Parts of speech
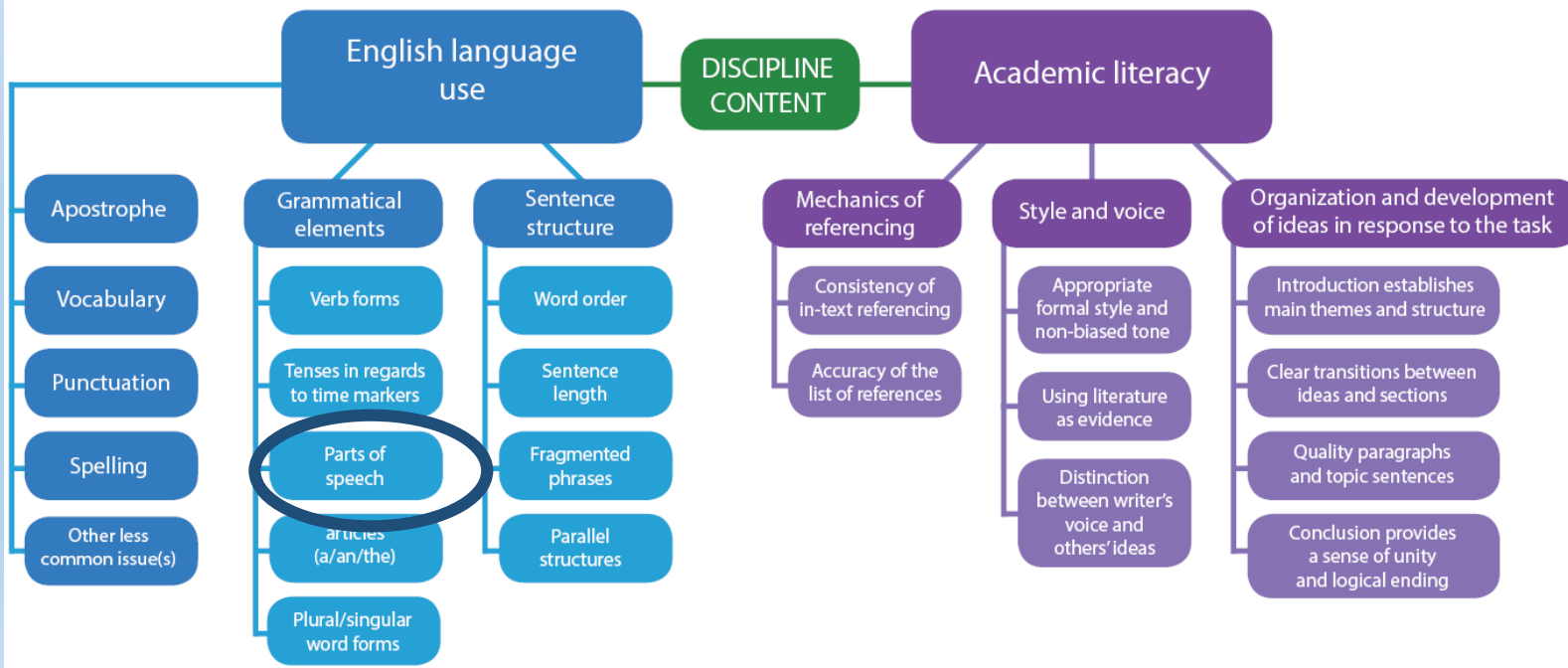
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Re-visit

Correct use of parts of speech in English is very important. Each part of speech explains how a word is used in a sentence:

Part of speech	Function
Noun	Names something (cat, dog)
Adjective	Describes the noun (black, quick)
Pronoun	Replaces a noun (I, me, we, us, he, him, she, her, it, they, them) (Possessive - my/mine, your/yours, his, its, etc. or reflexive – myself, themselves, etc.)
Verb	Describes what action is being done (running, walking)
Adverb	Describes how or when something is being done (quickly, often, rarely, yesterday, etc.)
Preposition	Expresses a relationship of space, time or direction (to, on, at, under)
Conjunction	Connects words or groups of words (and, or, but, although, so…)
* Interjection	Conveys emotion ("Wow!"), creates a pause (er um..)
**Article	Defines a noun as being specific or unspecific (a/an/the/zero article)

*Interjections are generally not used in academic writing
** Most parts of speech lists will not include articles. See the separate resource for more information on articles.

Parts of speech shift depending on their functions and meanings. For example:

Alex made his ideas concrete.

Alex's job is to concrete driveways.

In this sentence *concrete* functions as an **adjective.**

In this sentence *concrete* functions as a **verb**.

Notice how the words *studied*, *exam* and *hard* have changed their functions in the sentences below.

1. Claudia	studied	hard	for	her	next	exam.
Proper Noun	Verb	Adverb	Preposition	Possessive pronoun	Adjective	Noun

2. It	was	a	hard	exam	because	the	most studied
3d person pronoun	Verb	Indefinite article	Adjective	Noun	Conjunction	Definite Article	Superlative adjective /participle

topics	were	not	on	the	exam	paper.
Plural noun	Verb	Adverb used with verb to form the negative	Preposition	Definite Article	Adjective	Noun

Parts of speech live in families so please remember to check the function of your chosen word in a sentence – see an example below:

Word	Part of speech	Example in a sentence
To adopt	verb in the infinitive form	They decided *to adopt* that useful approach to teaching manners in their school.
Adopted	adjective	Their *adopted* kitten was cute.
Adoptive	adjective	Her *adoptive* parents changed her life for the better.
Adoption	noun	There are many kittens available for *adoption*.
Adopting	verb in a gerund form	They considered *adopting* a healthier lifestyle.
adoptable	adjective	Older cats are less *adoptable* than kittens.

For more information on academic word lists and sub-list families, see the links in the 'Learn more' section of this module.

Important rules to remember:

Adjectives describe nouns. Adverbs describe verbs:

*He made a **quick** decision.*	An adjective answers the question "What sort of?" and is usually used before a noun.
*He made a decision **quickly**.*	An adverb answers the questions "How? In what manner?" and usually comes after the verb.

Please note there are some verbs that can be followed by adjectives, not adverbs. Sometimes the meaning changes:

His parents grew old.	The adjective 'old' describes parents. In this case, grew = became
Some crops grow quickly.	The adverb quickly describes the verb 'grow'. In this case, *grow ≠ become*

Other verbs that can be followed by adjectives:

appear, be, become, feel, look (= appear), seem, smell, sound, taste, turn (= become), grow (= become)

Quick tips

Quick tips

Focus on the function of the word when using parts of speech to form sentences.	**Consult the dictionary and the thesaurus to ensure you have chosen the correct part of speech (look at examples).**	**Ensure you are using the correct form of the required part of speech, e.g., correct tense choice for verbs or plural/singular forms for nouns.**

Learn more

Useful links on parts of speech:

English Grammar Guide, EF English First

English Grammar Explanation, English Hilfen

English Grammar, British Council

UTS:HELP Parts of Speech

Purdue On-line Writing Lab

Monash University – ASCENT

(Module 2: Building blocks)

Griffith Uni – 'Help Yourself'

Victoria University of Wellington – Academic Word List

Using English for Academic Purposes – Academic word list

Face-to-face support

Who can help with English at Monash?

English Connect – conversational circles, peer feedback on your writing and grammar workshops

Grammar books

Azar, B. S. & Hagen, S.A. (2009). *Understanding and using English grammar (4th ed.)*. USA: Pearson Longman.

Borjars, K. & Burridge, K. *Introducing English grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Hodder Education.

Foley, M. & Hall, D. (2012). *MyGrammarLab (Advanced)*. England: Pearson.

Hewings, M. (2012). *Advanced grammar in use: a reference and practice book for advanced students of English* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R. (2011). *English Grammar in Use (Intermediate)* (3 ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.