

Gentle grammar

for the timid and terrified

Bruce Ross-Larson

ClearWriter

Washington, DC

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Eight parts of speech

- **Noun**—names someone, some place, something, some idea
Kate • war • book • ambition • team
- **Pronoun**—stands for a noun or nouns
you • your • which • this • itself • what • some • it
- **Adjective**—modifies a noun or pronoun
seven • beautiful • stunning • green • the
- **Verb**—tells what a sentence's main noun or pronoun does or is
makes • sighed • leaps • was
- **Adverb**—modifies a verb, adjective, or another adverb
not • totally • well • somewhat • never
- **Conjunction**—joins words, phrases, and clauses
and • either/or • because • that
- **Preposition**—introduces a phrase that modifies a noun or verb
about • of • between • in
- **Interjection**—expresses feeling!
Oh! • Ouch! • Alas!

Main pieces of sentences

- **Clause**—group of words with a subject, a verb, and their modifiers
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.
- **Subject**—word or words that something is being said about
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.
- **Predicate**—word or words that say something about the subject
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.
- **Object of verb**—word or words that say what or whom the verb is acting on (or to whom or for whom the verb is acting)
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.
- **Complement**—word or words that come after a linking verb and describe the subject
Both are far from ideal.
- **Phrase**—words that act as the subject or modify a noun, pronoun, or verb
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.
- **Object of preposition**—word or words following a preposition
The telecoms boom left a glut of fiber-optic cable.

1 Eight parts of speech

Noun—names someone, some place, something, some idea

Proper

United States •
Larry Kirkman •
Arlington, Va. •
Saturday • September

Common concrete

house • car • book •
computer

Common abstract

love • ambition •
generosity • journalism

Common collective

team • staff • jury

Some verb forms can act as nouns:

Gerund (verb + -ing)

fishing • riding • reading •
going

Infinitive (to + verb)

to be • to do • to have failed

A **bat** who fell upon the **ground** and was caught by a **weasel** pleaded to be spared his **life**. The **weasel** refused, saying that he was by **nature** the **enemy** of all **birds**. The **bat** assured him that he was not a **bird**, but a **mouse**, and thus was set free.



Circle the nouns

A boy put his hand into a pitcher full of filberts. He grasped as many as he could possibly hold, but when he tried to pull out his hand, he was prevented from doing so by the neck of the pitcher. Unwilling to lose his filberts, and yet unable to withdraw his hand, he burst into tears and bitterly lamented his disappointment.

A bystander said to him, "Be satisfied with half the quantity, and you will readily draw out your hand."

Do not attempt too much at once.

Pronoun—stands for a noun or nouns

Personal

I • you • he • she • it •
we • you • they

Possessive

my • your • his • her •
its • mine • yours • hers •
ours • theirs

Relative

who • whom • which • that

Relative, indefinite

what • who • whom •
whose • whoever •
whomever • whatever

Demonstrative

this • that • these • those

Reflexive/intensifying

myself • yourself • himself •
herself • itself • ourselves •
yourselves • themselves

Indefinite

many • all • few • some •
none • one • somebody •
nobody • nothing •
something

Reciprocal

each other • one another

A father had a family of sons **who** were perpetually quarreling among **themselves**. When **he** failed to heal **their** disputes by **his** exhortations, **he** determined to give **them** a practical illustration of the evils of disunion, and for this purpose **he** one day told **them** to bring **him** a bundle of sticks.



Circle the pronouns

A pigeon, oppressed by excessive thirst, saw a goblet of water painted on a signboard. Not supposing it to be only a picture, she flew toward it with a loud whir and unwittingly dashed against the signboard, jarring herself terribly. Having broken her wings by the blow, she fell to the ground, and was caught by one of the bystanders.

Zeal should not outrun discretion.

Adjective—word, phrase, or clause modifying a noun or pronoun

short • shorter • shortest

good • better • best

generous • more generous •
most generous

**Some other parts of speech can act
as adjectives:**

Articles

a • an • the

Numbers

one • twenty • fifty-ninth

Pronouns

my • your • his • her • their •
its • this • that • these • those

many • all • few • some •
another

Which? • What? • Whose?

Nouns

business [card] • user [group] •
down [comforter] • gold [watch]

Verbs (participles—verb + -ing)

shivering • growing • bleeding

The beasts of **the** field and forest had **a** lion as **their** king. He was neither **wrathful**, **cruel**, nor **tyrannical**, but **just** and **gentle** as **a** king could be. During **his** reign he made **a royal** proclamation for **a general** assembly of **all the** birds and beasts, and drew up conditions for **a universal** league, in which **the** wolf and **the** lamb, **the** panther and **the** kid, **the** tiger and **the** stag, **the** dog and **the** hare should live together in **perfect** peace and amity.



Circle the adjectives and adjective phrases

A mountain was once greatly agitated. Loud groans and noises were heard, and crowds of people came from all parts to see what was the matter. While they were assembled in anxious expectation of some terrible calamity, out came a mouse.

Don't make much ado about nothing.

Verb—what the sentence’s main noun or pronoun does or is

Linking verbs

is • was • has been •
will be

appears • seems • looks •
feels

Action verbs

eat • eats • eating • ate •
eaten

does eat • do eat • did eat

can eat • could eat •
would eat • should eat

must eat • might eat •
may eat • shall eat

am eating • are eating •
is eating

was eating • were eating

have eaten • has eaten •
had eaten

have been eating •
has been eating •
had been eating

will have been eating

would have been eating

The ants **were spending** a fine winter’s day **drying** grain **collected** in the summertime. A grasshopper, **perishing** with famine, **passed** by and earnestly **begged** for a little food. The ants **inquired** of him, “Why **did** you not **treasure** food during the summer?” He **replied**, “I **had** not leisure enough. I **passed** the days in **singing**.”



Circle the verbs

A goatherd had sought to bring back a stray goat to his flock. He whistled and sounded his horn in vain; the straggler paid no attention to the summons. At last the goatherd threw a stone, which broke the goat's horn.

He begged the goat not to tell his master.

The goat replied, "Why, you silly fellow, the horn will speak though I be silent."

Do not attempt to hide things that cannot be hid.

Adverb—word, phrase, or clause modifying a verb, adjective, or another adverb

finally • quickly • totally •
abruptly

many • too many • too much

how • when • where • why

never • often • somewhat

A wolf who had a bone stuck in his throat hired a crane, **for a large sum**, to put her head **into his mouth** and draw **out** the bone. When the crane had extracted the bone and demanded the promised payment, the wolf, grinning and grinding his teeth, exclaimed: “Why, you have **surely already** had a sufficient recompense, in having been permitted to draw out your head **in safety from the mouth and jaws of a wolf.**” **In serving the wicked**, expect no reward, and be thankful if you escape injury **for your pains**.



Circle the adverbs and adverb phrases

A heavy wagon was being dragged along a country lane by a team of oxen.

The axle-trees groaned and creaked terribly; whereupon the oxen, turning round, thus addressed the wheels: "Hullo there! Why do you make so much noise? We bear all the labor, and we, not you, ought to cry out."

Those who suffer most cry out the least.

Conjunction—joins words, phrases, and clauses

Coordinating

and • but • or • so • yet •
nor

both/and • either/or •

neither/nor • not only/but also

Subordinating

after • although • before •
if • since • unless • until •
when • whether

how • that • where •
whether

A dog, crossing a bridge over a stream with a piece of flesh in his mouth, saw his own shadow in the water **and** took it for that of another dog, with a piece of meat double his own in size. He immediately let go of his own **and** fiercely attacked the other dog to get his larger piece from him. He thus lost both: that which he grasped at in the water, **because** it was a shadow, **and** his own, **because** the stream swept it away.



Circle the conjunctions

A crow was jealous of the raven, because he was considered a bird of good omen and always attracted the attention of men, who noted by his flight the good or evil course of future events. Seeing some travelers approaching, the crow flew up into a tree, and perching herself on one of the branches, cawed as loudly as she could.

The travelers turned toward the sound and wondered what it foreboded, when one of them said to his companion, "Let us proceed on our journey, my friend, for it is only the caw of a crow, and her cry, you know, is no omen."

Those who assume a character that does not belong to them only make themselves ridiculous.

Preposition—introduces a phrase that modifies a noun or verb

about • above • across • after • of • off • on • over • since •
against • along • among • through • throughout • to •
around • at • before • behind • toward • under • until • up •
below • beside • between • with • within • without
but • by • despite • down •
during • except • for • from • according to • because of •
in • inside • into • like • near • instead of • next to • owing to

A herdsman tending his flock **in** a forest lost a bull-calf **from** the fold. **After** a long and fruitless search, he made a vow that, if he could only discover the thief who had stolen the calf, he would offer a lamb **in** sacrifice **to** Hermes, Pan, and the guardian deities **of** the forest.



Circle the prepositions

A traveler wearied from a long journey lay down, overcome with fatigue, on the very brink of a deep well.

Just as he was about to fall into the water, Dame Fortune, it is said, appeared to him and waking him from his slumber thus addressed him: "Good sir, pray wake up: for if you fall into the well, the blame will be thrown on me, and I shall get an ill name among mortals; for I find that men are sure to impute their calamities to me, however much by their own folly they have really brought them on themselves."

Everyone is more or less master of his own fate.

Interjection—expresses feeling!

Ouch! • Oh! • Oh no! • Alas! • Why

One winter a farmer found a snake stiff and frozen with cold. He had compassion on it and taking it up, placed it in his bosom. The snake was quickly revived by the warmth and resuming its natural instincts, bit its benefactor, inflicting on him a mortal wound. “**Oh,**” cried the farmer with his last breath, “I am rightly served for pitying a scoundrel.” The greatest kindness will not bind the ungrateful.



Circle the interjections

“Oh, how I have longed to see this day, in which the weak shall take their place with impunity by the side of the strong.” And after the hare said this, he ran for his life.

“Why, you have surely already had a sufficient recompense, in having been permitted to draw out your head in safety from the mouth and jaws of a wolf.”

“O you most perverse creatures, when I piped you would not dance, but now that I have ceased you do so merrily.”

2 Main pieces of sentences

Clause—group of words with a subject, a verb, and their modifiers

A clause can stand independently or act as a noun, adjective, or adverb. In the sentences below, core clauses are underlined, but for the sake of illustration, adjective and adverb phrases are not.

Once upon a time a wolf resolved to disguise his appearance in order to secure food more easily. Encased in the skin of a sheep, he pastured with the flock, deceiving the shepherd by his costume.

In the evening he was shut up by the shepherd in the fold, the gate was closed, and the entrance was made thoroughly secure. But the shepherd, returning to the fold during the night to obtain meat for the next day, mistakenly caught up the wolf instead of a sheep and killed him instantly.

Harm seek, harm find.



Underline the clauses

A sick stag lay down in a quiet corner of his pasture-ground.

His companions came in great numbers to inquire after his health, and each one helped himself to a share of the food that had been placed for his use; so that he died, not from his sickness, but from the failure of the means of living.

Evil companions bring more hurt than profit.

Subject—word or group of words that something is being said about

If the subject is a group of words, one is the core subject, and the others modify it, to make up the full subject.

In the sentences below, the core subject is in **bold**, and the rest of the full subject is in *bold italics*.

A wolf who had a bone stuck in his throat hired a crane, for a large sum, to put her head into his mouth and draw out the bone.

When **the crane** had extracted the bone and demanded the promised payment, **the wolf, grinning and grinding his teeth**, exclaimed: “Why, **you** have surely already had a sufficient recompense, in having been permitted to draw out your head in safety from the mouth and jaws of a wolf.”

In serving the wicked, [**you** should] expect no reward, and be thankful if **you** escape injury for your pains.

Sometimes the subject is implied, as with [**you**] in the example above.

Be sure that a singular subject has a singular verb and a plural subject a plural verb.



Underline the full subject, including all subject modifiers, and circle the core subject of each core clause

A fisherman skilled in music took his flute and his nets to the seashore.

Standing on a projecting rock, he played several tunes in the hope that the

fish, attracted by his melody, would of their own accord dance into his net,

which he had placed below. At last, having long waited in vain, he laid aside

his flute, and casting his net into the sea, made an excellent haul of fish.

When he saw them leaping about in the net upon the rock he said: "O you

most perverse creatures, when I piped you would not dance, but now that I

have ceased you do so merrily."

Predicate—word or group of words that says something about the subject

For a group of words, the verb is augmented by objects, complements, and modifiers—together the predicate.

In the sentences below, the verb in the main clause is in **bold**, and the rest of the predicate is in *bold italics*.

A wolf who had a bone stuck in his throat **hired a crane, for a large sum, to put her head into his mouth and draw out the bone.**

When the crane had extracted the bone and demanded the promised payment, the wolf, grinning and grinding his teeth, **exclaimed:** *“Why, you have surely already had a sufficient recompense, in having been permitted to draw out your head in safety from the mouth and jaws of a wolf.”*

In serving the wicked, [you should] **expect no reward and be thankful if you escape injury for your pains.**

Again, for a singular subject use a singular verb, and for a plural subject a plural verb.



Underline the predicates and circle the verbs

A carter was driving a wagon along a country lane, when the wheels sank down deep into a rut. The rustic driver, stupefied and aghast, stood looking at the wagon, and did nothing but utter loud cries to Hercules to come and help him.

Hercules, it is said, appeared and thus addressed him: "Put your shoulders to the wheels, my man. Goad on your bullocks and never more pray to me for help, until you have done your best to help yourself, or depend upon it you will henceforth pray in vain."

Self-help is the best help.

**Object of verb—words that say what or whom the verb is acting on
(or to whom or for whom the verb is acting)**

In the sentences below, the verb in the main clause is in *bold italics*, and the object of the verb is in **bold**.

A father, being on the point of death, *wished to be sure that his sons would give the same attention to his farm as he himself had given it.* He *called them* to his bedside and *said, "My sons, there is a great treasure hid in one of my vineyards."*

The sons, after his death, *took their spades and mattocks* and carefully *dug over every portion of their land.* They *found no treasure*, but the vines *repaid their labor* by an extraordinary and superabundant crop.



Underline the full objects of the verbs and circle the core objects

The pigeons, terrified by the appearance of a kite, called upon the hawk to defend them. He at once consented.

When they had admitted him into the cote, they found that he made more havoc and slew a larger number of them in one day than the kite could pounce upon in a whole year.

Avoid a remedy that is worse than the disease.

Complement—comes after a linking verb and describes the subject

Linking verbs include:

is • are • was • were • will be

looks • seems • feels

In the sentences below, the linking verb is in *bold italics*, and the complement is in **bold.**

“Pray stop, my boys: what ***is sport*** to you ***is death*** to us.”

Little liberties ***are*** great **offenses**.

Notoriety ***is*** often **mistaken for fame**.

“It ***is*** again **in want of dates** and therefore ***looks quiet***.”

Some verbs can at times be linking verbs (she *looked well*) and at other times verbs showing action (she *looked at her watch*).



Underline the complements

The least outlay is not always the greatest gain.

Pride goes before destruction.

The hero is brave in deeds as well as words.

Misfortunes springing from ourselves are the hardest to bear.

A traveler about to set out on a journey saw his dog stand at the door stretching himself. He asked him sharply: "Why do you stand there gaping? Everything is ready but you, so come with me instantly."

The dog, wagging his tail, replied: "O, master! I am quite ready; it is you for whom I am waiting."

The loiterer often blames delay on his more active friend.

Phrase—words that act as the subject or modify a noun, pronoun, or verb

In the sentences below, phrases are underlined.

A heifer saw an ox hard at work harnessed to a plow, and tormented him with reflections on his unhappy fate in being compelled to labor.

Shortly afterwards, at the harvest festival, the owner released the ox from his yoke, but bound the heifer with cords and led her away to the altar to be slain in honor of the occasion.

The ox saw what was being done and said with a smile to the heifer: “For this you were allowed to live in idleness, because you were presently to be sacrificed.”



Underline the phrases

A swallow, returning from abroad and especially fond of dwelling with men, built herself a nest in the wall of a court of justice and there hatched seven young birds.

A serpent gliding past the nest from its hole in the wall ate up the young unfledged nestlings.

The swallow, finding her nest empty, lamented greatly and exclaimed: "Woe to me a stranger! That in this place where all others' rights are protected, I alone should suffer wrong."

Object of preposition—word or words following a preposition

In the sentences below, the preposition is in *bold italics*, and the object of the preposition is in **bold**.

The woodcutter cut down a mountain oak and split it *in pieces*, making wedges *of its own branches for dividing the trunk*.

The oak said *with a sigh*, "I do not care *about the blows of the axe* aimed *at my roots*, but I do grieve *at being torn in pieces by these wedges* made *from my own branches*."

Misfortunes springing *from ourselves* are the hardest to bear.



Underline the full objects of the prepositions and circle the core objects

A cottager and his wife had a hen that laid a golden egg every day. They supposed that the hen must contain a great lump of gold in its inside, and in order to get the gold they killed it. Having done so, they found to their surprise that the hen differed in no respect from their other hens.

The foolish pair, thus hoping to become rich all at once, deprived themselves of the gain of which they were assured day by day.

3 Recommended solutions

page 3—Circle the nouns

A boy put his hand into a pitcher full of filberts. He grasped as many as he could possibly hold, but when he tried to pull out his hand, he was prevented from doing so by the neck of the pitcher. Unwilling to lose his filberts and yet unable to withdraw his hand, he burst into tears and bitterly lamented his disappointment.

A bystander said to him, "Be satisfied with half the quantity, and you will readily draw out your hand."

Do not attempt too much at once.

page 5—Circle the pronouns

A pigeon, oppressed by excessive thirst, saw a goblet of water painted on a signboard. Not supposing it to be only a picture, she flew toward it with a loud whir and unwittingly dashed against the signboard, jarring herself terribly. Having broken her wings by the blow, she fell to the ground and was caught by one of the bystanders.

Zeal should not outrun discretion.

page 7—Circle the adjectives and adjective phrases

A mountain was once greatly agitated. Loud groans and noises were heard, and crowds of people came from all parts to see what was the matter. While they were assembled in anxious expectation of some terrible calamity, out came a mouse.

Don't make much ado about nothing.

page 9—Circle the verbs

A goatherd had sought to bring back a stray goat to his flock. He whistled and sounded his horn in vain; the straggler paid no attention to the summons. At last the goatherd threw a stone, which broke the goat's horn. He begged the goat not to tell his master.

The goat (replied), "Why, you silly fellow, the horn (will speak) though I (be) silent."

(Do) not (attempt) to hide things that cannot (be) hid.

page 11—Circle the adverbs and adverb phrases

A heavy wagon was being dragged (along a country lane) (by a team of oxen). The axle-trees groaned and creaked (terribly); whereupon the oxen, turning (round), (thus) addressed the wheels: "Hullo there! (Why) do you make so much noise? We bear all the labor, and we, not you, ought to cry (out)."

Those who suffer (most) cry (out) (the least).

page 13—Circle the conjunctions

A crow was jealous of the raven, (because) he was considered a bird of good omen (and) always attracted the attention of men, who noted by his flight the good (or) evil course of future events. Seeing some travelers approaching, the crow flew up into a tree, (and) perching herself on one of the branches, cawed as loudly as she could.

The travelers turned toward the sound (and) wondered what it foreboded, (when) one of them said to his companion, "Let us proceed on our journey, my friend, (for) it is only the caw of a crow, (and) her cry, you know, is no omen."

Those who assume a character that does not belong to them only make themselves ridiculous.

page 15—Circle the prepositions

A traveler wearied (from) a long journey lay down, overcome (with) fatigue, (on) the very brink (of) a deep well.

Just as he was about to fall (into) the water, Dame Fortune, it is said, appeared (to) him and waking him (from) his slumber thus addressed him: "Good sir, pray wake up: for if you fall (into) the well, the blame will be thrown (on) me, and I shall get an ill name (among) mortals; for I find that men are sure to

impute their calamities to me, however much by their own folly they have really brought them on themselves.”

Everyone is more or less master of his own fate.

page 17—Circle the interjections

“Oh, how I have longed to see this day, in which the weak shall take their place with impunity by the side of the strong.” And after the hare said this, he ran for his life.

“Why you have surely already had a sufficient recompense, in having been permitted to draw out your head in safety from the mouth and jaws of a wolf.”

“O you most perverse creatures, when I piped you would not dance, but now that I have ceased you do so merrily.”

page 21—Underline the core clauses

A sick stag lay down in a quiet corner of his pasture-ground.

His companions came in great numbers to inquire after his health, and each one helped himself to a share of the food that had been placed for his use; so that he died, not from his sickness, but from the failure of the means of living.

Evil companions bring more hurt than profit.

page 23—Underline the full subjects, including all subject modifiers, and circle the core subjects of each core clause

A fisherman skilled in music took his flute and his nets to the seashore. Standing on a projecting rock, he played several tunes in the hope that the fish, attracted by his melody, would of their own accord dance into his net, which he had placed below. At last, having long waited in vain, he laid aside his flute, and casting his net into the sea, made an excellent haul of fish.

When he saw them leaping about in the net upon the rock he said: “O you most perverse creatures, when I piped you would not dance, but now that I have ceased you do so merrily.”

page 25—Underline the predicates and circle the verbs

A carter was driving a wagon along a country lane, when the wheels sank down deep into a rut. The rustic driver, stupefied and aghast, stood looking at the wagon and did nothing but utter loud cries to Hercules to come and help him.

Hercules, it is said, appeared and thus addressed him: "Put your shoulders to the wheels, my man. Goad on your bullocks and never more pray to me for help, until you have done your best to help yourself, or depend upon it you will henceforth pray in vain."

Self-help is the best help.

page 27—Underline the full objects of the verbs and circle the core objects

The pigeons, terrified by the appearance of a kite, called upon the hawk to defend them. He at once consented.

When they had admitted him into the cote, they found that he made more havoc and slew a larger number of them in one day than the kite could pounce upon in a whole year.

Avoid a remedy that is worse than the disease.

page 29—Underline the complements

The least outlay is not always the greatest gain.

Pride goes before destruction.

The hero is brave in deeds as well as words.

Misfortunes springing from ourselves are the hardest to bear.

A traveler about to set out on a journey saw his dog stand at the door stretching himself. He asked him sharply: "Why do you stand there gaping? Everything is ready but you, so come with me instantly."

The dog, wagging his tail, replied: "O, master! I am quite ready; it is you for whom I am waiting."

The loiterer often blames delay on his more active friend.

page 31—Underline the phrases

A swallow, returning from abroad and especially fond of dwelling with men, built herself a nest in the wall of a court of justice and there hatched seven young birds.

A serpent gliding past the nest from its hole in the wall ate up the young unfledged nestlings.

The swallow, finding her nest empty, lamented greatly and exclaimed: “Woe to me a stranger! That in this place where all others’ rights are protected, I alone should suffer wrong.”

page 33—Underline the full objects of the prepositions and circle the core objects

A cottager and his wife had a hen that laid a golden egg every day. They supposed that the hen must contain a great lump of gold in its inside, and in order to get the gold they killed it. Having done so, they found to their surprise that the hen differed in no respect from their other hens.

The foolish pair, thus hoping to become rich all at once, deprived themselves of the gain of which they were assured day by day.