

Glossary of Grammatical Terms

active verb (or **active voice**)

A verb form that indicates the subject is the *performer* of the action, as in “Everyone in our department read the book.” In contrast, a **passive verb** indicates the subject is the *receiver* of the action, as in “The book was read by everyone in our department.”

adjective

A word that modifies a noun or a pronoun, as in “The book was *wonderful*” and “It was a *complex* problem.”

adverb

A word that modifies a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or a whole phrase, clause, or sentence, as in “I read the book *quickly*” and “It was a *very* complex problem.”

article

A type of adjective. *The* is the definite article. *A* and *an* are indefinite articles.

clause

A group of words that has a subject and a verb. See **phrase**, **main clause**, and **subordinate clause**.

comma splice

The incorrect joining of two complete sentences or main clauses with a comma alone, as in “I didn’t mean to insult you, however, I do think you’re wrong.”

conjunction

A word that connects and shows the relation between words, phrases, and clauses, as in “A word that connects *and* shows the relation between words, phrases, *and* clauses.”

A **subordinating conjunction** (such as *when*, *while*, *if*, *although*, and *because*) introduces dependent clauses and connects them to main clauses, as in “*Although* you missed your plane, you can still make it in time for the opening of the conference.”

dependent clause (also called a **subordinate clause**)

A clause that is not a sentence, does not stand alone, and must be joined to a main clause to form a grammatically complete sentence, as in “*Although I wrote an angry response*, I decided not to send it.” See **independent** or **main clause**.

dangling modifier

A modifying phrase or clause that does not sensibly connect to any word in a sentence, as in “After reading your reports, it is recommended that you take a writing class.” See **misplaced modifier**.

independent clause (also called a **main clause**)

A grammatically complete sentence, one that contains a subject and a verb and that expresses a complete thought. See **dependent** or **subordinate clause**.

misplaced modifier

A modifier positioned incorrectly in a sentence, as in “When well stewed, you add the tomatoes to the pot.” See **dangling modifier**.

noun

A word that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

A **proper noun** names a particular person, place, or thing, as in “the *Lincoln Center*” and “the Department of Human Resources.”

parallelism (or **parallel structure** or **parallel construction**; sentences with parallel construction are sometimes called **balanced sentences**)

The principle that words, phrases, or clauses presented in a pair or in a series must be of the same kind or formation, as in “Our government is of the people, by the people, and for the people” and “Ask not what your country can do for you, but rather what you can do for your country.” An example of nonparallel structure is “Our guidelines were found to be inaccurate, inconsistent, and not complete.”

passive verb (or **passive voice**)

The verb form that indicates the subject is the *receiver* of the action, as in “The book was read by everyone in our department.” In contrast, an **active verb** indicates the subject is the *performer* of the action, as in “Everyone in our department read the book.”

phrase

A group of words that lacks a subject and a verb, as in “We found the report *in the top drawer*.” See **clause**.

predicate

The verb part of a sentence. It tells what the subject did or how it was acted upon, as in “He *stomped out of the meeting*” and “She *sought his advice*.”

preposition

A connecting word such as **in**, **on**, **of**, and **with**. **Prepositional phrases** are prepositions and their objects, as in “in the drawer,” “on the floor,” and “with malice.”

sentence fragment

A dependent clause (one that does not stand alone) that is incorrectly punctuated as though it were a main clause (or a complete sentence), as in “Although I disagree.”