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PART I: KINDS OF WORDS

Do you shudder when you hear the words *noun* or *verb*? Don't worry – you already know all about word categories, also known as parts of speech, though you may not think you do. You know, for example, that you can say *the idea* and *the boy* but not **the about* or **happy the*. (As stated in the *How to use this book* section, an asterisk [*] is used to indicate that something is ungrammatical.) That is, you know that some words can go in some places in a sentence and others can't. A word category, or part of speech, is just a name given to a group of words that have something in common, such as where they can go in a sentence. Part I gives you a quick and easy guide to basic word categories.

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UNIT 1: NOUNS

Lesson 1: Identifying nouns

Nouns are commonly defined as words that refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. How can you identify a noun?

Quick tip 1.1

If you can put the word *the* in front of a word and it sounds like a unit, the word is a noun.

For example, *the boy* sounds like a unit, so *boy* is a noun. *The chair* sounds like a unit, so *chair* is a noun. Compare these nouns to **the very*, **the walked*, **the because*. *Very*, *walked*, and *because* are not nouns. While you can easily put *the* and *very* together (for example, *the very tall boy)*, *the very*, by itself, does not work as a unit while *the chair* does. So, *chair* is a noun; *very* is not. (There is one kind of noun that cannot always have *the* in front of it; see Lesson 6 later in this unit.)

Test yourself 1.1

Which of the following words are nouns? See if they sound like a unit when you put them here: *the* _____. Check the appropriate column.

	Noun	*Not a noun*
Sample: always	.....	✗

Getting started (answers on p. 20)

1. tree	.....	.....
2. when	.....	.....
3. beds	.....	.....
4. glass	.....	.....
5. said	.....	.....

More practice (answers on the website)

6. slowly	.....	.....
7. factory	.....	.....
8. ticket	.....	.....
9. boxes	.....	.....
10. almost	.....	.....

Test yourself 1.2

Underline the nouns in these phrases. Test each word to see if it sounds like a unit when you put it here: *the* _____.
Sample: all my friends

Getting started (answers on p. 20)

1. your red sweater
2. those boxes
3. a few men
4. many digital photos
5. his very interesting article

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More practice (answers on the website)

6. their carpets
7. a hand-painted plate
8. the court stenographer
9. our psychology professor
10. two interesting museums

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Lesson 2: Concrete and abstract nouns

Here's an unusual sentence: *He smelled the marriage.* What makes this sentence unusual is that we don't generally think of the noun *marriage* as something that can be smelled. Some nouns are **concrete**: they can be perceived by our senses – they are things that we can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. Those nouns that are not concrete are **abstract**. *Marriage* is something abstract, so it's odd to say it's being perceived by one of our senses, our sense of smell.

The nouns in Lesson 1 were all concrete nouns. Other nouns, such as *marriage*, are abstract; this means that they refer to things that you cannot perceive with your senses, things you cannot see, smell, feel, taste, or touch. Here are some more concrete and abstract nouns:

Concrete	*Abstract*
newspaper	love
heel	honesty
glass	culture
jewelry	mind

Quick tip 2.1

Concrete nouns refer to things we can perceive with one of our senses. Abstract nouns cannot be perceived by our senses.

Test yourself 2.1

Decide if each noun is concrete or abstract.
Sample: discussion abstract

Getting started (answers on p. 20)

1. muffin .....
2. violin .....
3. freedom .....
4. elegance .....
5. train .....

More practice (answers on the website)

6. friend .....
7. friendliness .....
8. economics .....
9. dormitory .....
10. capitalism .....

Test yourself 2.2

Which of the following words are nouns? See if they sound like a unit when you put them here: *the* _____. The nouns will all be abstract nouns. Check the appropriate column.

	Noun	*Not a noun*
Sample: confusion	×	

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Getting started (answers on p. 20)

1. concept ....
2. shockingly ....
3. wrote ....
4. conversation ....
5. interview ....

More practice (answers on the website)

6. ran ....
7. secret ....
8. her ....
9. death ....
10. job ....

An abstract noun is sometimes easier to identify if you create a sentence with it. For example, *the happiness* is a unit, as can be seen in *The happiness on her face delighted him.* Thus, *happiness* is a noun. Here are some other abstract nouns in sentences; the nouns are underlined.

1. It was not the complaint which bothered him.
2. They were attempting to stop the abuse.
3. The joy which they felt was obvious.

Another easy way to identify a noun, especially an abstract noun, is to put the word *his* (or other words like it – see Lesson 21) in front of it and see if it sounds like a unit. For example, *his complaint*, *his happiness*, *his concern* all are units; therefore, *complaint*, *happiness*, and *concern* are nouns.

Quick tip 2.2

If you can put *his* in front of a word and it sounds like a unit, the word is a noun.

Test yourself 2.3

Which of the following words are nouns? See if they sound like a unit when you put them here: *his* _____. The nouns will all be abstract nouns. Check the appropriate column.

	Noun	*Not a noun*
Sample: obligation	×	

Getting started (answers on p. 20)

1. jumped ....
2. appropriate ....
3. popularity ....
4. emotions ....
5. real ....

More practice (answers on the website)

6. closed ....
7. celebration ....
8. their ....
9. news ....
10. spoken ....

Test yourself 2.4

Which of the following words are nouns? These are a mix of concrete and abstract nouns. Check the appropriate column.

	Noun	*Not a noun*
Sample: while		×

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Getting started (answers on p. 21)

1. repair ....
2. intelligence ....
3. a ....
4. skis ....
5. us ....

More practice (answers on the website)

6. obstruction ....
7. pounds ....
8. disgraceful ....
9. complicated ....
10. since ....

Test yourself 2.5

Underline the nouns in the sentences below. In this exercise, the nouns will all have *the* or *his* in front of them. Some will be concrete and some will be abstract. Some sentences have more than one noun.
Sample: His answer wasn't helpful.

Getting started (answers on p. 21)

1. She read the play over again.
2. The actions became monotonous.
3. He felt that his marriage, his relationship with her, was strong.
4. The time had finally come to confess the truth.
5. He's the boy who delivers the paper.

More practice (answers on the website)

6. The glitterati always like to follow the fashion of the day.
7. They will repair his stove.
8. The arrangement was good for all of them.
9. The audience stared at the screen, fascinated by the action they were seeing.
10. The definition was in his dictionary.

The nouns are underlined in the following sentences:

4. This author lives with her husband.
5. Do most people proceed contentedly through life?
6. Your photograph of that child sleeping won you a prize.

As you can see from these sentences, while *the* _____ or *his* _____ are ways to test a word to see if it's a noun, a noun doesn't necessarily have *the* or *his* in front of it in every sentence. Since we can say *the author*, *the husband*, *the people*, *his life*, *the photograph*, *his child*, and *his prize*, the underlined words in sentences 4–6 are each nouns.

Test yourself 2.6

Underline the nouns in the sentences below. In this exercise, the nouns will not all have *the* or *his* in front of them. Just test each word to see if it can be a noun.
Sample: The repair of my camera went smoothly.

Getting started (answers on p. 21)

1. I wrote every word of the letter.
2. The house was near the city.
3. Why did he get on an elevator?
4. She has my phone.
5. Your younger brother was busy.

More practice (answers on the website)

6. A group of three generals sent the troops away.
7. The flag was near your desk.
8. My mother acted in a play.
9. He called the house every day.
10. You have to give her salary and benefits.

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It's important to realize that the same word can often be used as more than one part of speech. For example, *repair* can be used as a noun (example: *The repair was relatively inexpensive*), as an adjective (example: *The repair manual was not very helpful*), or as a verb (example: *He needs to repair the washing machine*). We'll talk about verbs and adjectives in Units 2 and 4, respectively.

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Lesson 3: Singular and plural nouns

What's the difference between *cat* and *cats*? The noun *cat* is used when it refers to only one cat; its form is **singular**. The noun *cats* is used when it represents more than one cat; its form is **plural**. Thus, the singular and plural forms tell us about **number**. Below are some nouns in their singular and plural forms.

Singular	*Plural*
box	boxes
bed	beds
kite	kites
day	days
country	countries
man	men
child	children

Test yourself 3.1

Underline each noun in the sentences below and indicate whether it is singular (SG) or plural (PL). There may be more than one noun in a sentence.
Sample: They used her computer (SG) to download the files (PL).

Getting started (answers on p. 21)

1. He had a few good ideas.
2. The boys spoke in a quiet whisper.
3. The tourists greeted the queen with attitudes of respect.
4. My neighbor is a neurologist.
5. The exterminator found bugs in the office.

More practice (answers on the website)

6. Sharks live in water.
7. Yesterday, I caught a big trout.
8. There are many beautiful homes on this block.
9. Visitors to this country must obtain visas.
10. His cousin fought in a brutal battle to free ninety hostages.

Regular and irregular plurals

Usually, we pluralize a noun by adding an "s" to it, as in *books*; these nouns are called **regular**. There are a handful of nouns that are pluralized in other ways; these nouns are called **irregular**.

Irregular nouns form their plural in different ways. Here are some common patterns:

1. changing a vowel: *man*/*men*, for example
2. adding "ren" or "en": *child*/*children*, for example
3. adding nothing: *fish*/*fish*, for example
4. changing "f" to "v" and then adding "s": *knife*/*knives*, for example

Test yourself 3.2

Underline each plural noun in the sentences below and indicate if it is regular (REG) or irregular (IRREG) in terms of how it is pluralized.
Sample: The women (IRREG) received their education at some exclusive schools (REG).

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Getting started (answers on p. 21)

1. The doctor treated most of the patients who were waiting.
2. The geese crossed the road near my car.
3. She set a trap to catch the mice that had invaded her kitchen.
4. You will have to feed the oxen most afternoons.
5. Whenever I travel to the countryside, I see many sheep, ducks, deer, and cows.

More practice (answers on the website)

6. Those husbands and wives lead interesting lives.
7. Her feet have grown since last year.
8. The back window of my apartment overlooks about a dozen roofs.
9. The salesmen surrounded me in the showroom.
10. Kenneth had to buy two bottles of disinfectant to get rid of the lice in his bathroom.

To enhance your understanding

What is the plural of the ''word'' *blun*? Even though you've probably never seen this nonsense word, you're likely to say its plural is *bluns*. That's because we don't have to memorize the ending of regular plurals; we simply use our plural formation rule: ''add *s*.'' But the forms for irregular plural words, like *children* and *men*, need to be memorized since they don't follow a consistent pattern.

To further enhance your understanding

Earlier we said that we usually pluralize a noun in English by adding an ''s'' to it. There's actually more to it than that, when one examines the pronunciation of regular nouns more closely.

Here are some regular English nouns:

A	*B*
cat	dog
lip	bee
myth	car
laugh	deal

Say each word in column A out loud, adding its plural ending. (Don't whisper, or this won't work.) You'll notice that, as you expect, you're adding an [s] sound to each word. (Symbols in square brackets [ ] indicate sounds rather than letters.) Now say each word in column B out loud, adding its plural ending. If you listen carefully, you'll notice that you're not adding an [s] sound to each word to make it plural. You're actually adding a [z] sound! (If English is not your native language, you may not be doing this.)

It turns out that we learned, when we were acquiring English as children, that it is the last *sound*, and not *letter*, of a regular noun that determines whether we add [s] or [z]. Some sounds (voiced sounds) are made with our vocal cords vibrating, like the strings of a guitar. Try this: hold your hand touching your throat, about where a man's Adam's apple is, while you say and hold a [v] sound ([v v v v v . . .]). You'll feel the vibration of your vocal cords.

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Other sounds (voiceless sounds) are made with our vocal cords not vibrating. Now touch your hand to your throat again and this time say and hold an [f] sound ([f f f f f . . .]); you will notice the lack of vibration.

So how do we know whether to say the plural with an [s] or [z] sound? If the last sound of a word is a voiceless sound, we add an [s] sound to make it plural. If the last sound of a word is a voiced sound, we add a [z] sound to make it plural. This is not a rule that someone has ever taught us, but part of our unconscious knowledge of English.

Notice that having an [s] sound after voiceless sounds makes sense: [s] itself is voiceless. By the same reasoning, having a [z] after voiced sounds also makes sense: [z] itself is voiced. So what you can see is that the last sound of the noun and the sound of the regular plural share the same voicing characteristic: either the vocal cords vibrate for both sounds, or they don't.

You may have noticed that there's actually a third type of regular noun. Say the following words out loud, adding the plural ending to each:

glass	garage
maze	church
wish	judge

These words all already end in sounds (again, not letters) that are either [s] or [z] or sounds very similar to them. They are all ''noisy'' sounds. For the plural forms of these words, we add a vowel sound (written with the letter *e*) followed by a [z] sound (but written with the letter *s*): glasses, mazes, wishes, garages, churches, judges. If you think about it, pronouncing a vowel between the noisy sound at the end of the noun and the noisy sound [z] of the plural makes sense: without that vowel, we would have two noisy sounds in a row, something that would be harder for the listener to hear clearly.

Wow! You may want to just pause for a moment here and contemplate the complexity of what you know about your language. And you knew how to do this before you even went to kindergarten! You just haven't known that you know it.

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