

100 Key Grammatical Terms

1. **Abstract Noun**
A noun (such as *courage* or *freedom*) that names an idea, event, quality, or concept. Contrast with [concrete noun](#).
2. **Active Voice**
The verb form or voice in which the subject of the sentence performs or causes the action expressed by the verb. Contrast with [passive voice](#).
3. **Adjective**
The part of speech (or word class) that modifies a noun or a pronoun. Adjective forms: [positive](#), [comparative](#), [superlative](#). Adjective: *adjectival*.
4. **Adverb**
The part of speech (or word class) that is primarily used to modify a verb, adjective, or other adverb. Adverbs can also modify [prepositional phrases](#), [subordinate clauses](#), and complete [sentences](#).
5. **Affix**
A [prefix](#), [suffix](#), or [infix](#): a word element (or [morpheme](#)) that can be attached to a [base](#) or [root](#) to form a new word. Noun: *affixation*. Adjective: *affixable*.
6. **Agreement**
The correspondence of a verb with its [subject](#) in [person](#) and [number](#), and of a pronoun with its [antecedent](#) in person, number, and [gender](#).
7. **Appositive**
A noun, [noun phrase](#), or series of nouns used to identify or rename another noun, noun phrase, or pronoun.

8. **Article**
A type of determiner that precedes a noun: *a*, *an*, or *the*.

9. **Attributive**
An adjective that usually comes *before* the noun it modifies without a linking verb. Contrast with predicative adjective.

10. **Auxiliary**
A verb that determines the mood or tense of another verb in a verb phrase. Also known as a helping verb. Contrast with lexical verb.

11. **Base**
The form of a word to which prefixes and suffixes are added to create new words.

12. **Capital Letter**
The form of an alphabetical letter (such as *A*, *B*, *C*) used to begin a sentence or proper noun; an uppercase letter, in contrast to lower case. Verb: *capitalize*.

13. **Case**
A characteristic of nouns and certain pronouns that expresses their relationship to other words in a sentence. Pronouns have three case distinctions: subjective, possessive, and objective. In English, nouns have only one case inflection, the possessive. The case of nouns other than the possessive is sometimes called the *common case*.

14. **Clause**
A group of words that contains a subject and a predicate. A clause may be either a sentence (an independent clause) or a sentence-like construction within a sentence (a dependent clause).

15. **Common Noun**
A noun that can be preceded by the definite article and that represents one or all

of the members of a class. As a general rule, a common noun does not begin with a [capital letter](#) unless it appears at the start of a sentence. Common nouns can be subcategorized as [count nouns](#) and [mass nouns](#). Semantically, common nouns can be classified as [abstract nouns](#) and [concrete nouns](#). Contrast with [proper noun](#).

16. [Comparative](#)

The form of an adjective or adverb involving a comparison of more or less, greater or lesser.

17. [Complement](#)

A word or word group that completes the [predicate](#) in a sentence. The two kinds of complements are *subject complements* (which follow the verb *be* and other [linking verbs](#)) and *object complements* (which follow a [direct object](#)). If it identifies the subject, the complement is a noun or pronoun; if it describes the subject, the complement is an adjective.

18. [Complex Sentence](#)

A sentence that contains at least one [independent clause](#) and one [dependent clause](#).

19. [Compound-Complex Sentence](#)

A sentence that contains two or more [independent clauses](#) and at least one [dependent clause](#).

20. [Compound Sentence](#)

A sentence that contains at least two [independent clauses](#).

21. [Conditional Clause](#)

A type of [adverbial clause](#) that states a hypothesis or condition, real or imagined. A conditional clause may be introduced by the [subordinating conjunction](#) *if* or another conjunction, such as *unless* or *in case of*.

22. **Conjunction**

The part of speech (or word class) that serves to connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. The two main types of conjunction are [coordinating conjunctions](#) and [subordinating conjunctions](#).

23. **Contraction**

A shortened form of a word or group of words (such as *doesn't* and *won't*), with the missing letters usually marked by an [apostrophe](#).

24. **Coordination**

The grammatical connection of two or more ideas to give them equal emphasis and importance. Contrast with [subordination](#).

25. **Count Noun**

A noun that refers to an object or idea that can form a [plural](#) or occur in a [noun phrase](#) with an [indefinite article](#) or with numerals. Contrast with [mass noun](#) (or noncount noun).

26. **Declarative Sentence**

A sentence in the form of a statement (in contrast to a [command](#), a [question](#), or an [exclamation](#)).

27. **Definite Article**

In English, the definite article *the* is a [determiner](#) that refers to particular nouns. Compare to [indefinite article](#).

28. **Demonstrative**

A [determiner](#) that points to a particular noun or to the noun it replaces. The demonstratives are *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*. A *demonstrative pronoun* distinguishes its [antecedent](#) from similar things. When the word precedes a noun, it is sometimes called a *demonstrative adjective*.

29. **Dependent Clause**

A group of words that has both a [subject](#) and a [verb](#) but (unlike an [independent clause](#)) cannot stand alone as a sentence. Also known as a *subordinate clause*.

30. **Determiner**

A word or a group of words that introduces a noun. Determiners include [articles](#), [demonstratives](#), and [possessive pronouns](#).

31. **Direct Object**

A noun or pronoun in a sentence that receives the action of a [transitive verb](#). Compare to [indirect object](#).

32. **Ellipsis**

The omission of one or more words, which must be supplied by the listener or reader. Adjective: *elliptical* or *elliptic*. Plural, ellipses.

33. **Exclamatory Sentence**

A sentence that expresses strong feelings by making an [exclamation](#). (Compare with sentences that make a [statement](#), express a [command](#), or ask a [question](#).)

39. **Idiom**

A set expression of two or more words that means something other than the literal meanings of its individual words.

40. **Imperative Mood**

The form of the verb that makes direct commands and requests.

41. **Imperative Sentence**

A sentence that gives advice or instructions or that expresses a request or command. (Compare with sentences that make a [statement](#), ask a [question](#), or express an [exclamation](#).)

42. **Indefinite Article**

The [determiner](#) *a* or *an*, which marks an unspecified [count noun](#). *A* is used before a word that starts with a [consonant](#) sound ("a bat," "a unicorn"). *An* is used before a word that starts with a [vowel](#) sound ("an uncle," "an hour").

43. **Independent Clause**

A group of words made up of a [subject](#) and a [predicate](#). An independent clause (unlike a [dependent clause](#)) can stand alone as a [sentence](#). Also known as a *main clause*.

44. **Indicative Mood**

The [mood](#) of the verb used in ordinary statements: stating a fact, expressing an opinion, asking a question.

45. **Indirect Object**

A noun or pronoun that indicates to whom or for whom the action of a verb in a sentence is performed.

46. **Indirect Question**

A sentence that reports a [question](#) and ends with a [period](#) rather than a [question mark](#).

47. **Infinitive**

A [verbal](#)--usually preceded by the [particle](#) *to*--that can function as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

48. **Inflection**

A process of word formation in which items are added to the [base](#) form of a word to express grammatical meanings.

49. **-ing Form**

A contemporary linguistic term for the [present participle](#) and [gerund](#): any verb form that ends in *-ing*.

50. **Intensifier**

A word that emphasizes another word or phrase. Intensifying adjectives modify nouns; intensifying adverbs commonly modify verbs, [gradable](#) adjectives, and other adverbs.

51. **Interjection**

The part of speech that usually expresses emotion and is capable of standing alone.

52. **Interrogative Sentence**

A sentence that asks a question. (Compare with sentences that make a [statement](#), deliver a [command](#), or express an [exclamation](#).)

53. **Interrupting Phrase**

A word group (a statement, question, or exclamation) that interrupts the flow of a sentence and is usually set off by commas, dashes, or parentheses.

54. **Intransitive Verb**

A verb that does not take a [direct object](#). Contrast with [transitive verb](#).

55. **Irregular Verb**

A verb that does not follow the usual rules for verb forms. Verbs in English are irregular if they do not have a conventional *-ed* form.

56. **Linking Verb**

A verb, such as a form of *be* or *seem*, that joins the subject of a sentence to a [complement](#). Also known as a [copula](#).

57. **Mass Noun**

A noun (such as *advice*, *bread*, *knowledge*) that names things which cannot be counted. A mass noun (also known as a *noncount noun*) is used only in the singular. Contrast with [count noun](#).

58. **Modal**

A verb that combines with another verb to indicate [mood](#) or [tense](#).

59. **Modifier**

A word, phrase, or clause that functions as an adjective or adverb to limit or qualify the meaning of another word or word group (called the [head](#)).

60. **Mood**

The quality of a verb that conveys the writer's attitude toward a subject. In English, the [indicative mood](#) is used to make factual statements or pose questions, the [imperative mood](#) to express a request or command, and the (rarely used) [subjunctive mood](#) to show a wish, doubt, or anything else contrary to fact.

61. **Negation**

A grammatical construction that contradicts (or negates) part or all of a sentence's meaning. Such constructions commonly include the [negative particle](#) *not* or the contracted negative *n't*.

62. **Noun**

The part of speech (or word class) that is used to name or identify a person, place, thing, quality, or action. Most nouns have both a singular and plural form, can be preceded by an article and/or one or more adjectives, and can serve as the [head](#) of a [noun phrase](#).

63. **Number**

The grammatical contrast between singular and plural forms of nouns, pronouns, determiners, and verbs.

64. **Object**

A noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that receives or is affected by the action of a verb in a sentence.

65. **Objective Case**

The case or function of a pronoun when it is the direct or indirect object of a verb or

verbal, the object of a preposition, the subject of an infinitive, or an appositive to an object. The objective (or *accusative*) forms of English pronouns are *me, us, you, him, her, it, them, whom,* and *whomever*.

66. **Participle**

A verb form that functions as an adjective. Present participles end in *-ing*; past participles of regular verbs end in *-ed*.

67. **Particle**

A word that does not change its form through inflection and does not easily fit into the established system of parts of speech.

68. **Parts of Speech**

Traditional term for the categories into which words are classified according to their functions in sentences.

69. **Passive Voice**

A verb form in which the subject receives the verb's action. Contrast with active voice.

70. **Past Tense**

A verb tense (the second principal part of a verb) indicating action that occurred in the past and which does not extend into the present.

71. **Perfect Aspect**

A verb construction that describes events occurring in the past but linked to a later time, usually the present.

72. **Person**

The relationship between a subject and its verb, showing whether the subject is speaking about itself (first person--*I* or *we*); being spoken to (second person--*you*); or being spoken about (third person--*he, she, it,* or *they*).

73. **Personal Pronoun**

A pronoun that refers to a particular person, group, or thing.

74. **Phrase**

Any small group of words within a sentence or a clause.

75. **Plural**

The form of a noun that typically denotes more than one person, thing, or instance.

76. **Possessive Case**

The inflected form of nouns and pronouns usually indicating ownership, measurement, or source. Also known as *genitive case*.

77. **Predicate**

One of the two main parts of a sentence or clause, modifying the subject and including the verb, objects, or phrases governed by the verb.

78. **Predicative Adjective**

An adjective that usually comes after a linking verb and not before a noun. Contrast with [attributive adjective](#).

79. **Prefix**

A letter or group of letters attached to the beginning of a word that partly indicates its meaning.

80. **Prepositional Phrase**

A group of words made up of a [preposition](#), its [object](#), and any of the object's [modifiers](#).

81. **Present Tense**

A verb tense that expresses action in the present time, indicates habitual actions, or expresses general truths.

82. **Progressive Aspect**

A verb phrase made with a form of *be* plus *-ing* that indicates an action or condition continuing in the [present](#), [past](#), or [future](#).

83. **Pronoun**

A word (one of the traditional parts of speech) that takes the place of a noun, noun phrase, or noun clause.

84. **Proper Noun**

A noun belonging to the class of words used as names for unique individuals, events, or places.

85. **Quotation**

The reproduction of the words of a writer or speaker. In a [direct quotation](#), the words are reprinted exactly and placed in [quotation marks](#). In an [indirect quotation](#), the words are [paraphrased](#) and not put in quotation marks.

86. **Regular Verb**

A verb that forms its past tense and past participle by adding *-d* or *-ed* (or in some cases *-t*) to the [base form](#). Contrast with [irregular verb](#).

87. **Relative Clause**

A [clause](#) introduced by a [relative pronoun](#) (*which, that, who, whom, or whose*) or a [relative adverb](#) (*where, when, or why*).

88. **Sentence**

The largest independent unit of grammar: it begins with a capital letter and ends with a

period, question mark, or exclamation point. A sentence is traditionally (and inadequately) defined as a word or group of words that expresses a complete idea and that includes a subject and a verb.

89. **Singular**

The simplest form of a noun (the form that appears in a dictionary): a category of [number](#) denoting one person, thing, or instance.

90. **Subject**

The part of a sentence or clause that indicates what it is about.

91. **Subjective Case**

The case of a pronoun when it is the subject of a clause, a subject complement, or an appositive to a subject or a subject complement. The subjective (or *nominative*) forms of English pronouns are *I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who* and *whoever*.

92. **Subjunctive Mood**

The mood of a verb expressing wishes, stipulating demands, or making statements contrary to fact.

93. **Suffix**

A letter or group of letters added to the end of a word or stem, serving to form a new word or functioning as an inflectional ending.

94. **Superlative**

The form of an adjective that suggests the most or the least of something.

95. **Tense**

The time of a verb's action or state of being, such as past, present, and future.

96. **Transitive Verb**

A verb that takes a [direct object](#). Contrast with [intransitive verb](#).

97. **Verb**

The part of speech (or word class) that describes an action or occurrence or indicates a state of being.

98. **Verbal**

A verb form that functions in a sentence as a noun or a modifier rather than as a verb.

99. **Word**

A sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single [morpheme](#) or a combination of morphemes.

100. **Word Class**

A set of words that display the same formal properties, especially their inflections and distribution. Similar to (but not synonymous with) the more traditional term part of speech.