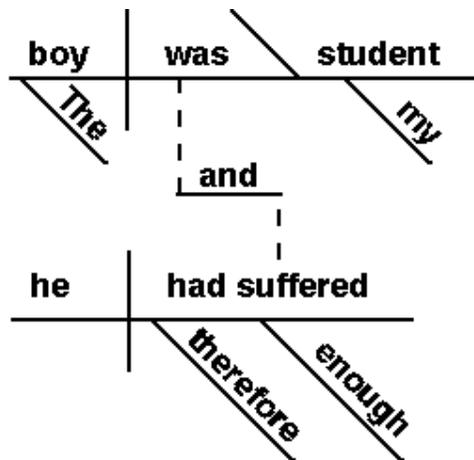# GRAMMAR 101

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LESSON #4

Parts of Speech I

Introduction

For some people, *grammar* strikes horror in their hearts. Their memories flash back to sentence diagramming in school, struggling to remember which word went on which line.

Maybe you are like me and have no problem identifying the parts of speech in a sentence, but knowing where to put words in their "proper" place on this jungle gym of a diagram was another thing altogether. I'm thankful that this model of identifying parts of speech is on the decline. I never saw the practical purpose in using this model to teach students sentence diagramming. Too much of the focus, at least for me, was on figuring out where the words go rather than the words' functions within the sentence. Yet there are those who are sad to see this model fade away into disuse. They see it as the "picture of language" or the "geometry of a sentence." I never like to be rude, but in this case, I say good riddance!

When I taught my children grammar, I used the model below that makes more sense because the sentence remains linear and the focus is on the parts of speech and their function rather than word placement:

The boy was my student, and he had suffered enough.
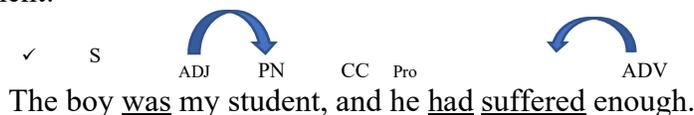
This is the breakdown of the parts of speech:
The = article
boy = noun functioning as the subject
was = verb
my = adjective, modifies (describes) student
student = noun functioning as the predicate nominative (renames the subject: *boy*)
, and = conjunction
he = pronoun functioning as the subject
had suffered = verb phrase (the main verb is *suffered*, with helping verb *had*)
enough = adverb, modifies the verb phrase

You may wonder how we'll approach identifying parts of speech in this lesson. Will I make you diagram sentences? No, I won't, but the truth is, grammar consists of rules concerning sentence syntax. It applies to all eight parts of speech, including the function of nouns and phrases within sentences. It is inevitable that you will encounter numerous tangles of sentences you will be expected to unravel and correct. Unless you understand English grammar and how it works, you cannot analyze the problem and then find the solution. (If you want to know how to diagram sentences, I recommend Denise Loock's Sentence Diagramming 101.)

Also, we will discuss a few "rules" that were never rules, just the biases of self-proclaimed experts of the English language.

You may not have heard the terms *descriptive grammar* and *prescriptive grammar*, but you will encounter the concepts as you edit. Both sides of this grammar coin have proponents and opponents; both arguments have their strengths and weaknesses.

> Descriptive grammar looks at the way a language is actually used by its speakers and then attempts to analyze it and formulate rules about the structure. Descriptive grammar does not deal with what is good or bad language use; forms and structures that might not be used by speakers of Standard English would be regarded as valid and included. It is a grammar based on the way a language actually is and not how some think it should be.

> Prescriptive grammar lays out rules about the structure of a language. . . . It deals with what the grammarian believes to be right and wrong, good or bad language use; not following the rules will generate incorrect language. (http://www.usingenglish.com/glossary.html)

Your task as an editor is to know when to follow established rules, when to let the author break a few rules, and when to ignore grammar myths. It's a balancing act between the needs of the author, publisher, and readers.

This brief list includes only a few of the grammatical errors you must identify and correct:
Subject and verb disagreement
Case and number

Failure of the pronoun to clearly refer to the intended antecedent
Sentence fragments and run-ons
Misplaced modifiers
Number disagreement
Lack of parallelism
Usage

Of course, you must be able to detect when a word or phrase is used incorrectly, and then you must fix it. The bottom line is that to do your job as an editor, you must have a thorough knowledge of grammar.

Some words function as more than one part of speech, depending on their use within the sentence.

Sometimes I'd like to be a *fly* on the wall. (noun)
I love to *fly* in airplanes. (verb)

Although grammar applies rules of verbal and written composition, we can't forget that language is always in a state of flux, which affects the rules that govern it. New words and phrases are added to our language as technology and other fields develop. Then we must decide how to spell the new words. Is it *e-mail* or *email*? Is it *Website*, *Web site*, or *website*? Consider also the functional shift of words or even neologisms. (See *CMOS* 5.24.) For example, Google is a search engine—a noun. But who hasn't read, written, or said *to google*, *googling*, or *googled* and knew what it meant? (Note: Google is a trademark name. To use it as anything else other than the search engine [noun] violates trademark protection.)

So let's begin reviewing the eight parts of speech, accessing *CMOS* as we go. I'll comment on common difficulties that *Chicago* does not mention or explain well. I've included the location numbers. Please study these and become familiar with them.

Nouns (*CMOS* 5.4–26)

A noun is a person, place, thing, or idea. A noun has case (the relationship between the noun and other words in the sentence) and number (singular and plural). (It also has gender, but English doesn't use masculine, feminine, or neuter endings as do other languages.) Nouns function as subjects, predicate nominatives, objects of prepositions, direct objects, indirect objects, appositives, and direct address and can be replaced with pronouns. Phrases and clauses can function as nouns. We have several types of nouns: common and proper, abstract and concrete, collective and compound.

Let's review noun functions because we'll be using these terms throughout this lesson.

The **subject** is what or who the sentence is about. It states who is doing the action of the verb.

The girl jumps. (*Girl* is the subject; *jumps* is the verb.)

A **predicate nominative** is the noun in the predicate (the part of the sentence that contains the verb) that renames the subject. A sentence can have a predicate nominative only when the verb is a helping or being verb.* If the verb is an action verb, there will be no predicate nominative.

> The girl is a teenager. (*Girl* is the subject; *is* is a *be*-verb; *teenager*, predicate nominative, renames *girl*.)

**Be*-verbs: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been
Helping verbs: have, has, had, do, does, did, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must, can, could

The **object of the preposition** is the noun, noun phrase, or pronoun that follows a preposition and completes its meaning.

> The cat ran up a tree. (*Up* is the preposition. If the sentence stopped there, you wouldn't fully understand this sentence, but when you add *a tree*, the meaning is complete. *Tree* is a noun and functions here as the object of the preposition. It is in the objective case.)

The **direct object** receives the action of the verb. Though not all sentences containing action verbs include direct objects, the sentence cannot have a direct object without an action verb.

> The girl kicked the ball. (*Girl* is the subject; *kicked* is the action verb.) Ask "The girl [sentence subject] kicked [action verb] whom or what?" The answer to the question is the direct object: *ball*.

The sentence contains an **indirect object** *only* if it also contains a direct object (which means the verb will be an action verb). But even if the sentence contains a direct object, it doesn't mean the sentence will also have an indirect object.

> The girl told Mom a story. (Follow the formula above to identify the direct object then add to the formula "to or for whom?" The answer will be the indirect object.) "The girl told whom or what? Story [direct object]." "The girl told a story to or for whom?" Mom. *Mom* is the indirect object.

An **appositive** renames or explains the noun or pronoun that precedes it. It can be in the subject or predicate of the sentence, and the type of noun has no bearing on it. Appositives are often nonessential, so they are set off by commas.

> The spider, a black widow, built a web in the corner. (*Black widow* renames *spider*.)
> The pyramid was built for Hatshepsut, the only female pharaoh. (*Pharaoh* explains *Hatshepsut*.)

A noun of **direct address** simply identifies who is being spoken to.

> Harry, hand me the dictionary. (*Harry* is being addressed—spoken to—and is set off by a comma.)

Pronouns (*CMOS* 5.27–67)

Pronouns replace nouns and sometimes other pronouns and can function as nouns. Antecedents are the words pronouns replace. Sometimes a pronoun can be used without a stated antecedent—as long as it's clearly understood.

Pronouns are divided into six classes: personal, demonstrative, interrogative, relative, indefinite, reciprocal, and adjective (*CMOS* 5.38). Most pronouns can function in more than one class. It all depends on its use in the sentence.

Personal pronouns refer to the speaker (I, me, we, us, my, mine, our, ours), the person spoken to (you, your, yours), and the person spoken about (he, she, it, they, him, her, them, his, hers, its, their, theirs).

Demonstrative pronouns point to the person or thing referred to (this, that, these, those).

Interrogative pronouns ask (who, whom, whose, which, what).

Relative pronouns introduce dependent clauses (who, whom, which, when, where, whose, that).

Indefinite pronouns don't point to a person or thing and don't usually have antecedents (each, each other, neither, one, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody, someone, somebody, both, few, several, many, some, any, none, all most).

Reciprocal pronuns show a relationship between elements: each other and one another.

Adjective pronouns show possession and the thing being possessed must follow the adjective pronoun (my, your, his, her, its, our, your [plural], their). (See *CMOS* 5.38 for more.)

Ellipticals

No, I don't mean an exercise machine; rather, I'm referring to a kind of structure within a sentence. Quite simply, an elliptical construction refers to a word or phrase implied by the context but omitted to avoid repetition. *CMOS* 5.46 mentions "elliptical construction" when using "than" or "as . . . as" in comparisons. To show comparison requires either a nominative case or an objective case pronoun—depending on the meaning of the sentence. I've seen the incorrect case used too many times in published works, so learn the distinction.

> He likes running better than I. (Meaning: He likes running better than I [like running]. *Like running* is the elliptical. The comparison is between how he likes running and how I like running.)

> He likes running better than me. (Meaning: He likes running better than he [likes me]. *Likes me* is the elliptical. The comparison is between how he likes running and how he likes me.)

Singular They

Read 5.48 in *CMOS*. Though you may see the following construction often in casual writing, and even hear it spoken, "singular they" is not grammatically correct. That being said, its use is becoming more acceptable in formal writing.

> **Wrong:** The child must learn to mind his manners. (Wrong if the child is female.)
> **Wrong:** The child must learn to mind their manners. (*Child* is singular; *their* is plural.)
> **Correct:** The children must learn to mind their manners. (*Children* and *their* are both plural.)

You will find other ways to fix the gender neutrality problem in *CMOS* 5.255.

Who *or* Whom*?*

Let's discuss the *who-whom* conundrum. Essentially, *who* is a nominative case pronoun and *whom* is an objective case pronoun. These pronouns can stand alone as well as introduce phrases and clauses. The big question is when to use *who(ever)* and when to use *whom(ever)*. The key is knowing its function within the sentence. If it is used as a subject (who is doing the action of the verb), appositive (renames the noun before it), or predicate nominative (renames the subject), use *who(ever)*. If it is used as a direct object (the noun that receives the action of the verb), indirect object, or object of the preposition, use *whom(ever)*.

> *Who* is going to the store? (subject, so nominative case)
> Give this package to *whoever* asks for it. (subject of the clause "whoever asks for it," nominative case)
> Give this package to *whomever*. (object of the preposition, objective case)
> Summer is the girl *whom* you met yesterday. (See explanation below.)

This last construction trips up most people. A simple way to test whether to use *who* or *whom* is to replace *who* or *whom* with another fitting pronoun. Whichever case that pronoun is will tell you which form (*who* or *whom*) to use. In our example, we'll replace *whom* with *she* and *her* and move it back into the clause:

> **Wrong:** You met *she* yesterday. (*She* is in the nominative case.)
> **Correct:** You met *her* yesterday. (*Her* is in the objective case—direct object.)

As you quickly see (or hear if you read the first example aloud), *she* is just wrong, but *her* is the correct case. So the objective case *whom* should be used.

Dependent Clauses

In Lesson 1, we discussed restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and how to punctuate them. Let's do a quick review, because pronouns come into play.

A restrictive clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence and does not take a comma, but a nonrestrictive clause is not essential to the meaning and, therefore, requires a comma. In other words, a nonrestrictive clause could be eliminated without changing the sentence's intent.

Dependent clauses beginning with *that*, *who*, *whom*, *which*, *whose*, *when*, and *where* are called relative clauses, and we distinguish them in the same way we do restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses.

> Trees *that* are not deciduous stay green year-round. (*That* restricts "trees" to only those that are not deciduous—no comma.)

> People *who* are power hungry don't care about others. (*Who* restricts people to only those who are power hungry—no comma.)

> Trees, *which* are either evergreens or deciduous, provide shade, food, and fuel. (*Which* makes the statement true of all trees—the clause is set off with commas.)

> My aunt, *who* will soon turn ninety-nine, is throwing a party. (*Who* sets off a clause that either renames the subject or noun preceding it or gives additional information about the noun—removable, set off with commas. You may recall also that if a comma is used in a situation like this, it indicates that I have only one aunt. If I had more than one aunt, I would not set off the clause with commas.)

Adjectives (*CMOS* 5.68–96)

If you have a strong background in grammar, this section will likely be a review of what you already know. But pay particular attention to phrasal adjectives (5.92), which often require hyphenation. A phrasal adjective is sometimes called a unit modifier.

Do not hyphenate phrases used as nouns in regular grammatical constructions.

> **Wrong:** Knowing how-to-study helps students retain important information.
> **Correct:** Knowing how to study helps students retain important information.

Phrases used as attributive adjectives (adjectives that come before the nouns they modify) typically require hyphenation: life-and-death struggle.

If the phrasal adjective is hyphenated, make sure no part of it is left without a hyphen, and be careful not to include a hyphen between the last modifier and the noun.

> **Wrong:** do-or-die-proposition
> **Correct:** do-or-die proposition

Check the hyphenation guide, *CMOS* 7.89, as well as *MW* to help you with hyphenation. If the phrase is hyphenated, then write it as such. If there's no chance of misreading, you can choose not to use hyphens. Flip over to *CMOS* 6.80 for examples of when to use an en dash in place of hyphens in compound adjectives. Use an en dash when one element is an open compound (New York–Chicago bus line) or two elements are already hyphenated (Italian–English-Irish ancestry).

When you have more than one adjective modifying a noun, you must know when to use a comma to separate them and when to leave out the comma. One way to help you know whether

to use a comma is to reverse the order of the adjectives. If you can reverse the order, use a comma; but if they are fixed adjectives (require a definite order), do not use a comma.

Reversible: The dirty, floppy hat.
The floppy, dirty hat.
Fixed: The beautiful diamond ring. (You wouldn't say or write: The diamond beautiful ring.)

Be aware of the royal order of adjectives. Adjectives fall into nine categories. When multiple adjectives work together to modify a noun, their "category" determines whether or not to separate the adjectives with commas (we touched on this in Lesson 1). The categories are the following:[1]

- Determiner—articles (a, an, the), possessives (your, his, her, my, their, our), number (ten, several, some), demonstratives (this, that, those, these)

- Observation or Opinion—cold, ugly, tasty, heroic, retired, carefree, enthusiastic, soft, opinionated, priceless

- Size—huge, minuscule, petite

- Shape—square, oblong, circular

- Age—ancient, old, young

- Color—green, gray, yellow

- Origin—British, Albanian, Hawaiian

- Material—wooden, velvet, plastic, aluminum

- Qualifier

Commas do not separate adjectives of different categories.

The *ugly red* house is mine.

Use commas between adjectives within the same category.

The *red, white, and blue* dress is my favorite.

Summary

Editors and proofreaders must know the parts of speech and how each one functions within a sentence. In this first lesson on parts of speech (part two is next), we covered nouns, pronouns, and adjectives (including when to hyphenate adjectives as well as the royal order of adjectives). We also discussed ellipticals, singular *they*, and how to determine when to use *who* or *whom*.

We'll cover the remaining parts of speech in the next lesson.

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Note:

1. Beth Hill, "Keeping Adjectives in Line," *The Editor's Blog*, November 2, 2017, https://theeditorsblog.net/2014/04/08/keeping-adjectives-in-line/.

LESSON #4 ASSIGNMENTS

Access the Lesson 4 Assignments file.