Language Terminology – Syntactic Form and Function

The following is a comprehensive list of the parts of speech/parts of sentences (syntactic form) and their respective functions that you are expected to be familiar with for the Language and Use exams.

Syntactic Form

This is concerned with the description of linguistic units in terms of what they *are*. In other words, syntactic form (also called 'parts of speech') refers to the labels we give different types of words or longer chunks of language. They include individual words, phrases, and clauses.

Verbs

1. FULL VERB – present form: *She **goes** home.*

2. FULL VERB – past form: *She **went** home.*

3. FULL VERB – present/1st/-*ing* participle[1]: *I will have been **driving** for two years by the end of term.*

4. FULL VERB – past/2nd/-*ed* participle[2]: *She has **gone** home.*

5. COPULA(R) VERB – these verbs are not done to the object like a normal verb, e.g. *The dog bit the man.* Instead, copula(r) verbs describe the subject in some way, usually with a noun or adjective 'complement': *She **is** a teacher.* [*is* links *She* and *teacher*] / *He **remained** silent.* [*remained* links *He* and *silent*]

6. AUXILIARY VERB – this verb helps with the grammar rather than telling us about the action: *I **have been** studying English for years.*

7. MODAL VERB – this is a subtype of auxiliary verbs and tells us something about the way the speaker thinks about the action: *My best friend **can't** have known, or she **would** have told me.*

8. FINITE VERB – these are verbs that show (are 'marked' for) tense (past or present), number (singular or plural) or person (I, you, he/she/it etc.): *She **wants** to go. / I **was** in Newcastle just last week.*

9. NON–FINITE VERB – these are verbs that do not show (are not 'marked' for) tense (past or present), number (singular or plural) or person (I, you, he/she/it etc.). These are normally:

    - infinitives (*She wants **to go**.*)

    - *-ing* forms / *-ing*/present participles (*He was **living** in St Andrews when I met him. / **Swimming** is good for your heart.*)

    - *-ed* forms / *-ed*/past participles (*I've **had** this car for eight years.*)

10. FULL INFINITIVE / INFINITIVE WITH 'TO': *I need **to eat**.*

11. BARE INFINITIVE / INFINITIVE WITHOUT 'TO': *I must **eat**.*

12. TRANSITIVE VERB – these are verbs that take a direct object: *I **had** lunch. We **prepared** breakfast.*

13. INTRANSITIVE VERB – these are verbs that don't take a direct object: *I **slept** well.* [*well* is not an object but a circumstance adverbial[3]]

14. DITRANSITIVE VERB – these verbs take two objects – an indirect object followed by a direct object: *She **gave** me* [indirect object] *a present* [direct object]*. In some cases, the indirect object can occur alone: *Ryan **told***

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[1] Some people refer to this as 'present participle', others as '1st participle'. Both terms are equally acceptable.
[2] Some people refer to this as 'past participle', others as '2nd participle'. Both terms are equally acceptable.
[3] See below

the children [indirect object]. In these cases the direct object isn't explicitly mentioned but rather implied: *Ryan **told** the children* [indirect object] [the news / the story; implied direct object].

15. CATENATIVE VERB – these verbs can be followed within the same clause by another verb, e.g. *He seems to have been here before. seems* is catenative as it is followed by another verb. Some catenative verbs are followed by (bare) infinitives, other by an *-ing* form, and some can be followed by either an infinitive or an *-ing* form either with or without a difference in meaning.

16. ERGATIVE/UNACCUSATIVE VERB – these are verbs which can be used both transitively and intransitively, and whose **object** when the transitive construction is used is the same as the <u>subject</u> of the intransitive construction. For example:

    - *They closed **the door**.* → <u>*The door*</u> *closed.*

    - *You can boil **water** at 100 degrees.* → <u>*Water*</u> *boils at 100 degrees.*

    - *She stopped **the car**.* → <u>*The car*</u> *stopped**.***

    - *The wind shook **the trees**.* → <u>*The trees*</u> *shook in the wind.*

17. MULTI–WORD VERB, e.g. phrasal verb: *We had an argument and **fell out**, but then we **made up** again.*

18. PERFECT ASPECT – conjugated form of 'have' + past/2nd participle: *He **had left** when I arrived.*

19. PROGRESSIVE ASPECT – conjugated form of 'be' + –present/1st participle: *She **was leaving** when I arrived.*

20. SIMPLE ASPECT (= not perfect or progressive): *I **arrived** when they **left**.*

Nouns

1. COUNTABLE NOUN – *I had two **burgers** for dinner.*

2. UNCOUNTABLE NOUN – *I don't eat much **rice**.*

3. PLURAL NOUN – *We've got two **cars**.*

4. ABSTRACT NOUN – these refer to non-concrete entities such as: ***love, optimism, truth, freedom, belief, hope and communism***

5. COMMON NOUN – a noun which refers to common, everyday entities such as: ***cat, dog, sister, bucket, book***

6. PROPER NOUN – the name of something or someone, starting with a capital letter: *I've been to **England**.*

Adjectives

1. ADJECTIVE (usually either before nouns or after copula(r) verbs as a subject complement): *The **American** teacher.* These can be 'gradable' (not very ***cold*** > slightly ***cold*** > very ***cold***) or 'ungradable' (~~slightly freezing~~ > absolutely ***freezing***!)

2. COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVE – usually used to compare two things: *He's **better** than me …*

3. SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVE – usually used to compare more than two things: *… but she's **the best**.*

Adverbs

1. ADVERB (OF CIRCUMSTANCE, E.G. DEGREE / TIME / PLACE / MANNER) – used to describe a verb, adverb, or adjective: *Study this **carefully**. / I'd **very much** like to get my car back in one piece, yes. / They are **happily** married.*

2. ADVERB (OF STANCE) – these are adverbs or adverb phrases that provide information on the speaker's attitude: ***Regrettably*** (= I regret that)*, I won't be able to join you tonight. / He will **no doubt** [= I have no doubt that] try and persuade his colleagues to change their minds. / He'll turn up, **hopefully** [= I hope that].*

3. LINKING ADVERB (OF CONTRAST / CONCESSION / ADDITION / CAUSE / CONSEQUENCE ETC.) – used to show the relationship between sentences or parts of sentences: *There's a lot of English grammar;* **however,** *I've seen most of it before. / His father, though ill-equipped for the project, had* **nevertheless** *tried his best.*

4. RELATIVE ADVERB – they fulfil essentially the same function as relative pronouns, but they are adverbs rather than pronouns: *This is the place* **where** *we first met. / Oh I remember now – it was the day* **when** *the heatwave started! / That's another reason* **why** *I don't want to join you.*

Prepositions

1. PREPOSITION – these are like glue and are used to stick an object / noun (phrase) onto another phrase: *I'm going* **to** *the shops. / The flight was delayed* **because of** *bad weather.* [*because of* = two-word preposition] */ He's pretty good* **at** *music. / This is a museum* **of** *art.*

Pronouns

PRONOUNS STAND IN FOR A NOUN.

1. INDEFINITE PRONOUN – indefinite pronouns aren't specific: *She told me* **something**.

2. POSSESSIVE PRONOUN – *It's not* **yours**, *it's* **mine.**

3. DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN – these are used to show or point to something: **This** *is a demonstrative pronoun.*

4. REFLEXIVE PRONOUN – these are often used when the object is the same as the subject (it 'reflects' the subject): *I saw* **myself** *in the shop window.*

5. PERSONAL PRONOUN – these could be subjects or objects: **She** *likes* **him.**

6. RELATIVE PRONOUN – this helps us determine which thing we are talking about, or gives more information about it: *I passed my English exam,* **which** *I'd been a little nervous about.*

7. INTERROGATIVE PRONOUN – we use them to ask questions: **Which** *of these do you prefer? /* **Who** *called last night?*

8. NOMINAL RELATIVE PRONOUN – a type of relative pronoun that includes both a head noun and a relative pronoun: **What** *I really don't understand is how he can get away with this kind of behaviour.* 'What' may be paraphrased as 'The thing that'. 'What' is the only nominal relative pronoun in English, and the clause it introduces is called 'nominal relative clause' (or sometimes a 'pseudo-cleft' or '*wh*-cleft').

Determiners

THESE ARE USED TO HELP SHOW, OR 'DETERMINE', WHICH THING YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT; THEY STAND IN FRONT OF A NOUN.

1. INDEFINITE ARTICLE: *I had* **a** *banana and* **an** *apple.*

2. DEFINITE ARTICLE: **The** *banana was delicious, but* **the** *apple was rotten.*

3. QUANTIFIER – to say how much/many there is/are – *I haven't been to* **many** *football matches this season.*

4. POSSESSIVE DETERMINER: *It's not* **your** *pen, it's* **my** *pen!*

5. INTERROGATIVE DETERMINER – **Which** *tea would you prefer? /* **What** *colour is the sky? /* **Which** *pen would you prefer? /* **What** *colour is your pen?*

6. DEMONSTRATIVE DETERMINER: *No,* **this** *pen is yours –* **that** *pen is mine!*

Conjunction

1. CONJUNCTION – words that join nouns, phrases or clauses together:

   - coordinating conjunctions link two main clauses (see the <u>FANBOYS</u>): *I'm not rich **but** I'm happy. / He's filthy rich, **and** a right twat. / I've got more money than I could ever spend in my lifetime, **so** I'm going to give some of it to charity.*

   - subordinating conjunctions link a main clause and a <u>subordinate clause</u>: *I can't join you tonight **because** <u>I have more important plans</u>. / **Once** <u>I have finished pressure washing my driveway</u>, I'll probably build a shed in the garden.*

   - correlative conjunctions come in pairs to join words, phrases, or clauses: ***Either** you help me with this **or** I'll tell your wife what you were really up to last night! / **Both** John **and** his cousin were arrested for disorderly conduct last night. / My aunt is **not only** a doctor **but also** an accomplished physicist.*

Phrases

1. NOUN PHRASE (NP) – *<u>many outraged students</u>*

   - A phrase with a noun as its head[4].

   - The **head** can be preceded by <u>determiners</u> such as *all, no, the, a, many, few:*

     o *<u>few</u> **people**; <u>an</u> excellent **idea**; <u>little</u> **research**; <u>no</u> **customers***

   - The **head** may be accompanied by <u>modifiers</u> (pre or post):

     o *A traditional <u>Sunday</u> **roast**; the **students** <u>who have passed the exam</u>*

   - Noun phrases are usually headed by common nouns, proper nouns, abstract nouns or pronouns:

     o ***Holmes** lives in **London**; **They** said **they**'d got **it**; "**All** You Need Is **Love**"*

   - Noun phrases can be followed by <u>*that*-clauses</u> or an infinitive**:**

     o *The popular **assumption** <u>that language simply serves to communicate thoughts or ideas</u> is too simplistic.*

2. VERB PHRASE[5] (VP) – *the students <u>will take</u> the test in the same room*

   - A phrase with a lexical verb as its head (i.e. its main verb).

   - The **main verb** can stand alone or be preceded by one or more <u>auxiliary verbs</u>, including <u>modal verbs</u>:

     o *<u>should have</u> **explained**; <u>can</u> **swim**; <u>might</u> **come**; <u>is</u> **teaching**; <u>are being</u> **repaired***

   - **Non-finite verb phrases** are indicated by a participle (*-ing* or *-ed*) or an infinitive**:**

     o *Please listen carefully to all the options before **making** your choice**; To have** and **to hold** from this day forth …*

   - **Verb phrases** are often **discontinuous** (split into two parts)

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[4] See *Syntactic Function* below.
[5] Please note that the terminology used in the department's *Linguistics* section differs slightly from the terminology used within *Sprachpraxis*. In the department's Linguistics section, verb phrases include the main verb plus accompanying elements such as objects and complements, but they do not include modal verbs. In the Sprachpraxis section, the part that follows the subject in a clause is sometimes referred to as 'predicate' (see *Syntactic Function* below).

- o *What's he doing?* (VP = is doing); *The current academic year has definitely started well.* (VP = has started)

3. ADJECTIVE PHRASE (ADJP) – *happy enough*

- A phrase with an adjective as its head

- Adjective phrases most typically modify noun phrases, but they also often follow copular verb phrases.

- Optional <u>modifiers</u> can precede or follow the **adjective**:

  - o ***Complex**; <u>so</u> **lucky**; <u>surprisingly</u> **clever**; <u>not</u> **long** <u>enough</u>*

- The most typical modifiers of adjectives are adverbs/adverb phrases

- **Adjective heads** can also take <u>complements</u>:

  - o ***bare** <u>of any meaning</u>; **slow** <u>to respond</u>; so **dark** <u>(that) you couldn't see anything</u>*

4. ADVERB PHRASE (ADVP) – *fairly promptly*

- A phrase with an adverb as its head

- Adverb phrases typically modify verb phrases, adjectives and other adverbs

- Optional <u>modifiers</u> may precede or follow the **adverb head:**

  - o ***there**; **quietly**; <u>pretty</u> **soon**; **fortunately** <u>enough</u>*

- The most typical modifiers of adverbs are other adverbs/adverb phrases

- **Adverb heads** can also take <u>complements</u>:

  - o *so **quickly** <u>(that) you don't even enjoy it</u>; much more **quickly** <u>than imagined</u>*

5. PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE (PREPP OR PP) – *my plane leaves <u>in the morning</u>*

- A phrase consisting of a preposition followed by a noun phrase (known as the prepositional complement).

- The **preposition** links the <u>noun phrase</u> to the preceding structures:

  - o ***to** <u>town</u>; **in** <u>the afternoon</u>; **at** <u>lunchtime</u>*

- Prepositional phrases are often embedded in larger (prepositional) phrases:

  - o ***in** a street [**with** no name]; **on** the morning [**of** the first day]*

- Prepositions can also take <u>complement clauses</u> but normally only *wh*-clauses or *-ing* clauses:

  - o *Component drawings carry instructions [**on** <u>where they are used</u>]; It was hard to come back [**after** <u>spending so much time in the Seychelles</u>].*

Clauses

1. MAIN CLAUSE (COORDINATING CLAUSE / INDEPENDENT CLAUSE) – a stand–alone clause with a subject and finite main verb; optionally introduced by a <u>coordinating conjunction</u>: *Despite it raining,* ***I went out for a walk****. / It was raining,* ***yet he went for a walk****.* [*yet* = coordinating conjunction]

2. SUBORDINATE CLAUSE (DEPENDENT CLAUSE) – a clause that supports the main clause in some way and can come before or after the main clause; introduced by a <u>subordinating conjunction</u>: ***Because it was raining,*** *I got really wet.*

- non-finite clause – these contain a verb which does not show tense. We usually use non-finite verbs only in subordinate clauses. We usually understand the time referred to from the context of the main clause. We often use a non-finite clause when the subject is the same as the subject in the main clause: *I had something to eat **before leaving**.* (I had something to eat before I left.) / ***After having spent** six hours at the hospital, they eventually came home.*

- verbless clause – these do not contain an overt verb or verb phrase; rather, the verb is implied: ***With the children so sick*** (=With the children *having been* so sick)*, we've been forced to stay at home.*

Syntactic Function

As opposed to syntactic form, syntactic function is not concerned with the labels of linguistic units but rather with what they *do*. Different syntactic functions answer the question *Who does what to whom and how*. Whereas the syntactic form of linguistic units never changes, most linguistic units can fulfil a variety of functions in a sentence. A noun, for example, can function as subject, direct object, indirect object, premodifier, etc.

Broadly speaking, clauses consist of subject and predicate (but there are indeed "verbless clauses").

1. SUBJECT – the doer of the action: *In March, **she** bought her daughter a new car.*

    - dummy subject / subject pronoun – English clauses (apart from imperative clauses) must have a subject. Sometimes we need to use a 'dummy' or 'empty' or 'artificial' subject when there is no subject attached to the verb, and where the real subject is somewhere else in the clause. *It* and *there* are the two dummy subjects used in English: ***It's** always interesting to find out about your family history. / **There** are five Dutch people in our village.*

        o [real subject] To find out about your family history is always interesting. (The real subject – the thing that is interesting – is 'to find out about your family history'.)

        o ***There** are five Dutch people in our village.* (The real subject is *five Dutch people* – they are in the village.)

2. PREDICATE – everything that follows the subject:

    i. DIRECT OBJECT – the thing or person the action is done to: *I bought him **a pizza**.*

    ii. INDIRECT OBJECT – the thing or person who receives the direct object: *I bought **him** a pizza.*

    iii. PREDICATOR – the syntactic function of verbs/verb phrases: *In March, she **bought** her daughter a new car.*

    iv. ADVERBIAL – divided into circumstance, stance, and linking adverbials. These provide information on:

        - circumstance – time, manner, place, degree, reason: ***In March**, she bought her daughter a new car. / He **often** chose to rely on his friends in such situations. / Joanne walked off **happily**. / Put the dishes back **into the cupboard**, please! / **Despite the rain**, he went for a walk.*

        - stance – the speaker's attitude towards an utterance: *You can't be serious, **surely**! / **Regrettably**, I wasn't able to join them last week. / Then he goes on to say how much he appreciates all the effort we've put into it. **Which is strange** because he never seemed to care much about what we do.*

        - linking – how sentences or parts of sentences are connected: ***Moreover**, what this graph shows is that… / What I cannot do, **however**, is reveal the identity of my source.*

> ➢ Linking adverbials only make sense in context, which makes them easy to distinguish from stance or circumstance adverbials.

v. SUBJECT COMPLEMENT – THESE COME AFTER COPULA(R) VERBS AND DESCRIBE A PERSON OR THING PICKED OUT BY THE subject: *This soup is **delicious**. / The soup tastes **foul**. / Sarah is **a good swimmer**. / He came to see that his calling was **to farm**. / The prisoner's case seemed **hopeless**. / He died **a poor but happy man**. / Grant always gets **too emotional**.*

vi. OBJECT COMPLEMENT – these typically follow the direct object and describe the person or thing it refers to:
*I don't find that **amusing**. / The police are treating the incident as **murder**.* (In this case, the object complement follows the word "as.") / *I find your behaviour **completely unacceptable**. / They appointed her **CEO of Thames Water**.*

- Note: It is often possible to rephrase sentences containing object complements in such a way that the object complement becomes a subject complement: *Your behaviour is completely unacceptable. / She was appointed CEO of Thames Water. / This incident is being treated as murder (by the police).*

vii. LINKER – the syntactic function of conjunctions: *Bob learned **that** one of his great-great uncles had travelled to New York from Liverpool on the Lusitania. / I don't want to **because** I can't stand his guts.*

viii. DETERMINATIVE – the syntactic function of determiners: ***All those other** guys were just trying to get close to you. / **Which** house would you like to live in?*

ix. HEAD – the most important word in a phrase: *He spoke reverently of all the wonderful **people** there. / She was most **displeased** about the way I conducted myself in public.* (A head is the "anchor" of a phrase, for example, the actual noun in a noun phrase, or the adjective in an adj. phr., and so on)

x. PREMODIFICATION – a word or phrase that comes before the <u>head</u> in a phrase and which changes or adds to the meaning of the head: *He suffered a **heart** <u>attack</u> on his 70th birthday. / We are taking a **rare shopping** <u>trip</u> this weekend.*

xi. POSTMODIFICATION – a word, phrase, or clause that comes after the <u>head</u> in a phrase and which changes or adds to the meaning of the head: *Business <u>practices</u> **common in India** are not necessarily going to work over here. / I'm not <u>well</u> **enough** to go out tonight.*

xii. NOMINAL COMPLEMENT – provides specific content about the noun it complements or provides the purpose or intention of the noun. Essentially, a noun complement helps to specify or elaborate on the content or characteristics of the noun it is associated with: *In the end, what swung Bob's decision was the idea **that workers at the cooperative were able to earn a share of its profits**.* (Note here that the italicized chunk in bold does not postmodify the noun phrase "the idea"— there is no grammatical gender tie between "that" and "the idea." This is the same in German. Here you would have "… die Idee, dass …" and not *"…die Idee, die…*," the grammatical connection you would see at the beginning of a relative clause. What we see here is a "completion" of the noun phrase "the idea." We often see this with the noun phrase "the fact [that]" as well.)

Clause patterns

Below you will find a list of common clause patterns in English:

o **Subject** + **intransitive verb** : *David laughed.*
o **Subject** + **transitive verb** + **direct object**: *David shut the door.*
o **Subject** + **ergative verb** (+adverbial): *The window opened. / The tickets sold like hotcakes.*
o **Subject** + **copula(r) verb** + **subject complement**: *David is tall.*
o **Subject** + **intransitive verb** + adverbial: *David resides in Wales.*
o **Subject** + **ditransitive verb** + **indirect object** + **direct object**: *David gave me a letter.*
o **Subject** + **transitive verb** + **direct object** + **object complement**: *David reckoned it silly.*
o **Subject** + **transitive verb** + **direct object** + adverbial: *David put salt in the soup.*