

Key concepts: grammar glossary

1. Complete sentences, clauses and phrases

Using complete sentences is the founding grammatical principle of academic and professional writing. Constructing incomplete sentences is one of the most common mistakes students make in their writing. Knowing the difference between sentence, clause and phrase can help avoid this error.

UWA India offers a range of [academic skills resources](#) that you can refer to for further guidance.

Sentence

A sentence contains a subject and a predicate, and expresses a complete idea.

Example

I don't think waiting for him is wise, because the forecast promises rough winds.

Clause

A clause contains a subject and a predicate, but is not always a complete sentence.

Examples

- I don't think waiting for him is wise. (independent clause, complete sentence).
- because the forecast promises rough winds (dependent clause, incomplete sentence).

Phrase

A phrase is a set of words grouped together, without a predicate or subject.

Example

I don't think waiting for him is wise, because the forecast promises rough winds.

In this example, 'waiting for him' and 'rough winds' are phrases.

2. Grammatical roles: predicate, subject, object

Sentences, clauses and phrases are made up of 3 key grammatical roles: the predicate, subject and object. The predicate and subject are the most important roles, and a sentence cannot be complete without them.

Simple predicate

A simple predicate is a verb that has a tense and a subject. It is an essential part of a complete sentence.

Example

She wrote a letter to us. They know the old secret. My concern for Mark is growing.

In this example, 'wrote', 'know' and 'is growing' are simple predicates.

Subject

The subject controls the predicate. It is also an essential part of a complete sentence.

Example

She wrote a letter to us. They know the old secret. My concern for Mark is growing.

In this example, 'she', 'they' and 'my concern for Mark' are subjects.

Object

The object is impacted by the predicate, a preposition or another object.

Example

She wrote a letter to us. They know the old secret. My concern for Mark is growing.

In this example, 'a letter', 'us', 'the old secret' and 'Mark' are objects.

A sentence does not have to have an object to be complete.

Example

I am writing. She woke up early.

3. Parts of speech

Different word categories, also known as parts of speech, either fill or complement one of the key grammatical roles in a sentence.

Verb

A verb is an action or a state of being. If it has tense and a subject it is a simple predicate.

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'finds' and 'read' are predicates. However, the basic forms 'to find' and 'to read' do not have tenses or subjects, so they are verbs but not predicates.

Noun

A noun is a person, place, thing or idea. It can be either the subject or object of a sentence.

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'article', 'paper' and 'day' are nouns.

Pronoun

A pronoun stands in for a noun. It can act as either the subject or object of a sentence.

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'she', 'me', 'I' and 'them' are pronouns.

Adjective

An adjective modifies or describes nouns.

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'interesting' is an adjective.

Adverb

An adverb modifies or describes verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'very' and 'quickly' are adverbs.

Article

An article indicates whether a noun is definite (the) or indefinite (a, an).

Example

She finds me a very interesting article in the paper every day. I read them quickly.

In this example, 'a' and 'the' are articles.

Preposition

A preposition indicates a relationship or link to a noun or pronoun.

Example

Call me and the lab technician on our mobiles, but not before Friday.

In this example, 'on' and 'before' are prepositions.

Conjunction

A conjunction joins two or more words or clauses.

Example

Call me and the lab technician on our mobiles, but not before Friday.

In this example, 'and' and 'but' are conjunctions.