L'arbi Ben Mhidi University

Faculty of Sciences, Earth, and Architecture

Department of Geology

Level: Master 1

Lecture 02: Phrases (part one)

What is a phrase?

A phrase is a small group of words that communicates a concept but isn't a full sentence. You use phrases in your writing and your speech every day. There are lots of different kinds of phrases, some of which play a technical role in your writing and others that play a more illustrative role. No matter which role a phrase is playing, it's achieving one simple goal: making your sentences richer by giving your words context, detail, and clarity.

Keep in mind, not all phrases are good phrases. Sometimes, common phrases actually undermine your writing by making you look less confident or making your point less clear. Know <u>which phrases to avoid</u> so you don't inadvertently weaken your writing by using them.

Even though you write and speak phrases every single day, truly understanding their mechanics can be tricky. Read on for a deep dive into the various types of phrases English speakers use and become a stronger writer, speaker, and editor by mastering the art of phrasing.

Phrases vs. clauses

Phrases and clauses aren't the same thing. A clause contains a subject and a predicate and in many—but not all—cases, can be a sentence on its own. In contrast, a phrase **can't** be its own sentence because a phrase does **not** contain a subject and predicate.

Here's a quick example of a phrase vs. a clause:

Phrase: Meows so loudly

Clause: That cat meows so loudly

Clauses contain phrases, and sentences contain clauses. So an easy way to visualize the three are: phrases < clauses < sentences.

The term "phrase" is understood to mean two different things: a sentence component and a common expression. These two types of phrases are known respectively as grammatical phrases and common phrases.

Grammatical phrases

A grammatical phrase is a collection of words working together as a unit. Grammatical phrases add meaning to sentences by giving detail about one or more of the parts of speech in use.

A grammatical phrase can clarify **any** part of speech—the key here is that **all** a phrase does is provide some detail; it doesn't have the structure to be a clause of its own.

Sentences don't need to have phrases to be grammatically correct. Sometimes, a sentence only has individual words working together, like:

- Sheila skated yesterday.

It's a short, simple sentence that paints a clear, yet stark, picture. By expanding some of those words into phrases, you get a much more detailed image of how Sheila spent her time yesterday. For example, you might write:

- Sheila skated through the park yesterday.
- Sheila skated with Dennis and Terry yesterday.

- Sheila skated on her brand-new longboard yesterday.

Grammatical phrases come in a variety of types and often, you'll find two or more in the same sentence. Each type is named for the part of speech it modifies or the role it plays in a sentence:

Adjective

An adjective phrase is a phrase that describes or otherwise provides additional meaning for an adjective. It contains an adjective and any words that modify the adjective. Here are a few examples of adjective phrases within sentences, with the adjective phrases bolded:

- That song choice was **way too bold**.
- She was **taller than all of her classmates**.

Adverb

An adverbial phrase is a phrase that takes on the role of an adverb in a sentence. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. Adverbial phrases in action look like:

- He bakes cakes **every Sunday**.
- We ran out of there **at a breakneck speed**.

Noun

A noun phrase provides detail or clarification about a noun. Examples of noun phrases include:

- **My small dog** barks at ducks.
- **The boxy van outside** has circled the block twice already.

Verb

Verb phrases are phrases that contain a verb and any linking verbs or modifiers. Like an adverbial phrase, a verb phrase plays the role of a verb in the sentence where it's used. Examples of verb phrases include:

- Shelley **has been waiting** for an hour already.
- I **am writing** a novel.

Prepositional

Prepositional phrases are phrases that include a preposition and its object. They can also include modifiers, but they don't have to. A few examples of prepositional phrases include:

- The cat jumped **onto the counter**.
- The space **under the gray shed** is overgrown and needs to be cleared out.

Gerund

A gerund phrase is a phrase that includes a gerund, which is a noun created by adding *ing* to a verb, and its modifiers. Within a sentence, a gerund phrase acts as a noun. It can be tricky to understand, so remember the definition of a noun: a person, place, thing, or concept. Often, gerunds fall into the category of "thing." Examples of gerund phrases include:

- **Competitive horseback riding** is one of my favorite hobbies.
- All the neighbors are looking forward to **barbecuing on Sunday**.

Infinitive

Can you guess what an infinitive phrase is? Yep, it's a phrase made up of an infinitive (the most basic form of a verb, often accompanied by "to") and the words that give it clarity. A few examples of infinitive phrases within sentences are:

- We had hoped **to be there**.

- Mom said **to call Grandma tomorrow**.

Participle

Participles are modified verbs that take on the role of adjectives. Participle phrases are phrases that contain participles and their modifiers, like:

- The **continually sputtering** boat finally broke down.
- The fish that **swam away from its school** got eaten by a shark.

Appositive

An appositive phrase is a phrase that includes an appositive and the noun (or pronoun) it describes. Appositives are short descriptions that add detail about a noun by defining it.

Here are a few examples of appositive phrases:

- Their favorite horse, **a pinto named Molly**, won lots of awards.
- Fairfield, **a town in New Jersey**, is home to 7,500 people.

Tips and tricks for grammatical phrases

Verbs playing adjectives' roles? Verbs turned into nouns? When you break down grammatical phrases and examine how they operate within sentences, they can suddenly seem complex and confusing. Here are a few tips for getting phrases just right every time:

- Ask yourself if the phrase you've chosen is making your sentence *clearer* or if it's just making your sentence *longer*. When you're writing, clarity is always your top priority. Conciseness is another high, but not top, priority. The most effective sentence is **always** one that includes enough information to make your message clear *without* overshadowing it with extra information.
- Read your writing aloud and listen to its rhythm. Often, sentences and phrases that look fine on a screen sound confusing or feel too long when they're read

aloud. This is especially important if you're writing a speech, presentation, or another type of message that will be delivered verbally.

- Don't overthink phrases. If you're a fluent English speaker, you use all kinds of grammatical phrases in your writing and speech automatically. If you're not sure whether a phrase is grammatically correct, Grammarly can help you out by finding punctuation mistakes, syntax errors, and weak words that can be replaced to make your message stronger.