

Plain English Campaign: Basic grammar – parts of speech

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Basic grammar – parts of speech

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Basic grammar – parts of speech

Grammar is the system and structure of a language. The rules of grammar help us decide the order we put words in and which form of a word to use.

When you're talking about grammar, it's useful to know some basic terms. The following are called **parts of speech** and they each have their own function.

Verbs

Verbs are often known as 'doing words'. They can also show 'having' or 'being'.

For example:

- The horse **jumped** the fence.
- The rider **had** a fall.
- The rider **is** not hurt.

Nouns

Nouns are the names of people, places, things and ideas. There are four kinds of noun.

- Common nouns – dog, computer, river, biscuit
- Collective nouns (names of a group of something) – a **herd** of cows, a **flock** of sheep
- Proper nouns (the names of people, places and so on) – London, Anne, Plain English Campaign
- Abstract nouns (names of things we can't see or touch) – love, hope, fear, decision, poverty

Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns.

For example:

- She wore a **blue** dress.
- The **small** dog barked at me.
- A **cool** breeze made her shiver.

Adverbs

Adverbs give us extra information about how, where or when a verb happens. For example:

- He drove **slowly**.
- She spoke **loudly**.
- The article is **well** written.

- **Pronouns**

Pronouns are usually small words which stand in place of a noun, often to avoid repeating the noun. They include words such as I, you, he, we, hers, they, it.

Prepositions

Prepositions come before nouns or pronouns and usually show a connection.

For example:

- Your pen is **on** the desk.
- The children went **to** the park.
- We rested **under** the tree.
- Jim hid **behind** the door.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions link words, sentences or parts of a sentence together.

- The rug is blue **and** cream.
- The road was busy. **And** it was loud.
- I closed the door **but** I didn't lock it **because** I thought she was still inside.

Articles

There are two kinds of article: definite and indefinite.

The definite article is 'the'. It is used to identify a specific thing.

The indefinite article is 'a' and 'an'. It is used to refer to something in general.

For example:

- **The** cat sat on **the** mat. (We know which cat and which mat.)
- I need **a** ruler. (We do not need a specific ruler, any will do.)
- **The** car would struggle to get up **a** hill. (We can identify which car, but are referring to any hill.)