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Parts of Speech

Parts of speech are the basic building blocks of language. They include nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. In this chapter, each part of speech is deﬁned, and its function in a sentence is discussed.

A good dictionary is an invaluable aid in understanding the pronunci- ation, grammatical function, spelling, and various meanings of different parts of speech. Figure 1.1 highlights the information that a dictionary offers.

An up-to-date dictionary should be part of any reference library. Con- sult it often for answers to questions about spelling, grammar, or usage.

main entry showing word division

word origin

**1ab•nor•mal** \(’)ab-”no•r-m@l, @b-\ *adj* [alter. of F *anormal*, fr. ML *anormalis*, fr. L *a-* + LL *normalis* normal] (ca. 1836)

: deviating from the normal or average : UNUSUAL, EXCEPTIONAL <~ behavior> — **ab•nor•mal•ly** \-m@-l e¯\ *adv*

pronunciation

part of speech (adjective)

deﬁnitions with examples

other parts of speech formed from the word (adverb)

FIGURE 1.1 Sample Dictionary Entry

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###### 3

Nouns

A noun refers to a person, place, or thing (objects, concepts, ideas, or events).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Person** | **Place** | **Thing** |
| ballplayer | stadium | glove |
| child | school | education |
| conductor | theater | performance |
| manager | company | excellence |

*Proper, Common, and Collective Nouns*

Proper nouns are capitalized and name speciﬁc persons, places, or things. Common nouns identify general categories and are not capitalized, even when used with proper nouns (IBM machines, Minolta cameras). Collec- tive nouns refer to a group of people, animals, objects, or other units.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Proper** | **Common** | **Collective** |
| Texas A&M | university | trustees |
| Google | company | management |
| Julia Roberts | woman | movie cast |
| Nemo | ﬁsh | school |
| U.S.S. *Enterprise* | ship | ﬂeet |

### *Functions of Nouns*

Nouns can be used as the subject, direct object, and indirect object of a verb; as the object of a preposition; and as an adverb or adjective. Nouns can also show possession.

**Subject:** The **mail carrier** always rings twice.

**Violets** are spring ﬂowers. (tells *who* or

*what* does or is something)

**Direct object:** I ﬁnally sold my **car**. (tells *what* is sold)

**Indirect object:** Harold fed the **cat** another olive. (tells *to*

*whom* he fed the olive)

**Object of preposition:** She gave directions over the **phone**. (tells

*what* is the object of the preposition *over*)

**Adverb:** The train leaves **today**. (tells *when*)

**Adjective:** The **ofﬁce** building faces the mall. (tells

*what kind*, *which one*)

**Possession:** The **parrot’s** cage needs cleaning. My **father’s** brother is my uncle. (shows *ownership* or *relationship*)

### *Plural Nouns*

Most nouns can be made plural by adding *s* to the singular form. For other plural forms such as *es* and *ies*, see the section on Plurals on page 126.

**Singular Plural**

highway highways

bagel bagels

base bases

**Collective Nouns.** Collective nouns can be singular or plural depending on how they are used. When the group acts as a unit, the noun is consid- ered singular. When the group acts as individual members, the noun is plural.

**Singular:** The **management agrees** with the new president.

**Plural:** The **management have** expressed different views.

**Singular:** The **family is** celebrating three birthdays this month.

**Plural:** The **family are** taking separate vacations.

For a more complete treatment of plural nouns, including compound and hyphenated nouns, see the section on Plurals on page 126.

### *Possessive Nouns*

*Possessive nouns* are used to indicate ownership or relationship.

**Singular Possessive.** To form the possessive of singular nouns, add *’s* to all nouns. (For a complete discussion of the apostrophe used to indicate possession, see page 57.)

**Singular Singular Possessive** boy the boy’s iPod hurricane the hurricane’s path

**Plural Possessive.** To form the possessive of a plural noun that ends in *s*

or *es*, add an apostrophe to the end of the word.

**Plural Plural Possessive**

sons my sons’ children

ships the ships’ escorts

For nouns that form the plural any other way, add *’s* to the end of the word.

**Plural Plural Possessive**

children children’s toys

women women’s shoes

men men’s suits

**Singular or Plural?** To decide whether to place the apostrophe before or after the *s*, follow this simple rule: rephrase the sentence substituting an *of phrase* for the possessive noun to determine if the noun is singular or plural.

The (team’s, teams’) colors were on display.

**Of Phrase Possessive Form** colors of the team (singular) team’s colors colors of the teams (plural) teams’ colors

**Individual and Joint Ownership.** To show individual ownership, make both nouns in the sentence possessive. To show joint ownership, make only the *ﬁnal* noun possessive.

**Individual ownership:** Mark’s and Arlene’s cell phones were

stolen. (Each person had a cell phone that was stolen.)

**Joint ownership:** Mark and Arlene’s cell phone was stolen.

(The cell phone belonged to both Mark and Arlene.)

In individual ownership, the noun following the possessive is generally plu- ral (cell phones). In joint ownership, the noun is usually singular (cell phone). Look for this clue when deciding whether to use joint or individ- ual possessive forms.

Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of one or more nouns or a group of words in a sentence. Like nouns, they can be used to refer to a person, place, or thing.

The coach described several key plays. **He** wanted the team to memorize **them**. (*He* replaces *coach*; *them* replaces *several key plays*.)

My car, which is in the garage, is getting too old for these winters. I should sell **it**. (*It* replaces *my car*, *which is in the garage*.)

The word or phrase that the pronoun replaces is called the *antecedent* of the pronoun. In the previous sentences, *coach* is the antecedent of *he*, while *my car*, *which is in the garage*, is the antecedent of *it*. (See more about antecedents on page 11.)

Pronouns are classiﬁed as *personal*, *intensive/reﬂexive*, *indeﬁnite*, *pos- sessive*, *relative*, *interrogative*, and *demonstrative*.

### *Personal Pronouns*

Personal pronouns can be used in a variety of ways. They serve as the sub- ject of a sentence, as the object of a verb or preposition, to show posses- sion, to provide emphasis (called *intensive* pronouns), or to refer action back to the subject (called *reﬂexive* pronouns).

**Subject: She** is simply too good to be true.

**Object:** Tell **him** the parakeet died. (object of verb)

Break the news to **him** gently. (object of a preposition)

**Possessive: Your** hands are warm. Where did **my** glasses go?

**Intensive:** The quarterback **himself** changed the call. (The pronoun *himself* emphasizes the subject *quarterback*.)

**Reﬂexive:** Jane taught **herself** to use the scanner. We made the reservations **ourselves**. (The pronouns *herself* and *ourselves* refer the action back to the subjects.)

### *Case of Personal Pronouns*

Personal pronouns have three cases: nominative (subject), possessive, and objective (object of verb or preposition). The following table shows the personal pronouns in all their case forms—including the intensive/reﬂex- ive forms—for the ﬁrst person (*I, we*), second person (*you*), and third per- son (*he, she, it, they*).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Person** | **Case** | **Singular** | **Plural** |
| First | nominative | I | we |
|  | possessive | my/mine | our/ours |
|  | objective | me | us |
|  | intensive/reﬂexive | myself | ourselves |
| Second | nominative | you | you |
|  | possessive | your/yours | your/yours |
|  | objective | you | you |
|  | intensive/reﬂexive | yourself | yourselves |
| Third | nominative | he/she/it | they |
|  | possessive | his/her, hers/its | their/theirs |
|  | objective | him/her/it | them |
|  | intensive/reﬂexive | himself/herself/itself | themselves |

### *Indeﬁnite Pronouns*

Indeﬁnite pronouns refer to unspeciﬁed people or things. Many indeﬁnite pronouns express some idea of quantity: *all, several, few, none*. Following is a list of the most commonly used indeﬁnite pronouns.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| all | each | most | other |
| another | either | neither | several |
| any | everybody | nobody | some |
| anybody | everyone | none | somebody |
| anyone | few | no one | someone |
| both | many | one | such |

The board of directors needed a new president for the company. They appointed **someone** from outside the ﬁrm. (*Someone* replaces *new president*.)

Do you have any fantasy novels in your library? Yes, we have a **few**. (*Few* replaces *fantasy novels*.)

### *Possessive Pronouns*

*Possessive pronouns*, unlike possessive nouns, never take an apostrophe. As shown in the table on page 8, the possessive forms are *my/mine*, *our/ours*, *your/yours*, *his/her*, *hers/its*, *their/theirs*. The pronoun *who* also has a pos- sessive form, *whose*.

**Whose** gym shoes are on the ﬂoor?

I thought **my** wallet was lost, but the one Jameel found was **mine**. **Our** vacation starts next week.

Those four suitcases are **ours**. How can we get **your** dog to obey? Is this **yours**?

Jerry Seinfeld never seems to lose **his** timing.

You have to take either **her** car or **theirs**. **Hers** is better. The lawyers knew **their** client was probably guilty.

**Possessive Pronouns vs. Contractions.** People often confuse posses- sive pronouns with pronoun-verb forms that sound exactly like them (*its/it’s*, *whose/who’s*, *your/you’re*, *their/they’re*). To keep the possessive forms straight, remember this easy rule: possessive pronouns never take an apostrophe.

Pronouns that do take an apostrophe are contractions formed by the pronoun and a verb (*it’s* = *it is*; *they’re* = *they are*).

its The shuttle ﬁred **its** engines. (possessive) it’s **It’s** (*it is*) an awesome sight. (contraction) whose **Whose** video game is this? (possessive)

who’s We need to know **who’s** (*who is*) coming. (contraction)

**Who’s** (*who has*) been eating my fudge? (contraction) your Can I use **your** fax machine? (possessive)

you’re **You’re** (*you are*) welcome to try it. (contraction) their The Jaguar is **their** best car. (possessive)

they’re **They’re** (*they are*) the top racing team. (contraction)

**Possessive Pronouns and Gerunds.** Gerunds are verb forms ending in *ing* that are used as nouns. In the sentence *Skiing is a wonderful sport*, *ski- ing* is a gerund used as the subject. If a pronoun precedes the gerund, the pronoun is generally in the possessive form.

Bill told me about **his snowboarding** down a mountainside. She liked **my calling** her before I came over.

**Her winning** the lottery stunned us all.

The exception to this rule occurs when the pronoun follows verbs such as *see*, *hear,* and *watch*. In that case, use the objective form of the pronoun.

We didn’t see **him leaving** the house.

The whole neighborhood heard **us playing** Nirvana.

### *Relative Pronouns*

*Relative pronouns* can be used to avoid repeating the noun within a sen- tence. They are particularly helpful when one clause is embedded in another, because they keep both clauses grammatical.

The relative pronouns *who*, *whom*, and *whose* refer to people and ani- mals, while *which* and *of which* refer to things. *That* can refer to people or things.

This violin, **which** he learned to play as a child, is a valuable instrument. (Using *which* avoids repeating the noun—*This violin, the violin he learned to play*.)

The woman **who** bought the suit returned it the next day. (*The woman she* would be ungrammatical.)

### *Interrogative Pronouns*

The interrogative pronouns *who, whom, whose, what*, and *which* introduce questions. *Who, whom*, and *whose* indicate that the question refers to a per- son or animal; *what* refers to an object, idea, or event; and *which* can indi- cate either a person or thing.

**Who** called last night?

**What** is your earliest memory?

You can have a latte or a café mocha. **Which** do you want?

### *Demonstrative Pronouns*

*Demonstrative pronouns* generally indicate nearness to or distance from the speaker, either literally or symbolically. *This*, *these*, *that,* and *those* usually refer to a speciﬁc noun, pronoun, or clause. However, sometimes the ref- erence is to a general class of people or objects rather than to a speciﬁc antecedent.

**This** is my driver’s license, and **that** is my credit card. (The driver’s license is closer at hand.)

I don’t envy **those** stuck at the airport tonight. (*Those* has no speciﬁc antecedent but refers to a general class of people: anyone stuck at the airport.)

### *Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement*

The antecedent, as mentioned previously, is the word or phrase to which a pronoun refers. Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in person, case, and number.