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**Types of Phrases and their Syntactic Functions in English**

Phrases are considered as the second level of classification as they tend to be larger than individual words, but they are smaller than sentences.

**What is a phrase?**

A phrase is a group of related words that lacks a subject, or a finite verb, or both. It does not make sense by itself.

Examples:

* picks up his coffee cup → the subject lacks in this phrase.
* was making coffee → the subject also lacks in this phrase.
* my dear mother → the finite verb lacks in this phrase.
* my patient father → the finite verb lacks in this phrase.
* in a castle → both the subject and the finite verb lack in this phrase.
* white and green→ both the subject and the finite verb lack in this phrase.

We refer to the central element or word in a phrase as the **head** of the phrase. If the head is a noun, then the phrase is called a noun phrase; if the head is a verb, the phrase is called a verb phrase, and so on. Note that the headword is the only part that cannot be omitted from the phrase.

**Types of Phrases**

The types of phrases are generally based on the headword of the phrase.

**Noun Phrases**

A noun phrase has a ***noun*** as its ***head***. It is constructed using determiners, adjectives, and a head noun.

Note:

1. A **determiner** is one of the following: an **article** (*the, a, an*) a **quantifier** (*some, any,* *no, few, a few, many, little, a little* etc.), a **possessive adjective** (*my, your, his, her, their,* etc*.*), a **demonstrative adjective** (*this, that, these, those*), a **numeral** (*one, two, three*, etc.).
2. Noun phrases may contain prepositions with their objects.

Examples of noun phrases:

* ***The boy*** ate ***an apple***.
* ***My friend*** works with ***her father***.
* ***The young girl*** wore ***a very nice veil***.
* ***Some people*** are violent.
* ***That handsome man*** is ***my father***.
* I do not have ***any problem***.
* I answered ***three hard questions***.
* ***The history of Algeria*** is glorious.

**Syntactic Functions of Noun Phrases**

Like nouns, noun phrases may serve as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, subject complements, object complements, or objects of prepositions.

***Noun Phrase as Subject:***

* **My coach** is happy. → NP/ Subj
* **Her young sister** is pretty. → NP/ Subj

***Noun Phrase as Direct Object:***

* Mary helped **that old woman**.
* I watched **a new film** last night.

***Noun Phrase as Indirect Object:***

* I offered **the poor child** sweets.
* The director assigned **the team** a **project.**
* The groom bought **his new bride**a wedding present.

***Noun Phrase as Subject Complement:***

* **Your grandmother seems a kind person.**
* **He has become a lovely person.**
* **She is my dearest friend.**

***Noun Phrase as Object Complement:***

* **I consider you good students.**
* **They elected Martin the new president.**

***Noun Phrase as Object of Preposition:***

* The man ***with* the gun** frightened the people ***in* the bank**.
* The boy ***with* blue eyes** is the most intelligent boy in this class.

Note: A noun phrase may function as an appositive. An appositive is a single word or a phrase that renames another noun in the sentence.

* Houari BOUMEDIENE, ***the popular Algerian president***, was known for his honesty.
* Bob, ***my best friend***, works here.

**Verb Phrases**

**Finite and Non-Finite Verb Phrases**

A finite verb phrase is one that can be the main verb of a sentence. A non-finite verb phrase is an infinitive, gerund or participle phrase.

**The Structure of a Finite Verb Phrase**

In the verb phrase there is always an ordinary verb. There may be one or more auxiliaries in front of it.

Auxiliary verb(s) Ordinary verb

*you* ***leave*** *valuable articles*

*the police* ***arrived***

*someone* ***will steal*** *them*

*this* ***has gone*** *on too long*

*he* ***was looking*** *for his clothes*

*the police* ***were informed***

*the camera* ***should have worked***

*someone* ***has been taking*** *things*

*a man* ***is being questioned*** *by police*

*his clothes* ***had been stolen***

*I* ***must have been dreaming***

**Non-Finite Verb Phrases**

**The Gerund Phrase**

A **gerund phrase** is made up of a gerund and any modifier(s) and/or objects and/or complement(s).  The words or phrases that can modify a gerund are: an adjective, an adverb, and a prepositional phrase. In addition, it can have (pro)noun(s) and/or noun phrases that function as the direct object, indirect object or subject complement of the action or state of being expressed in the gerund.

**The Syntactic Functions of Gerund Phrases**

The gerund phrase, like the gerund, functions as a noun i.e. subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, or object of preposition.

***Gerund Phrase as Subject:***

*- Swimming in the pool* is fun.

*- Diagramming sentences* is good.

*- Being the boss* made Jeff unhappy.

***Gerund Phrase as Direct Object***

-I enjoy ***riding*** *my bike* in the evening.

- She appreciates *my offering her this opportunity*.

***Gerund Phrase as Indirect Object:***

- Lila gives *reading books* much importance.

***Gerund Phrase as Subject Complement:***

- The difficult part of our vacation will be *getting to Florida*.

***Gerund Phrase as Object of Preposition:***

Sandra was awarded a meal **after** *winning the race.*

**Participial Phrases**

A participial phrase is a group of words consisting of a participle and the modifier(s) and/or (pro)noun(s) or noun phrase(s) that function as the direct object(s), indirect object(s), or complement(s) of the action or state expressed in the participle.

**Present Participial Phrases**

- ***Removing his coat***, Jack rushed to the river.

The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *Jack*.

- Delores noticed her cousin ***walking along the shoreline***.

The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *cousin.*

- ***Being a cheerleader for two years***, Ellen knows the school song by heart.

The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *Ellen*.

**Past Participial Phrases**

- Food ***frozen for five years*** tastes icky.

The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying *food.*

-***Damaged by the storm***, the car no longer ran.

The participial phrase functions as an adjective modifying test booklet.

**Infinitive Phrases**

**An Infinitive Phrase** is a group of words consisting of an infinitive and the modifier(s) and/or object(s) and/ or complements of the action or state of being expressed in the infinitive. Like infinitives, infinitive phrases may function as nouns, adjectives or adverbs.

**Infinitive Phrase as Noun**

***Infinitive Phrase as Subject***

* *To learn a foreign language* requires patience.
* *To swim smoothly* needs practice.

***Infinitive Phrase as Direct Object***

* John agreed *to give me a ride*.
* I wanted *to design a website*.

***Infinitive Phrase as Subject Complement***

- A good way of losing money is *to go to the mall*.

**Infinitive Phrase as Adjective**

- I have a paper *to write before class*.

- The governor's plan *to fix the budget* made many problems.

**Infinitive Phrase as Adverb**

* Malcolm struggled hard *to free himself*.

**Note:** 1) An infinitive phrase requires a comma when it is used as an adverb at the beginning of the sentence.

* *To improve your English***,** you must practise it.

**2.3Adjective (Adjectival) Phrases**

Adjectival phrases are composed of the adjectives that modify nouns and any adverbs or other elements that modify those adjectives. In an adjective phrase (AdjP), the head word is an adjective.

Examples:

* My sister is **very young**.
* They always have a house **full of friends** during the summer.

Note: Adjectival phrases often occur inside noun phrases.

eg. Dad bought [a **(very expensive)** watch.]

**Syntactic Functions of Adjective Phrases**

Like adjectives, adjective phrases function as adjectives, subject complements, or object complements.

***Adjective Phrase as Adjective:***

* She prepared a **wonderfully light** meal.
* We experienced an **extremely strange** phenomenon today.

***Adjective Phrase as Subject Complement:***

* Your perfume smells **especially nice**.
* The cake tastes **too sweet***.*

***Adjective Phrase as Object Complement:***

* Egyptians’ violent behaviour made Algerians **extremely upset**.
* Algerians consider the Sudanese **very generous**.
  1. **Adverb (Adverbial) Phrases**

In an adverb phrase (AdvP), the head word is an adverb. Adverbial phrases are composed of adverbs.

eg. He graduated ***very recently***.

He scored the goal ***extremely quickly***.

**Syntactic Functions of Adverb Phrases**

Like single adverbs, adverb phrases function as adverbs modifying verbs.

* He opened it **extremely easily**.
* She has done the work **really well.**
* He came **very surprisingly** quickly.
  1. **Prepositional Phrases**

A prepositional phrase (PrepP) is composed of the preposition and a following noun, pronoun, gerund, or noun phrase functioning as its object.

eg. Marta fell ***over the cat***.

**Syntactic Functions of Prepositional Phrases**

Prepositional phrases function as adjectives modifying nouns or adverbs modifying verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Prepositional phrases may also function as nouns.

***Prepositional Phrase as Adjective:***

* The man **in the house** rented it.
* The purple hat **with the red feather** is very expensive.

Note: A prepositional phrase can modify a noun used as object of a preposition.

* This is a book of *photographs* **about history**.
* This is a book with *photographs* **of great Algerian personalities**.

***Prepositional Phrase as Adverb:***

* Peter *bought* flowers **for his mother**.
* We *must finish* our project **in December**.
* He appears *happy* **about the result**.
* The baby is *asleep* **in his bed**.
* Algerian footballers fought *courageously* **against Egyptian footballers**.
* I am thinking *seriously* **about your problem**.

***Prepositional Phrase as Noun***

Prepositional phrases may occupy some positions in the sentence that a noun ordinarily would, namely subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, and object complement.

**Prepositional Phrase as Subject:**

* ***Under the bed*** is filthy.
* ***In the bathroom*** requires extra attention from the housekeeper.
* ***Near the window*** is leaking.

**Prepositional Phrase as Direct Object:**

* I cleaned ***under the bed***.
* The decorator has painted ***along the trim***.

**Prepositional Phrase as Indirect Object:**

* You have given ***under the bed*** a good cleaning.
* The farmer will be giving ***beyond his fields*** some consideration.

**Prepositional Phrase as Subject Complement:**

* A good place to study is ***in the library***.
* His hiding place appears ***under the bed***.

**Prepositional Phrase as Object Complement:**

* Children often consider the scariest time of day ***during the night***.
* The child has declared his hiding place ***under the bed***.