
Glossary

Any given word is a bundle, and meaning sticks out of it in various directions.

—OSIP YEMILYEVICH MANDELSTAM, *CONVERSATION ABOUT DANTE*

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active voice. The voice in which the subject performs the verb's action instead of receiving it. In *Edgar shoveled that crooked sidewalk four times before noon*, the verb *shoveled* is in the active voice because the subject (*Edgar*) performs the action. If shoveling isn't active, I don't know what is. Compare **passive voice**.

adjectival. Any word or phrase that acts as an adjective. In *Call me a shoveling fool from Liverpool*, the word *shoveling* is an adjectival because, although it's a verb in form (it ends in *-ing*), it acts as an adjective, modifying the noun *fool*.

adjectival compound. See **compound modifier**.

adjective. To call any word an adjective is ambiguous. Is it an adjective in form? In function? Both?

- **Adjective in form:** A form-class word (*crooked*) that can change form, in natural usage, in ways characteristic of adjectives. In other words, an adjective in form is a word with adjective features of form. In isolation, it can pass linguistic tests for adjectiveness. *Crooked*, the standalone word, qualifies as an adjective in form (example test: *crooked+est* = superlative). Of course, *crooked* also qualifies as a verb in form (*crook+ed* = past tense); like many English words, it belongs to multiple form classes.

- **Adjective in function (an adjectival):** Any word or phrase that acts as an adjective (a modifier of a noun) in a phrase or clause. An adjective in function typically describes something. In *Siegrid cleared the crooked sidewalk*, the word *crooked* is an adjective not only in form but also in function because it modifies *sidewalk*.

To call any word an adjective is ambiguous. Is it an adjective in form? In function? Both?

advance organizer. A preview or overview. Advance organizers typically describe the structure of the information to come, sometimes listing the section headings as a sectional table of contents. This device presumably gets its name from its purpose: organizing the reader's brain in advance of reading.

adverb. To call any word an adverb is ambiguous. Is it an adverb in form? In function? Both?

- **Adverb in form:** A form-class word (*frantically*) that has adverb features of form. In isolation, an adverb in form can pass linguistic tests for adverbness. *Frantically*, for example, has the telltale *-ly* ending, so you might call it an adverb in form. You can't be sure with adverbs, though. They are "the most difficult of the four form classes to identify" by form alone because adverbs and adjectives have overlapping form characteristics.¹⁷⁸ (The adjective *friendly* ends in *-ly* too.)

- **Adverb in function (an adverbial):** Any word or phrase that acts as an adverb (a modifier of a verb, an adjective, or another adverb) in a phrase or clause. An adverb in function typically tells when, where, or how something happens. In *Tim shoveled frantically*, the word *frantically* is an adverb not only in form but also in function because it describes the manner in which Tim did his shoveling.

adverbial. Any word or phrase that acts as an adverb. In *Zelda hurled her shovel into the ravine*, the prepositional phrase *into the ravine* is an adverbial because it tells us the direction in which Zelda did her hurling.

alliteration. The repetition of sounds within words or among neighboring words. Alliteration comes in two types: assonance and consonance. In *Utterly, unutterably sumptuous to utter*, the alliteration consists of six *uhs* and five *t* sounds. (Only the sounds count; the ear doesn't care about spelling.) The *New York Times* crossword puzzle often mixes both types of alliteration in a clue, as in *Stash for cash* (answer: "IRA").

Used judiciously, alliteration adds pizzazz. Too much alliteration distracts the reader and sounds corny.

178. Klammer, Schultz, and Della Volpe, *Analyzing English Grammar*, 81.

amplification. The repetition of a word or phrase followed by additional detail. Example: *The sidewalk, groaning with snow, aroused Gena's sense of responsibility—her sense of obligation, decency, and saintliness.* The repetition of the phrase *sense of* affords the addition of three nouns—*obligation, decency, and saintliness*—that amplify the meaning of *responsibility*.

Here's another amplification example (from "Explore and Heighten: Magic Words from a Playwright" on page 103): *Those are the times to add detail, the times to expand.* The repetition of *the times* affords the addition of a second phrase (*to expand*) that amplifies the first (*to add detail*).

anadiplosis. The repetition of words from the end of one sentence or clause at the beginning of the next: *Clint decided that the time had come. The time had come to haul out the snow blower.* This device can help create emphasis or transition.

Here's another anadiplosis example (from "Decisions, Decisions" on page 161): *This usage resonates with me—its upside-downness. Upside-down is how I feel in this place.*

analogy. A comparison that highlights similarity not just between two things but also between two relationships: *That kid is as handy as a pocket on a shirt.* (Relationship 1: Pocket on a shirt and handiness. Relationship 2: Kid and—by extension—handiness.) Analogy goes beyond straight metaphor, which would have the kid *being* a pocket on a shirt.

At its most useful, the by-extension part of an analogy illuminates the unfamiliar. At its least useful, it creates a logical fallacy, implying that the by-extension similarity equals truth: *Just as efforts to influence the weather are futile, so, too, are efforts to influence language usage.* Analogous reasoning can have a persuasive effect on people who fail to detect the points at which the analogy breaks down. For a discussion of this weather-language analogy, see "Up with (Thoughtful) Prescriptivism" on page 7.

anaphora. The repetition of a key word or phrase at the beginning of consecutive clauses or sentences: *The snow fell for an hour; the snow fell for a day; the snow fell for weeks—and it's still falling.*

For another example of anaphora, see the opening paragraph of "Appendix: Up with Human-Crafted Indexes" on page 183. Five consecutive sentences start with *Like other writers*.

anecdote. A short, usually true story that introduces, clarifies, or reinforces what's being said. Want to draw your reader in? Start with *The other day*. For an example, see the opening of "Who's Your Sam?" on page 210page 153.

antecedent. The noun or noun phrase to which a pronoun refers. In *Where's my parka? I know it's around here somewhere,* the noun *parka* is the antecedent for the pronoun *it*. Keeping pronouns close to their antecedents avoids ambiguity.

anthimeria (antimeria). See **enallage**.

antithesis. The juxtaposition of two contrasting ideas highlighted by a grammatically parallel structure: *To ignore the snow is human; to shovel, divine.*

Here's another antithesis example (from "Decisions, Decisions" on page 161): *She persisted. I relented.*

appositive. A noun or noun phrase that renames the noun directly preceding it. In *My neighbor Aleks, a rock collector, is digging out her driveway*, the phrase *a rock collector* is an appositive. If an appositive is nonrestrictive (not required to identify the noun), it is set off with enclosing commas.

article. See **determiner**.

aspect. A verb attribute similar to tense in that it conveys information about time. In English, aspect and tense are tangled up together. Aspect has to do with an action's ongoingness or lack thereof: *Bob is/was shoveling* or *Bob has/had shoveled*. You need terms like *progressive* and *perfect* to talk about aspect. I leave it to you, if you're so inclined, to venture into those deeps. Compare **mood**, **tense**, **voice**. See also **auxiliary**.

assonance. A type of alliteration in which vowel sounds are repeated, as in *Come up to Uncle Bud's for supper*. Here, the assonance consists of five *uhs*. (Only the sounds count; the ear doesn't care about spelling.) The *New York Times* crossword puzzle often uses assonant clues, as in *Prepare to share* (answer: "divide").

auxiliary. A structure-class word that signals the coming of a main verb. In *Let's get working*, the auxiliary *get* signals the coming of *working*. In *Teresa will have gone ice skating by this time tomorrow*, the auxiliaries *will* and *have* signal the coming of the main verb *gone*.

Although sometimes called *auxiliary verbs* or *helping verbs*, auxiliaries are not "true verbs."¹⁷⁹ They are verb helpers. Unlike true (main) verbs, auxiliaries are not form-class words. We recognize auxiliaries not by form but by function. One or more auxiliaries work with the main verb to determine tense, voice, mood, and aspect.

The role of auxiliary can be played by a *be*-verb, *have*-verb, *do*-verb, or *get*-verb or by one of the modal auxiliaries: *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *ought*, *may*, *might*, *must*.

Unlike the modal auxiliaries, *be*-verbs, *have*-verbs, *do*-verbs, and *get*-verbs can also function as main verbs: *I'll be fine*. *You'll get better*. In the leading role, *be*, *have*, *do*, and *get* transform from verb-helping auxiliaries (structure-class words) into true verbs (form-class words).

179. Klammer, Schultz, and Della Volpe, "Auxiliaries" in *Analyzing English Grammar*, 106–111.

Unique among the auxiliaries, the modal auxiliaries, in normal usage, play a supporting role every time. You never hear of people *mighting* their hearts out, for example, although they might sing their hearts out. Linguists argue convincingly that modal auxiliaries never act as form-class words—as main verbs—even when they seem to. Modal auxiliaries have no features of form; they never change form. *Might is might is might*. For these reasons, modal auxiliaries qualify as “prototypical structure words”;¹⁸⁰ in normal usage, they never stray from the structure class into the form class. Unless they take a notion to act as nouns. They do have the might.

Compare **linking verb**.

bdelygmia. A series of exuberantly disparaging remarks: insult as art form. *Bdelygmia* (de-LIG-me-uh) comes from the Greek word for “abuse.” Fans of the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* will recognize this example spewn by a Frenchman from a battlement to the foreigners below:

You don't frighten us, English pig-dogs! Go and boil your bottoms, sons of a silly person! I blow my nose at you, so-called Ah-thoor Keeng, you and all your silly English K-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-niggits! ... You empty-headed animal food trough wiper! I fart in your general direction! Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries!¹⁸¹

be-verb. Any form of the verb *to be*—*am, are, be, been, being, is, was, were*—whether it acts as an auxiliary (*You are getting tired*) or as a main verb (*You are tired*). As an auxiliary, a *be-verb* is a structure-class word, not a “true verb.”¹⁸² As a main verb, a *be-verb* is a form-class word: a true verb. See also

linking verb.

bossy verb. See **imperative**.

brainstorm.

- A natural phenomenon that occurs in a room when a group of people fill the air with hundreds of charged ideas.
- A natural phenomenon that occurs in individuals' heads as they write, sketch, or create anything, causing them to forget to eat, sleep, and change out of their slippers when they go outside.

clause. A group of related words containing a subject and a verb. Clauses come in two types: independent and dependent (subordinate). Compare **phrase**.

180. *Ibid.*, 107.

181. “Monty Python and the Holy Grail,” *Wikiquote*, last modified March 6, 2012, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Monty_Python_and_the_Holy_Grail.

182. Klammer, Schultz, and Della Volpe, *Analyzing English Grammar*, 108–109.

comma-spliced sentence. A run-on sentence that includes two independent clauses joined by only a comma, making the comma a comma splice: *Max bent down to pick up the rock, he heard his back snap.* Compare **fused sentence.**

complex sentence. A sentence that contains exactly one independent clause and at least one dependent clause: *Although the snow blower's lack of cooperation frustrated him, Xavier persisted until he got the thing running again.* A complex sentence distinguishes the subordinate ideas (Xavier's frustration) from the more important ones (Xavier's persistence).

compound-complex sentence (complex-compound sentence). A sentence that contains two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause: *Although the snow blower's lack of cooperation frustrated him, Xavier persisted until he got the thing running again, and the neighbors cheered.*

compound modifier (adjectival compound, phrasal adjective, unit modifier). A phrase that functions as a unit in modifying a noun. When a compound modifier precedes the noun, it requires a hyphen—with rare (and hotly disputed) exceptions. In *snow-crusted chronicles*, the words *snow* and *crusted* form a compound modifier, acting as an adjective that describes, oddly if mellifluously, the noun *chronicles*.

compound sentence. A sentence that contains two or more independent clauses: *Xavier's snow blower conked out, and he had a devil of a time getting it to run again.*

conjunction. A structure-class word that joins words, phrases, or clauses. Conjunctions come in various types, including coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs.

conjunctive adverb. An adverb that acts as a conjunction: *therefore, nevertheless, however, subsequently, otherwise, then.* Conjunctive adverbs join two independent clauses, signaling a relationship between them: cause and effect, sequence, contrast, comparison, etc.

In *Siobhan shoveled as fast as she could; nevertheless, night fell before she could finish the job*, the word *nevertheless* acts as a conjunctive adverb, revealing a contrast between Siobhan's speed and the sun's. A conjunctive adverb is followed by a comma and preceded by a semicolon—or a period: *Siobhan shoveled as fast as she could. Nevertheless, night fell.*

(The words identified here as conjunctive adverbs may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

Compare **coordinating conjunction** and **subordinating conjunction**.

consonance. A type of alliteration in which consonant sounds are repeated, as in *Tuckered-out and thirsty, Titus can't feel his toes*. Here the consonance consists of seven *t* sounds. (Only the sounds count; the ear doesn't care about spelling.) The *New York Times* crossword puzzle often includes consonant clues, like *Parmesan pronoun* (answer: "mio," Italian for *my*).

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content words. See **form-class words**.

coordinating conjunction (coordinator). A conjunction that joins words, phrases, or clauses of equal grammatical rank or function (coordinate words, phrases, or clauses). Coordinating conjunctions have no characteristic features of form. You can remember the most common ones by the acronym FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

In *Hey, fanboy, how about a bowl of chili or a mug of wassail?* the coordinating conjunction is *or*. *A bowl of chili* and *a mug of wassail* are coordinate phrases.

In *Jacqueline drove through the storm to get chili powder, and Jacques stayed home to cook*, the coordinating conjunction is *and*, and the two independent clauses are the coordinate elements. When the coordinate elements are independent clauses, the conjunction is preceded by a comma.

As for the notion that sentences shouldn't start with *and* or *but*, forget it—lest you fall for a "rank superstition" and a "gross canard."¹⁸³ Kicking off with *and* or *but* is, in fact, "highly desirable in any number of contexts." Good writers do it all the time, especially in informal writing. But—make that *and*—they don't follow either little word with a comma.

(The words identified here as coordinating conjunctions may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

Compare **conjunctive adverb** and **subordinating conjunction**.
copular verb. See **linking verb**.

dangling modifier. A word or phrase intended to modify a word that's missing ...gone... *verschwunden*. When you calibrate your eye to danglers, a new source of humor opens up for you. In *As a mother of eight, my sidewalk is*

183. Garner, *Garner's Modern American Usage*, 44 (under "and"), 121 (under "but").

never shoveled, the word *mother* is the dangling modifier. It's intended to modify *I*, but the sentence contains no such word. *Mother* is left dangling. It has no choice but to modify the only noun in sight, *sidewalk*, creating a ridiculous pairing—unless the sidewalk has, in fact, spawned eight little sidewalks. Compare **misplaced modifier** and **squinting modifier**.

dependent clause (subordinate clause). A clause that depends on an independent clause to form a complete sentence. In *People skittered off to the sides of the road because a neophyte driver was barreling down the icy street*, the second half of the sentence—*because a neophyte driver was barreling down the icy street*—is a dependent clause.

Mother is left dangling. It has no choice but to modify the only noun in sight, sidewalk, creating a ridiculous pairing—unless the sidewalk has, in fact, spawned eight little sidewalks.

A dependent clause begins with a subordinating conjunction (in this case, *because*). By itself, a dependent clause is a sentence fragment. A dependent clause requires no punctuation when it follows the independent clause. When the dependent clause comes first, it is followed by a

comma: *Because a neophyte driver was barreling down the icy street, people skittered off to the sides of the road.*

Compare **independent clause**.

determiner. A structure-class word—*a, an, the, this, that, those, my, her, his, its, their, every, many, one, two, second, last* (an article, a possessive, a number, etc.)—that precedes and modifies a noun but is neither an adjective nor another noun. Examples: *this task, their travails, every livelong day*. (The words identified here as determiners may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

deverbal -ing noun. An *-ing* noun with no verb qualities beyond the superficial resemblance. In *Every cloud has a silver lining*, the word *lining* has only noun qualities: it's a direct object, and you could replace it only with another noun (like *layer*); you could not replace it with an infinitive (*to line*). Compare **gerund**.

diction level. The degree of formality in word choice. *I beg your pardon, excuse me, and say what?* say the same thing at various levels of diction.

direct object. A noun that completes the meaning of a transitive verb, answering the question, *what?* In *Tony whacked the snowbank*, the noun *snowbank* is the direct object of the transitive verb *whacked*.

dummy word. See **expletive**.

enallage (anthimeria, grammatical shift). Usage of a word outside its natural forms or functions. In *This weather will not peace us*, the word *peace* functions, uncharacteristically—enallagistically, you might say—as a verb.

E-Prime (English-Prime, E’). A form of English that excludes *be*-verbs.

Advocates claim that E-Prime (proposed by D. David Bourland Jr., a student of philosopher Alfred Korzybski) clarifies thinking and strengthens writing. E-Prime rejects statements like *Shoveling is the worst*, which presents judgment as fact, in favor of statements that more accurately communicate a speaker’s experience: *I spit in shoveling’s general direction*.

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equational verb. See **linking verb**.

exclamation. See **interjection**.

expletive (dummy word). A word that has no grammatical function. In phrases like *there is*, *there are*, *it is*, and *it was*, the words *there* and *it* are expletives. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *expletive* (in its adjective form) means “introduced merely to occupy space...serving merely to fill out a sentence, help out a metrical line, etc. Also occas. of a mode of expression: Redundant, wordy.” See also **filler word**.

figure of speech. A colorful expression with idiomatic meaning, a turn of phrase: *Dog my cats!* (“I’ll be dipped!”). Compare **rhetoical device**.

filler word. A word that contributes no meaning—and, therefore, typically no value—to a phrase or sentence.

Two types of filler words to delete (usually) are qualifiers and expletives. In *Vera feels somewhat cold*, the qualifier *somewhat* adds no value. In *There is no reason to turn the heat down*, the expletive *there* adds no value. Better: *Vera feels cold. Don’t turn the heat down*.

A filler word may add value in terms of meter or sound. The Nat King Cole lyric “V is very, very extraordinary” would be tough to sing without the filler *verys*. And we’d have nothing to smile about without the *some-what* here: *Shirts that have haikus / Are somewhat overrated / Still I’m wearing one*.

foot. See **metrical foot**.

form. A word's physical shape, the aspect of the word that you see or hear. Every word has form. The form of the word *sidewalk* is s-i-d-e-w-a-l-k. If you add or delete or change the letters—whether meaningfully (*sidewalks*) or randomly (*sidewalkqwerty* or *qwertysidewalk* or *sdqwertywks*)—you change its form. *Going* (*go+ing*) is a form of the verb *to go*. *Went* is also a form of *to go*. Because *went* falls outside the standard pattern of verb conjugation (past tense = <verb>+ed), *went* is called an irregular form of the verb. Compare **function**.

form-class words (content words, parts of speech). Words in any of the form classes: nouns (*house*), verbs (*welcomed*), adjectives (*warm*), and adverbs (*warmly*). Modern linguists consider these classes—only these four—the parts of speech. Form-class words, or content words, usually contain not grammatical meaning (as structure-class words do) but lexical meaning, that is, meaning in themselves.

Form-class words, the majority of English words, have something in common that sets them apart from words in the structure classes: they generally change form in characteristic ways. In isolation (out of context), these words can be linguistically tested in ways that help classify them. For example, adding an *s* transforms a noun into a plural that English speakers would use naturally (*house+s = houses*), and adding *est* transforms an adjective into a superlative (*warm+est = warmest*).

When a word changes form in ways characteristic of a given form class, linguists call that word a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb in form.

While some words never stray from a single form class—*desk*, for example, is a prototypical noun (you wouldn't normally say, "We're desking" or "That's the deskest")—many English words can belong to multiple form classes. *House* belongs to two form classes: nouns and verbs. It changes form in ways characteristic of nouns (*houses, house's*), so it qualifies as a noun in form—and it changes form in ways characteristic of verbs (*housed, housing*), so it also qualifies as a verb in form.

Self-proclaimed enigmatologist Will Shortz, crossword-puzzle editor for the *New York Times* and consummate creator of duplicitous clues, has built his following on the backs of words like this—words that move easily between form classes. Take the tease of a clue *Defeat in a derby*. Are we meant to read *defeat* as a noun (as in "a defeat in a derby") or as a verb ("to defeat in a derby")? The clue alone lacks sufficient context. We have to fill in some neighboring answers to determine the answer: "outride" (a verb—aha!). In some puzzles, the same clue appears multiple times, yielding answers from multiple form classes. The clue *mean* might appear twice, yielding a noun

(“average”) for one answer and a verb (“signify”) for another. In crossword puzzles, as in everyday usage, a form-class word holds clues within itself but reveals its full meaning only in the context of other words.

fragment. See **sentence fragment**.

function. The grammatical role that a word or phrase plays in a phrase or clause. *Sidewalk* functions as (acts as) a direct object in *Let’s shovel this sidewalk* and as an adjective in *I’ve got the sidewalk blues*. Just as a musical note’s function in a chord is determined by its position relative to the other notes—the same note contributes to a major chord here, a minor chord there—a word’s or phrase’s function in a phrase or clause is determined largely by its position relative to the other words. Compare **form**.

function words. See **structure-class words**.

fused sentence. A run-on sentence that includes two independent clauses joined by only a space: *Max bent down to pick up the rock he heard his back snap*. Compare **comma-spliced sentence**.

gerund. An *-ing* noun with verb qualities (a verbal noun). Some linguists define the gerund the other way around: a verb that acts as a noun (a nominal verb). Either way, in *Lining clouds with silver is no easy job*, the word *lining* is a gerund because it has both noun qualities (it’s the subject of the sentence) and verb qualities (you could replace it with the infinitive *to line*—a sure-fire test of gerundness). Compare **deverbal -ing noun**.

grammatical shift. See **enallage**.

helping verb. See **auxiliary**.

hyperbole. The use of exaggeration to create emphasis or effect: *An Alpine avalanche hit our house last night*.

iamb (iambus). A type of metrical foot. An iamb is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable: da-DUM. *Prefer* is an iamb. *Come on!* is an iamb. A series of iambs creates an iambic pattern.

idiom. A word or combination of words whose commonly understood meaning differs from the literal meaning. In *Keith did a bang-up job chipping the ice off the living-room windows*, you can rest assured that no banging was involved. See also **phrasal verb**.

imagery. Concrete language, language that appeals to the senses—all of them. (Of all words, how has *imagery*—*image* with a tail—come to mean not just what we see but also what we smell, hear, touch, and taste?) Psychologists claim that we process concrete language more quickly than

abstract language—and, further, that the faster we process the words, and the more our senses tingle along the way, the more likely we are to believe what we read.¹⁸⁴ No word from psychologists on the increased likelihood of enjoying it.

imperative (bossy verb). A verb's command form. In *Help me knock these icicles off the gutters*, the verb *help* is an imperative. Technically, imperative is one of several verb moods.

independent clause. A clause that stands alone—or could—as a complete sentence. In *People skittered off to the sides of the road because a neophyte driver was barreling down the icy street*, the first half of the sentence—*People skittered off to the sides of the road*—is an independent clause. Compare **dependent clause**.

infinitive (to-verb). The *to* form of a verb: *to chop*, *to scrape*, *to fling*, and *not to yield*. (Apologies to Alfred Lord Tennyson.)

-ing noun. A word ending in *-ing* that functions as a noun: either a gerund or a deverbal noun.

intensifier. A qualifier that supposedly intensifies another word but doesn't. Examples: *very*, *such*, *so*.

interjection (exclamation). A word or phrase, often placed at the beginning of a sentence, used to express emotion or to indicate voice: *ah!* *hi*, *oh*, *well*, *um*, *hey*, *wow!* *that's great!* Traditionally, the interjection has been considered a part of speech, but it qualifies as neither a form-class word nor a structure-class word. It's a grammatical outlier, like the expletive. Use interjections rarely, but don't rule them out. Sometimes you need a good *yikes!*

interrogative. A structure-class word used to begin a question: *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *how*, *why*, etc.

(The words identified here as interrogatives may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

intransitive verb. See **transitive and intransitive verbs**.

linguistics. The scientific study of human language.

linking verb (equational verb, copular verb). A *be*-verb or other verb—*seem*, *appear*, *become*, *remain*, *grow*, *get*—that equates two elements in a clause.

184. Jochim Hansen and Michaela Wänke, "Truth from Language and Truth from Fit: The Impact of Linguistic Concreteness and Level of Construal on Subjective Truth," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, no. 11 (Society for Personality and Social Psychology, November 2010), 1576–1588. Abstract: <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/36/11/1576>. Discussed in Jeremy Dean, "Why Concrete Language Communicates Truth," *PsyBlog* blog, June 29, 2011, <http://www.spring.org.uk/2011/06/why-concrete-language-communicates-truth.php>.

In *The icicles are slippery*, the linking verb *are* equates *icicles* and *slippery*. When a word acts as a linking verb, it is (like the *is* you just read) a form-class word. Compare **auxiliary**.

-ly word. See **adverb**.

metalinguage. Words about words (*noun, preposition, form class, structure class, modifier, independent clause, etc.*). Metalinguage is talk that talks about itself, a downright gymnastic proposition. I would compare it to a sketch sketching itself, but everyone knows that's impossible.

metaphor (comparative trope). A comparison of one thing to another.

This sled has wings is a metaphorical statement that compares a sled to something that can literally fly. Throw in *like* or *as*, and you have a simile, a type of metaphor whose comparison is explicit: *This sled sails through the air like a <crash> ... never mind.*

meter. The rhythmic structure of a group of words, that is, the patterns formed by their accented syllables. Meter is determined by two elements: the type of metrical foot and the number of feet per grouping. For example, iambs repeated in groups of five form the meter known as iambic pentameter: da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM.

Even if you aren't writing poetry, keep meter in mind as you choose your words—especially at the ends of sentences or sections—to GIVE your READers THAT much MORE to LIKE.

Even if you aren't writing poetry, keep meter in mind as you choose your words—especially at the ends of sentences or sections—to GIVE your READers THAT much MORE to LIKE.

metrical foot (foot). The basic unit of meter. The best-known metrical foot is the iamb (da-DUM). A metrical foot is the grouping of syllables according to two elements: the number of syllables in the unit and the arrangement of accented syllables. If you were to tap your foot to the beat as you read aloud, you'd tap once per accented syllable but not necessarily once per metrical foot. The longest foot, a dispondee, is DUM-DUM-DUM-DUM.

Metrical feet come in over two dozen types, whose names (ditrochee, molossus, etc.) MOST of US will NEVER NEED to KNOW.

misplaced modifier. A word or phrase that, by virtue of its position, modifies the wrong word. In *Geraldine saw the snowplow peeking through the window*, the phrase *peeking through the window* follows, and therefore seems to describe, *snowplow*. Presumably, Geraldine did the peeking, in which case the phrase *peeking through the window* is a misplaced modifier. It belongs

next to the word it modifies: *Peeking through the window, Geraldine saw the snowplow.* Compare **dangling modifier** and **squinting modifier**.

modal auxiliary. See **auxiliary**.

modifier. A word or phrase that modifies—adds meaning to—another word.

In *wooden handle*, the word *wooden* modifies the word *handle*. For clarity, modifiers must stay as close as possible to the words they modify. Otherwise, the sentence could end up suffering (perhaps hilariously) from one of these modification errors: dangling modifier, misplaced modifier, or squinting modifier. See also **compound modifier**.

mood (modality). A verb attribute that indicates such abstractions as conditionality, probability, obligation, ability. Moods in English include the following:

- indicative (the most common mood: *Taylor goes* or *Taylor is going*)
- imperative (*Taylor, go!*)
- subjunctive (*if only Taylor were going*)
- conditional (*Taylor would go*)

Compare **aspect, tense, voice**. See also **auxiliary**.

motif. An element that recurs throughout a piece of writing. If you read these glossary entries straight through, you'll discover two motifs: winter activities and the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

nominal. Any word, phrase, or clause that acts as a noun. In *That Suki wanted to take a break didn't stop her from finishing the job*, the clause *That Suki wanted to take a break* is a nominal because it acts as a noun: the subject of the sentence.

noun. To call any word a noun is ambiguous. Is it a noun in form? In function? Both?

- **Noun in form:** A form-class word (*shovel*) that can change form, in natural usage, in ways characteristic of nouns. In other words, a noun in form is a word with noun features of form. In isolation, it can pass linguistic tests for nounness. *Shovel*, the standalone word, qualifies as a noun in form (example tests: *shovel+s* = plural; *shovel+'s* = possessive). Of course, *shovel* also qualifies as a verb in form; like many English words, it belongs to multiple form classes.
- **Noun in function (a nominal):** Any word, phrase, or clause that acts as a noun. A noun in function typically names a person, place, or thing. In *Carl broke the shovel over his knee*, the word *shovel* is a noun not only in form but also in function because it names the thing that Carl broke (grammatically, the direct object).

onomatopoeia.

- The reinforcement of meaning in words' sounds: *buzz, chop, slide, crackle, murmur, mellifluous*.
- A word that has onomatopoeic (also *onomatopoeic*) qualities. Plural: *onomatopoeias*. Say that with a straight face.

paragraph. One sentence or a group of sentences that stands alone as a compositional unit. A paragraph can be defined various ways:

- **By its components:** A paragraph typically contains a topic sentence and multiple supporting sentences.
- **By its content:** A paragraph typically develops one main idea.
- **By its typography:** A paragraph typically begins with an indent, outdent, or simple line break.
- **By its structure:** A paragraph typically develops according to a coherent structure: chronological order, logical progression, spatial sequence, or some other organizational scheme.
- **By its purpose:** A paragraph typically has one of these purposes: to describe, to persuade, to create a desire to turn the page.

To build powerful paragraphs, heed *The Little English Handbook* author, Edward Corbett, who urges writers to “take care” of “the three most persistent and common problems that beset the composition of written paragraphs,” namely, “unity, coherence, and adequate development.”¹⁸⁵

parallelism. The repetition of grammatical structure, sound, meter, meaning, etc., within a sentence or from one sentence to another. In *Roland put on his heaviest coat, his thickest gloves, his widest muffler, and his warmest hat*, the structure [*his* <adjective+est> <noun>] recurs four times, creating parallelism within the sentence.

particle. See **verb particle**.

parts of speech. Ask a traditional linguist and a modern linguist to name the parts of speech, and you'll get shockingly different lists:

- **Traditional parts of speech:** nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and interjections (give or take a part).
- **Modern parts of speech (form-class words):** nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

See also **structure-class words**.

passive voice. The voice in which the sentence's subject receives the verb's action instead of performing it. Passive voice is indicated by a passive

185. Edward P. J. Corbett, *The Little English Handbook*, 3rd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1980), 85.

marker, namely, the combination of an auxiliary *be*-verb (*was*) and the past-participle (*-ed*) form of the main verb. In *The sidewalk was shoveled*, the subject (*sidewalk*) receives the action. Typical sidewalk if you ask me. Compare **active voice**.

pentameter. A MEter conSISTing of FIVE METrical FEET.

periodic structure. A structure (of a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or section) in which the emphatic information appears at the end. A classical periodic sentence comprises a series of clauses that build to the main clause, leading to a...a...a climax. *No matter how much Mandy begged to stay inside, no matter how loudly she pleaded, no matter how pitifully she wept, her mother—without a single sign of sympathy—continued to insist that she go outside with her friends and play in the snow.*

personal pronoun. A pronoun with attributes related to grammatical person (first-person, second-person, third-person): *I, you, we, she, herself, their, it, its*, etc.

phrasal adjective. See **compound modifier**.

phrasal verb. A multiple-word verb (*chip in, drop out of*) that has an idiomatic meaning, a meaning different from that of the individual words (*chip in* means “help”; *drop out of* means “quit”).

The *New York Times* crossword puzzle wouldn’t be the *New York Times* crossword puzzle without phrasal verbs. Examples:

- The clue *Give _____ to (approve)* yields the answer “anod.” (*Give a nod to* is a phrasal verb meaning “approve.”)
- The clue *Long (for)* yields the answer “hope.” (*Long for* and *hope for* are synonymous phrasal verbs.)
- The clue *Distribute, with “out”* yields the answer “parcel.” (*Parcel out* is a phrasal verb meaning “distribute.”)

See also **verb particle**.

phrase. A group of related words that contains no subject-verb relationship: *the neophyte driver* or *at high noon* or *barreling down the icy street*. Compare **clause**.

preposition. A structure-class word (*from, with, over, into*, etc.) that typically appears immediately before—in *pre-position* to—a noun phrase. The preposition connects the noun phrase to another word in the sentence. In *The mug of coffee dissipated welcome warmth into Hubert’s frozen fingers*, the preposition *into* connects the noun phrase *Hubert’s frozen fingers* back to the verb *dissipated*. The prepositional phrase *into Hubert’s frozen fingers* modifies the verb *dissipated*, describing how and where the dissipating happened. The prepositional phrase, as a whole, plays the role of an adverb in this sentence; the word *into* plays the role of a preposition.

(The words identified here as prepositions may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

pronoun. A structure-class word (*he, she, it, this, those, that*, etc.) that can substitute for a noun or noun phrase. Unique among the structure-class words, pronouns can change their form (*he* changes to *him* or *his*, for example). In spite of this commonality with form-class words, though, pronouns are classified as structure-class words because they are defined by their function; they create relationships between words.

The words identified here as prepositions may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.

Pronouns come in lots of types: personal, relative, reflexive, indefinite, etc.

(The words identified here as pronouns may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

prototype word. A word that belongs to only one class. *Sidewalk* is a prototype word, a prototypical noun. You would not normally use it as a verb (*sidewalked*), adverb (*sidewalkly*), adjective (*sidewalkest*) or any other type of word.

Shovel is not a prototype word. It works as either a noun or a verb: You need a *shovel* (noun) to *shovel* (verb).

See also **auxiliary, form-class words, structure-class words**.

qualifier. A structure-class word or phrase (*very, such, so, fairly, a bit*) that precedes an adjective or adverb and supposedly either increases or decreases its degree: *very hot, a bit shovel-weary*. (Qualifiers that increase the degree are called intensifiers.) Qualifiers rarely add value. *Hot* and *shovel-weary* work better alone. See also **filler word**.

relative clause. A dependent clause that modifies (and, typically, directly follows) a noun or noun phrase. In *I know the folks whose woods these are* (apologies to Robert Frost), the dependent clause *whose woods these are* is a relative clause that modifies the noun *folks*. A relative clause starts with a relative pronoun.

relative pronoun (a relative). A pronoun (*that, which, who, whose, whom*) that introduces a relative clause. In *I know the folks whose woods these are* (apologies again to Robert Frost), the word *whose* is a relative pronoun. It's called a relative pronoun because it relates the clause (*whose woods these are*) to the noun that the clause modifies (*folks*). Some linguists call

these words relatives, not relative pronouns, because in this role they are not substituting for nouns.

(The words identified here as relative pronouns may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.)

See also **remote relative**.

remote relative. A relative pronoun that is positioned too far away from its antecedent. In *Gunther finally dug up his potatoes whose field almost froze before he got around to the task*, the word *whose* is a remote relative—too far away from its antecedent, *Gunther*. Because *whose* follows *potatoes*, the field seems at first to belong to the spuds. Here's one fix: *Gunther, whose field almost froze before he got around to the task, finally dug up his potatoes*.

restatement. A rhetorical device in which an idea is repeated in a series of synonymous phrases or statements. Here's an example from "Explore and Heighten: Magic Words from a Playwright" on page 103: *Those are the times... to expand. Build up. Pile on the voom*. Restatement, like many rhetorical devices, creates emphasis. Pile on the restatement!

rhetorical device. A technique that a writer or speaker uses (alliteration, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.) to clarify, emphasize, persuade, delight, or otherwise engage the reader.

rhetorical question. A question that either can't be or isn't intended to be answered. A rhetorical question emphasizes a point while letting the writer's voice come through. How many rhetorical questions do you suppose this book contains?

run-on sentence (run-on). A sentence that includes two independent clauses joined insufficiently. Run-on sentences come in two types: comma-spliced sentences (*Max bent down, he heard his back snap*) and fused sentences (*Max bent down he heard his back snap*).

Some run-ons serve a purpose, as when several short independent clauses form a unit (*Max came, he saw, he ran for cover*). Most of the time, though, a run-on sentence of either type reads better when punctuated with one of the following:

- A period, semicolon, colon, or dash: *Max bent down; he heard his back snap*.
- A coordinating conjunction preceded by a comma: *Max bent down, and he heard his back snap*.
- A conjunctive adverb preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma: *Max bent down; simultaneously, he heard his back snap*.

sentence. One word or a group of words that stands alone as a grammatical unit. A sentence can be defined in various ways:

- **By its components:** A sentence typically contains at least one subject and a related verb.
- **By its content:** A sentence typically forms a complete thought.
- **By its typography:** A sentence typically begins with a capital letter.
- **By its punctuation:** A sentence typically ends with a period, question mark, or exclamation point.
- **By its structure:** A sentence typically has one of these structures: simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex.
- **By its purpose:** A sentence typically has one of these purposes: to state (declarative sentence), to command (imperative sentence), to ask (interrogative sentence), to exclaim (exclamatory sentence).

No definition of *sentence* captures all the flexibility and creative potential of this fundamental unit of grammar.

No definition of *sentence* captures all the flexibility and creative potential of this fundamental unit of grammar.

Compare **clause, phrase, sentence fragment.**

sentence fragment. A phrase or clause that is punctuated as if it were a sentence but that does not stand alone grammatically as an independent clause. Like this.

In informal writing, when used judiciously, sentence fragments can enhance the reading experience by creating emphasis, suspense, and variety. Keep fragments short so readers won't mistake them for complete sentences and have to reread. Powerful.

simile. A metaphor that includes a comparative word, such as *like* or *as*.

simple sentence. A sentence that contains exactly one independent clause and no dependent clauses: *Xavier's snow blower sputtered and conked out.* Compare **complex sentence, compound-complex sentence, compound sentence.**

singular they. The widely condoned¹⁸⁶ yet still controversial use of *they* (or any of the third-person-plural pronouns—*their, them, themselves*) with

186. Phonetics professor Mark Liberman sums it up this way: "Singular they' is deprecated by a few authorities, but is supported by most informed grammarians, and has often been used by great writers over the centuries" ("The SAT Fails a Grammar Test," *Language Log* blog, January 31, 2005, <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languageblog/archives/001863.html>).

a singular noun (*friend, neighbor, dentist*). In *An employee who is snowed in can't help missing their meetings*, the pronoun *their* is called a singular *they* because its antecedent, *employee*, is singular.

spliced sentence. See **comma-spliced sentence**.

squinting modifier. A word or phrase tucked confusingly between two elements, looking at both. In *Dale said tonight he'd build a fire*, the squinting modifier is *tonight*. Does *tonight* modify the verb to its left (*said*), as in "Dale made his statement tonight"? Or does it modify the verb to its right (*build*), as in "Dale will build the fire tonight"?

Possible fixes: *Tonight, Dale said he'd build a fire* or *Dale said he'd build a fire tonight*.

Compare **dangling modifier** and **misplaced modifier**.

stem sentence. A subheading traditionally used in a technical procedure to flag the break between any introductory paragraphs and the first step. Stem sentences typically start with an infinitive: *To replace the snow-blower rotator gizmo ...*

structure-class words (structure words, function words). Words in any of the structure classes: prepositions (*with*), pronouns (*he*), conjunctions (*but*), determiners (*the*), auxiliaries (*might*), qualifiers (*very*), relatives (*whose*), and interrogatives (*where*).

Structure-class words have something in common that sets them apart from form-class words (parts of speech): structure-class words generally have only one form; in natural usage, they do not change form. (*The* does not appear as *thes, the's, theicity, thely, theing, unthe*.)

Unlike form-class words, structure-class words have no features of form—no defining characteristics based on form alone. In isolation (out of context), these words cannot be linguistically tested in ways that help classify them. No structure-class word—not even the words listed at the top of this definition as typical examples (*with, he, but, etc.*)—can be called a preposition in form, a pronoun in form, a conjunction in form, an *anything* in form.

Instead, structure-class words, or function words, are characterized by function: they build relationships between the form-class words around them. Words from the structure classes contain not lexical meaning (as form-class words do) but grammatical meaning; they give sentences structure and coherence. Only the most rudimentary sentences (*See Spot dig*) could exist without them.

Punctuation decisions, like sentences themselves, often hinge on structure-class words.

subordinate clause. See **dependent clause**.

subordinating conjunction (subordinator). A conjunction that subordinates a clause, transforming it into a dependent clause while joining it to an independent clause. Words that typically act as subordinating conjunctions include *although*, *as if*, *because*, *unless*, *whenever*, and *while*.

In *Judith sprinkles rock salt on the porch because it makes the ice melt faster*, the word *because* is a subordinating conjunction. No punctuation is needed between clauses when the dependent clause comes second. When the dependent clause leads, however, you follow it with a comma: *Because rock salt makes ice melt faster, Judith sprinkles some on the porch*.

(The words identified here as subordinating conjunctions may also play other roles, in which case they are classified differently.) Compare **conjunctive adverb** and **coordinating conjunction**.

syntax. The arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses to create well-formed sentences—the result of the writer’s answer to the question, should I put this first or that? (or maybe, should I put this or that first?).

tense. A verb attribute that locates the action in time: past (*Bob shoveled*), present (*Bob shovels*), future (*Bob will shovel*). Verb-tense variations, with their sundry participles and auxiliaries, require the use of words like *pluperfect*, which I leave to you to sort out. Compare **aspect**, **mood**, **voice**. See also **auxiliary**.

they, singular. See **singular they**.

tone. See **voice**.

topic sentence. A sentence that summarizes a paragraph’s main idea. Not every paragraph has a topic sentence. Those that do typically start with it. Sometimes, for dramatic effect, a paragraph builds to a topic sentence at the end.

to-verb. See **infinitive**.

transitive and intransitive verbs. These two verb types are best defined side-by-side:

- **Transitive verb:** A verb that has a direct object; the verb *transfers* action to a noun (*trans* = “across”). For example, in *The mail carrier bought some fur-lined boots*, the verb *bought* is a transitive verb, and *boots* is its direct object (the noun to which it transfers action).
- **Intransitive verb:** A verb that has no direct object. In *The mail fell onto the ground*, the verb *fell* is intransitive; *ground* is not a direct object of the verb but an object of the preposition *onto*.

Some verbs can play either a transitive or an intransitive role. The verb *fell*, for example, is intransitive in *The mail fell onto the ground* (no direct object) and transitive in *The mail carrier is going to fell that tree* (direct object = *tree*).

unit modifier. See **compound modifier.**

verb. To call any word a verb is ambiguous. Is it a verb in form? In function? Both?

- **Verb in form:** A form-class word (*shovel, feel, seem*) that can change form, in natural usage, in ways characteristic of verbs. In other words, a verb in form is a word that has verb features of form. In isolation, it can pass linguistic tests for verbness. *Shovel*, the standalone word, qualifies as a verb in form (example tests: *shovel+s* = third-person singular; *shovel+ing* = present participle). Of course, *shovel* also qualifies as a noun in form; like many English words, it belongs to multiple form classes.
- **Verb in function:** Any word or phrase that acts as a main verb in a phrase or clause. A verb in function typically designates actions, sensations, or states. In *Carl has been shoveling all morning*, the word *shoveling* is a verb not only in form (it ends with *-ing*) but also in function because it designates Carl's action.

Part of determining a verb's function is identifying whether it acts as a linking verb, a transitive verb, or an intransitive verb. In *Carl has been shoveling all morning*, *shoveling* plays an intransitive role because it has no direct object. Incidentally, the other two verbs—*has* and *been*—belong (by virtue of their position directly in front of the main verb) not to the form class known as verbs but to the structure class known as auxiliaries, a separate grammatical entity.

Verbs, the most complicated part of speech, have several other attributes: voice, tense, aspect, and mood.

See also **phrasal verb.**

verb particle. A word that works with a main verb, and sometimes with other words, to create a phrasal verb. For example, in the phrasal verb *chip in* ("help"), *in* is a verb particle. In the phrasal verb *drop out of* ("quit"), *out* and *of* are verb particles.

voice.

- A verb attribute that relates the subject to the action. Voice comes in two types: active and passive. Compare **aspect**, **mood**, **tense**. See also **auxiliary**.
- The writer's personality (supposedly) coming through in the words. *Voice* and *tone* are sometimes used synonymously. Those who differentiate between them say that *tone* is the writer's attitude toward the subject or audience in a given piece (or, more accurately, the feelings

that the piece stirs in the reader, the only thing the reader can determine). A reader might perceive that a personal letter, for example, has a conciliatory tone. Tone may change from one piece of writing to another.

On the other hand, voice (as in the writer's personality) theoretically remains constant across a body of work. I don't know what to make of that claim since writers hardly remain constant across a body of work.

Ultimately, both tone and voice emerge from the writer's entire set of writing decisions—word choice, syntax, sentence length, punctuation, metaphors—everything that this book touches on and more. Base each decision on your purpose and audience. Tone and voice will follow.

- Corporate voice, the personality of an organization. An organization's writers need style guidelines to help them keep their writing consistent and on brand. If they're lucky, they also have editors—not robotic style-checking programs, which catch only the most basic of *faux pas*, but human editors, people who possess command of the language, people who know from voice.