shows how short, regular adjectives are changed in order to show a difference in degree.

The absolute form of a short, regular adjective	The comparative form of a short, regular adjective	The superlative form of a short, regular adjective
nice	nicer	nicest
big	bigger	biggest
young	younger	youngest

If an adjective has more than one syllable we consider it a long adjective. The following table shows how we place an adverb in front of long, regular adjectives in order to show a difference in degree.

The absolute form of a long, regular adjective	The comparative form of a long, regular adjective	The superlative form of a long, regular adjective
beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful
repulsive	more repulsive	most repulsive
ancient	more ancient	most ancient

Sometimes adjectives change completely when we change them into their comparative or superlative form. Then we call them irregular adjectives. (Luckily there are not many irregular adjectives to learn.) The following table shows how two common irregular adjectives are changed in order to show a difference in degree.

The absolute form of an irregular adjective	The comparative form of an irregular adjective	The superlative form of an irregular adjective
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

Some adjectives cannot be changed to show degree. For example, 'square' cannot be changed. A thing either is square or it is not.

- 1 Complete the following sentences with adjectives of the correct degree.
 - a Juliet is (young), but Bongani is (young) and Rosinah is the (young) of all.
 - b The toilets at the school are (repulsive), but the toilets at the community centre are (repulsive) and the toilets at the place my father works are the (repulsive) of all.
 - c My sister's cooking is (good), but my mother's cooking is (good), and my father's cooking is the (good) of all.

Similes and metaphors

We often compare the things we are talking about to other things, in order to describe them more effectively. For example, famous actors and actresses are often called 'stars'. But stars are actually the bright things we can see in the sky at night. When we call an actress a star we are saying that, compared to ordinary people, she shines brightly like a star surrounded by darkness. We make these comparisons to emphasise a point or add some flavour to the way we speak.



Similes and metaphors are types of comparison. They are very similar. Look at these examples.

Simile: When she walked onto the stage she shone *as* brightly as a star.

Simile: She sang to the crowd and her dress sparkled *like* a star.

Simile: She shone brighter *than* a star on a moonless night.

Metaphor: During her brief career she was a bright star, adored throughout the world.

Metaphor: She sparkled in front of the audience.

Metaphor: While she lived she shone brighter than all the other singers in Africa.

The first three examples are called similes, because they are comparisons that use a comparing word ('like', 'as' or 'than'). Because similes use one of these three words they are easier to spot than metaphors, which do not.

Metaphors are comparisons that do not use a comparing word. They simply say, for example, 'she is a star' and we are left to work out that she is bright like a star, rather than she is thousands of miles away and can only be seen at night. Metaphors are even harder to understand when only the verb gives us a clue that a comparison is being made, as happens in the last two examples on page 18. The verbs 'sparkled' and 'shone' are verbs normally used to describe stars, but here they are used to describe a singer. This means that the writer is making a subtle comparison, and pointing out in a quiet way that she is like a star.

- 1 What is being compared to what in the following similes? And why is the writer doing this?
- Jabu was happier than a pig in mud.
 - Hitting Nelson in the stomach was like hitting a concrete wall.
 - Helen was as dependable as a brick house in a storm.
 - pig in mud
 - boy hitting concrete wall
 - a brick house in a storm



- 2 What is being compared to what in the following metaphors? And why is the writer doing this?
- For Mpho, Nqolo was the doorway to a new world of useful business contacts.
 - After the divorce Pauline was completely shattered.
 - Although she moved to America, Zoleka's roots would always be in South Africa.

When a sentence does not seem to make sense, this could be because it contains a metaphor – so slow down and look to see if something is being compared to something else.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Sometimes we shorten words so they will be quicker to say. The shorter words we create are called abbreviations (because 'abbreviate' means 'shorten'). We can abbreviate many different parts of speech, but the examples below are all of commonly abbreviated nouns. When we abbreviate we use only part of the original word or phrase.

phone – telephone	cell – cellular telephone
fax – facsimile	email – electronic mail
memo – memorandum	laptop – laptop computer
ipod – information pod	pro – professional
web – worldwide web	net – internet

Alternatively, we can use the first letter of each word in a phrase and pronounce the name of each letter.

DJ (pronounced 'dee-jay') – disc jockey
R&B (pronounced 'ar-and-bee') – rhythm and blues
SMS (pronounced 'ess-em-ess') – short message service
TV (pronounced 'tee-vee') – television
LP (pronounced 'el-pee') – long-playing (record)
CD (pronounced 'see-dee') – compact disc
DVD (pronounced 'dee-vee-dee') – digital video disc/digital versatile disc
CPU (pronounced 'see-pee-you') – central processing unit
RNA (pronounced 'ar-en-ay') – ribonucleic acid
DNA (pronounced 'dee-en-ay') – deoxyribonucleic acid
HIV (pronounced 'aitch-eye-vee') – human immunodeficiency virus

- 1 Use the correct abbreviation in the following sentences.
- It's hard to get hold of me on my home _____, so rather call me on my _____ or just _____ me.
 - The _____ at the club prefers to use _____s to the more modern _____s as they are easier to mix with.
 - The _____ inside the nucleus of a human cell contains information about the design of that human body, while the _____ carries messages from the DNA to other parts of the cell.

We can also abbreviate people's titles, such as when we use 'Mrs' instead of 'Mistress'. These abbreviations become part of proper nouns, which is why they start with a capital letter. When the last letter of the abbreviation is not the last letter of the original word, it is traditional to end the abbreviation with a full stop.

Mr – Mister (for a married man or an unmarried man)
Mrs – Mistress (for a married woman)
Miss – Mistress (for an unmarried woman)
Ms – Mistress (for a woman who refuses to be titled according to whether she is married or unmarried)
Dr – Doctor
Rev. – Reverend
Prof. – Professor