English Grammar
A Short Guide
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FURTHER READING

PARTS OF A WORD

A word can be divided into its STEM (the basic part of the word containing its meaning) and its INFLECTIONS (the endings added to indicate such things as that a noun is PLURAL or a verb is in the past tense).

Examples:  
**Stem:**  
dog  
walk  

**Inflections:**  
s in dogs  
ed in walked

PARTS OF A SENTENCE

SUBJECT

The subject is the person, thing or topic which the sentence deals with. To discover the subject, ask **who** or **what** before the verb, e.g. in the sentence **The house stands on the hill**, **what** stands on the hill? Answer: **the house**.

Examples:  
The house stands on the hill.  
It overlooks the plain.

PREDICATE

The predicate is all of the sentence except the subject.

Examples:  
The house **stands on the hill**.  
It overlooks the plain.

OBJECT

The object is the person, thing or topic upon which the subject carries out the action of the verb. To discover the object, ask **who** or **what** after the verb, e.g. the house overlooks **what**? Answer: the plain.

Examples:  
The house overlooks **the plain**.  
I see **him** clearly.  
He watches **himself** carefully.

In some cases a whole clause can act as object.

Example:  
He said **that the Green Knight was really orange**.

Sometimes we apparently have two objects. Where one of these can alternatively be expressed by placing **to** before it, it is called the **indirect object**. For example, instead of **He gave me the book** we can say **He gave the book to me**. Here **the book** is the direct object and **me** the indirect object.

COMPLEMENT
After the verb to be there is no object since the noun which follows refers to the same thing as that which precedes the verb (the subject). The noun following the verb to be is called the complement.

Examples: I am a man.
This is the question.

CLAUSE

There are two kinds of clauses: principal (or main) clauses, and subordinate (or dependent) clauses.

Principal Clauses

A group of words which includes a subject and a finite verb and makes a complete statement.

Examples: I am a man.
The house stands on the hill.
When I come home, I will let the cat in.

The following are not principal clauses because they do not make a complete statement which can stand by itself:

Which is a problem
That the house is standing on the hill
When I come home
The house which stands on the hill

Subordinate Clause

A group of words which includes a finite or non-finite verb but does not make a statement which stands by itself.

Examples: As soon as the Green Knight entered the room all were astounded.
He said that the Green Knight was really orange.
The house, which stands on the hill, is empty.

Subordinate clauses can be classified according to their function:

Adverbial Clause

Example: As soon as the Green Knight entered the room, all were astounded.

In this sentence the clause fulfills the same function as an adverb such as immediately in the sentence immediately all were astounded.

Noun Clause
Example: He said that the Green Knight was really orange.

The clause fulfills the same function as a noun such as the words in He said the words.

Relative Clause

Example: The house, which stands on the hill, is empty.

Relative clauses are adjectival in nature. The clause fulfills the same role as an adjective such as high-placed in the sentence The high-placed house is empty.

Clauses can also be classified by whether they contain a finite verb.

Finite Clause

A finite clause contains a finite verb and, usually, a subject. It can be a principal clause or a subordinate clause.

Examples: They say nice things about you. (principal clause)
When they say nice things about you they are not lying. (subordinate clause)

Non-Finite Clause

A non-finite clause contains a non-finite verb but does not contain a finite verb and cannot stand alone. A non-finite clause cannot be a principal clause. Non-finite verbs include participles and infinitives.

Examples: Singing and dancing, he moved slowly up the aisle.
He gave me an invitation to bring you to the party.
Having eaten all the cakes, he began to consume the biscuits.
Filled with joy, he left the room.

PHRASE

A phrase is a group of words without a verb.

Examples: It is on the hill.
He went over the sea.

PARTS OF SPEECH

Examples:

house noun
The house article + noun
The house stands article + noun + verb
The house stands firmly article + noun + verb + adverb
The house stands firmly on the hill
article + noun + verb + adverb
preposition + article + noun
The empty house stands on the hill
article + adjective + verb + adverb +
preposition + article + noun
It stands on the hill
pronoun + verb + preposition + article + noun
Since it stands on the hill it overlooks
the plain
conjunction + pronoun + verb +
preposition + article + noun +
pronoun + verb + article + noun

NOUN

Nouns can be thought of as 'names'; they denote things, people, abstract ideas.

Examples:

The **house** is old.
A **king** was here.
**Virtue** is its own **reward**.
**Accidents** will happen.

ARTICLE

The articles are: **the, a, an. The** is called the **definite article**; **a** (and **an**) is called the **indefinite article**.

VERB

A verb is a "doing word". It expresses the carrying out of an action. With an active verb this action is carried out by the subject.

Examples:

It **stands**.
I **am**.
He **adjudicates** between the parties concerned.
Alfred **burnt** the cakes.

With a passive verb the action is carried out upon the subject:

Examples:

The cakes **were burnt** by Alfred.
The Bible **is read** in many languages.

Verbs have various qualities:

Tense

This is the feature of the verb indicating when the action took place.
Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>It stands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>It stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>It will stand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aspect**

This is the feature of the verb which indicates whether the action is was or will be a completed one or a continuous one. If the verb is unmarked as to whether it is completed, 'perfect' or continuous, 'progressive', it is called **simple**. Hence we can draw up the following scheme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Present</td>
<td>It stands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Past</td>
<td>It stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Future</td>
<td>It will stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>It has stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>It had stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Perfect</td>
<td>It will have stood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive</td>
<td>It is standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Progressive</td>
<td>It was standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Progressive</td>
<td>It will be standing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The present perfect is often known simply as the **perfect** and the past perfect is sometimes called the **pluperfect**.

**Voice**

In English we have the active and the passive voice. In the active voice the subject carries out the action of the verb; in the passive the action of the verb is carried out upon the subject.

Examples:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>I place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>I am placed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A full complement of passive verbs exists in English. The passive is formed with the appropriate tense of the verb **to be** and the past participle.

Examples:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present Progressive Passive</td>
<td>I am being placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Perfect Passive</td>
<td>I had been placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Perfect Passive</td>
<td>I will be placed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mood**

There are three moods in English.
1. **Indicative:**

The **indicative** mood is the normal one in present-day English (PE):

Example: I was going to the pictures

2. **Subjunctive:**

The subjunctive mood is much rarer in PE; it expresses a hypothetical action.

Examples: If I were going to the pictures.  
I wish I were going to the pictures.

3. **Imperative:**

The **imperative** mood expresses an order.

Example: Go to the pictures.

**Finite and Non-Finite Verbs**

Verbs are either **finite** or **non-finite**. Non-finite verbs do not include any indication of tense. One kind of non-finite verb is the **infinitive**. The infinitive is the basic form of the verb. It is often combined with **to** as in I am going to stand here. However the infinitive is not always preceded by to: in the sentence I will stand the infinitive is stand. Combined with will the infinitive stand makes the finite (future tense) verb will stand. Other non-finite parts of the verb are the participles. The present participle is the form of the verb used in constructions like:

I am going.  
He is combing his hair.  
They are developing rapidly.

The same form of the verb can also be used as a noun (in which case it is called a **gerund** or **verbal noun**):

Examples: Developing is not easy.  
Walking is pleasant in the summer.

or as an adjective (in which case it is called a **gerundive** or **verbal adjective**):

Examples: The third world is made up of the developing countries.  
She is a growing child.

The **past participle** is used in constructions like:

I have walked.  
She has grown.  
It has developed into a major argument.
This form is often the same in PE as the past tense (cf. I walked) but not always (cf. I grew). This also appears as an adjective:

A grown man

ADVERB

An adverb modifies a verb; it indicates how the action of a verb is carried out.

Examples: The house stands firmly.
She speaks well.
He dresses beautifully.

It can also modify an adjective or another adverb.

The house is very firm.
She answered most considerately.

PREPOSITION

A preposition connects a noun (with or without an article) or a pronoun to some other word. Prepositions are the "little words of English".

Examples: It stands on hills.
The swagman jumped into the billabong.
England is over the sea.
She told the good news to him.

ADJECTIVE

An adjective qualifies a noun; it describes the attributes of a noun.

Examples: The house stands on the high hill.
Precious purple prose provokes profound professors.

PRONOUN

Pronouns take the place of nouns.

Examples: It stands on the hill.
I see myself.
The house which stands on the hill overlooks the plain.
That stands on the hill.
What stands on the hill?

There are a number of different kinds of pronouns:

Personal Pronouns

These are divided into "persons" as follows:
The personal pronouns also include the reflexive and emphatic pronouns. These are the same in form but different in function. They are *myself, himself, themselves* etc.

Examples: Reflexive: I see *myself.*
People help *themselves.*

Emphatic: I think *myself* that it is wrong.
They *themselves* want to stay on.

Relative Pronouns

The relative pronouns are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>who, that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>whom, that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>whose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are used in relative clauses such as:

Examples: This is the man *who* saw me.
This is the man *whom* I saw.
This is the man *whose* house I saw.
This is the man *that* I saw.
This is the house *that* Jack built.

Demonstrative Pronouns

These are: This these
That those

Examples: This is the house.
That is the question.

They are also used as demonstrative adjectives:

Examples: This man is green.
That house is red.

Interrogative Pronouns

These are used in questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Object whom, who what, which
Possessive whose

Examples: Who(m) did you see?
Who is that man?
Which is the right way?
Who(m) did you speak to?

What and which can be also used as interrogative adjectives in which case they can be applied to people.

Examples: Which house stands on the hill?
Which Prime Minister was drowned?
What sweet do you recommend?

CONJUNCTIONS

Some conjunctions are coordinating (i.e. joining elements of the same kind) like and or but.

Examples: It stands on the hill and overlooks the plain.
I say this but she says that.

Other conjunctions are subordinating (i.e. joining a subordinate clause to a main clause) like when because, since, as.

Examples: Since it stands on the hill it overlooks the plain.
Although I say this she says that.
When Gawain saw the Green Knight he did not show that he was afraid.