

Grammar

Many students see comments on graded papers that say something like “work on grammar” or “grammar issue,” but what exactly does that mean? In simple terms, grammar is the structure of language: types of words, how words are used in differing contexts, and how words are positioned in a sentence. Working on “grammar” can mean all of these things. This handout will help you understand basic grammar.

At the basic level, the smallest grammatical unit are letters, which form words. These words can be broken down into the eight parts of speech:

- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Conjunctions
- Interjections
- Noun
- Preposition
- Pronoun
- Verb

In addition to these eight parts of speech, English has articles and determiners, which will be covered later in this handout.

Adjectives

Adverbs are words that describe something. These are words like:

Happy	The boy is happy .
Green	The green grass waves in the wind.
Soft	I have a soft pillow.

Adverbs

Adverbs are words that describe *how* something was done. These are words like:

Happily	The boy happily ran through the playground
Softly	The wind whispered softly .
Slowly	The car ahead of me drove slowly .

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that join phrases and/or clauses. These words are:

- For
- And
- Nor
- But
- Or
- Yet
- So

We went to the store **and** the ice cream store.

The Lorax may seem like just a children’s book, **but** it is actually a great commentary on environmental preservation.

The author wrote the book, **so** the audience would know what life in Medieval times would be like.

Interjections

Interjections are words that can stand alone as sentences. These are words that are usually in reaction to something. These are words like:

Wow	Wow! That was neat!
Great	Great! Let’s meet at 2 p.m.
Hey	Hey! How are you?

Noun

Nouns are words that represent people, places, or things. These are words like:

School	What school do you go to?
Dog	I love my dog .
Manager	The manager led the staff meeting.

Preposition

Prepositions are words that show location or how words or phrases relate to one another. These are words like:

To	She went to the window to look outside.
In	The cat wanted to come in the house.
Out	The cat then wanted to go back out .

Pronoun

Pronouns are words that refer to a noun. These are words like:

She	She left the stage after the encore.
Him	Did you want to go with him ?
They	They went out of town yesterday.

Verb

Verbs are words that show action.

Verbs can take several forms, so it’s important to know what the different forms look like.

Infinitives

Infinitives are the raw form of the verb. They are verbs that include the word “to” in front of them. These are words like:

To run	The child likes to run .
To swim	People go to the pool to swim .
To sew	I like to sew in my free time.

Participles

Helping and auxiliary verbs

Jorge **ran** to the music lesson.

Fish **swim** in the ocean.

I **sew** monograms into my sweaters.

Articles and Determiners

Articles and determiners are words that indicate a noun is coming up in the sentence.

Articles

Articles can take three forms:

- A
- An
- The

The word “The” refers to a specific noun:

- Mom took me to **the** school.
- Hand me **the** cup, please.
- **The** lady at the register was so nice.

The words “A” and “An” refer to singular, non-specific nouns:

- The parents looked for **a** school with a good reputation.
- I wanted **a** cup of water.
- **A** lady at the store told me to buy a different brand.

“An” is used for singular words that begin with a vowel *sound*. This is important to remember because the vowel “y” begins with a “w” sound, a consonant sound; therefore, words like “yeti” will take “a” as an article, not “an”.

Determiners

Determiners, sometimes referred to as quantifiers, are words that indicate there is some amount of objects, but these determiners do not specify the amount:

Some	We’re going to need some chairs for the event.
Few	Grab a few pencils.
Many	I own many shoes.

Full Sentence Structure Examples

The	author	makes	it	clear	that	life	imitates	art.
Article	Noun	Verb	Pronoun	Adjective		Noun	Verb	Noun

Live Oak,	a	common	tree	in	South Texas,	is	highly	susceptible	to	oak wilt.
Noun	Article	Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Noun	Verb	Adverb	Adjective	Preposition	Noun