Parts of Speech

Parts of speech are words or phrases categorized by grammatical function. The most common are **nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions,** and **prepositions**. This handout contains basic definitions and examples of different parts of speech and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Nouns

A noun names a **person, place, thing, or idea**.

Common Nouns

Common nouns name **general** people, places, things, or ideas and are not capitalized.

> **Common Nouns:** doctor, library, bridge

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns name **specific** people, places, things, or ideas and should be capitalized.

> **Proper Nouns:** Dr. Wynn, the Library of Alexandria, the Golden Gate Bridge

Pronouns

Pronouns **replace nouns** to avoid repetition. They usually replace nouns that directly precede them.

> **Example:** Mike crashed *his* car the day *he* got *it*. (*He* and *his* refer to *Mike*; *it* refers to *car*.)

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns relate clauses to the word(s) the clauses modify. *That*, *what*, and *which* are used with things; *who*, *whom*, and *whose* are used with people; and *where* is used with places.

> **Example:** He sold the computer *that* broke. (*That* describes *computer*.)

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns show **ownership**. They include words such as *my*, *mine*, *your*, *yours*, *his*, *her*, *hers*, *its*, *our*, *ours*, *their*, and *theirs*.

> **Example:** Yuki's husband just lost *his* keys. (*His* refers to *Yuki's husband.*)

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns take the place of **nouns that have not been named** at all. They refer to **non-specific** things. Some common indefinite pronouns include *all*, *any*, *each*, *few*, *none*, *one*, *several*, and *something*.

> **Example:** *Someone* moved *everything* out of the room. (*Someone* and *everything* refer to unnamed, non-specific nouns.)

Verbs

Verbs express **action** or show a **state of being**. There are two types of verbs: action verbs and auxiliary or helping verbs.

Action Verbs

Action verbs show some kind of activity or state of being.

> **Example:** Kathy *worked* all day and *was* tired. (*Worked* is an action, and *was* shows state of being.)

Helping Verbs

Auxiliary or helping verbs provide context and functionality, generally as part of a verb phrase. Helping verbs often indicate tense and tone.

> **Example:** That dog *was* chasing the ball. (*Was* shows tense and when the chasing happened.)

Adjectives

Adjectives **modify nouns or pronouns** to provide description and context. Adjectives answer questions such as *What kind?, How many?, Which one?,* or *Whose?*

> **What kind:** *warm* soup, *striped* shirt, *blue-green* cars
> **How many:** *ten* apples, *some* people, *many* rocks
> **Which one:** *the smartest* student, *that* backpack
> **Whose:** *Jamal's* house, *the baby's* toy

Adverbs

Adverbs **modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs** to provide description and context. Adverbs answer questions such as *How?, When?, Where?,* and *To what extent?* Adverbs often use an *-ly* ending.

> **How:** Paolo skis *gracefully*.
> **When:** I'll take out the trash *now*.
> **Where:** You ran *upstairs*.
> **To what extent:** Xiao plays the guitar *very well*.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are **words that connect** other words, phrases, and clauses within a sentence.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* [FANBOYS]) link words, phrases, and clauses.

> **Example:** She wanted to go to the party, *but* I wanted to stay home and read.

Correlative Conjunctions

Correlative conjunctions are always used in **pairs** (*both . . . and, neither . . . nor, either . . . or, not only . . . but also*) and connect words, phrases, and clauses.

> **Example:** *Neither* Utah *nor* Wyoming was mentioned.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions **show relationships** of time, reason, purpose, or condition between two clauses.

> **Example:** She was upset *because* her friend moved away.

Prepositions

Prepositions indicate and clarify relationships within a sentence. Prepositions are used to illustrate **location, time, or other relationships** and are almost always followed by a noun (the object of the preposition).

> **Location:** Brian stood *outside* the door. (*Outside* describes the space in which Brian stood.)
> **Time:** I showered *before* going to work.
> **Other Relationship:** Lawson cut the apple *with* a knife.