

Lesson Three : Phrases

In a sentence, words do not only act individually, but also in groups. The grouped words act together as a unit which may function as a modifier, a subject, a verb, an object, or a predicate nominative. The most common group of related words is known as *the phrase*

Phrases are groups of related words that *do not contain* both a subject and a verb. They act as parts of speech within sentences. In other words, phrases are groups of words that serve as *nouns, adjectives or adverbs* in sentences. Because sentences are made up of *phrases* and *clauses*, understanding these basic elements of sentence structure will help you to create writing that is clear, concise, stylistically interesting and free of errors such as *sentence fragments*.

1. Phrase Definition

A phrase is *two or more words* that do not contain the subject-verb pair necessary to form a clause. Phrases can be very short or quite long. Here are two examples:

- a- After lunch
- b- After slithering down the stairs and across the road to scare nearly to death Mrs. Philpot busy pruning her rose bushes

Traditionally "*phrase*" is defined as "*a group of words that does not contain a verb and its subject and is used as a single part of speech.*"

2. Kinds of Phrases and their Functions

Certain phrases have specific names based on the type of word that begins or governs the word group: *noun phrase, verb phrase, prepositional phrase, infinitive phrase, participle phrase, gerund phrase, and absolute phrase.*

- Some people classify them as : **Prepositional phrase** (used as *a noun, an adjective* , or an *adverb*), **verbal phrase** (including the participial phrase, the gerund phrase, and the infinitive phrase) ,and **appositive phrase**.

2.1. Noun Phrase

A *noun phrase* includes a *noun* (a person, place, or thing) and *the modifiers* -either before or after- which distinguish it. Its pattern looks like this:

OPTIONAL MODIFIER(S) + NOUN + OPTIONAL MODIFIER(S)

E.g.s. a-The shoplifted pair of jeans (the + shoplifted (modifiers) + pair (Noun) + of jeans (modifiers))

b - A cat that refused to meow

c- A great English teacher

- Noun phrases function as *subjects*, *objects*, and *complements*
- As said before, noun phrase contains a noun and its modifiers and functions as a noun within a sentence.

E.g.s a-*The tree with the purple blossoms* hangs over the sidewalk, sprinkling flowers along the path (as a Subj)

b-He decided to wear *the yellow shirt*. (as an object)

c-With her love of Shakespeare and knowledge of grammar, Jasmine will someday be *a great English teacher* (as a subject compliment)

2.2. Verb phrase

Sometimes a sentence can communicate its meaning with a *one-word verb*. Other times, however, a sentence will use a verb phrase, a multi-word verb, to express more nuanced action or condition. A verb phrase can have up to four parts. The pattern looks like this:

AUXILIARY VERB(S)+MAIN VERB +VERB ENDING IF NECESSARY

E.g.s.: a- Had cleaned(Had = auxiliary verb ; clean = main verb; ed = verb ending) .

b - Should have been writing (Should, have, been = auxiliary verbs; write = main verb; ing = verb

ending)

c- Must wash (Must = auxiliary verb; wash = main verb.

Here are the verb phrases in action:

- ☒ Mom *had just cleaned* the refrigerator shelves when Lawrence knocked over the pitcher of orange juice.

- ☒ Sarah *should have been writing* her research essay, but she couldn't resist another short chapter in her Stephen King novel.
- ☒ If guests are coming for dinner, we *must wash* our smelly dog!

2.3. Prepositional phrase

At the minimum, a prepositional phrase will *begin with a preposition* and end *with a noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause* (i.e. the "**object**" of the preposition) The object of the preposition will often have one or more modifiers to describe it. These are the patterns for a prepositional phrase :

PREPOSITION + NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND, OR CLAUSE.

PREPOSITION + MODIFIER(S)+NOUN, PRONOUN, GERUND, OR CLAUSE

E.g.s. **On** time (On = preposition; time = noun) , **Underneath** the sagging yellow couch (Underneath = preposition; the, sagging, yellow = modifiers; couch =noun) , **From** eating too much (From = preposition; eating = gerund; too, much = modifiers.)

A prepositional phrase will function as *an adjective or an adverb*. Occasionally, a prepositional phrase is used as a noun.

- **As an adjective**, the prepositional phrase will answer the question Which one?

E.g. The librarian *at the check - out desk* smiles whenever she collects a late fee.

Which librarian? The one at the check-out desk!

Tourists *from the East* visit the old frontier towns *in the West*.

- **As an adverb**, a prepositional phrase will answer questions such as How? When? or Where?

E.g. He practises <i>in his studio</i>	(<i>Where</i> he practises)
He practises <i>with diligence</i>	(<i>How</i> he practises)
He practises <i>for his own good</i>	(<i>Why</i> he practises)
He practises <i>before a concert tour</i>	(<i>When</i> he practises)
He practises <i>for weeks</i>	(<i>To what extent / how long</i> he practises)
He was true <i>to his words</i>	(The adverb phrase modifies the adjective " true")