

Glossary of Grammatical Words and Terms

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Introduction¹

In this publication, we provide an explanation of grammatical terms. You might also like to read “*Elements of Style*”, the classic 1918 book on writing by William Strunk (our publication number 550).

This glossary is limited to grammatical terms but we publish several other glossaries as well – check our website or call us for details.

Glossary of Grammatical Terms

- **Abbreviation** - many long words, especially those that we use a lot, are shortened; a word that has been shortened is an abbreviation. For example, Ad/Advert = Advertisement or Flu = Influenza.
- **Accent** -
 - 1: an articulative effort giving prominence to one syllable over adjacent syllables.
 - 2: a mark used in writing or printing to indicate a specific sound value, stress, or pitch, to distinguish words otherwise identically spelled, or to indicate that an ordinarily mute vowel should be pronounced.
- **Acronym** - a kind of abbreviation. It is a word formed by taking letters from a phrase that is too long to use comfortably. For example, Laser is an acronym of Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. If the letters do not make a word, but are pronounced individually, as in the CIA or the BBC, it can be called an initialism.
- **Acrostic** - a poem where the first letter of each line form a word or phrase when read together.
- **Active** - asserting that the person or thing represented by the grammatical subject performs the action represented by the verb. In the last sentence, the subject "person or thing" performs the action "perform", so the sentence is in the active voice. In the last sentence, the subject "subject" performs the action "perform", so the sentence is also in the active voice.
- **Adjective** - a word that serves as a modifier of a noun to denote a quality of the thing named, to indicate its quantity or extent, or to specify a thing as distinct from something else. It answers the questions "which?", "how many?", and "what kind of?"
- **Adverb** - a word serving as a modifier of a verb, an adjective, another adverb, a preposition, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence, and expressing some relation of manner or quality, place, time, degree, number, cause, opposition, affirmation, or denial. It answers the questions "where?", "when?", or "how?"
- **Affix** - a Morpheme added to a word to change its function or meaning. There are three basic ways to do this:
 - Prefix - by adding a morpheme to the beginning of a word: Possible can be made negative in meaning by adding im-: impossible.
 - Suffix - by adding -ly to the end of many adjectives, the adverb can be formed: cheerful- cheerfully.
 - Infix - some languages add morphemes to the middle of the word, but this system is rarely used in English, except in expressions such as “Fan-freaking-tastic”, known as tmesis.
- **Allegory** - where a narrative is used symbolically to suggest something else; a journey could be used allegorically to suggest a person's journey through life, etc.
- **Alliteration** - the use of words beginning with the same letter to achieve a poetical effect. For example, Shakespeare (Macbeth) “Good things of day begin to droop and drowse.”
- **Allomorph** - a different form of a Morpheme. The regular Simple Past ending is -ed. In the verb 'advised' the ending is pronounced /d/, but in 'walked' it is pronounced /t/ and in 'wanted' it is pronounced /i:d/. A verb ending in -e, like 'hire' only takes -d. These are different forms of the same thing; they are allomorphs of the simple past tense ending.
- **Allophones** - An allophone is a different form of the same sound or Phoneme.
- **Anadiplosis** - a rhetorical device where a word or phrase at the end of a sentence or phrase is repeated at the beginning of the next sentence or phrase.
- **Anaphora** - Words or phrases like pronouns are anaphora when they point backwards to something earlier in the text. For example, “Helen needed the book and asked me to hurry up with it.” Here, it is anaphoric because it refers back to the noun book. The term is also used for the repetition of words or phrases for rhetorical effect. For example, “We shall not give in; we shall not falter; we shall not surrender”. Here, the repetition of we shall not is anaphoric.

- **Antimetabole** - a rhetorical device where a word or a phrase in one clause or phrase is repeated in the opposite order in the next clause or phrase. For example, "The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence".
- **Antonym** - a word that means the opposite of another. For example, 'fat' is an antonym of 'thin', likely / unlikely, entity / nonentity or decent / indecent.
- **Apodosis** - a term for the main clause in a conditional sentence. For example, "If you tried it, you'd probably love it." The apodosis is "you'd probably love it" and "if you tried it is the protasis" (if clause).
- **Aphorism** - a remark or sentence, often a definition that conveys the truth about something in a concise and witty way.
- **Apposition** - a grammatical construction in which two typically adjacent nouns referring to the same person or thing stand in the same syntactical relation to the rest of a sentence. For example, in "the rally of the opposition Labour Party", "Labour Party" is in apposition with "opposition".
- **Aspect** - shows whether the action or state in a verb is complete or not: "She's doing a crossword puzzle." (Incomplete- progressive aspect) "They've washed up." (Complete-perfect aspect). The progressive aspect is often called 'continuous'.
- **Articulation** - refers to the production of the different sounds of speech through the use of the speech organs: the larynx, lungs, tongue, lips, jaw, soft and hard palate.
- **Article** - one of a small set of words or affixes (as a, an, and the) used with nouns to limit or give definiteness to the application. English has an indefinite article (a, an) and a definite article (the).
- **Assimilation** - the process of conforming one sound to another to aid in pronunciation. For example, the prefix in- becomes im- in impossible by assimilation to the labial p of possible.
- **Auxiliary verbs** - 'Do', 'Be' and 'Have' are the English auxiliary verbs used in a negative structure, a question or to show tense. Descriptions of English auxiliary verbs.
 - 'Do', 'Don't', 'Does' and 'Doesn't' are used for questions and negatives in the Present Simple Tense, and 'Did' and 'Didn't' are used in the Past Simple Tense.
 - 'Be' is used with the Present Participle in Continuous (Progressive) Verbs. It is also used with the Past Participle in the Passive.
 - 'Have' is used with the Past Participle to form the Perfect Aspect.
- **Case** - an inflectional form of a noun, pronoun, or adjective indicating its grammatical relation to other words. English does not have cases for nouns or adjectives. English has cases for pronouns: I/me/my, he/him/his, she/her/hers, you/you/your and they/them/their are the subjective, objective, and possessive cases, respectively.
- **Cataphora** - Words or phrases like pronouns are cataphora when they point forwards to something later on in the text. For example, "As he was unaccustomed to it, Jake found the pressure very hard to deal with." Here, it is cataphoric because it refers forwards to the noun pressure.
- **Causative verbs** - We use the causative when we do not carry out an action ourselves, but are responsible for the action being performed. For example, "She had her car serviced last week." (She didn't service the car herself, but the car was serviced because of her; she took it to a garage and asked them to do it.)
- **Chiasmus** - a figure of speech in which two clauses are related to each other through a reversal of structures to make a larger point, though the reversal does not have to feature the same words as in antimetabole, which could be considered to be a type of chiasmus. One example often quoted come from Shakespeare's Othello: "Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves." (Act 3, Scene iii). Dotes/loves doubts/suspects are the parallel elements in the sentence, following an ABBA pattern, which is common is simple chiasmus- dotes (A- positive) doubt (B- negative) suspect (B- negative) loves (A- positive).
- **Clause** - a group of words containing a subject and predicate and functioning as a member of a complex or compound sentence.
- **Cliché** - a phrase that is used excessively and has become a bit meaningless and even irritating. For example, "Always look on the bright side of life", "To be or not to be".
- **Collective** - denoting a number of persons or things considered as one group or whole. For example, "flock" is a collective noun. Colligation is a type of collocation, but where a lexical item is linked to a grammatical one. Surprising, amazing and astonishing are nearly synonymous. We can say it is astonishing/surprising/amazing, but we tend to say it is not surprising and not the others- surprising colligates with the negative.
- **Colloquial** – language that is informal

language that is not rude, but would not be used in formal situations. It is less unacceptable than Slang & Swear Words. A colloquialism is an informal expression, that is, an expression not used in formal speech or writing.

- **Comparative** - the degree of comparison in a language that denotes increase in the quality, quantity, or relation expressed by an adjective or adverb. "Sillier" is the comparative form of "silly".
- **Concord** - When words have a grammatical relationship which affects the form of one or more of the elements then they are showing concord. 'They are' shows concord because the plural subject takes the verb form associated with the plural.
- **Complement** - an added word or expression by which a predicate is made complete. For example, "prime minister" is a complement in "they elected him prime minister".
- **Compound subject** - a subject joined together with a conjunction. "Or" or "and" can join together the nouns or clauses. The preceding sentence has a compound subject.
- **Conjugate** - to give in prescribed order the various inflectional forms of something. It is used especially of a verb, in which case it means to give the forms for every person, number, mood, and tense.
- **Conjunction** - a word that joins together sentences, clauses, phrases, or words. There are two kinds of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions (such as "and" and "or") and subordinating conjunctions (such as "but").
- **Consonant** - one of a class of speech sounds characterized by constriction or closure at one or more points in the breath channel. It contrasts with a vowel.
- **Defective** - lacking one or more of the usual forms of grammatical inflection. A defective word is nearly always a verb.
- **Deixis** - Words or phrases that can only be understood from the context of the text or utterance where they are found are deictic. For example, "Tom's interview was about to start and he was feeling nervous about it." Here, from the context, we know that he refers to Tom and it refers to the interview; these are examples of deixis.
- **Diacritic** - a mark added to a letter to change the pronunciation, and it can appear above or below the letter. Modern English does not use diacritics, though è is used in old poetry to show that -ed is to be pronounced as a syllable. Diacritics used in English today come from other languages, so some people write café, which keeps the

original French accent, while others write cafe. Sometimes a diacritic is often maintained even though the pronunciation change is not; many still write Citroën, where the diaeresis indicates that the two vowels should be pronounced separately, though most English speakers pronounce the two vowels as one sound.

- **Dialect** - a variety of a language that is spoken by a group in a particular area or of a social group or class. It can have a different accent and pronunciation, vocabulary and use different grammatical structures.
- **Di(a)eresis** - two dots placed side-by-side over a vowel. The vowel is considered a separate vowel, even though it would normally be considered part of a diphthong.
- **Diglossia** - a language that has two forms, where one is regarded as prestigious and associated with the language of law and government, etc, and the other form is a colloquial vernacular form that is widely used but less prestigious.
- **Digraph** - a series of two letters that constitute a single sound not predicted by combining the two letters. The final two letters of 'digraph' form a digraph.
- **Diphthong** - a gliding monosyllabic speech item that starts at or near the articulatory position for one vowel and moves to or toward the position for another (as the vowel combination that forms the last part of toy).
- **Direct object** - a noun or noun phrase representing the primary goal or the result of the action of its verb. For example, 'direct objects' is the direct object of the sentence "I explained direct objects to you".
- **Direct speech** - used to give the exact words used by another speaker. The words are given between quotation marks (" ") in writing. For example, "I'm coming now," he said.
- **Disjunct** - expresses the speaker or writer's attitude to what is being described in the sentence. For example, "Fortunately, we managed to get there on time." ('Fortunately' shows us that the speaker was pleased about the result of the action.)
- **Disyllabic** - a word that has two syllables. For example, cannot; over; under; forwards; therefore; neither; doctor.
- **Dyad** - Two people speaking is a dyad; the smallest unit of communication. Relationships between people; employer employee, etc., are dyads as well.

- **Ellipsis** - the omission of one or more words that are understood in the context, but which are required to make the sentence or utterance grammatically correct. Ellipsis is also the name of the three dots (...) used as punctuation to show that some written text is incomplete.
- **Epanadiplosis** - the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning and end of a phrase, clause or sentence. For example, "Laugh with those that laugh, and weep with those that weep."
- **Epanalepsis** - the repetition of a word or phrase, but in no particular position as long as there are words between the repetitions. For example, '[They said,] "In three weeks England will have her neck wrung like a chicken." Some chicken; some neck.' (Winston Churchill)
- **Epistrophe** - the repetition of a word or phrase at the end of different phrases, clauses or sentences. For example, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child."
- **Epizeuxis** - the repetition of words or phrases next to each other. For example, "A rose is a rose is a rose".
- **Equative** - the degree of comparison in a language that denotes the same quality, quantity, or relation expressed by an adjective or adverb. "As silly" is the equative form of "silly". English does not have a separate equative form for adjectives.
- **Etymology** - An etymologist studies the origins of words, how their meaning changes and develops over time and how they fall into disuse, etc. This study is etymology.
- **Euphemism** - when you substitute language that is less direct and vague for another that is considered to be harsh, blunt, or offensive. When talking or writing about subjects that we find embarrassing or unpleasant, we often use euphemisms; rather than say that somebody has died, we might say that they "have passed away".
- **Exophoric** – language that points to something outside the language of the text, which is understood in the context. For example, "Take a look at this." Here, 'this' refers to something that the speaker and listener can see and understand, but 'which' has no meaning outside the context- we don't know what this is- exophora.
- **Figure of Speech** - where a word or words are used to create an effect, often where they do not have their original or literal meaning. For example, if someone says that they are 'starving', they do not mean that they are in fact dying of hunger, but that they are very hungry. This is a simple example of a figure of speech, where the word is used to heighten or increase the state that they are describing. A metaphor or a simile are two of the most common forms used.
- **Future perfect progressive** - used for actions that will be unfinished, but have reached a certain stage. For example, "This time next month, I'll have been living here for three years."
- **Future Progressive** - used for actions that will be unfinished at a certain time in the future, or for things that will happen in the normal course of events, rather than being part of your plans and intentions.
- **Gender** - a quality attached to a noun or pronoun that indicates an abstract category of the individuals being referred to. Most English nouns are neuter, and English has singular pronouns that are masculine, feminine, and neuter ("he", "she", and "it", respectively).
- **Gerund** - a verb when it acts as a noun; gerunds can act as the subject or object of a main verb. For example, Studying is good for you. Gerunds are used after prepositions, but not usually after 'to'. The gerund looks identical to the present participle, which is used after the auxiliary verb 'to be', but are not the same as they do not function as main verbs. Gerunds are used after certain words and expressions, as is the infinitive, so it is useful to try to learn which form an adjective, etc., takes. Formation: Base Form + ING. If a verb ends with -e, it loses the last letter before adding the -ing suffix.
- **Homonym** - a word that is written and pronounced the same way as another, but which has a different meaning. For example, 'Lie' can be a verb meaning to tell something that is not true or to be in a horizontal position. They look and sound the same, but are different verbs as can be seen from their forms: Lie-lied-lied (to say something untrue) and Lie-lay-lain (to be in a horizontal position).
- **Homophone** – a word that is spelled differently but sounds the same. For example, "Rain", "rein" and "reign" or "To", "Two", and "Too".
- **Hyperbole** – an overstatement or exaggerated language that distorts facts by making them much bigger than they are if looked at objectively. The media use it a lot to make stories seem more important or interesting than they really are (an apparently unfair boxing decision was described as the "crime of the century" by one newspaper which seems excessive when compared to murder). It may be used to entertain or more seriously.
- **Hypothetical question** - one asked

out of interest, as the answer will have no effect on the situation.

- **Idiom** – a phrase which has a meaning that is commonly understood by speakers of the language, but whose meaning is often different from the normal meaning of the words is called an idiom.
- **Imperative** - grammatical mood of a verb that expresses the will to influence the behaviour of another, expressive of a command, entreaty, or exhortation. In the sentence "Come here!", "come" is an imperative.
- **Indicative** - a set of verb forms that represents the denoted act or state as an objective fact. Most of our speech is in the indicative mood, like this sentence.
- **Indirect object** - a grammatical object representing the secondary goal of the action of its verb. For example, "me" is the indirect object of the sentence "He gave me an example of indirect objects".
- **Indirect Speech** - used to communicate what someone else said, but without using the exact words. The tenses of the verbs are often changed. For example, "He said that he was going to come." (The person's exact words were "I'm going to come.")
- **Infinitive** - usually occurs with 'To'. For example to go, to come, to wear etc., except after an auxiliary or modal verb. It is a verb form that shows no person, tense or aspect. For example, "I had to go". The following verb forms are derived from the Infinitive:
 - Imperative (same as Infinitive but without 'To')
 - Present Simple (same as Infinitive without 'To' but the third person singular takes 's')
 - Present Participle or Gerund (add 'ing')
- **Inflection** - is a system in which words' forms are altered by an affix. Nouns in English can be changed to show plurality, the 3rd person singular of most verbs is inflected by the addition of -s, etc.
- **Interjection** – An exclamatory utterance often standing alone.
- **Intransitive verb** - a verb that does not act on an object. For example, "lobby" is intransitive in the sentence "I lobby for intransitive verbs".
- **Irony** - common in English, especially in humour. When the speaker or writer says one thing but wants you to understand something different, they are being ironic. Sometimes the implied meaning is the opposite of the words being used, or the person could be trying to be rude, even though the words used are seemingly polite etc. For example, Your friend turns up in ripped jeans. With a smirk, you say, "I see you have put on your best clothes! "
- **Irregular verb** - one that does not take the -ed ending for the Past Simple and Past Participle forms. Some irregular verbs do not change; put put put, while others change completely; buy bought bought, etc. Irregular verbs fall into 5 categories: Base Form, Past Simple, Past Participle, 3rd Person Singular, Present Participle / Gerund.
- **Jargon** - the language used by people who work in a particular area or who have a common interest: lawyers, computer programmers, criminals, etc. All have specialised terms and expressions that they use, many of which may not be comprehensible to the outsider. They may also use familiar words with different meanings as well as abbreviations, acronyms etc.
- **Leading question** - one that suggests an answer that implies that there is a proper answer. The term comes from law, where the courts insist that questions that suggest answers are not asked because they restrict the right of witnesses to speak freely.
- **Litotes** - a kind of understatement, where the speaker or writer uses a negative of a word ironically, to mean the opposite. Litotes is to be found in English literature right back to Anglo-Saxon times. For example, "She's not the friendliest person I know." (= she's an unfriendly person)
- **Malapropisms** - Mrs Malaprop was a character in a play by the British writer Sheridan who confused words and used incorrect words that sounded similar to the word she meant to say. If someone does this it is a Malapropism. For example, a politician is alleged to have said that he would support a colleague to the best of his "mobility", instead of "ability".
- **Meiosis** - another term for understatement, where someone represents something as less than it is for a rhetorical effect, often used ironically.
- **Metaphor** - a word or phrase that describes one thing being used to describe another; on a simple level a phrase such as 'the heart of the matter' is a metaphor as matters do not actually have hearts. Metaphorical phrases are widely used in English.
- **Mnemonic** - something used to help remember something. Verses and lists are commonly used. To remember the difference between stationary (stopped) and stationery (paper, pens and other office consumables), children are taught that the office supplies word has e for envelope. Once heard, this makes it easy to remember the difference

between the spellings. This is a mnemonic. "Richard of York gave battle in vain" is used as an acrostic to help remember the colours of the rainbow-red (Richard), orange (of), yellow (York), green (gave), blue (battle), indigo (in), violet (vain).

- **Monosyllabic** – a word that only has one syllable. For example, bar, her, its, why, just, not, both, since, health.
- **Morpheme** - the smallest unit of meaning. A word can contain more than one morpheme: 'Unable' can be divided into two morphemes- the prefix 'un' and 'able', whereas the word 'mahogany' cannot be divided into anything smaller.
- **Mood** - a particular set of inflectional forms of a verb to express whether the action or state it denotes is conceived as fact or in some other manner (as command, possibility, or wish). English has four moods: indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and good.
- **Negative** - a structure that can show the absence of a noun or any other substantive, the non-performance of the action described by a verb, or the non-existence in the case of a stative verb. An adverb or adjective can equally be negated so that it expresses the absence of the quality or characteristic described. Negation can be used to break the linking function of a preposition so that the items governed by it are shown to be separate. Unless it is tied to something quantifiable, the number zero or nought simply implies an absence of anything numerically quantifiable. In contrast, negation in language functions in a contradictory way; it invokes a connection, action, modification, etc., only to then deny it. However, a negative nearly always creates a ghostly presence of the very thing it is saying is absent. Something may well not be green, but in learning that our image and understanding of whatever it is coloured by the green whose absence is a characteristic. This ingenious mechanism common to all languages is one of the driving forces of creativity and generators of meaning. Through it we have access to one of the primary and most fundamental of all tools for creating shades of meaning.
- **Neologisms** - a new word that comes into use. Technology is an area particularly rich in them; CD, Internet, information superhighway, etc.
- **Number** - a quality attached to a noun or pronoun that indicates a category of how many individuals are being referred to. English has two numbers: singular (one individual) and plural (more than one individual).
- **Noun** - a word that is the name of something (as a person, animal, place,

thing, quality, idea, or action).

- **Object** - a noun or noun equivalent either in a prepositional phrase or in a verb construction with the action of a verb directed on or toward it. Objects can be one of two kinds in English: a direct object or an indirect object.
- **Onomatopoeia** - a word which imitates the sound it represents. For example, 'splash' sounds similar to the noise of something falling into water, 'thud' sounds like a falling object hitting the ground or 'buzz' is the sound an insect makes when flying.
- **Orthoepy** - the study of pronunciation or correct pronunciation.
- **Oxymoron** combines two terms that are normally contradictory. For example, real nightmare, living death, educated guess or plastic flowers.
- **Palindrome** - a word or phrase that is spelled the same way forwards or backwards. "Madam" is an example of a palindromic word and "Madam, I'm Adam" is a palindromic phrase.
- **Paragraph** - an organisational feature of written English and many other languages as well. It is a group of sentences, or possibly a single sentence, separated from the rest of the text by a space above and below it or by indenting the first line (leaving a space between the margin and the first word). A paragraph usually contains sentences that deal with one topic, and a new paragraph signals a change of topic.
- **Participle**- There are two participles in English: the present participle and the past participle. They can both be used as adjectives.

The present participle is formed by adding -ing to the base form of a verb. It is used in:

- Continuous or Progressive verb forms - I'm leaving in five minutes.
- As an adjective: A dying man.

The past participle is formed by adding -ed to the base form, unless it is an irregular verb. It is used:

- As an adjective - A tired group.
- With the auxiliary verb 'have' to form the perfect aspect - They've just arrived.
- With the verb 'be' to form the passive – "He was robbed".

- **Part of speech** - There are eight categories which form the parts of speech. Each part of speech explains not what the word is, but how the word is used. The parts of speech: Verbs, Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives, Adverbs, Prepositions, Conjunctions, Interjections.
- **Particle** – A particle is a word that does not fit into the conventional

grammatical categories the word 'to' can act as a preposition describing direction; she's gone to Antwerp. When 'to' is used with a verb in the infinitive, 'to abide' 'to do' etc., it is a particle, satisfying a grammatical function, but without an easily defined meaning. The term is also often employed for the words that make up a phrasal verb. This is because words that are familiar as prepositions, which link words, are functioning in a different manner. For example, "The plane took off an hour late." 'Off' changes the meaning of the verb but is not linking words or expressing direction, location, time or possession, which it would if it were acting as a preposition. Hence many people prefer to call words like this particles in phrasal verbs.

- **Passive** - asserting that the person or thing represented by the grammatical subject is subjected to or affected by the action represented by the verb. In the last sentence, the subject "person or thing" is acted upon by the verbs "subject" and "affect", so the sentence is in the passive voice. In the last sentence, the subject "subject" is acted upon by the verb "act", so the sentence is also in the passive voice.
- **Past participle** - The Past Participle is used for all perfect forms of the verb:
 - Present Perfect. For example, I have taken.
 - Past Perfect. For example, I had taken.
 - Future Perfect. For example, I will have taken.
 - Conditional Perfect or the 3rd Conditional. For example, I would have taken.

The Past Participle is also used in the Passive with the verb "To be" in most aspects and tenses. Note: The Past Participle may also be used as an adjective.

- **Past perfect** – used for actions that happened before related past events or times. For example, "When she arrived, all the tickets had gone or I'd never heard of it until last week." This used to be the pluperfect, but the term is not used nowadays. Formation: 'Had' + Past Participle.
- **Past perfect progressive** - used for actions that were unfinished when another action, etc, took place: I had been living there for years before I got married. Formation: Had + Been + Ing.
- **Past simple tense** - used for past actions that happened either at a specific time, which can either be given by a time phrase (yesterday, last year, etc.) or understood from the context. Regular Verbs add -ed to the base form, or -d if the verbs ends with -e. Irregular verbs can change in many different ways. The verb form is the

same for all persons. For example, I liked, you liked, she/he/it liked, we liked, they liked. NOTE: After the auxiliary verb, Did/Didn't, it returns to the base form. For example, "Did you take it?" or "She didn't like it."

- **Penult** - the next-to-last syllable of a word. Every time I use a "pen", it is the penult of "penult".
- **Perfect** - a tense of a verb that indicates an action has been completed in the past. "I have finished" is in the perfect tense.
- **Perfect aspect** - formed with the auxiliary verb 'to have' + the past participle. It is used for finished actions that are relevant to the time referred to or ones that continue up to the time referred to. For example, "She's worked here for donkey's years." (this continues up to now) "I've lost my keys." (a past action that is relevant now as I can't open the door)
- **Periphrastic** - formed by the use of function words or auxiliaries instead of by inflection. In other words, stated in other words.
- **Person** - a segment of discourse that pertains to the speaker (first person), to the one spoken to (second person), or the one spoken of (third person). The singular pronouns in English that are first person, second person, and third person are respectively "I", "you", and any of "he", "she", "one" or "it".
- **Personal pronoun** - any pronoun that refers to a noun by person and number.
- **Phoneme** - the smallest sound in a language. The English phonemes are represented in the Phonetic Alphabet.
- **Phonetics** - the study of the sounds of spoken language.
- **Phrase** - A phrase is a group of words that go together, but do not make a complete sentence.
- **Plagiarism** - The use of quotes, words or ideas taken from a source without crediting them is plagiarism, which is regarded as a form of cheating in universities.
- **Pleonasm** - the use of an excessive number of words to say something, including unnecessary repetition, especially when this is done through ignorance rather than for effect. For example, Could you repeat that again? (Again is unnecessary).
- **Plural** - a class of grammatical forms used to denote more than one of a noun or pronoun.

- **Polyptoton** - when words are repeated that are not identical but are derived from the same root. For example, "Our fear-mongering press keeps us fearful."
- **Polysemy** - refers to a word that has two or more similar meanings: "The house is at the foot of the mountains." "One of his shoes felt too tight for his foot." "Foot" here refers to the bottom part of the mountains in the first sentence and the bottom part of the leg in the second.
- **Polysyllabic** - a word that has three or more syllables. For example, exciting, wonderful, fantastic, irregular, unnecessarily or wickedly.
- **Possessive** - a grammatical case that denotes ownership or a relation analogous to ownership. For example, in "owner's manual", the owner is possessive.
- **Possessive Pronoun** - Mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs are the possessive pronouns used to substitute a noun and to show possession or ownership. For example, "This is your disk and that's mine." "Mine" substitutes the word "disk" and shows that it belongs to me.
- **Predicate** - the part of a sentence or clause that expresses what is said of the subject and that usually consists of a verb with or without objects, complements, or adverbial modifiers. The predicate excludes the subject itself.
- **Prefixes** - groups of letters that can be placed before a word to modify its meaning. For example, impossible (the prefix im- modifies the meaning to produce a negative sense)
- **Preposition** - a word that combines with a noun, pronoun, or noun equivalent to form a phrase that typically has an adverbial, adjectival, or substantival relation to some other word, e.g. "at" or "by". In English, you should avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.
- **Prepositional phrase** - a phrase that starts with a preposition. "With a preposition" is a prepositional phrase.
- **Present** - a tense of a verb that indicates an ongoing action. "I am present" is in the present tense.
- **Present Participle** - used with the verb 'To be' to indicate an action that is incomplete. For example, "I am reading"/ "I was reading". Present Participles can also be used as an adjective; an interesting story, a fascinating woman, etc.
- **Present perfect** –
 - For unfinished past actions. For example, "I've worked here for four years."
 - For past actions when the time is not specified. For example, "Have you ever been to Rome?"
 - When a past action is relevant now. For example, "I've missed my flight" or "She's broken her leg and cannot go on holiday next week." Formation: 'Have' + Past Participle.
- **Present Perfect Progressive** - used to emphasise the duration of a recent past activity. It can also be used for actions that began in the past and are still going on now. Formation: Have + Been + Present Participle
- **Present Progressive** - used for actions that have begun but not finished. It can also be used to talk about future arrangements. Formation: Simple Present of 'To be' + -Ing.
- **Present Simple Tense** –
 - Actions that are repeated or habitual.
 - States.
 - Statements that are always true.

For example, "I get up at 9.00 am", "I like coffee" or "The sun sets in the west." The form of the verb is usually the same as the base form, but the third person singular adds -s. Some verbs change, like 'to be', which uses 'am', 'are' and 'is', and 'to have', where the third person is 'has'. The auxiliary verb 'to do' is used in a negative structure or a question: "Do you like tea?"; "Does she live nearby?" The third person returns to the base form when 'does' or 'doesn't' are used.
- **Pronoun** - a word that is used as a substitute for a noun or noun equivalent, takes noun constructions, and refers to persons or things named or understood in the context. For example, "he" is a pronoun.
- **Proper noun** - a name belonging to an individual or place. For example, "Amy" and "Cardiff" are proper nouns.
- **Prose** – Prose and poetry are the two basic categories which Language can be divided into. Poetry is characterised by its use of rhythm, and prose by not using a regular rhythm, which is the case for the vast majority of spoken and written language.
- **Prosody** - the study of the various rhythms used in poetry.
- **Protasis** - A term for the 'if' clause in a conditional sentence. For example, "If you go there, you'll enjoy it." "If you go there" is the protasis and "you'll enjoy it" is the apodosis.
- **Punctuation** - the symbols used in written language to indicate the end of a sentence or a clause, or to indicate that it is a question, etc. . , ; : ? ! ' - " " () are the punctuation symbols most commonly used in English.
- **Quantifier** - as its name implies, expresses quantity. Quantifiers can be a single word or a phrase and are used with nouns. They can be used with both a countable or an uncountable noun to express amount or quantity.
- Some, much, many, few, little, a lot, half,

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three, etc., are common quantifiers

- **Question** - a sentence, a phrase or even just a gesture that shows that the speaker or writer wants the reader or listener to supply them with some information, to perform a task or in some other way satisfy the request.
- **Reciprocal Pronouns** - Phrases like "each other" or "one another" are reciprocal pronouns. They show that an action is two-way: Jane and Helen greeted each other. (This means that Jane greeted Helen and Helen greeted Jane).
- **Redundancy** - the use of unnecessary words or phrases that express something already said in the utterance or sentence.
- **Reflexive Pronouns** - Myself; yourself; himself; herself; itself; ourselves; yourselves; themselves are the reflexive pronouns. Reflexive pronouns are used when the complement of the verb is the same as the subject. For example, He shot himself. The reflexive pronoun can also be used to give more emphasis to the subject or object. For example, "I did it myself." (I want to emphasise the fact that I did it.) "They spoke to the Director herself." (Emphasising the importance of the Director).
- **Regular verb** - one that follows the pattern of taking -ed for the past simple and past participle (or -d if the verb ends in -e; smoke smoked). For example walk, walked, walked. As regular verbs follow a fixed pattern, there is no irregular verb list in existence.
- **Relative clause** - a dependent clause in apposition with a substantive for the purpose of specifying it. For example, "who works for my father" is the relative clause in the sentence "The man who works for my father won."
- **Reported Speech** - used to communicate what someone else said, but without using the exact words. A few changes are necessary; often a pronoun has to be changed and the verb is usually moved back a tense, where possible. For example, He said that he was going to come. The person's exact words were "I'm going to come."
- **Rhetorical question** - one that requires no answer because the answer is obvious and doesn't need to be stated. The speaker (of the rhetorical question) is not looking for an answer but is making some kind of a point, as in an argument.
- **Rhotic** – speakers who pronounce the letter r after vowels in all positions, including after a vowel in words like world.
- **Rhyme** - when words at the end of lines of poetry have the same sound so that they work together to produce an effect, the poem has a rhyme.
- **Sarcasm** - a form of irony that is widely used in English especially when people are being humorous. Generally the sarcastic speaker or writer means the exact opposite of the word they use, often intending to be rude or to laugh at the person the words are addressed to.
- **Satire** - a form of humour where the writer or speaker tries to make the reader or listener have a negative opinion about someone, by laughing at them, making them seem ridiculous or foolish etc. If someone is being satirical, their aim is not just to amuse, but to affect the person that they dislike; to hurt them, ruin them, etc.
- **Scanning** - a reading technique where the reader looks for specific information rather than trying to absorb all the information. If you're reading a timetable, say, you want specific information usually and so look for something that is convenient for your journey plans- when you do this, you are scanning.
- **Semantics** - the study of how meaning is generated in language.
- **Sentence** - a group of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full-stop, exclamation or question mark in written language, containing a main verb.
- **Simile** - a comparison between two different things, designed to create an unusual, interesting, emotional or other effect often using words such as "like" or "as ... as". Common comparisons are with the qualities associated with animals (as sly as a fox, as brave as a lion, etc.).
- **Singular** - the form of a pronoun or noun used to reference an object that occurs singly, alone, one-at-a-time, or without any others of its kind around it. For example, "hermit" only occurs in the singular.

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- **Slang** - a language at its most informal, using expressions that many would consider to be grammatically imperfect and sometimes rude. Slang often used within small social groups where it can help draw and keep the group together. It changes very quickly in English.
- **Spoonerisms** - originates from the Reverend Spooner, who is well known in England because of a speech problem he is supposed to have had; it is said that he used to mix up the first couple of letters of words, sometimes creating strange sentences. One of the most famous spoonerisms attributed to him is when he told a student off because he had "hissed the mystery lectures" when he meant to say "missed the history lectures".
- **Stanza** - When a poem is divided into groups of lines, often with a regular pattern.
- **Subject** - the part of a sentence that indicates what acts upon the verb. It is always a noun, pronoun, or noun clause. For example, "explaining grammar" is the subject of the sentence "Explaining grammar is one of my favourite activities". In English it must agree in person and number with the main verb of the sentence.
- **Subjunctive** - a set of verb forms that would represent a denoted act or state not as fact but as contingent or possible or viewed emotionally (as with doubt or desire). The "would" in the last sentence makes its mood subjunctive.
- **Suffix** - groups of letters placed after a word to modify its meaning or change it into a different word group, from an adjective to an adverb, etc. For example, gladly (the suffix -ly changes the word from an adjective to an adverb), approached (the suffix -ed changes the verb from the present to the past)
- **Superlative** - the degree of grammatical comparison that denotes an extreme or unsurpassed level or extent. "Silliest" is the superlative form of "silly".
- **Superordinate** - a general term that includes various different words representing narrower categories, called Hyponyms. For example, Superordinate: Animal, Hyponym: Cat, horse, etc.
- **Syllable** - a unit of spoken language which contains a single vowel sound, and which may or may not contain consonants.
- **Syntax** - the study of the rules governing sentence structure, the way words work together to make up a sentence.
- **Synecdoche** - a word that refers to a part of something to mean the whole. For example, "All hands on deck" is an example in which "hands" is used to mean "people".
- **Synonym** - a word that means the same as another word, or more or less the same. If a word is slightly different, it is a near-synonym. For example, "Movie" is a synonym of "film". In this example the former is more common in American English and the latter in British English.
- **Tautology** - where two near-synonyms are placed consecutively or very close together for effect. For example, free gift, in this day and age, new innovation or lonely isolation.
- **Tense** - a distinction of form in a verb to express distinctions of time.
- **Text** - a body of language; it could consist of a single word like 'Ladies' or 'Gentlemen' on a toilet door right up to a complete book and can be either written or spoken.
- **Thesaurus** - a book that organises words by categories and concepts, so synonyms and near-synonyms will be grouped together.
- **Tmesis** - When a word is split into two and another word is added in the middle to give extra emphasis, this is tmesis. For example, "Fan-freaking-tastic".
- **Transitive verb** - a verb that can act upon an object.
- **Ultima** - the last syllable of a word. "Ma" is the ultima of "ultima".
- **Verb** - a word that expresses an act, occurrence, or mode of being. It is the grammatical centre of a predicate. For example, "walk" is a verb in the sentence "It is possible to walk there in ten minutes".
- **Voice** - a system of inflections of a verb to indicate the relation of the subject of the verb to the action which the verb expresses. English has two voices: active and passive.
- **Vowel** - one of a class of speech sounds in the articulation of which the oral part of the breath channel is not blocked and is not constricted enough to cause audible friction; it is the most prominent sound in a syllable. In English, all words contain at least one of the vowels a, e, i, o or u or sometimes y.
- **Word** - the smallest unit of a language that can exist on its own in either written or spoken language. A morpheme such as -ly, used to create an adverb cannot exist without the adjective it modifies; it is not a word, although the adjective it modifies can exist alone and, therefore, is a word. For example, "The woman was robbed." (4 words- an article a noun an auxiliary verb and a past participle. 'Robbed' consists of the verb 'rob' and the -ed morpheme to show that it is a past participle so the sentence has 5 morphemes.)

Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues.

We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

If you would like to receive further information about this subject or other publications, please call us – see our contact details on the next page.

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