

Modern English Grammar

Word classes (or parts of speech)

All words belong to categories called word classes (or parts of speech) according to the part they play in a sentence. In English, these are distinguished into two groups – **Open** and **Closed**. This distinction is based on the number of items in their respective group. These are listed below.

Open Word Classes: Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb

Closed Word Classes: Pronoun, Preposition, Conjunction, Exclamation (Interjection), Auxiliary, and Determiner

In Open Word classes, there are unlimited number of items whereas in the Closed Word classes, the number of items is always limited.

All these word classes are described below:

Noun

It is an Open word class item because there are unlimited number of nouns in English. A noun is a word that identifies:

a person (*man, girl, engineer, friend*)

a thing (*horse, wall, flower, country*)

an idea, quality, or state (*anger, courage, life, luckiness*)

Verb

Verb is also an Open Word Class item since there are unlimited number of verbs in English. A verb describes what a person or thing does or what happens. For example, verbs describe:

an action – *jump, stop, explore*

an event – *snow, happen*

a situation – *be, seem, have*

a change – *evolve, shrink, widen*

The basic form of a verb is known as the **infinitive**. It's often preceded by the word 'to':

*Molly decided **to follow** him.*

*He began **to run** back.*

Adjective

It is an Open Word class item. An adjective is a word that describes a noun, giving extra information about it. For example:

*an **exciting** adventure*

*a **green** apple*

*a **tidy** room*

Adverb

Adverbs belong to the Open Word class category. An adverb is a word that's used to give information about a verb, adjective, or other adverb. They can make the meaning of a verb, adjective, or other adverb stronger or weaker, and often appear between the subject and its verb (*She **nearly** lost everything.*)

Pronoun

Pronoun is a closed word class item since the number of pronouns in English is limited. Pronouns are used in place of a noun that is already known or has already been mentioned. This is often done in order to avoid repeating the noun. For example:

*Laura left early because **she** was tired.*

*Anthony brought the avocados with **him**.*

***That** is the only option left.*

***Something** will have to change.*

Personal pronouns are used in place of nouns referring to specific people or things, for example *I, me, mine, you, yours, his, her, hers, we, they, or them*. They can be divided into various different categories according to their role in a sentence, as follows:

- subjective pronouns
- objective pronouns
- possessive pronouns
- reflexive pronouns



Preposition

Prepositions belong to the Closed Word class group due to its limited number. A preposition is a word such as *after, in, to, on, and with*. Prepositions are usually used in front of nouns or pronouns and they show the relationship between the noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. They describe, for example, the position of something, the time when something happens, or the way in which something is done.

Conjunction

It is a closed word class item. A conjunction (also called a connective) is a word such as *and, because, but, for, if, or, and when*. Conjunctions are used to connect phrases, clauses, and sentences. The two main kinds are known as *coordinating conjunctions* and *subordinating conjunctions*.

Determiner

Determiners belong to the closed word class group.

A determiner is a word that introduces a noun, such as *a/an, the, every, this, those, or many* (as in *a dog, the dog, this dog, those dogs, every dog, many dogs*). These are articles, demonstrative pronouns, and quantifiers.

The determiner **the** is sometimes known as the *definite article* and the determiner **a** (or **an**) as the *indefinite article*.

Interjection (Exclamation)

Exclamations are limited in number. Hence, this word class belongs to the closed group. An exclamation (also called an interjection) is a word or phrase that expresses strong emotion, such as surprise, pleasure, or anger. Exclamations often stand on their own, and in writing they are usually followed by an exclamation mark rather than a full stop.

Auxiliary

Although Verb is an Open word class item, its type -the auxiliary- belong to the Closed group since its number is limited. Auxiliary verbs are so called because they help to form the various tenses, moods, and voices of other verbs. The principal ones are *be*, *do*, and *have*.

Be is used with other verbs to form continuous tenses and the passive voice:

*She **is** reading a magazine.*

*We **were** talking to them for ages.*

*England **were** beaten by Germany in the final.*

Have is used to make perfect tenses:

*The judge **had** asked her to speak up.*

*In two years, we will **have** established community gardens.*

Do is used:

for emphasis:

*He **did** look tired.*

to make questions:

***Do** you want a coffee?*

to form negative statements or questions:

*I **don't** like meat.*

***Didn't** he know how to play football?*

Modal verbs

There is a further set of auxiliary verbs known as **modal verbs** or **modal auxiliary verbs**.

These combine with other verbs to express necessity, possibility, intention, or ability. The

modal auxiliary verbs are *must, shall, will, should, would, ought (to), can, could, may, and might*. For example:

*You **must** act promptly.*

***Can** you speak Spanish?*

*I **would** go if I **could** afford it.*

*He said he **might** reconsider his decision.*

*I **ought** to visit my family.*

*We **should** get to London before midday.*

***May** I come in?*

[Reference:

https://www.lexico.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&filter=en_grammar&dictionary=en&query=Auxiliary. Access date: 23/03/2020.]