

The Structure of English Language
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Introduction

This web page is intended for students who are following GCE Advanced level (AS and A2) specifications in English Language. This resource may also be of general interest to language students on university degree courses, trainee teachers and anyone with a general interest in language science. It contains a basic guide to the **structure** of the English language.

Please note that I have **not** set down prescriptive rules which must be obeyed. I have **described** language, using both traditional terms and some of the categories and descriptions of modern grammar. English is **not** "derived" from Latin (whatever Prince Charles thinks) but has a Germanic origin, although much of our **lexicon** comes from French and the classical languages of Greek and Latin. None of this classical lexis was found in Old English, of course - it has entered English from the Renaissance onwards, most of it in comparatively modern times, thanks to its extensive use in science.

Some of the language categories of traditional grammar have more coherence than others. Nouns and verbs are fairly coherent, while adverbs (or all the words classed by lexicographers as such) are certainly not.

If you have any comments or suggestions about the guide, please contact me.

We can study the structure of language in a variety of ways. For example, we can study

- classes of words (parts of speech),
- meanings of words (semantics), with or without considering changes of meaning,
- how words are organised in relation to each other (syntax),
- how words are formed (morphology),
- the sounds of words (phonology) and
- how written forms represent these (lexicography).

There is no universally accepted model for doing this, but some models use the notion of a **hierarchy**, and this may prove fruitful for you. The framework (description of structure) you will study here is written to be comprehensive yet succinct. Elsewhere, in studying language theory, you will focus on a selective area, and investigate this in more detail.

The most basic units of meaning are simple words (e.g.: **dog**, **yes** and **swim**) or the elements of complex words (e.g.: **un-** **-happi-** and **-ness** in **unhappiness**). These basic elements are called **morphemes**, and the study of how they are combined in words is **morphology**.

The study of how words are organised into **phrases**, **clauses** and **sentences** is usually referred to as **syntax**.

A longer stretch of language is known as **discourse**, the study of its structure as **discourse analysis**.

This hierarchy is partly explained by the table below, from David Crystal's **The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language**. The right hand column should be read upwards, in the direction of the arrow.

Outline structure of English		
sentences are analysed into clauses are analysed into phrases are analysed into words are analysed into morphemes	↓ ↑	sentences are used to build clauses are used to build phrases are used to build words are used to build morphemes

The following table shows a three-part model of the structure of English.

Three-part model of English		
Morphology	Syntax	Discourse
morphemes ↓ words	phrases ↓ clauses ↓ sentences	relationships between sentences in longer stretches of language

Morphology

This is the study of the structure of words. The name comes from Greek **morphos** (=shape or form). The smallest units of meaning may be whole simple words (e.g. **man**, **run**, **big**) or parts of complex words (e.g. **un-**, **-faith-** and **-ful** in **unfaithful**) which are called **morphemes**.

Some morphemes, such as **faith** in **un-faith-ful** or **dream** in **dream-ing** can stand alone as words which make sense. These are known as **free** morphemes. You will see how very many simple words are free morphemes, but can combine with other morphemes, both free and bound (see below) to form complex words.

Where two simple words are joined together to form a new complete word, this is called a **compound word**. Examples include **teapot**, **starlight** and **careworn**. When these terms are first coined, they are shown in some dictionaries with a hyphen, as **light-house** or **fish-finger**.

Other morphemes, such as **prefixes** and **suffixes** (collectively called **affixes**), cannot stand alone - they need to be part of a complex word to make sense. Examples are **dis-** in **dis-miss**, **dis-pute** or **dis-grace**, **-ing** in **dream-ing**, **-ness** in **happi-ness** or **sad-ness** and even **-s** used to form plurals, as in **boy-s** or **horse-s**. These morphemes are said to be **bound** morphemes.

Inflection and derivation

Bound morphemes are traditionally divided into two further classes. Sometimes a word is changed in its form to show the internal grammar of a sentence ("agreement");. Examples would be plural forms of nouns (**dog + s → dog-s**) or past (imperfect) tenses of regular verbs (**want + ed → want-ed**). The study of such changes is **inflectional morphology** (because the words in question are **inflected** - altered by adding a suffix).

Other compound or complex words are made by adding together elements without reference to the internal grammar of a sentence. For example, the verb **infect** suggests a new verb **disinfect** (=to undo the action of infecting). New words are often formed by noun + **-ize**, noun + **ism**, or verb + **able** (**scandalize**, **Stalinism**, **disposable**). The study of such words, "derived" from existing words or morphemes is **derivational morphology**. The elements of which the word is made may have a grammatical relationship **within the word** (you may find this idea difficult), but their formation is independent of the syntax of the clause or sentence in which they occur. If you find this puzzling, two things may help:

- Inflectional morphology is **much** easier to recognise. A relatively small number of types of inflection (showing number or tense, say) covers most cases.
- **All** compound and **most** complex words show derivational morphology. If a complex word does **not** show inflection it **will** show derivation.

But note: a complex word may show **both** inflection **and** derivation! A derived word may be inflected to show, for example, tense or number: **deported** or **disposables** (as in nappies or diapers).

This table shows how the most common kinds of inflection are found in three word classes:

Inflection of nouns, verbs and qualifiers		
Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives and adverbs
Addition of terminal s to show plural (one cat; two cats);	Ending shows tense (wanted) or person ([she wants).	Addition of -er → comparative (hotter; likelier);
Addition of 's to show possession (Henry's cat).		Addition of -est → superlative (coldest; soonest).

This table illustrates how derivation can occur:

Derivational morphology in complex words

Prefix	Base of Word	Suffix	Complex Word
Bi	cycl(e)	ing	Bicycling
Dis	grace	ful	Disgraceful
In	tolera(te)	able	Intolerable
Re	vision	ist	Revisionist
Un, co	operat(e)	ive, ly	Uncooperatively
Un	likely (y becomes i)	hood	Unlikelihood

Remember that morphology is the study of the structure of words. The structure of words can also be studied to show how the meaning of a given morpheme, or its relation to the rest of the word, varies from one complex word to another. Consider how **sun** works in the following words: **sunbeam**, **sunburnt**, **sundial**, **sunflower**, **sunglasses**, **sunlight**, **sunrise**, **sun-spot** (scientific sense), **sun-spot** (tourist sense), **suntan**.

Inflection does not really yield “new” words, but alters the form of existing ones for specific reasons of grammar. Derivation, on the other hand, does lead to the creation of new words. David Crystal (*Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*; p. 90) lists four normal processes of word-formation, of which three are examples of derivation:

Four kinds of word-formation

Prefixation (derivational)	Suffixation (derivational)	Compounding (derivational)	Conversion (not derivational)
Affix placed before base of word, e.g. disobey	Affix placed after base of word, e.g. kindness	Two base forms are added together, e.g. blackbird	Word changes class, without any change of form, e.g. (the) pet (n) becomes (to) pet (vb.)

Words considered as wholes can be categorized according to how they work within phrases, clauses or sentences. These categories, traditionally called **parts of speech** are now more usually known as **word classes**. Parts of speech are labels for categories in which words are **usually** placed. But in a given sentence a word from one category may behave as if it were in another. A dictionary will only record established or standard usage.

The traditional parts of speech were of eight kinds, excluding the two articles (**a/an**, **the**). These were nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs, and interjections. Modern linguists prefer to list words in classes that are coherent - all the words in them **should** behave in the same way. But if this principle were applied rigidly, we would have hundreds of classes, so irregularities are tolerated!

Closed and open word classes

Some classes of words are called **closed** because they contain a relatively small number of items to which no new words can normally be added. These are words (prepositions and conjunctions) which make connections (**connectives** or **connectors**), pronouns and words (including articles) like **the, some, each** that co-occur with nouns - these are called **determiners**.

Other classes of word are constantly being added to. Each contains a vast number of terms already. They are **open** to new words being introduced. The open classes are nouns, verbs and the words which qualify them, adjectives and adverbs. These form the bulk of a language's vocabulary or **lexis** (also **lexicon**, though this sometimes refers to a published version). These classes may be called **lexical** whereas the closed-class words are **structural** or **functional**. These tables illustrate the two kinds of word class.

Closed word classes			
Determiner	Pronoun	Preposition	Conjunction
a, the, any, my, those, which	she, them, who, that, himself	in, across, at, by, near, within	and, but, if, or, while, unless
Open word classes			
Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
Abstract: fear, joy Concrete: chair, mud Common: boy, town Proper: Fred, Hull	Transitive: bite, steal Intransitive: live, cry Modal: can, will, may Auxiliary: be, have, do	Descriptive: lazy, tall Comparative: lazier Superlative: tallest	Manner: reluctantly, keenly, easily, softly Time: soon, often Place: here, there

Problems of classification

Some words are difficult to classify. Not all grammatical descriptions will place them in the same word class. **This, these** or **those** are sometimes classified as demonstrative (or distinctive) adjectives or pronouns. Possessives, like **my, his, their**, are sometimes classified as pronouns (showing the word from which they are formed), sometimes as adjectives, showing their grammatical function of qualifying nouns: usually they are pronouns when alone (**I like that**) and adjectives when they precede a noun (**I like this weather**). Traditional lists of adverbs contain words like **very** which qualify other adverbs or adjectives. This word class is sometimes called a "dustbin" class, because any word which defies classification will be put in it! Among words which have sometimes been classified as adverbs are the following: **however, just, no, not, quickly, tomorrow** and **when**.

This incoherence has long been recognised by grammarians who subdivide adverbs into further categories, such as adverbs of **time, place** or **manner**.

In trying to organise words into coherent classes, linguists will consider any or all of the following: what they **mean** (semantics), their **form** (morphology), **provenance** (historical origin) and **function** in a phrase, clause or sentence (syntax).

Some words, such as numbers, do not fit in any of the word classes given above. They can behave as adjectives (**one loaf or two?**) or pronouns (**I want one now!**). And no **one** description of word classes is regarded as finally authoritative. Some classes (such as verbs or conjunctions) are fairly coherent. You should be able to discuss the problems of how or where to classify words which seem not to "fit".

Also note that a dictionary does not (or should not) **prescribe**, but indicates the word class or part of speech where a word is **usually** placed. But in a given sentence, if the speaker or writer has used it as if it were in a different class, then this is where it should be placed.

For example, **toilet** is usually classified as a noun. But UK primary school teachers often speak of **toileting** children (**I had to toilet John twice today**). In describing such a sentence, you should be guided by the internal grammar of the sentence (syntax) rather than the dictionary. Here **toilet** is a transitive verb. If this usage becomes standard, lexicographers will record it. This kind of word formation is called **conversion**, a self-explanatory name.

Kinds and Functions of Words: Word Classes or Parts of Speech

Every statement is a combination of words, and every statement says something to communicate information. The simplest possible kind of statement - for example, **Dogs bark** - has two kinds of words in it. It has a **what** word, dogs, and a **what happens** word, bark. These kinds of words are the most basic parts of any statement. If a person only says **dog**, no statement is made, and no information is conveyed. A sound is made that calls to mind a common, four-footed animal, but nothing regarding it is learned.

The **what** words are called **nouns**. They tell what is being talked about. They are identifying words, or names. Nouns identify persons, places, or things. They may be particular persons, places, or things: **Michael Jackson, Reykjavik, World Trade Center**. Or they may be general nouns: **singer, town, building**. **Concrete nouns** indicate things that can be seen such as **car, teapot, and potato**. **Abstract nouns** denote concepts such as **love, honesty, and beauty**.

It is rather odd that English grammar should retain this **abstract-concrete** distinction for nouns. It appears to be a survival from the philosopher Plato, who divided the world into mind and matter. If it has any value it is in the philosophical field of epistemology (theory of knowledge). It does not really reveal anything for linguists beyond itself. That is, we can, if we wish, try to place nouns in the sub-categories of concrete and abstract, but once we have done so, this categorization has no further value for the study of language. Moreover, modern science confuses the issue, since it shows that many things we once supposed to belong to mind, are in fact, embodied in matter. A **thrill** is not only abstract, since it involves matter at the level of biochemistry.

The **what happens** words are called **verbs**. They are the action words in a statement. Without them it is impossible to put sentences together. It is the verb that says something about the noun: **dogs bark, birds fly, fish swim**. Verbs are the important words that create information in statements. Although nouns alone make no statement, verbs can occasionally do so. **Help!** gives the information that someone is in trouble, and **Go away!** tells someone or something emphatically to leave.

Besides nouns and verbs there are other kinds of words that have different functions in statements. They are **pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, articles, prepositions**, and a very few words that can be called **function words** because they fit into none of the other categories. All of these kinds of words together are called parts of speech. They can just as well be called parts of writing because they apply to written as well as to spoken language.

Nouns and articles

Nouns can be particular or general: **the house**, **a house**. The words **the** and **a** are articles, or, in more technical terms, **determiners**. **A house** can be any house, but **the house** is a quite definite building. When a noun begins with a vowel (**a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**, and, occasionally, **y**) the indefinite article **a** becomes **an** for the sake of easier pronunciation - **an apple**, **an elephant**, **an orange**. Sometimes **an** is used before words that start with **h**, especially if the **h** is silent: **an honorary degree**. If the **h** is sounded **a** is the standard form: **an 'otel**, **a hotel**.

Nouns can be singular or plural in number: **cat**, **cats**.

- In some cases **es** is added to make nouns plural: **dress**, **dresses**.
- Some nouns change their forms in the plural, without adding an **s** but by changing or **mutating** a vowel: **foot**, **feet**; **man**, **men**; **mouse**, **mice**; **goose**, **geese**.
- Some nouns do not change at all in the plural: **sheep**, **fowl**.

There are also group nouns, called **noun phrases**. This means that two or more nouns, or a noun and an adjective, are put together to form what amounts to, or works like, one noun: **football stadium**, **rock concert**, **orange tree**. In each case certain nouns - **football**, **rock**, **orange** - are attached to other nouns, and each modifies or describes the second noun in some way to convey a different kind of object. **A football** and **a football stadium** are two entirely different things, though they both have to do with the same game.

Some nouns are one-of-a-kind names: **Suez Canal**, **Elvis Presley**, **Empire State Building**. Also called **proper nouns**, they are capitalized to set them off from general nouns. Sometimes **adjectives** (words that describe nouns) are also capitalized. This normally happens when the adjective is made from a proper noun, especially a place or person: **American literature**, **English countryside**, **Elizabethan theatre**.

Proper nouns are contrasted with common nouns (naming words for general classes of things which contain many individual examples). In fact many of the nouns that we consider proper are still names for more than one individual, as with the name of a model of car (like **Ford Escort** or **VW Beetle**, which might have been produced in the millions). Like the abstract-concrete distinction, the common-proper categories may originate in Platonic philosophy, which contrasted the many things in the real world with unique ideal originals of which they are imperfect copies. It is of more practical concern, since it is meant to inform the written representations of words (whether or not to use an initial capital). Unlike German (which uses a capital for all nouns) or Norwegian (which never does), English has a mixed and inconsistent system which changes over time, and which is confused by the individual tendencies of writers. One problem is that a descriptive phrase (like **the second world war**) can become petrified into a title, so that we write **Second World War** or **World War Two**. And Queen Juliana is or was **the queen of the Netherlands**, but Queen Elizabeth II is, to many of her subjects, simply **the Queen**, or even **The Queen**. In these cases, the "correct" forms are not universally standard for all writers of English, but more a matter of publishers' house styles.

Many introductions to English grammar for schoolchildren are to blame for presenting this common-proper distinction as if it were very straightforward - by referring only to well-behaved kinds of proper noun, such as personal names or the names of cities, rivers and planets. In such introductions the distinction is introduced chiefly to lead onto instruction about the use of capital letters in writing such nouns.

Nouns are used in different ways: **The dog barks**. **The man bit the dog**. In the first case, dog is the actor, or the one that initiates the action of the verb. In the second, dog is acted upon. In **The dog barks**, dog is the **subject** of the verb. In the other sentence, dog is the **object** of the verb.

Sometimes a noun is the indirect object of a verb: **He gave the dog a bone**. **Bone** is the direct object; it is what was given. Because it was given **to** the dog, **dog** is considered the **indirect** object of the action.

Nouns can also be objects of **prepositions** - words like **to, in, for, and by** - so the above sentence could read: **He gave a bone to the dog.** The words **to the dog** are called a **prepositional phrase**.

Some verb forms take nouns as objects: **Drinking milk is good for you.** In this sentence, **milk** is the object of the verbal form **drinking**. Such a combination of verb and noun is called a **verbal phrase**.

Nouns can show possession: **The dog's collar is on the table.** The collar is possessed, or owned, by the dog. All possession does not indicate ownership, however. In **The building's roof is black,** the roof is on, but not owned by, the building. Adding an apostrophe and an **s** to a noun shows possession ('): **the cat's tongue, the woman's purse.** If the noun is plural or already has an **s**, then often only an apostrophe need be added: **the mothers' union** (that is, a union of many mothers). The word **of** may also be used to show possession: **the top of the house, the light of the candle, the Duke of Wellington.**

Pronouns

There are several words that are used to replace nouns. They are called **pronouns**. **Pro** in Greek means "for" or "in place of".

Personal pronouns

Some pronouns are called **personal pronouns** because they take the place of specific names of persons, places, or thing, as in: **Has Fred arrived? Yes, he is here.** Here **he** is the personal pronoun that replaces **Fred**. As indicated in the table, there are both subject and object personal pronouns as well as those that show possession. In **His house is the white and green one,** **his** is a personal possessive pronoun.

Personal pronouns: subjects, objects and possessives			
Singular	Subject	Object	Possessive
First person	I	me	my, mine
Second person	you	you	your, yours
Third person	he, she, it (one)	him, her, it (one)	his, her, hers, its (one's)
Plural	Subject	Object	Possessive
First person	we	us	our, ours
Second person	you	you	your, yours
Third person	they	them	their, theirs*

*Some authorities give **my, your, his, her, our, your** and **their** as **possessive adjectives** or **pronominal adjectives**, as they qualify nouns.

Some personal pronouns are formed by the addition of **-self** or **-selves** as a suffix: **myself, ourselves, yourself, himself, herself, itself, and themselves.**

Demonstrative pronouns

Some pronouns - **this, that, these, those** - refer to particular people or things: **This is mine, and that is yours.** These are **demonstrative pronouns**. The demonstrative words can also be used as adjectives: **this house, those cars.**

Indefinite pronouns

Pronouns that refer to people or things in general are called **indefinite pronouns**. Like the demonstrative pronouns, they can be used as adjectives: **another day, both animals, many weeks.**

Relative and interrogative pronouns

The words **who, whose, whom, that, which, and what** are called **relative pronouns**. (The word **that** can be a demonstrative or a relative pronoun.) They create relative clauses in a sentence: **The committee, which met last night, discussed your report.** The words **which met last night** form a relative clause that describes the subject of the main clause, **the committee**.

Sometimes a relative pronoun is used as the subject of a question such as **Who ate the pizza?** Here it is classed as an **interrogative pronoun**. **Interrogate** means "ask" (questions).

Verbs

Verbs are the action words in a statement. They tell what is happening - what a noun is doing or what is being done to it, or the state of being, becoming, thinking or feeling. A verb with a subject, which will be in a particular tense is a **finite verb**. Without a subject it will be the **infinitive** form (for example, **to think, to dream**) or a **gerund** (the present participle, used as a noun: **smoking is bad for you**).

When a verb denotes what a noun is doing, the noun is said to be the **subject** of the verb: **The man speaks**. When the verb denotes what is being done **to** a noun, the noun is the **object** of the verb: **The man eats jelly**. The noun **jelly** is the **direct object** of the verb. Verbs can also take **indirect objects**: **Parents give children toys**. In this sentence, **toys** is the direct object, (what is given) and **children** is the indirect object. The parents do not give children but toys.

Verbs that take objects are called **transitive verbs**, and those that normally do not take an object are **intransitive verbs** (but note that an intransitive verb may be used transitively in non-standard speech or writing). Some common transitive verbs are: **tell, give, show, eat, buy, take, and see**. Some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive: **Tell a story** (transitive), and **Time will tell** (intransitive). Verbs like **sleep, walk, rest, come, and go** are nearly always intransitive. The most common verb of all, **to be**, is intransitive in all of its forms: **am, are, is, was, were, and been**.

Tenses (time signals): Verb tenses tell the time when an action takes place. Any action or condition may be in the past, present, or future: **he was, he is, he will be**. Most common verbs simply add an **-ed** to show the past time, or form the past tense, as it is normally called. Thus **walk** becomes **walked**. Other verbs, sometimes called **irregular** (or **strong**) verbs, do not add **-ed**. Instead they undergo an internal change: **sing, sang, sung; fly, flew, flown; go, went, gone**.

Auxiliary verbs: In the sentence **She will sing even though he cannot stay**, the verbs **will** and **cannot** are called **auxiliary**, or helper, verbs. Other auxiliary verbs are the **incomplete** or **modal** verbs: **can, could, may, might, shall, should, and would**.

The various forms of the verb **to be** can also be used as auxiliaries: **I am going**. **He was singing**. **They have been shopping**. The verb **have** - and its other forms **has** and **had** - are also common auxiliaries to indicate past action.

Participles: The verb form used with auxiliaries is the **participle**. There is a **present participle**, **talking**, and a past participle, **talked**. Thus, a person can say either **I talk** (present tense) or **I am talking** (present continuous) to show present action and **I talked** (imperfect), **I have talked** (perfect), or **I had talked** (pluperfect) to show past action. When a present participle is used with an auxiliary verb, the purpose is to show continuing or ongoing action. **She is doing the laundry**. **He was speaking when someone interrupted him**. Note that this uses a present participle with a past tense auxiliary verb (**was**) to indicate continuous **past** action.

Verb flexibility: Verbs and verb forms can be used in a number of ways in sentences. A verb can be the subject of a statement (**To walk is good exercise**) or its object (**I like to walk**). In each case, the infinitive form **to walk** is used as a noun. Participles can be used in the same way: **He likes swimming**. **Flying is great sport**. In the first sentence, **swimming** is the object of the verb, and in the second, **flying** is the subject.

Verb forms can also be used as adjectives, or words that describe nouns. In **a wrecked car**, the word **wrecked** is a past participle used as an adjective.

Occasionally a verb form or verb phrase can be used as an adverb: **He was pleased to meet her**. The phrase **to meet her** modifies the adjective **pleased**.

Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are descriptive words, sometimes called **modifiers** because they restrict meaning. They add detail to statements. The difference between the two is that adjectives modify only nouns, pronouns, and verb forms used as nouns; adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

Adjective function: An adjective may be a single word: **blue, tall, funny, warm**. As a single word, it may come before the noun - **the blue sky** - or after the verb - **the sky is blue**. Adjectives may be positive (**tall**), comparative (**taller**) or superlative (**tallest**). **Adjective phrases** usually follow the noun they describe: **the girl with blond hair**. The phrase **with blond hair** describes **girl**. **Adjective clauses** also usually follow the noun: **The child who finds the most Easter eggs wins**. The clause **who finds the most Easter eggs** modifies **child**.

Adverb function: The most common use of an adverb, of course, is to describe verbs: **He ran quickly**. Actually, however, adverbs can modify anything but nouns or verb forms used as nouns. Typically adverbs express:

- **time** (now, then)
- **manner** (happily, easily)
- **degree** (less, more, very)
- **direction** and **place** (there, up, down)
- **affirmation** or **negation** (certainly, not)
- **cause** and **result** (thus, consequently), and
- **qualification** or **doubt** (however, probably).

Although many adverbs are formed by adding **-ly** to adjectives (**quick, quickly; happy, happily**), adverbs have no characteristic form. They must be identified by the function they perform in a sentence. In the sentence **That is a fast car**, **fast** is an adjective. But in **He ran fast**, it is an adverb.

Certain adverbs (*how, when, where, why, whenever, and wherever*) are called **relative adverbs** because they introduce relative clauses in a sentence: *The keys are upstairs where you left them.* The clause *where you left them* modifies the adverb *upstairs*.

Other adverbs are called **conjunctive adverbs** because they join one clause with another. Some of these adverbs are: *therefore, accordingly, besides, furthermore, instead, meanwhile, and nevertheless*. In the sentence *He was tired; therefore he stayed home*, the word *therefore* modifies the clause of which it is a part and connects that clause to the previous part of the sentence. Note that *therefore* is not to be used as a conjunction, hence the semi-colon.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are joining words: they connect words, phrases, or entire clauses. There are two general kinds of conjunctive words: **coordinate** and **subordinate**.

Coordinate conjunctions join elements that are grammatically the same: two or more words, two equivalent phrases, or two equivalent clauses. The most common coordinate conjunctions are: *and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet*.

- *Red and white* (two equal words joined in a phrase).
- *Taking walks and looking at nature* (two equal phrases in a relative clause).
- *She ran to the corner, but she missed the bus* (two equal clauses in a complete sentence).

A **correlative conjunction** is a special kind of coordinate conjunction. It connects equivalent elements, but it works in pairs of words: *both, and; either, or; neither, nor; whether, or; not only, but also*.

- *He wants both money and power.*
- *Neither money nor power matters.*
- *Either she will go, or she will stay.*

Subordinate conjunctions. While coordinate conjunctions connect equal grammatical elements, subordinate conjunctions introduce dependent or conditional clauses.

- *Although she has money, she buys few luxuries.*
- *Because he was late, he missed the train.*
- *After the movie is over, we shall have dinner.*

Other word uses. Words that operate as conjunctions can often be used in other ways: as adverbs, prepositions, adjectives, or even pronouns.

- *We have met before* (*before* is an adverb).
- *Before they leave, let us have dinner* (*before* is a conjunction).

There are other words besides conjunctions that serve as connectors (or connectives) in sentences. The relative pronouns *who* and *which* are often so used.

- *That is the man who was speaking to her.*
- *The dessert is strawberries, which give him a rash.*

Some of the conjunctions work both as adverbs and conjunctions in the same sentence. This is often true of *consequently, however, therefore, and nevertheless*.

- He was ill; nevertheless he went to work.
- She disliked work; consequently she lost her job.

Note the semi-colon (;). This is standard here but is non-standard before **but** or **and**. (This appears to be changing, as speakers and writers treat words like **nevertheless** as conjunctions.)

It is possible to make clauses with conjunctions into separate sentences, especially when writing for literary effect.

- He did it. And he was glad.
- Stay away from here. Unless you want trouble.

In the second case the clause is so obviously dependent that it would not stand alone as a sentence and make sense. It can only be written that way for emphasis or some other effect.

Prepositions

Prepositions are words or groups of words that introduce phrases; and these phrases modify some element in a sentence. What follows a preposition is normally a noun, pronoun, or noun clause. A word that follows a preposition is its object, and, in the case of pronouns especially, this affects the form of the word.

- He walked near her (never He walked near she).
- He gave them to her and me (never He gave them to she and I or He gave them to her and I).

One of the problems in spotting prepositions in a sentence is that many of the words that are usually prepositions can also be used as adverbs.

- He never saw them before (here **before** is an adverb).
- They sat before the counter (**before** is a preposition, and the whole prepositional phrase serves as an adverb, modifying **sat**).

Parts of speech: a summary

- **Noun:** A noun is a name for someone or something. It can be someone or something in particular, or someone or something in general.
- **Pronoun:** A pronoun is a substitute for a noun or a noun phrase.
- **Verb:** A verb is the action word in a statement. Some verbs link the subject to a noun, pronoun, or adjective.
- **Adjective:** An adjective is a modifier. Usually it modifies, or makes more exact, the meaning of a noun or pronoun.
- **Adverb:** An adverb is a modifier. Usually it modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.
- **Conjunction:** A conjunction is a connector. A coordinate conjunction connects words or groups of words that are grammatically the same. A subordinate conjunction connects a subordinate, or dependent, clause to a main clause.
- **Preposition:** A preposition is a connector that introduces a prepositional phrase. It usually connects a noun or noun phrase to the part of the sentence modified by the whole prepositional phrase, and it shows the relation between the two.

Modern language scientists have devised other categories of word in relation to syntax, which you should know. A few of these are explained in the table below.

New word classes

- **Auxiliary:** A word whose function is to assist the main verb in a clause to express basic grammatical contrasts such as person, number and tense. The **primary auxiliaries** are forms of *be, have, do*. The **modal auxiliaries** are such verbs as *may, might, should*.
- **Connective:** A word which links language units, such as conjunctions and some adverbs
- **Determiner:** A word which co-occurs with a noun to show meanings such as number, quantity or identity (*the, some, each*)
- **Head:** The main element in a phrase; it may be pre- or post-modified
- **Intensifier:** Traditionally classed as an adverb; a word which adds force or emphasis to a qualifier (*extremely stupid, very cleverly*)
- **Modifier:** Word or phrase which gives more information about the head element in a phrase (*All the beautiful* (pre-modification) *fish* (head) *in the ocean* (post-modification))

Syntax and syntactic structures

Parts of speech, or word categories, indicate what words usually do, or may be expected to do. Some of these categories - such as nouns and pronouns - make sense when we consider words in isolation. Others - such as conjunctions or prepositions - only make sense within a longer structure, a **phrase, clause** or **sentence**.

Note that these three terms are traditional, and do not easily describe how strings of language work. All are broad categories. The sentence, especially, is much more characteristic of written than of spoken English, and of formal rather than informal usage. Alternatively, we may say that spoken English contains sentence types not usually found in writing.

The internal grammar of phrases, clauses and sentences refers to the principles (sometimes mistakenly called "rules") of structure and organization. Be aware of the tension between model structures devised for textbooks and guides for learners of the language, and the syntax of **real** sentences (those you have found in speech or writing), which you are subjecting to analysis.

A **phrase** is a useful all-purpose name for any short sequence of words (or even a single word, considered as an element in the structure of a clause or sentence), especially a grouping which could be replaced by a single word. A phrase which works like, or equates to, a noun is a **noun phrase**, one which qualifies a verb is an **adverb phrase** and so on.

A **clause** may be short or long, but must contain at least one main, finite verb. A short clause may in fact be identical with a verb phrase: the two terms reflect differences of emphasis or analysis in regard to the language string in question. If you are analysing a sentence, you will look first for clauses; if you wish to see how words have been combined in simple sequences, you will look for phrases. Phrases are especially important for analysing spoken data, and some kinds of written text (such as advertisements or information leaflets) where (written) sentence forms are not considered essential.

Phrases

Noun phrases

The **noun phrase** (NP) is the main construction which can be the **object**, **subject** or **complement** of a clause. It must contain a noun or noun-like word (such as a pronoun) which is the main element, and which is called the **head**. It may contain other elements, either before or after the head. These could include **predeterminers**, **determiners**, **postdeterminers**, **premodifiers** and **postmodifiers**. The examples in the table below show how noun phrases can grow in length, while their structure remains fairly clear.

Noun Phrases						
<i>Noun phrase structure</i>						<i>Verb phrase</i>
Predeterminer	Determiner	Postdeterminer	Premodifier	Head	Postmodifier	(not part of noun phrase)
				Buns		are for sale.
	The			buns		are for sale.
All	the		currant	buns		are for sale.
Not quite all	the		currant	buns		are for sale.
Not quite all	the		hot tasty currant	buns		are for sale.
Not quite all	the		hot tasty currant	buns	on the table	are for sale.
Not quite all	the	many	hot tasty currant	buns	on show on the table	are for sale.
Not quite all	the	very many	fine hot tasty currant	buns	which I cooked	are for sale.

Adjective phrases

These are usually formed from an **intensifier**, followed by the **head** (an adjective, shown in bold below). Examples include **very happy**, **not too awkward**, and **cold enough**. They may also be formed from an adjective and a verb construction, such as **easy to please**, **loath to do it**.

Adverb phrases

These are intensifying expressions formed from an **intensifier** (optional), followed by the **head** (an adverb, shown in bold below), followed by a **postmodifier** (optional). Examples would be: **terribly slowly**, **very happily indeed**, **exceptionally carefully**, **completely utterly dangerously**, **quite often** and **very soon**.

Prepositional phrases (adverbials/adjectivals)

These are formed from the **head** (a preposition, shown in bold in the examples), followed by a **noun phrase**. Examples of prepositional phrases are **in the teapot**, **on the bog**, and **round the bend**.

- They may be called **adverbials** since their usual function is to qualify a verb in the same way as an adverb does. You can test this by replacing a given prepositional phrase with an adverb - for

example: Fred swam in the river and Fred swam swiftly. Both of these are grammatically standard forms.

- They may also function as adjectives: the pirate with the wooden leg.

Pronoun phrases

These are restricted to a small number of constructions, and are sometimes regarded as a minor type of noun phrase. They are formed from a head (a pronoun, shown in bold below) with a pre- or postmodifier. Examples would be: Silly **me!** You **there!** **she** herself, **we** all, nearly **everyone**, and such relative clause types as **those who knew Fred**.

Verb phrases

These are quite simple syntactically, although the verb in them may contain important grammatical information, such as **tense, number, active or passive voice** and so on. (All of these are explained above in the section on word categories). One or more auxiliaries may precede the **head** (a verb participle, shown in bold below). Examples would be: **has died, may have gone, might have been listening**. You may be puzzled by the simplicity of these models. Don't be. In order to explain the more complex function of verbs in the predicates of sentences (what they say about their subject), we use the structural model of the **clause**.

Sentences and clauses

In the syntax of English and other modern European languages, such as Dutch, French, German or Italian, the two most important structures are almost certainly **clauses** and **sentences**. Please note that:

- the sentence as we know it, is **not** found in all languages
- the sentence is not a **necessary structure** in natural language
- many written texts and most spoken data are **not organized into regular sentence forms**

Before you look at descriptions of either structure, you may wonder why they appear together in the heading above. This is because neither makes sense without the other. Writers of language textbooks may put either of them ahead of the other, depending upon whether their structural model builds (or **synthesises**) smaller structures into larger ones ("bottom up") or **analyses** larger structures into smaller ones ("top down"). This is explained at the start of this guide, and briefly again below, under the heading **Building or analysing?** This guide places clauses before sentences, in keeping with its "bottom up" or synthetic approach. You should try to explain the subject with both **synthetic and analytic** models.

Clauses

We can understand a clause in several ways. Simply it can be seen as **a verb and the words or phrases which cluster round it**. Professor Crystal (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p. 449) describes it as "**a structural unit smaller than a sentence but larger than phrases or words**". The problem here is that in some cases a clause may appear identical with a sentence or phrase, but the term we use tells us about a different structural feature. A more difficult explanation to follow is that a clause is **a syntactic unit consisting of a verb, together with its associated subject, objects or complements and adverbials**. Note that the only obligatory ("must have") elements are the subject and the **verb** (usually, but not always, in this order). So before you can go further, you need to know about these different **clause elements** (parts of the clause).

Clauses and clauses

You may have met the term **clause** in other contexts - it is used to identify short passages within longer ones (such as paragraphs) in such texts as legal or parliamentary documents. The writers of these will often construct artificial sentences which are broken into a series of clauses, so that these can be named. This allows us to write such things as "**Paragraph x, clause y of the Sale of Goods Act, 1979 protects consumers.**" Here **clause** identifies the unit of syntax (and its meaning or semantic content) but may not in every case exactly match the models explained here or in grammatical reference works.

Clause elements

These are well worth learning about, as you will certainly want to use them to explain the syntax of language data you are studying in exams or investigations. If you are not able to describe or identify clause types, it is usually acceptable and always helpful to consider how these elements work together. You may use them to explain how sentences work, also. They are:

- **subject (S), object (O), verb (V), complement (C), adverbial (A)**

Subject

- The subject is a noun or noun phrase, pronoun or subordinate clause.
 - **The dog was sick. Fred felt funny.** (n)
 - **Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.** (NP)
 - **I am happy. They are jealous.** (pn.)
 - **What she said is untrue.** (sub.clause)
- In this kind of analysis a series of noun phrases is a single clause element.
- Pronouns used as subject are in the subject case (**I, she, they** not **me, her, them**)
- The subject controls singular-plural verb agreement (**You go; she goes**) and agreement of reflexive pronoun objects (**I injured myself; they amused themselves**)
- A subject is usually present in a clause, but it may be omitted in non-standard (especially spoken) structures (**Drinks like a fish. Gets here when?**) or imperatives (**Listen to this**).

Object

- Objects usually follow the verb. They may be **direct** or **indirect**.
 - **Direct object: Fred bit his thumb. The chimpanzees groomed each other.**
 - **Indirect object: Jane gave the gorilla a kiss. Jane gave a kiss to the gorilla.** (Note that here there is also a direct object = a kiss)
- Just as with subjects, they may be nouns, noun phrases, pronouns or subordinate clauses.
- Just as subjects are, pronouns are in the appropriate (object) case (**me, her, them**).
- As above, reflexive pronoun objects agree with their subjects (**They amused themselves**).
- But **unlike** subject, the object has no effect on agreement of verb.

Verb

- This is the central and obligatory element. A clause **must** contain **at least one verb phrase**, which **may** be **a single verb**: **Jesus wept. They are drowning. The cow jumped over the moon.**
- The choice of verb will largely determine what other elements are in the clause.
- The verb usually has a subject. A transitive verb is one which takes a direct object. (Strictly this is a tautology since **transitive** = "taking a direct object")

Complement

- **Complement** (verb) means "go with". (Do not confuse with **compliment**). In clause syntax, the **complement** is anything which adds to the meaning of the subject (**subject complement**) or object (**object complement**).
- **Subject complement** usually follows the verb. The most common verb for a subject complement is the verb **to be**, but some other verb may be substituted where the meaning of **be** is expressed. These are called **copular** (= linking) verbs or simply **copulas**. In the examples complements are in bold, copular verbs underlined: She **is** a doctor. That **smells** heavenly. The students **are feeling dazed and confused**.
- **Object complement** usually follows the direct object: Football **makes me very happy**. The voters elected Clinton **president of the USA**.

Adverbials

- These clause elements add to or complete the meaning of the verb element. They may be **single adverbs**. But they also include **nouns, noun or verb phrases** and **subordinate clauses**: They ran **quickly**. He went home **twice nightly**. We walked **on the playground**. My girlfriend phoned me **this morning**. I was happy **when I saw her again**.
- Adverbials may appear in several positions in the clause, but are most common at the end: Often I dream. I often dream. I dream often.
- Adverbials may perform different functions:
 - Adding information: I walked **quietly**.
 - Linking clauses: The bus was full. **However**, Fred found a seat.
 - Adding a comment on what is expressed: **Quite frankly** we disapprove of violence.
- Some verbs (like **put**) must have an adverbial to complete their meaning: Please **put the gun down**. The path runs **around the field**.

Vocatives

- These are optional elements used to show the person to whom a sentence is addressed. They may occur in various positions in the clause. They include names, titles, evaluative labels, the pronoun you and certain kinds of clause: **John**, it's me. It's me, **darling**. Hello, **Susan**, how are you? **You daft girl**, what do you mean? **Honey**, I shrank the kids. Come out, **whoever you are**. Come in, **ladies**, and sit down. **Madam Speaker**, I will give way.

Clause types

- Clause elements combine to form **clauses**. The number of patterns is small. According to David Crystal (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p. 221) there are only seven basic types.
 - S + V: I / yawned
 - S + V + O: Fred / opened / the door
 - S + V + C: The dinner / is / ready
 - S + V + A: Dick Whittington / went / to London
 - S + V + O + O: Romeo / gave / Juliet / a kiss
 - S + V + O + C: Henry / got / his feet / very wet
 - S + V + O + A: Sam / put / the bottles / in the cellar
- We can vary these patterns using **directives** (such as advising, instructing or commanding): **Turn left at the junction**. **Help yourself to a drink**. **Go to hell!** **You be quiet**.

- We can also vary the patterns through **pro-forms** (words which replace long constructions) and **ellipsis** (omitting an understood element).
 - **Pro-forms:** I've got a lovely cold drink and you've got one as well. (Here **one** is the pro-form, understood to mean a lovely cold drink.)
 - **Ellipsis:** I'd like to drink some tea, but I won't. (Here **drink some tea** is understood to follow but I won't.)

Building or analysing?

These are contrasting ways of organizing the same theoretical model. We may either **analyse** long structures (and find the smaller elements in them) or think of how smaller elements are **combined** to form longer structures. The second approach has been seen as akin to what really happens in speech and writing (**phrase structure grammar**). Noam Chomsky argues that real language users start with longer structures and alter these by means of transformations (**transformational grammar**). For example, a model or paradigm with an **active** verb is changed by a transformational rule into a structure with a **passive** verb.

To understand the contrast in these approaches, see the table at the start of this guide to structure. The two approaches are shown in simple form below:

- **"Bottom up"/synthetic model:** morpheme → word → phrase → clause → sentence
- **"Top down"/analytic model:** sentence → clause → phrase → word → morpheme

Clause functions and sentence structures

Coordinate clauses

The simplest sentences may contain **a single clause**. (**Simple** is a standard description of one kind of sentence.) Where a sentence contains more than one clause, these **may** be considered of equal grammatical importance. If this is so, these are **coordinate clauses**. They are joined by a **coordinating conjunction**, such as **and** or **but**. (Some grammarians call the first clause of the sentence the **main clause**, and the others coordinate clauses). Here are some examples. Apart from the conjunctions (**or**, **so** and **and**, everything else is a main/coordinate clause):

- You can travel by tube, you can drive or you can take the train.
- The weather was hot, so I went on my bike.
- Lucy opened her window, and in came Count Dracula.

Subordinate clauses

Sometimes the clauses are placed in a hierarchy: the more important ones are **main clauses**, while the less important are **subordinate clauses**. A main or coordinate clause could stand on its own as a sentence, **but a subordinate clause works only within a sentence**. A subordinate clause can do the job of other clause elements. It can work as **subject**, **object**, **complement** and **adverbial**, as in these examples:

- **Subordinate subject clause:** **What you say** is stupid.

Clause as subject = **What you say**; main clause = **X is stupid**, verb = **is**

- **Subordinate object clause:** I did not know **that you were here**.

Clause as object = **that you were here**; main clause = **I did not know X**; verb = **did not know**

- **Subordinate complement clause:** Your first job is **learning this grammar**.

Clause as complement = **learning this grammar**; main clause = **Your first job is X**; verb = **is**

- **Subordinate adverbial clause:** Come round **when you're ready**.

Clause as adverbial = **when you're ready**; main clause = **Come round (X)**; verb = **Come**

Clauses that function as **subject**, **object** or **complement** replace noun phrases, so they are called **nominal clauses**. Those that function as **adverbs/adjectives** are **adverbial/adjectival clauses**.

Some other kinds of nominal clauses are shown below. For clarity, they are all shown in object position. This is not the only place where they may occur, but is the most common.

- **That clause:** I think **(that)** you know each other. (That may be omitted if understood.)
- **Wh- clause:** I know **what** you did last summer. (Clause introduced by **who**, **when**, **what**, **why**, **whether**.)
- **-ing clause:** I don't recall **seeing** her there. (Clause introduced by present participle.)
- **inf. clause:** I wish **to confess** to my crimes. (Clause introduced by **to** + infinitive.)

Adverbial clauses

These are introduced by a **subordinating conjunction**, which explains the adverbial meaning of the clause. These include **when/before/after/while** (time); **because/since** (reason); **if/unless/lest** (condition), as in these examples:

- **When the bell sounds**, you may leave the room.
- We cannot send you the goods, **because we are out of stock**.
- **Unless you are good**, Father Christmas will bring you nothing.

Two minor types of adverbial clause are **inf.** and **-ing** clauses.

- **Inf. clause:** I went to the shop **to buy some bread**. (Clause introduced by **to** + infinitive.)
- **-ing clause:** Jane broke her arm **while fighting**. (Clause introduced by present participle.)

Adjectival clauses

A familiar type is the **relative clause**, introduced by a **relative pronoun** (**who**, **whom**, **whose**, **that**, **which**), as in these examples:

- Here is the woman **(whom)** I married.
- This is the book **(which)** I am reading.
- The drink **(that)** I most like is orange juice.

The relative pronouns are in brackets, as they may be omitted if understood.

Two minor types of adjectival clause are **-ing** and **-ed** clauses.

- **-ing clause:** The train now **standing** at platform four is the 5.30 to Leeds.

- -ed clause: She is the celebrity pursued by the press.

Since past participles do not all end in -ed we may find other verb forms in such clauses: The tea drunk by the students or the exam taken by the pupils.

Clause elements may be **single words** of the appropriate category, they may be **phrases** or even some kinds of **subordinate clause**. Explaining even simple structures is difficult. Verbal explanations are less easy to make than diagrams. These work best when there is a hierarchical level, as **sentences** are analysed into **clauses**, which are further analysed into (more clauses and) **phrases**, which are analysed into **words**, which are analysed into **morphemes**.

In an exam, you are very unlikely to be required to analyse long sequences. Use **clause analysis** (or phrase analysis) selectively, to establish some point about language acquisition (learning to make or understand structures), about language and society (how structures embody social attitudes to language), language change (how structures or paradigms change over time) or stylistics (how structures embody style).

The sentence

Sentence types

In many respects, **sentences** can be analysed in the same terms as clauses, that is separating the elements into the categories of **subject, object, verb, complement** and **adverbial**.

However, sentences are also described in terms of:

- how clauses are arranged
- functions of the sentence
- traditional patterns which are used for particular effects in speech and writing

Clause structures in sentences

The most basic sentence form contains a single clause. This is known as a **simple** sentence:

- Mary had a little lamb.
- Chocolate is delicious.
- Down fell the rain.

A **compound sentence** joins two coordinate clauses together:

- Mary had a little lamb and took it to school.
- I drank some tea and felt better.
- Here is a wug and here are two wugs.

A **multiple sentence** links clauses of essentially similar type, with coordinating conjunctions.

- I came home, sat down, put the kettle on, lit the fire and sat down with a book.

A **complex sentence** uses **subordination** to link clauses. It is not necessarily very "complex" in the everyday sense (that is, difficult to analyse), but it may be:

- I hope that she will come.
- Lest you forget, here is my address.
- Having played football, I sat in the bath, while the kettle boiled, thinking of how to spend the evening, which loomed before me promisingly.

Functions of the sentence

This is a simple kind of classification. Sentences are traditionally categorized into four types: **statement**, **command**, **question** or **exclamation**. These are readily illustrated by examples (note alternative names).

- **Statement** or **declarative**: This is my porridge.
- **Command**, **wish**, **imperative** or **directive**: Go and never darken my doors again.
- **Question** or **interrogative**: Who's been eating my porridge?
- **Exclamation**: How happy I feel!

Other sentence types

David Crystal (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p. 218) notes some other categories. Among these are:

Tag questions

Here a statement is turned into a question, with an interrogative tag at the end. Tags are typical of speech where the speaker changes the function of the sentence in mid-utterance:

- Jolly nice day today, isn't it?

Exclamatory questions

Here the structure is that of a question, but the meaning (indicated in speech by intonation) equates to an exclamation:

- Didn't she do well? Have I got news for you?

Rhetorical questions

Again the structure is that of a question, but the speaker (or writer) expects no answer. They are used as emphatic statements:

- How on earth should I know? Is the Pope a Catholic? Do bears crap in the woods?

Directives

These are akin to imperatives, but Crystal expands the category to include related functions of **instruction**, **direction** and so on. He lists: **commanding**, **inviting**, **warning**, **pleading**, **suggesting**, **advising**, **permitting**, **requesting**, **meditating**, **expressing wish** or **imprecation**. Crystal notes that many use the verbs **let** and **do** in non-standard ways:

- Let me see. Let's go. Let us pray.
- Do come in. Do be quiet. Don't do that again.

Echoes

These sentences of a special kind, which reflect the structure of a preceding sentence from a different speaker in a language interaction (usually conversation):

- **Echo of statement:** A: It took me five hours to get here. B: Five hours to get here?
- **Echo of question:** A: Have you seen my wife? B: Have I seen your lice?
- **Echo of directive:** A: Sit down there. B: Down there?
- **Echo of exclamation:** A: What a plonker! B: What a complete plonker!

Special or minor sentence types

Professor Crystal (*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, p. 216) records some unusual types of sentence, which cannot be analysed in a regular way. They are found in particular kinds of text and discourse - some are common in real speech or fictional dialogue, while others are found in such things as headlines or slogans, where a message is presented as a block of text. They do not follow all the rules of normal grammar, such as verb agreement. Among the types noted by Crystal are:

- **Formulae for set social situations:** Cheers, Hello, Ciao, See you, How do you do? Ta!
- **Emotional or functional noises (traditionally interjections):** Hey! Ugh! Agh! Ow! Tut! Shh! (Note how such forms are subject to change over time. Consider Tush, eh, hein?)
- **Proverbs or aphorisms:** Easy come, easy go. Least said, soonest mended.
- **Short forms as used in messages, instructions or commentaries:** Wish you were here. Shearer to Beckham. Simmer gently. Hope you are well.
- **Elliptical words or phrases with a structural meaning equivalent to a complete exclamation, question or command:** Brilliant! Lovely day! Coming? Drink? All aboard! Drink up!

Structure and style in sentences

For purposes of analysing style, sentences may be described as **loose**, **balanced** or **periodic**.

Loose sentence

Here the writer or speaker states fact after fact as they occur, seemingly freely and artlessly, as in the opening of *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*:

“I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull: he got a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade, lived afterwards at York, from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznoer; but by the usual corruption of words in England, we are now called, nay we call ourselves, and write our name Crusoe, and so my companions always called me.”

Balanced sentence

Here the writer or speaker has a concern for symmetry - the second half of the sentence contains a similar or opposite idea to the first half. These techniques are very effective in persuasion, and are sometimes known as parallelism or antithesis. Consider this from Francis Bacon (1561-1626):

“Children sweeten labours, but they make misfortunes more bitter: they increase the cares of life, but they mitigate the remembrance of death.”

Or this from Viscount Grey of Fallodon, on the eve of the First World War:

“The lamps are going out all over Europe: we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”

Or, finally, this, spoken by President John F. Kennedy:

“Ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country.”

Periodic sentence

Here the climax of the sentence comes at its end. A good example is in the opening of Edward Gibbon's 18th century [Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire](#):

“It was in Rome, on the 15th of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.”

Studying Language: sources of information

A comprehensive bibliography is published by AQA/NEAB. You and your teachers will use some of the reference works on this list. In addition you may make use of any of the following sources of help.

Dictionaries are an excellent source of information. The best of these give etymologies, identify word classes, record standard and non-standard words and show variant spellings. Some modern dictionaries use a language corpus to indicate words among the thousand (or other number) most commonly used. [The Oxford English Dictionary](#) (OED) and [The Shorter Oxford Dictionary](#) are the traditional authorities, but there are excellent dictionaries published by Chambers, Longman, Collins, Cambridge and others.

The most comprehensive reference works are [The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language](#) and [The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language](#) by David Crystal. The former can often be purchased at a discount by joining a book club. At the opposite extreme an excellent introduction to traditional grammar can be found in Dorothy Paull's [The Ladybird Book of Spelling and Grammar](#).

Broadcast material can also be helpful, and some is available on video or audio-tape from the broadcasters. This includes Professor Jean Aitchison's 1996 Reith Lectures for BBC radio: [The Language Web](#), and Robert McCrum's TV history: [The Story of English](#). A long-running radio series, which investigates a comprehensive range of language issues is R4's [Word of Mouth](#).

For a very full explanation of syntax, especially the function of the independent main clause, see Shirley Russell's [Grammar, Structure and Style](#) (OUP, Oxford, 1993; ISBN 0-19-831179-6)

The World Wide Web has a huge range of sites dedicated to language use, too many to list here. Very helpful are translation engines (most browsers or search engines have these) which will alter a given text into English (or a different variety of English). The Web also, of course, will give you access to the language departments of many academic institutions.