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## English grammar

### 1 Summary

#### Grammatical units • 2

The grammatical units of English are these: word, phrase, clause and sentence.

#### Word classes • 3

The main word classes are these: verb, noun, adjective, adverb, preposition, determiner, pronoun and conjunction.

#### Phrases • 4

There are these kinds of phrase: verb phrase, noun phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase and prepositional phrase.

#### Sentence elements • 5

The sentence elements are these: subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial.

#### English compared with other languages • 6

English words do not have a lot of different endings for number and gender.

Word order is very important in English.

The verb phrase can have a complex structure.

There are many idioms with prepositions.

### 2 Grammatical units

#### A FLIGHT ANNOUNCEMENT

*'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of British Island Airways, Captain Massey and his crew welcome you on board the Start Herald Flight to Southampton. Our flight time will be approximately forty-five minutes, and we shall be climbing to an altitude of eight thousand feet and cruising at a speed of two hundred and fifty miles per hour.'*

(from M. Underwood and P. Barr *Listeners*)

The grammatical units of English are words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

#### 1 Words

The words in the announcement are *good, evening, ladies, and, gentlemen, on* etc.

NOTE For word-building, e.g. *air + ways = airways*, • 282.

## 2 Phrases and clauses

We use phrases to build a clause. Here is an example.

Subject (noun phrase)	Verb (verb phrase)	Complement (noun phrase)
<i>Our flight time</i>	<i>will be</i>	<i>approximately forty-five minutes.</i>

Here the noun phrase *our flight time* is the subject of the clause. A clause has a subject and a verb. There can be other phrases, too. In this next example we use a prepositional phrase as an adverbial.

Adverbial (prepositional phrase)	Subject (noun phrase)	Verb (verb phrase)	Object (noun phrase)	Object (noun phrase)
<i>On behalf of the airline</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>wish</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>a pleasant flight.</i>

For more about the different kinds of phrases, • 4.  
For subject, object, complement and adverbial, • 5.  
For finite and non-finite clauses, • 239 (3).

## 3 Sentences

A sentence can be a single clause.

*On behalf of British Island Airways, Captain Massey and his crew welcome you on board the Star Herald flight to Southampton.*

A written sentence begins with a capital letter (*On*) and ends with a mark such as a full stop.

We can also combine two or more clauses in one sentence. For example, we can use *and* to link the clauses.

*Our flight time will be approximately forty-five minutes, and we shall be climbing to an altitude of eight thousand feet and cruising at a speed of two hundred and fifty miles an hour.*

For details about sentences with more than one clause, • 238.

## 3 Word classes

- 1 There are different classes of word, sometimes called 'parts of speech'. The word *come* is a verb, *letter* is a noun and *great* is an adjective.

### NOTE

Some words belong to more than one word class. For example, *test* can be a noun or a verb.

*He passed the test.* (noun)

*He had to test the machine.* (verb)

2 There are eight main word classes in English.

Verb:	<i>climb, eat, welcome, be</i>
Noun:	<i>aircraft, country, lady, hour</i>
Adjective:	<i>good, British, cold, quick</i>
Adverb:	<i>quickly, always, approximately</i>
Preposition:	<i>to, of, at, on</i>
Determiner:	<i>the, his, some, forty-five</i>
Pronoun:	<i>we, you, them, myself</i>
Conjunction:	<i>and, but, so</i>

NOTE There is also a small class of words called 'interjections'. They include *oh, ah* and *mhm*.

3 Verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs are 'vocabulary words'. Learning vocabulary means learning verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs.

Prepositions, determiners, pronouns and conjunctions belong to much smaller classes. These words are sometimes called 'grammatical words'.

4 Most word classes can be divided into sub-classes. For example:

Verb	Ordinary verb: <i>go, like, think, apply</i> Auxiliary verb: <i>is, had, can, must</i>
Adverb	Adverb of manner: <i>suddenly, quickly</i> Adverb of frequency: <i>always, often</i> Adverb of place: <i>there, nearby</i> Linking adverb: <i>too, also</i> etc
Determiner	Article: <i>a, the</i> Possessive: <i>my, his</i> Demonstrative: <i>this, that</i> Quantifier: <i>all, three</i>

## 4 Phrases

There are five kinds of phrase.

- 1 Verb phrase: *come, had thought, was left, will be climbing*  
A verb phrase has an ordinary verb (*come, thought, left, climbing*) and may also have an auxiliary (*had, was, will*).
- 2 Noun phrase: *a good flight, his crew, we*  
A noun phrase has a noun (*flight*), which usually has a determiner (*a*) and/or adjective (*good*) in front of it. A noun phrase can also be a pronoun (*we*).
- 3 Adjective phrase: *pleasant, very late*  
An adjective phrase has an adjective, sometimes with an adverb of degree (*very*).
- 4 Adverb phrase: *quickly, almost certainly*  
An adverb phrase has an adverb, sometimes with an adverb of degree (*almost*).
- 5 Prepositional phrase: *after lunch, on the aircraft*  
A prepositional phrase is a preposition + noun phrase.

## 5 Sentence elements

- 1 Each phrase plays a part in the clause or sentence. Here are some examples.

Subject	Verb	Adverbial
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*The flight is leaving shortly.*

Subject	Verb	Complement
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*The weather is very good.*

*My father was a pilot.*

Subject	Verb	Object
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*I was reading a newspaper.*

*Two stewards served lunch.*

Subject	Verb	Object	Adverbial
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*The aircraft left London at three o'clock.*

*We must book the tickets next week.*

- 2 These are the elements of an English sentence and the kinds of phrase that we can use for each element.

Subject            Noun phrase: *the flight, I, two stewards*

Verb                Verb phrase: *is, served, must book*

Object             Noun phrase: *a newspaper, lunch*

Complement      Adjective phrase: *very good*

Noun phrase: *a pilot*

Adverbial         Adverb phrase: *shortly*

Prepositional phrase: *at three o'clock*

Noun phrase: *next week*

### NOTE

a The verb is central to the sentence and we use the word 'verb' for both the sentence element - 'The verb follows the subject' - and for the word class - 'Leave is a verb.'

For more details about sentence patterns, • 7.

b The word *there* can be the subject. • 50

*There was a letter for you.*

## 6 English compared with other languages

### 1 Endings

Unlike words in some other languages, English words do not have a lot of different endings. Nouns take *s* in the plural (*miles*), but they do not have endings to show whether they are subject or object.

Verbs take a few endings such as *ed* for the past (*started*), but they do not take endings for person, except in the third person singular of the present tense (*it starts*).

Articles (e.g. *the*), Possessives (e.g. *my*) and adjectives (e.g. *good*) do not have endings for number or gender. Pronouns (e.g. *lime*) have fewer forms than in many languages.

## 2 Word order

Word order is very important in English. As nouns do not have endings for subject or object, it is the word order that shows which is which.

Subject	Verb	Object	
<i>The woman</i>	<i>loved</i>	<i>the man.</i>	(She loved him.)
<i>The man</i>	<i>loved</i>	<i>the woman.</i>	(He loved her.)

The subject-verb order is fixed, and we can change it only if there is a special reason.

## 3 Verb phrases

A verb phrase can have a complex structure. There can be auxiliary verbs as well as the ordinary verb.

*I climbed up the ladder.*

*I was climbing the mountain.*

*We shall be climbing to an altitude of eight thousand feet.*

The use of tenses and auxiliary verbs can be difficult for speakers of other languages.

## 4 Prepositions

The use of prepositions in English can be a problem.

*We flew here on Friday. We left at two o'clock.*

Both prepositions and adverbs combine with verbs in an idiomatic way.

*They were waiting for the flight. The plane took off.*

There are many expressions involving prepositions that you need to learn as items of vocabulary.