**Terms Related to Grammar and Other Aspects of Language**

The following words and expressions are used to talk about grammar and other aspects of language.

**abstract noun** (the opposite of a [concrete noun](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#C)) the name of something which we experience as an idea, not by seeing, touching, etc. Examples: *doubt*; *height*; *geography*.

**active** An active verb form is one like *breaks*, *told*, *will help* (not like *is broken*, *was told*, *will be helped*, which are [passive](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P) verb forms). The subject of an active verb is usually the person or thing that does the action, or that is responsible for what happens.

**adjective** a word like *green*, *hungry*, *impossible*, which is used when we describe people, things, events, etc. Adjectives are used in connection with nouns and pronouns. Examples: *a green apple*; *She’s hungry*.

**adjective clause** another name for [relative clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#R).

**adverb** a word like *tomorrow*, *once*, *badly*, *there*, *also*, which is used to say, for example, when, where or how something happens.

**adverbial** an adverb, or a longer expression which has a similar function to an adverb in a clause. Examples: *I usually get up at seven o’clock on weekdays*.

**adverbial clause** a clause which functions as an adverbial. Examples: *On Sundays I usually get up when I wake up*; *I’ll phone you if I have time.*

**adverb particle** a short adverb like *up*, *out*, *off*, often used as part of a phrasal verb (e.g. *clean up*, *look out*, *tell off*).

**affirmative** An affirmative sentence is one that makes a positive statement – not a negative sentence or a question. Compare *I agree* (affirmative); *I don’t agree* (negative).

**agent** In a passive sentence, the agent is the expression that says who or what an action is done by. Example: *This picture was probably painted by a child.*

**article** *A*, *an* and *the* are called ‘articles’. *A/an* is called the ‘indefinite article’; *the* is called the ‘definite article’.

**aspect** Many grammarians prefer to talk about progressive and perfective aspect, rather than progressive and perfect tense, since these forms express other ideas besides time (e.g. continuity, completion). However, in *Practical English Usage* the term *tense* is often used to include aspect, for the sake of simplicity.

**attributive** Adjectives placed before nouns are in ‘attributive position’. Examples: *a* ***green*** *shirt*; *my* ***noisy*** *son*. See also [predicative](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**auxiliary verb** a verb like *be*, *have*, *do* which is used with another verb to make tenses, passive forms, etc. Examples: *She* ***was*** *writing*; *Where* ***have*** *you put it?* See also [modal auxiliary verb](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#M).

**base form** the form of a verb that has no endings or other changes, used for example in infinitives, imperatives and present tenses (except third person singular). Examples: *I’d like to* ***phone***; ***Pass*** *the salt*.

**clause** a stretch of language which contains a subject and a finite verb. Sentences consist of one or more clauses. Examples: *Alex couldn’t come today. I’ll be glad when Harry gets back.* The word *clause* is also sometimes used for some structures containing participles or infinitives. Example: *Not knowing what to do, I telephoned Robin.* See also [co-ordinate clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#C), [main clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#M), [subordinate clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**cleft sentence** a sentence in which special emphasis is given to one part (e.g. the subject or the object) by using a structure with *it* or *what*. Examples: *It was you that caused the accident*; *What I need is a drink*.

**collective noun** a singular word for a group. Examples: *family*; *team*.

**comparative** the form of an adjective or adverb made with *-er* (e.g. *older*, *faster*); also the structure *more* + adjective/adverb, used in the same way (e.g. *more useful*, *more politely*).

**complement** **1.** (predicative complement) a part of a sentence that gives more information about the subject (after *be*, *seem* and some other verbs), or, in some structures, about the object. Examples: *You’re the right person to help*; *She looks very kind*; *They elected him President*.   
**2.** a structure or words needed after a noun, adjective, verb or preposition to complete its meaning. Examples: *the intention to travel*; *full of water*; *try phoning*; *down the street*.

**compound** A compound noun, verb, adjective, preposition, etc is one that is made of two or more parts. Examples: *bus driver*; *get on with*; *one-eyed*.

**concrete noun** (the opposite of an [abstract noun](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#A)) the name of something which we can experience by seeing, touching, etc. Examples: *cloud*; *petrol*; *raspberry*.

**conditional** a clause or sentence containing *if* (or a word with a similar meaning). Examples: *If you try you’ll understand*; *I would be surprised if she knew*; *Supposing the train had been late, what would you have done*?

**conjunction** a word like *and*, *but*, *although*, *because*, *when*, *if*, which can be used to join clauses together. Example: *I rang because I was worried*.

**consonant** for example, the letters *b*, *c*, *d*, *f*, *g* and their usual sounds (See [Phonetic alphabet](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/phonetic-alphabet)). See also [vowel](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#V).

**continuous** the same as [progressive](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**contraction** a short form in which a subject and an auxiliary verb, or an auxiliary verb and the word *not*, are joined together into one word. Contractions are also made with non-auxiliary *be* and *have*. Examples: *I’m*; *who’ve*; *John’ll*; *can’t*.

**co-ordinate clause** one of two or more clauses of equal ‘value’ that are connected. Examples: *Shall I come to your place or would you like to come to mine?*; *It's cooler today and there's a bit of wind.* See also [clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#C), [main clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#M), [subordinate clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**co-ordinating conjunction** a conjunction that joins co-ordinate clauses or other co-ordinate structures. Examples: *and*, *but*, *or*.

**countable noun** a noun like *car*, *dog*, *idea*, which can have a plural form, and can be used with the indefinite article *a/an*. See also [uncountable noun](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#U).

**declarative question** a question which has the same grammatical form as a statement. Example: *That’s your girlfriend?*

**definite article** *the*.

**defining relative** see [identifying relative](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I).

**demonstrative** *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*.

**determiner** one of a group of words that begin noun phrases. Determiners include *a/an*, *the*, *my*, *this*, *each*, *either*, *several*, *more*, *both*, *all*.

**direct object** see **object**

**direct speech** speech reported ‘directly’, in the words used by the original speaker (more or less), without any changes of tense, pronouns, etc. Example: *She looked at me and said, ‘This is my money’*. See also [indirect speech](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I).

**discourse marker** a word or expression which shows the connection between what is being said and the wider context. A discourse marker may, for example, connect a sentence with what comes before or after, or it may show the speaker’s attitude to what he/she is saying. Examples: *on the other hand*; *frankly*; *as a matter of fact*.

**duration** how long something lasts. The preposition *for* can be used with an expression of time to indicate duration.

**ellipsis** leaving out words when their meaning can be understood from the context. Examples: *(It’s a) Nice day, isn’t it?*; *It was better than I expected (it would be)*.

**emphasis** giving special importance to one part of a word or sentence (for example by pronouncing it more loudly; by writing it in capital letters; by using *do* in an affirmative clause; by using special word order).

**emphatic pronoun** reflexive pronoun (*myself*, *yourself*, etc) used to emphasise a noun or pronoun. Examples: *I’ll tell him myself*; *I wouldn’t sell this to the president himself*. See also [reflexive pronoun](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#R).

**ending** something added to the end of a word, e.g. *-er*, *-ing*, *-ed*.

**finite verb** Verbs which show time (e.g. *goes*, *went*) are often called ‘finite’ in grammars; other forms (e.g. *written*, *playing*) are called ‘non-finite’.

**first person** see [person](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**formal** the style used when talking politely to strangers, on special occasions, in some literary writing, in business letters, etc. For example, *commence* is a more formal word than *start*.

**frequency** Adverbials of frequency say how often something happens. Examples: *often*; *never*; *daily*; *occasionally*; *every three days*.

**fronting** moving a part of a clause to the beginning in order to give it special emphasis. Example: *Jack I like, but his wife I can’t stand*.

**full verb** a verb that is not an auxiliary verb. Examples: *work*, *remove*, *explain*.

**future** a verb tense made with the auxiliary *will* (or sometimes *shall*) + infinitive without *to*. Example: *I will arrive on Tuesday evening*.

**future perfect** a verb tense made with *shall/will* + *have* + past participle. Example: *I will have finished by lunchtime*.

**future progressive** (or **future continuous**) a verb tense made with *shall/will* + *be* + *…ing*. Example: *I will be needing the car this evening*.

**gender** the use of different grammatical forms to show the difference between masculine, feminine and neuter, or between human and nonhuman. Examples: *he*; *she*; *it*; *who*; *which*.

**gerund** the form of a verb ending in *-ing*, used like a noun (for example, as the subject or object of a sentence). Examples: ***Smoking*** *is bad for you*; *I hate* ***getting*** *up early*. See also [present participle](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**gradable** *Pretty*, *hard* or *cold* are gradable adjectives: things can be more or less *pretty*, *hard* or *cold*. Adverbs of degree (like *rather*, *very*) can be used with gradable words. *Perfect* or *dead* are not gradable words: we do not usually say that something is *more* or *less perfect*, or *very dead*.

**grammar** the rules that show how words are combined, arranged or changed to show certain kinds of meaning.

**hypothetical** Some words and structures (e.g. modal verbs, *if*-clauses) are used for hypothetical situations – that is to say, situations which may not happen, or are imaginary. Example: *What would you do if you had six months free?*

**identifying** (or **defining**) **relative clause** a relative clause which identifies a noun – which tells us which person or thing is being talked about. Example: *There’s the woman who* ***tried to steal your cat****.* (The relative clause *who tried to steal your cat* identifies the woman – it tells us which woman is meant.) See also [non-identifying relative clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#N).

**imperative** the form of a verb used to give orders, make suggestions, etc. Examples: *Bring me a pen*; *Have a good holiday*.

**indefinite article** *a/an*.

**indirect object** see [object](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#O).

**indirect speech** a structure in which we report what somebody said by making it part of our own sentence (so that the tenses, word order, pronouns and other words may be different from those used by the original speaker). Compare: *He said ‘I’m tired’* (the original speaker’s words are reported in direct speech) and *He said that he was tired* (the original speaker’s words are reported in indirect speech).

**infinitive** the base form of a word (usually with *to*), used after another verb, after an adjective or noun, or as the subject or complement of a sentence. Examples: *I want* ***to go*** *home*; *It’s easy* ***to sing***; *I’ve got a plan* ***to start*** *a business*; ***To err*** *is human,* ***to forgive*** *divine*.

**informal** the style used in ordinary conversation, personal letters, etc, when there is no special reason to speak politely or carefully. *I’ll* is more informal than *I will*; *get* is used mostly in an informal style; *start* is a more informal word than *commence*.

***-ing* form** the form of a verb ending in *-ing*. Examples: *finding*; *keeping*; *running*. See also [gerund](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#G), [present participle](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**initial** at the beginning. *Sometimes* is an adverb that can go in initial position in a sentence. Example: *Sometimes I wish I had a different job*.

**intensifying** making stronger, more emphatic. *Very* and *terribly* are intensifying adverbs.

**interrogative** Interrogative structures and words are used for asking questions. In an interrogative sentence, there is an auxiliary verb (or non-auxiliary *be*) before the subject (e.g. *Can you swim?*; *Are you ready?*). *What*, *who* and *where* are interrogative words.

**intonation** the ‘melody’ of spoken language: the way the musical pitch of the voice rises and falls to show meaning, sentence structure or mood.

**intransitive** An intransitive verb is one that cannot have an object or be used in the passive. Examples: *smile*; *fall*; *come*; *go*.

**inversion** a structure in which an auxiliary or other verb comes before its subject. Examples: *Never had she seen such a mess*; *Here comes John*.

**irregular** not following the normal rules, or not having the usual form. An irregular verb has a past tense and/or past participle that does not end in *-ed* (e.g. *swam*, *taken*); *children* is an irregular plural.

**linking verb** (or **copular verb**) *be*, *seem*, *feel* and other verbs which link a subject to a complement that describes it. Examples: *My mother is in Jersey*; *He seems unhappy*; *This feels soft*.

**main clause, subordinate clause** Some sentences consist of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause acts like a part of the main clause (e.g. like a subject, or an object, or an adverbial). Examples: *Where she is doesn’t matter* (the subordinate clause *Where she is* is the subject of the main clause); *I told you that I didn’t care* (the subordinate clause *that I didn’t care* is the direct object in the main clause); *You’ll find friends wherever you go* (the subordinate clause *wherever you go* acts like an adverb in the main clause: compare *You’ll find friends anywhere*).

**manner** an adverbial of manner describes how something happens. Examples: *well*; *suddenly*; *fast*; *without any delay*.

**mid-position** If an adverbial is in mid-position in a sentence, it is with the verb. Example: *I have never been to Africa*.

**misrelated participle** (also called **hanging** or **dangling participle**) a participle which appears to have a subject which is not its own. Example: ***Looking*** *out of the window, the mountains appeared very close*. (This seems to say that the mountains were looking out of the window.) The structure is usually avoided in careful writing because of the danger of misunderstanding.

**modal auxiliary verb** one of the verbs *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *will*, *shall*, *would*, *should*, *ought*.

**modify** An adjective is said to ‘modify’ the noun it is with: it adds to or defines its meaning. Examples: *a* ***fine*** *day*; *my* ***new*** *job*. An adverb can modify a verb (e.g. *run* ***fast***), an adjective (e.g. ***completely*** *ready*) or other words or expressions. In ***sports*** *car*, the first noun modifies the second.

**negative** A negative sentence is one in which the word not is used with the verb. Example: *I didn’t know*.

**nominal relative clause** a relative clause (usually introduced by *what*) which acts as the subject, object or complement of a sentence. Example: *I gave him what he needed*.

**non-affirmative** (also called **non-assertive**) The words *some*, *somebody*, *somewhere*, etc are used most often in affirmative sentences. In other kinds of sentence they are often replaced by *any*, *anybody*, *anywhere*, etc. Words like *any*, *anybody*, etc are called ‘non-affirmative’ or ‘non-assertive’ forms. Other non-affirmative forms are *yet* and *ever*.

**non-identifying** (or **non-defining**) **relative clause** a relative clause which does not identify the noun it refers to (because we already know which person or thing is meant). Example: *There’s Hannah Smith, who tried to steal my cat*. (The relative clause, *who tried to steal my cat*, does not identify the person – she is already identified by the name Hannah Smith.) See also [identifying relative clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I).

**noun** a word like *oil*, *memory*, *arm*, which can be used with an article. Nouns are most often the names of people or things. Personal names (e.g. *George*) and place names (e.g. *Birmingham*) are called ‘proper nouns’; they are mostly used without articles.

**noun phrase** a group of words (e.g. article + adjective + noun) which acts as the subject, object or complement in a clause. Example: *the last bus*.

**number** the way in which differences between singular and plural are shown grammatically. The differences between *house* and *houses*, *mouse* and *mice*, *this* and *these* are differences of number.

**object** a noun phrase or pronoun that normally comes after the verb in an active clause. The direct object most often refers to a person or thing (or people or things) affected by the action of the verb. In the sentence *Take the dog for a walk*, *the dog* is the direct object. The indirect object usually refers to a person (or people) who receive(s) the direct object. In the sentence *Anna gave me a watch*, the indirect object is *me*, and the direct object is *a watch*. See also [subject](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**participle** see [present participle](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P) and [past participle](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**participle clause** a clause-like structure which contains a participle, not a verb tense. Examples: *Discouraged by his failure, he resigned from his job*; *Having a couple of hours to spare, I went to see a film*.

**passive** A passive verb form is made with *be* + past participle. Examples: *is broken*; *was told*; *will be helped* (but not *breaks*, *told*, *will help*, which are active verb forms). The subject of a passive verb form is usually the person or thing that is affected by the action of the verb. Compare: *They sent Lucas to prison for five years* (active) and *Lucas was sent to prison for five years* (passive). See also [active](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#A).

**past participle** a verb form like *broken*, *gone*, *stopped*, which can be used to form perfect tenses and passives, or as an adjective. (The meaning is not necessarily past, in spite of the name.)

**past perfect** a verb tense made with *had* + past participle. Examples: *I had forgotten*; *The children had arrived*; *She had been working*; *It had been raining*. The first two examples are simple past perfect; the last two (with *had been* + *…ing*) are past perfect progressive (or continuous).

**past progressive** (or **continuous**) a verb tense made with *was/were* + *…-ing*. Examples: *I was going*; *They were stopping*.

**past simple** see [simple past](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**perfect** a verb form made with the auxiliary *have* + past participle. Examples: *I have forgotten*; *She had failed*; *having arrived*; *to have finished*.

**perfect conditional** *should/would have* + past participle. Examples: *I should/would have agreed*; *He would have known*.

**perfect infinitive** *(to) have* + past participle. Example: *to have arrived*.

**perfect participle** a structure like *having lost*, *having arrived*.

**person** the way in which, in grammar, we show the difference between the person(s) speaking (*first person*), the person(s) spoken to (*second person*), and the person, people or thing(s) spoken about (*third person*). The differences between *I*, *you*, and *he/she*, or between *am*, *are* and *is*, are differences of person.

**personal pronoun** the words *I*, *me*, *you*, *he*, *him*, etc.

**phrasal verb** a verb form that is made up of two parts: verb + adverb particle. Examples: *fill up*; *run over*; *take in*.

**phrase** two or more words that function together as a group. Examples: *dead tired*; *the silly old woman*; *would have been repaired*; *in the country*.

**plural** a grammatical form used to refer to more than one person or thing. Examples: *we*; *buses*; *children*; *are*; *many*; *these*. See also [singular](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**possessive** a form used to show possession and similar ideas. Examples: *John’s*; *our*; *mine*.

**possessive pronoun** *My*, *your*, *his*, *her*, etc are possessive pronouns (they stand for ‘the speaker’s’, ‘the hearer’s’, ‘that person’s’, etc). *Mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, etc are also possessive pronouns, for the same reason. *My*, *your*, etc are used before nouns, so they are not only pronouns, but also determiners. (They are often called ‘possessive adjectives’, but this is not correct.) *Mine*, *yours*, etc are used without following nouns.

**postmodifier** a word that comes after the word which it modifies, e.g. *invited* in *The people invited all came late*. See also [premodifier](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**predicative** Adjectives placed after a verb like *be*, *seem*, *look* are in predicative position. Examples: *The house is enormous*; *She looks happy*. See also [attributive](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#A).

**prefix** a form like *ex-*, *anti-* or *un-*, which can be added to the front of a word to give an additional or different meaning. Examples: *ex-wife*, *anti-British*, *unhappy*. See also [suffix](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**premodifier** a word that comes before the word which it modifies, e.g. *invited* in *an invited audience*. See also [postmodifier](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**preparatory subject**, **preparatory object** When the subject of a sentence is an infinitive or a clause, we usually put it towards the end of the sentence and use the pronoun *it* as a preparatory subject. Example: *It is important to get enough sleep*. *It* can also be used as a preparatory object in certain structures. Example: *He made it clear that he disagreed*. *There* is used as a kind of preparatory subject in *there is …* and similar structures. Example: *There is somebody at the door*.

**preposition** a word like *on*, *off*, *of*, *into*, normally followed by a noun or pronoun.

**prepositional verb** a verb form that is made up of two parts: verb form + preposition. Examples: *insist on*; *care for*; *listen to*.

**present participle** the form of a verb ending in *-ing*, used as an adjective, a verb or part of a verb. Examples: *a crying baby*; *Opening his newspaper, he started to read*; *She was running*. (The meaning is not necessarily present, in spite of the name.) See also [gerund](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#G).

**present perfect** a verb tense made with *have/has* + past participle. Examples: *I have forgotten*; *The children have arrived*; *I’ve been working all day*; *It has been raining*. The first two examples are simple present perfect; the last two (with *have been* + *…ing*) are present perfect progressive (or present perfect continuous).

**present progressive** (or **continuous**) a verb tense made with *am/are/is* + *…ing*. Examples: *I am going*; *She is staying for two weeks*.

**present simple** see [simple present](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**progressive** (or **continuous**) A verb form made with the auxiliary *be* + *…ing*. Examples: *to be going*; *We were wondering*; *I’ll be seeing you*.

**progressive** (or **continuous**) **infinitive** a form like *to be going*; *to be waiting*.

**pronoun** a word like *it*, *yourself*, *their*, which is used instead of a more precise noun or noun phrase (like *the cat*, *Tom’s self*, *the family’s*). The word *pronoun* can also be used for a determiner when this includes the meaning of a following noun which has been left out. Example: *I’ll take these*.

**proper noun** or **proper name** a noun (most often with no article) which is the name of a particular person, place, organisation, etc. Examples: *Alex*; *Brazil*; *the European Union*.

**quantifier** a determiner like *many*, *few*, *little*, *several*, which is used in a noun phrase to show how much or how many we are talking about.

**question tag** an expression like *do you?* or *isn’t it?*, consisting of an auxiliary verb (or non-auxiliary *be* or *have*) + pronoun subject, put on to the end of a sentence. Examples: *You don’t eat meat, do you?*; *It’s a nice day, isn’t it?*

**reflexive pronoun** *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, etc. Example: *I cut myself shaving this morning*. See also [emphatic pronoun](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#E).

**regular** following the normal rules or having the usual form. *Hoped* is a regular past tense; *cats* is a regular plural. See also [irregular](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I).

**relative clause** a clause which modifies a noun, usually introduced by a relative pronoun like *who* or *which*. Example: *I like people who like me*. See also [identifying relative clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I), [non-identifying relative clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#N).

**relative pronoun** a pronoun used to connect a relative clause to its noun. *Who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which* and *that* can be used as relative pronouns, and sometimes also *when*, *where* and *why*. Examples: *There’s the man who wants to buy my car*; *This is the room* ***which*** *needs painting*; *Do you remember the day* ***when*** *we met?*

**reply question** a question (similar in structure to a question tag) used to reply to a statement, for instance, to express interest. Example: *‘I’ve been invited to spend the weekend in London.’ ‘Have you, dear?’*

**second person** see [person](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**sentence** a group of words that typically expresses a statement, command, question or exclamation. A sentence consists of one or more clauses, and usually has at least one subject and verb. In writing, it begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.

**short answer** an answer consisting of a subject and an auxiliary verb (or non-auxiliary *be* or *have*). Examples: *‘Has anybody phoned the police?’ ‘Jack has.’*; *‘Who’s ready for more?’ ‘I am.’*

**simple past** (or **past simple**) a past verb tense that has no auxiliary verb in the affirmative. Examples: *I stopped*; *You heard*; *We knew*.

**simple present** (or **present simple**) a present verb form that has no auxiliary verb in the affirmative. Examples: *He goes there often*; *I know*; *I like chocolate*.

**simple** a verb form that is not [progressive](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**singular** a grammatical form used to talk about one person, thing, etc, or about an uncountable quantity or mass. Examples: *me*; *bus*; *water*; *is*; *much*; *this*. See also [plural](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**slang** a word, expression or special use of language found mainly in very informal speech, often in the usage of particular groups of people. Examples: *thick* (= stupid); *lose one’s cool* (= get upset); *sparks* (= electrician).

**split infinitive** a structure in which an adverb comes between *to* and the rest of the infinitive. Example: *to easily understand*. Some people consider split infinitives ‘incorrect’, but they are common in standard usage.

**standard** A standard form of a language is the one that is most generally accepted for use in government, the law, business, education and literature. *I’m not* is standard English; *I ain’t* is non-standard.

**statement** a sentence which gives information; not a question. Examples: *I’m cold*; *Daniel didn’t come home last night*.

**stress** the way in which one or more parts of a word, phrase or sentence are made to sound more important than the rest, by using a louder voice and/or higher pitch. In the word *particular*, the main stress is on the second syllable (*parTIcular*); in the sentence *Where’s the new secretary?* there are three stresses (*WHERE’S the NEW SEcretary?*).

**strong form**, **weak form** Certain words can be pronounced in two ways: slowly and carefully with the vowel that is written (strong form), or with a quicker pronunciation with the vowel /ə/ or /ɪ/ (weak form). Examples: *can* (/kæn/, /kən/), *was* (/wɒz/, /wəz/), *for* (/fɔ:(r)/, /fə(r)/).

**subject** a noun phrase or pronoun that normally comes before the verb in an affirmative clause. It often says (in an active clause) who or what does the action that the verb refers to. Examples: *Ellie gave me a wonderful smile*; *Oil floats on water*. See also [object](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#O).

**subjunctive** a verb form (not very common in British English) used in certain structures. Examples: *If I were you . . .*; *It’s important that he be informed immediately*; *We prefer that he pay in cash*.

**subordinate clause** a clause which functions as part of another clause, for example as subject, object or adverbial in the main clause of a sentence. Examples: *I thought that you understood; What I need is a drink*; *I’ll follow you wherever you go*. See also [clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#C), [main clause](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#M).

**subordinating conjunction** a conjunction that joins a subordinate clause to the rest of its sentence. Examples: *when*, *if*, *because*.

**suffix** a form like *-ology*, *-able* or *-ese*, which can be added to the end of a word to give an additional or different meaning. Examples: *climatology*; *understandable*; *Chinese*. See also [prefix](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**superlative** the form of an adjective or adverb made with the suffix *-est* (e.g. *oldest*, *fastest*); also the structure *most* + adjective/adverb, used in the same way (e.g. *most intelligent*, *most politely*).

**swear word** a taboo word used (usually with a change of meaning) to express strong emotion or emphasis. Example: *Fuck!*

**syllable** The word *cat* has one syllable, *cattle* has two, *cataract* has three and *category* has four. A syllable normally has a vowel, and usually one or more consonants before and/or after the vowel. Sometimes the consonant sounds *l*, *m* and *n* can act as syllables (for instance in the words *bottle* /ˈbɒtl/, *capitalism* /ˈkæpɪtəlɪz(ə)m/, *button* /ˈbʌtn/).

**taboo word** a word (e.g. *fuck*) connected with a subject (such as sex) which is not talked about freely, so that some of its vocabulary is considered shocking. Taboo words are not used in formal speech or writing, and are avoided altogether by many people. See also [swear word](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).

**tag** a short phrase (e.g. pronoun subject + auxiliary verb) added on to the end of a sentence, especially in speech. Examples: *He likes to talk, Josh does*; *You can’t swim, can you?*; *Very noisy, those kids*. See also [question tag](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#Q).

**tense** a verb form that shows the time of an action, event or state, by a change in its form and/or the use of an auxiliary. Examples: *worked*, *saw*, *will go*; *is sitting*.

**third person** see [person](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#P).

**transitive** A transitive verb is one that can have an object. Examples: *eat (a meal)*; *drive (a car)*; *give (a present)*. See also [intransitive](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#I).

**uncountable noun** a noun which has no plural form and cannot normally be used with the article *a/an*. Examples: *mud*; *rudeness*; *furniture*.

**verb** a word like *ask*, *wake*, *play*, *be*, *can*. Most verbs refer to actions, events or states. See also [auxiliary verb](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#A), [modal auxiliary verb](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#M), [verb phrase](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#V).

**verb phrase** a verbal structure that has more than one part. Example: *would have been forgotten*.

**vowel** the letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u* and their combinations, and their usual sounds (see [Phonetic alphabet](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/phonetic-alphabet)). See also [consonant](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#C).

**weak form** see [strong form](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/about/practical-english-usage/language-terminology#S).