

Grammar for Literacy

CfE

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Parts of speech

Different words have different jobs to do. Look at this **sentence**:

The brum tublup was dinating gurdly beside the condle pirrostin.

Don't worry if the sentence seems like nonsense. You should still be able to answer these questions about it.

- 1 What was the tublup like?
- 2 What was the tublup doing?
- 3 How did the tublup do this?
- 4 What was the pirrostin like?

If you find those questions really tricky, you could think of it like this:

The brum tublup was dinating gurdly beside the condle pirrostin.

is organised in exactly the same way, with the same structure, as this sentence:

The old dog was dreaming quietly beside the warm radiator.

Now try again to answer those four questions.

You could work out the correct answers for these questions because you can already speak and write English. You already have a wide and deep knowledge of how our language works. This chapter about **parts of speech** – like many other chapters in this book – will give you a way to understand, handle and discuss this knowledge. That knowledge will also be stretched, added to and challenged.

The expression **parts of speech** means the different sorts of words that we have in the English language and the different jobs that those words do for us. The main English parts of speech are:

nouns	adverbs	conjunctions
adjectives	pronouns	articles
verbs	prepositions	interjections

► Nouns

You most likely used your first ever spoken word when you were about a year old and that word was probably a **noun**. You might have used the name of someone in your family. You might have said the word for your favourite toy or a family pet. All of those words are nouns. If we can use nouns then we can start, at least in a simple way, to talk about the world around us. For example, if a baby can say 'banana', someone can give the baby a chunk of that fruit; if a baby can say 'teddy', someone can give the baby a cuddly toy.

A **noun** is a naming word. It tells us the name of a thing, place or person. Nouns are the words that help us to identify and talk about what we find in the world around us.

There are several different types of noun. We are going to start with the simplest and most common type. In fact, there is a clue in the name.

» Common nouns

A **common noun** is a word that tells us the name of a thing we can experience with our senses. Common nouns are the names of things that we can see, hear and touch. It can be helpful if we think of common nouns as the names of ordinary things:

dog

gate

biscuit

hat

train

leaf



Group task

Take a few seconds to look around the room you are in. Everyone in your group or class should then take it in turns to say the **common noun** for something they can see from where they are sitting. Make sure you listen carefully so that you don't say a common noun someone has said already.

If your group is quite small, or if you are in a big class but ready for a challenge, keep going round and round until nobody can see any more common nouns.



Building

Read the following extract. It contains **23** different **common nouns**. Can you find them all?

The café was packed. A barista at the counter was energetically pulling the lever on a vast, shiny machine, skilfully turning out cup after cup of steaming coffee. A speedy waiter slipped quickly between the tables, delivering plates of cake and bowls of spicy-smelling soup. In the corner, by the window, sat a small woman, quietly tapping away at the keys of a shiny laptop. She ignored everything around her, until she was disturbed by a sudden bark. An unsupervised toddler had pulled a dog's ears. The woman smiled sympathetically at the dog, scowled at the child and went back to whatever she was thinking about.



Strengthening

The paragraph above describes a busy café. How many more **common nouns** can you think of for things that could be found in that café scene? Make a list.



Extending

So far you have identified common nouns in someone else's writing or made lists of common nouns. Now it is time to use some common nouns in your own writing.

1 Parts of speech

First, pick **one** of the following locations. Make a list of at least **ten common nouns** for things you would expect to find there:

➤ a supermarket ➤ a street in town ➤ a museum ➤ a sports ground

Next, write about **100 words** to describe the scene in that place. Use all the common nouns from your list. **HINT!** It may help if you look back at the café scene paragraph on page 3, which was just over 100 words long.

Finally, read back over your writing. Underline all the common nouns as you go. Did you use all the common nouns on your list? Did you use any others as well?

There are several different types of noun. We have started with the simplest and most frequent type, the common noun, and you have practised identifying these and knowing where to use them. Let's move on to the next kind of noun.

>> Proper nouns

A **proper noun** is the name of a particular person or place:

Tom Hanks

New York

Kings Cross Station

Beyoncé

Germany

Loch Ness

Proper nouns **always** begin with a **capital letter**.



Building

Read the following extract. It contains **15** different **proper nouns**. Can you find them all? **HINT!** Some of the proper nouns here are made up of more than one word.

It took Romesh and Claire a long time to plan their holiday. At first, they thought they might go to France. Paris would be lovely at this time of year, and they could climb the Eiffel Tower or take a boat along the Seine at night. Then they considered Germany. Berlin would be a fascinating city to visit, and they could stay with Claire's Aunt Frida, who lived very near the Brandenburg Gate. Romesh really wanted to take Claire to Sri Lanka, to see where his family had come from, but it was too far away, and it would cost too much money. At last, they decided to spend a weekend in London: the only language they both knew how to speak was English, and the British Museum and the National Gallery would both be free.



Strengthening – group task

Get everybody in your group or class to stand up. Everyone has a name, which is a proper noun. Take a few seconds to look around the room. When you all feel ready, the person whose **first name** comes nearest to the start of the alphabet should say their name out loud and then sit down. The person whose name comes second should say theirs and then sit down. Carry on around the class until everyone is sitting down.

To extend the challenge, get everyone to stand up and play the game again, but this time use everyone's **surname** alphabetically.

Crossover

As you do the next few tasks, remember that proper nouns **always** begin with a capital letter. That is not the only reason why we use capital letters in English. We also use them at the beginning of **sentences**, which you can learn about on page 115.

Building

The word 'country' is a common noun because there are lots of countries in the world. But in the example above, France, Germany and Sri Lanka are the names of particular countries. They are proper nouns and they start with capital letters.

Look at the table on the next page. The middle column is full of **common nouns**. The left column lists the **proper nouns** that go with those common nouns – just as 'Germany' goes with 'country' or 'Romesch' goes with 'man'. But the proper nouns in the first column are in the wrong order. Match each common noun with the correct proper noun. One has been done for you as an example.

1 Parts of speech

Proper noun	Common noun	Proper noun
India	island	
Aisha	continent	
Europe	company	
Tuesday	country	
September	river	
Tasmania	girl	
Islam	building	
Amazon	language	
Pacific	month	
Polish	mountain	<i>Ben Nevis</i>
Mount Everest	religion	
Nike	state	
Texas	ocean	
Houses of Parliament	day	



Strengthening

Now look at the empty third column of the table. Find another **proper noun** to go alongside each of the common nouns in the middle column. For example, 'Ben Nevis' is a proper noun that goes with 'mountain'.



Extending

You learned already that proper nouns are the names of particular people or places. We can see that in the table above. Girls are people. Buildings, continents, countries, islands, mountains, oceans, rivers and states are all different sorts of places.

But there are some other, quite specific, reasons why we use proper nouns. They are not used only for names of people and places. What **other types of proper noun** can you find in the table above?

You already know about common nouns and proper nouns. Let's move on to another kind of noun.

► Apostrophes

You have now learned about three of the most common punctuation marks: the full stop, question mark and exclamation mark. They are all used at the end of sentences. We will move on now to an important mark that some people find a little confusing.

An **apostrophe** is a small punctuation mark that hovers just above written or printed words. You can see it in the examples below.

It is used for **contraction**, to show that letters and spaces have been missed out when words are combined to make a shorter word:

don't hasn't can't didn't

It is also used for **ownership**, to show possession or a strong connection:

our dog's bed the students' exam papers the children's room

» The contraction apostrophe

You can use an **apostrophe** to show that letters, and spaces between words, have been missed out to make words shorter and therefore easier to say. The apostrophe goes into the place where the letters and spaces have been removed. For example:

that is = that's

we are = we're



Building

Look at these **contractions**. Write them out in full. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------|
| 1 they'll
<i>they will</i> | 2 I'd | 3 haven't | 4 I'm |
| 5 don't | 6 won't | 7 let's | |



Strengthening

Write out these phrases in their **contracted** form, using **apostrophes** where you need them to show that letters and spaces have been missed out.

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| ➤ they would | ➤ he did not | ➤ here is |
| ➤ I have | ➤ you are | ➤ she cannot |
| ➤ we will | ➤ it is | ➤ they are |
| ➤ I am not | ➤ we might have | ➤ we were not |
| ➤ you would not have | ➤ I had not | ➤ he is |



Extending

Write out this story using **apostrophes** in the right places to **contract** some of the words.

Nadia had a secret. She had taken her dad's recipe book. Nadia's dad was on a diet and she thought it would be a good idea if he could not make any more of his famous creamy curries.

First she thought she would hide the book in the laundry basket, but he would find it when it was his turn to fill the washing machine.

Then she considered her little brother's bedroom, but there was a note on the door that said, 'If you come in here, I will shoot you with my space blaster.'

She wondered about putting the book in the cat's basket, but she knew it would hate to sleep on something lumpy.

Finally, she put the book in the cupboard with the curry spices. After all, her dad was not meant to be looking in there.

Mistake!

Some people mix up words that use a **contraction apostrophe** with other words that sound or look similar but have a different meaning. Be very careful with these contractions:

you're is short for 'you are'

your means belonging to you

we're is short for 'we are'

were is a verb

they're is short for 'they are'

there tells us about a place

You're very tall.

Give me your plate.

We're going out now.

We were out all day yesterday.

They're very noisy.

Put it over there.

2 Punctuation

The next exercise will let you practise using the tricky words explained on the previous page. Write out the paragraph, choosing the right word each time. The first letter of the word is there in **bold** to help you each time. **HINT!** Not every answer will be a word that uses a contraction apostrophe.

I know (1) **y** going to New York on holiday. Have you got (2) **y** tickets yet? (3) **W** going to Barcelona. We (4) **w** going to go to Paris but (5) **t** having a big strike (6) **t** in the summer and we (7) **w** afraid we wouldn't be able to get home again if the airport (8) **t** got shut down. (9) **W** really looking forward to Barcelona but I'm sure (10) **y** going to have a great time in New York too. Will you show me (11) **y** photos when (12) **y** back home again?

Mistake!

Another mistake that some people make is not a mistake with contraction apostrophes but something that happens **because of how we hear** some words that use these apostrophes. Look at this example and especially at the three words in **bold**:

I **should've** gone with her. I **could've** gone: I had lots of spare time that day. I **would've** been able to help her.

Because you understand this way of using apostrophes, you know that those three words could also be written out like this:

I **should have** gone with her. I **could have** gone: I had lots of spare time that day. I **would have** been able to help her.

Sometimes we see people writing things like:

I should **of** gone. I would **of** helped.

The word 'of' in these sentences is wrong. People write it because they hear the '**ve** **sound**' in words like should've, could've and would've, but they think they are hearing an '**of** **sound**'. It's wrong to use 'of' when you write something like this, because there is no verb 'to of'. The verb is 'to have', and the -ve in those contractions is part of the word 'have'.

There is one more thing that you should know about the contraction apostrophe. Using apostrophes like this is considered to be not very **formal**. Contraction apostrophes are not incorrect English, but there are some **situations** where it would be thought wrong to use them. For example, if you are writing a job application, a formal business letter, a formal report or an essay, you should use the longer, more separate and more complete forms of words, rather than shortening them and pulling them together with the contraction apostrophe.