## PARTS OF SPEECH

**By the end of this lesson you should be able to:**

* Identify the different parts of speech, namely nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs.
* Apply the rules concerning how to use the different parts of speech.
* Fix incorrect use of parts of speech in your own writing.

**Introduction**

The parts of speech are the individual words that make up any sentences or fragments in English writing. These are usually divided into categories such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs. The words that fall into each of these categories have their own rules that apply whenever you use them. Familiarise yourself with each of these and refer back to this lesson plan whenever you get stuck on how to use them.

**LESSON PLAN**

1. **NOUNS**

**A noun is one of the parts of speech. It is a word that is used to name a person, place, thing or idea.**

Here are some examples of nouns:

People: mother, brother, Mary, Doctor White, Thomas

Place: Cape Town, library, bedroom, beach, church

Thing: telephone, shoe, desk, plate, bag

Idea: happiness, excitement, honesty, anger, love

A noun can either be a ***common noun*** or a ***proper noun***.

* A common noun names any general person, place or thing.
* A proper noun names a specific person, place or thing. It is almost always capitalized.

Here are some examples of common nouns and proper nouns.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Common Noun   | Proper Noun |
| city | Johannesburg |
| university | The University of Cape Town |
| boy | Matthew |
| shop | Pick n Pay |

In a sentence, the noun is often the ***subject*** of the sentence. However, it can also have other functions. For example:

* **The library is a place of silent study**. This sentence is about the library, so “library” functions as the subject. But “place” which is also a noun, serves as an object in this sentence as well.
* **The assistants in the library are very helpful**. In this sentence, the noun “assistants” is the subject as this is what the sentence is about. But “library” serves as an object in this sentence – although it is also a noun.

So nouns can be either subjects or objects of a sentence.

1. **PRONOUNS**

**A pronoun is a word that is used to replace a noun (or nouns).**

We can use a pronoun in the place of a noun or to refer to a noun.

**Personal pronouns** are used to refer to people or things. There are three different categories of personal pronouns:

1. First person – refers to the person (or people) speaking
2. Second person – refers to the person (or people) spoken to
3. Third person – refers to anyone or anything else

 Singular Plural

First person I, my, mine, me we, our, ours, us

Second person you, your, yours you, your, yours

Third person he, him, his they, their, theirs,

 she, her, hers them

 it, its

For example:

* *Mike wrote a good essay* ***He*** *wrote a good essay.*

In this example, the pronoun “he” is being used in place of the noun “Mike”.

* *Jason and Matt were unable to attend the seminar because* ***they*** *were involved in an accident.*

In this example, the pronoun “they” is being used to refer to the nouns “Jason and Matt”.

This makes the sentence clearer than if we had to say “Jason and Matt were unable to attend the seminar because Jason and Matt were involved in an accident”. Using pronouns makes reading easier.

1. **ADJECTIVES**

**An adjective is a describing word – it is used to modify or describe a noun.**

An adjective answers the following questions:

* which one?
* what kind (s)?
* how many?
* how much?

Here are some examples: (the adjectives are in bold)

* *Which car did you buy?* We bought the **blue** car.
* *What kind of jacket did you buy?* Joseph is wearing a **leather** jacket.
* *How many books did you read yesterday?* I read **five** books yesterday.
* How much time did Tom spend preparing? He spent **little** time preparing his speech.

**\*Note**: the words ***a***, ***an*** and ***the*** are also adjectives; and they are actually the most commonly used adjectives.

1. **VERBS**

**A verb is a part of speech that is used to express an action or a state of being. It is often called the ‘doing word’ of a sentence because it is normally used to describe the action in a sentence. There are three different types of verbs: the action verb, the linking verb and the helping verb.**

Examples:

1. My brother ***plays*** hockey. The verb in this sentence is “plays” as it tells us what action the subject (brother) is doing. This kind of verb is called an **action verb**.
2. I ***am*** sad. The verb here is “am” and it is being used to express a state of being. This kind of verb is called a **linking verb**. Linking verbs are usually a form of the verb “to be”: *am*, *is, are, was, were, been, being*.
3. They ***are going*** to church in the morning. The main verb in this sentence is “going” and the verb “are” is acting as a **helping verb**. A helping verb ‘helps’ the main verb in a sentence. The most common helping verbs are: *am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being, has, had, have, do, does, did, may, might, must, can, could, shall, should, will,* and *would*.

**\*Note**: in an interrogative sentence, the main verb and the helping verb are usually separated. For example: ***Did*** you ***hear*** the good news?

**EXERCISES**

Activity 1

Identify the nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs in the passage below:

One writer makes the point that in an effort to destroy completely the structures that had been built up in the African society and to impose their imperialism with an unnerving totality the colonialists were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grop and emptying the Native’s brain of all form and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the “dark continent”. Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition. The history of African society was reduced to tribal battles and internecine wars. There was no conscious migration by the people from one place of abode to another. No, it was always flight from one tyrant who wanted to defeat the tribe not for any positive reason but merely to wipe them out of the face of this earth.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Nouns Pronouns Adjectives Verbs**

1. Biko. S. 1978. ‘We Blacks’ in I Write What I like. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Pg. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)