



CHAPTER 04

the art of language | what language can do | parts of speech (continued)

In Chapter 1, we studied the first five **PARTS OF SPEECH**: **NOUNS**, **VERBS**, **PRONOUNS**, **ADJECTIVES**, and **ADVERBS**. Now, let's look at the remaining four:

- Articles
- Conjunctions
- Interjections
- Prepositions

Remember: it's all about **nouns** and **verbs**. All these other **PARTS OF SPEECH** relate somehow to **nouns** and **verbs**.

Parts of Speech VI: Articles

What is an **ARTICLE**? What can an **ARTICLE** do for your sentence?

ARTICLES are a special kind of **adjective**. (**ARTICLES** are also sometimes now called **determiners**.)

Like all **adjectives**, **ARTICLES** modify a noun. **ARTICLES** tell us:

- whether the **noun** names someone or something that is singular or plural
- whether the **noun** names someone or something *in general* or someone or something *specific*.

This definition might confuse you at first, but as you read on, we will make it all clear.

In English, we have only three **ARTICLES**. They are:

- **A**
- **An**
- **The**



A & An:

A and **An** have the same function, almost exactly.

- **A** and **An** both indicate that the **noun** is **singular**
- **A** and **An** both indicate that the **noun** names someone or some thing **in general**.

The only difference between “**A**” and “**An**” is this:

- We use “**A**” before a **consonant** because it is easier to pronounce.

If you don’t know whether to use “**A**” or “**An**,” say the words out loud to yourself. Which of the following is easier to pronounce?

[**An** bird flew into my house] — difficult to pronounce

A bird flew into my house. — easy to pronounce

“**A**” BEFORE THE consonant “b” of “bird”

- We use “**An**” before a **vowel**, because it sounds right.

If you don’t know whether to use “**A**” or “**An**,” say the words out loud to yourself.

An elephant walked through the classroom, and we all just watched it go.

“**An**” BEFORE THE vowel “e” of “elephant”

Let’s look at some additional examples of “**A**” and “**An**,” all before *singular nouns* that name someone or something *in general*:

“**A**” before a consonant

A guy who lives on my block won the lottery.

Robert went to **a** desert somewhere in California.

Louise bought **a** new computer yesterday.

The people voted for **a** democracy.

"An" before a vowel

An actor spoke to our drama class this morning.
 She lives in **an** area of the city I don't know.
 You had **an** ice cream from that new place.
 The country was ruled by **an** autocracy.

BUT, what is the difference between "**A/AN**" and "**THE**," and why do we need them? We said, on page 42, that **A** and **AN** both indicate that the noun names someone or something in general. As for **THE**:

- We use "**THE**" before a noun that names a *specific* person/place/thing/idea, either *singular* or *plural*:

Let's look at some additional examples of "**The**," some before *singular* nouns, some before *plural* nouns, but all before nouns that name something *specific*.

Examples of "**The**" before *specific* nouns, either singular or plural.

The guy who lives next door to me won the lottery.
 Robert went to **the** desert called Mojave.
 Louise bought **the** computer she had been wanting for a long time.
 The people voted for **the** way of life they believed in.
 I have read all **the** books in the library.
 We fed **the** birds that came into our backyard.
The students in my class all got the difference between "**A**" and "**And**" and "**The**."

What happens when you don't use the right **articles**? Let's say that you go home at night where you have dinner with your family and you want to tell them this fantastic story of what happened during the day; you wouldn't say:

Elephant walked into our classroom today. Nobody did anything about it. Everybody, the Professor, the students, just stared. Elephant walked to the back of the room then, like it was a ghost, it walked out through the back wall! It was amazing! It was incredible! When elephant left, the Professor just said, "OK, turn to page 95. Let's talk about President Truman and the atom bomb."

To communicate this story well, you need to tell us **which** elephant walked into the room: Was it some random elephant, any elephant, an elephant in general; or was it *the specific* elephant your Professor bought last week for his daughter to ride because his daughter loves to ride elephants?

You tell us more if you say:

AN elephant walked into our classroom today.

or

THE elephant walked into our classroom today.

We use “**AN** elephant” if it is some *random* elephant, any elephant, or just *one among many* elephants in the world.

We use “**THE** elephant” if it is a *specific* elephant, **THE** elephant your Professor just bought for his daughter. Let’s say it was **THE** elephant your professor just bought for his daughter {we have put all **ARTICLES** in bold red}

THE Elephant walked into our history classroom today. Nobody did anything about it. Everybody, **THE** Professor, **THE** students, just stared. **THE** Elephant walked to the back of **THE** room, then, like it was a ghost, it walked out through **THE** back wall! It was amazing! It was incredible! When **THE** elephant left, **THE** history Professor just said, “OK, turn to page 95. Let’s talk about President Truman and **THE** atom bomb.”

Here are some more examples of when to use **A** versus **THE**. You would say:

I couldn’t get any sleep. **A** baby was crying all night long,

You would say this if it were some *random* baby, any baby, or *one among many* babies—if, for example, it was a baby in your neighborhood, but you don’t know which baby.

You would say:

A computer started writing on its own, and it wrote a whole novel before anyone knew it,

if it were some *random* computer somewhere, any computer, or one among all the many computers in the world.

You say:

THE baby was crying all night,

if it were a *specific* baby, a baby you know, for example, the baby your sister had last week.

You would say:

THE computer started writing on its own, and it wrote a whole novel before anyone knew it, *if* it were a *specific* computer, for example, the computer you bought yesterday.

OK? Got it?

- **A/AN**
- **THE**

A/AN & THE

General & Specific

- **A** and **AN** both point to a noun that names someone or some thing **in general**.
- We use **“THE”** to point to a noun that is **specific**.

Consonants & Vowels

- We use **“A”** before a **consonant** sound because it is easier to pronounce.
- We use **“AN”** before a **vowel** sound because it is easier to pronounce.
- We use **“THE”** before *both* **consonants** and **vowels**.

Singular & Plural

- **A** and **AN** both point to a noun that is **singular**.
- We use **“THE”** before nouns that are either singular or plural.

After all of this, of course, we still don't know how the elephant managed to walk through the back wall of the classroom without destroying it, but we'll have to leave that for some other time.

A LITTLE MORE COMPLICATED

It gets a little more complicated. It always does!

ARTICLES describe **NOUNS**. But there are different kinds of **NOUNS** with different rules for the **ARTICLES** that describe those **NOUNS**. We've been talking about **common** nouns. Let's look at just one more kind of **NOUN**:

PROPER NOUNS

PROPER NOUNS name **specific** persons, places, things, or ideas that begin with a **Capital Letter**. We don't use any **ARTICLES** in front of **PROPER NOUNS**.

The Chicago.

The Steve and the Andrew went to the New York.

EXERCISES ON ARTICLES

Fill in the **articles** missing in the following sentences:

1. Rodrigo watched _____ movie I had told him about.
2. My father bought me _____ new watch for my graduation.
3. _____ new watch that my father bought me for my graduation looks very sharp.
4. When I saw _____ movie star walk down the street, I played it very cool.
5. I took _____ picture of Robert pitching in the game last night.

Parts of Speech VII: Conjunctions

What are **CONJUNCTIONS**? What can **CONJUNCTIONS** do?

Simple. **CONJUNCTIONS** either:

- *join things* together
- or*
- they *separate* one thing from another.

The two main **CONJUNCTIONS** are:

- **And**—joins things together
- **But**—separates things one from another

There are more **CONJUNCTIONS**, and different kinds of **CONJUNCTIONS**, and we'll give you an index of them—the Index of Conjunctions—on page 243, but you will use mostly the **CONJUNCTIONS** “**and**” and “**but**.”

AND:

“**And**” joins things together:

- **nouns**

I had a hamburger **AND** a milkshake **AND** French fries.

- **pronouns**

He **AND** she both kept daily diaries.

- **verbs**

I walked five blocks **AND** took the bus from there.

- **adjectives**

My new brother-in-law is very tall **AND** very handsome **AND** very smart.

- **adverbs**

I ran hard **AND** fast down the track.

BUT:

“But” separates, or distinguishes, one thing from one another

- **nouns**

Billy, **BUT** not Sandy, worked at the hotel for the summer.

- **pronouns**

He, **BUT** not she, kept a daily diary.

- **verbs**

That winter it rained, **BUT** it never snowed.

- **adjectives**

My new brother-in-law is very tall **BUT** not very handsome.

- **adverbs**

I dressed quickly **BUT** nicely.

EXERCISES ON CONJUNCTIONS

Fill in the missing **conjunctions** in the following sentences:

1. I had math _____ physical science _____ anthropology today.
2. After three classes in a row, I'm hungry _____ tired.
3. I bought a new bicycle _____ not a new moped.
4. I sent a package to my brother in Afghanistan, _____ I didn't put any music in it.
5. I read two novels for my English class _____ one chapter in physical science, _____ I didn't get to the homework for history yet.

Parts of Speech VIII: Interjections

What are **INTERJECTIONS**? What can **INTERJECTIONS** do for you?

INTERJECTIONS are pretty simple. You add **INTERJECTIONS** to a sentence to add emphasis. We've given you some examples of **INTERJECTIONS** that will make this clear. We've put the **INTERJECTIONS** in *italics*.

Oh no, I forgot my house keys.

Uh oh, we just ate, but I don't have money for the check.

Ouch, I stubbed my toe!

Hey, that's hot. Don't touch it!

AN EXERCISE ON INTERJECTIONS

Find and circle all the **interjections** in the following paragraph:

Wow, I loved that air show we saw. Man, those planes flew incredibly close in formation. And, hey, they were so fast flying overhead you couldn't turn away for one second. Oh, I forgot to tell you, my buddy flew one of them.

Parts of Speech IX: Prepositions

What exactly are **PREPOSITIONS**? How do we use **PREPOSITIONS**? What can **PREPOSITIONS** do for us? We saved the most challenging **PART OF SPEECH** for last so give it all your attention. **PREPOSITIONS** can be tricky; they can be difficult to get right. If you are careful, you will do well with them.

- **PREPOSITIONS** describe the *relationship* between two **NOUNS**.
- **PREPOSITIONS** often {but not always} modify another word in the sentence.

Modify =

From the French: *modifier*

Modifier = to change

Two hints about how to use **PREPOSITIONS**:

- **PREPOSITIONS** *always* come before a noun.
- *Most*, but not all, **PREPOSITIONS** tell us:
- **WHERE** something is

or

- **WHEN** something happens.

A. **WHERE**

Take any two **NOUNS**. For example, take “bird” and “tree.” You can say:

The bird is *in* the tree.
 The bird is *near* the tree.
 The bird is far *from* the tree.

The **PREPOSITIONS**, *in*, *near*, and *far from*, describe the *relationship* between the two nouns,

“bird”  “tree.”

The **PREPOSITIONS** *in*, *near*, and *far from* also modify the **noun** bird. Those prepositions tell us something more about the bird; they tell us **where** the bird is.

“To modify” means to change something. When we use the prepositions *in*, *near*, or *far from* to modify the **NOUN** “bird,” we change our understanding of that word. We change what we know about the bird. Now we know where the bird is.

Let’s take another example. In this one, if we give you the two nouns “lake” and “farm” and the **PREPOSITION** “behind,” you might give me the sentence:

NOUN **PREPOSITION** **NOUN**
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 The lake is **behind** the farm.

You describe the relationship between the two nouns,

“lake”  “farm”

with the **PREPOSITION** *behind*.

You also *modify* the **noun** “lake.” You tell us **where** the lake is.

Now let's take the two **nouns** "mouse" and "house." You could say:

The mouse ran *through* the house.

The mouse ran *in* the house.

The mouse ran *under* the house.

- The **PREPOSITIONS** *through*, *in*, and *under* describe the relationship between the nouns,

"mouse"  "house"

- The **PREPOSITIONS** *through*, *in*, and *under* modify the **noun** "mouse." They tell us more about the mouse. They tell us where the mouse is.

B. WHEN

Let's take the **nouns** "tree" and "bird." You can say:

Before the huge wind blew, the bird sang happily in the tree.

When the huge wind blew, the bird was quiet in the tree and just hung on.

During the huge wind, it was hard to see the bird in the tree.

After the huge wind blew, the bird was no longer in the tree.

- The **PREPOSITIONS** *Before*, *When*, *During*, and *After* describe the relationship between the **nouns**

"tree"  "bird."

- The **PREPOSITIONS** *Before*, *When*, *During*, and *After* modify the **NOUN** "wind." They tell us more about the wind. They tell us about *when* the wind blew.

C. THE MOST DIFFICULT PREPOSITION OF THEM ALL: **OF**

"*Of*," like all the **PREPOSITIONS**, describes the relationship between two **NOUNS**. But, "*of*" does not exactly tell us where something is, nor does it exactly tell us when something happens.

Why is "*of*" so difficult? Why is it so hard to tell you *how* and *when* to use "*of*"? Why do students make so many mistakes with "*of*"?

We have said that **language is alive**, that words in a sentence all interact with each other. Language is **alive** because it is always changing, always growing. The English language grows and changes faster than any other language in the world. It's challenging to keep up with all the rapid changes in the English language.

Hip =

In 1900, “hip” just meant a part of your body. By 1970, if you were “hip,” you were aware of things like jazz, rock ‘n roll, certain ways of dressing, and certain ways of thinking. What does “hip” mean today, if anything? Do we still use it? Language is ever changing. It's alive.

“*Of*” is an old word that has changed so much in the last thousand years that we would never recognize its original meaning. Originally, “*of*” meant “**away from**.”¹ It's even difficult to define what “*of*” means today.

Look at a few examples of the use of “*of*.”

She came out *of* the house.

It is a quarter *of* ten.

He was one out *of* ten winners.

I told him to get out *of* my way.

It was sad. They had to shoot the horse to put him out *of* his misery.

I live ten miles north *of* the college.

I arrived at ten o'clock. She arrived within an hour *of* me.

An ogre lives in back *of* their house. They don't know what to do!

There were upwards *of* three hundred students in my high school class.

He was cured *of* his cold.

The Boston Red Sox were finally cleansed *of* “The Curse of the Babe.”

They had to clear the street *of* all traffic.

¹Strangely enough, if you were to substitute “**away from**” in each of the following sentences, it kind of works – even after a thousand years of the history of this word, “*of*.”

We emptied the rooms *of* all the waste baskets, so they could wash the floors.

It feels pretty good to be rid *of* that guy who was bugging me.

Yesterday, he was robbed *of* all his money.

This list could go on and on!

This list could go on and on, and yet it's still hard to tell the difference between the use of "*of*" in each of these examples. How then can you learn to use "*of*" properly? You will have to learn from reading a lot and from paying attention. You will also learn when your Professor corrects your misuse of "*of*" in your papers. Eventually, you'll get the feel *of* it, but for now, you have all nine **PARTS OF SPEECH**.

Before finishing this Chapter, let's look at one way we use one of the **PARTS OF SPEECH**, prepositions, to make what we call **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES**.

Prepositional Phrase

What is a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**? What can a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE** do for us?

We have seen how prepositions work to tell us, mostly, where something is or when something happens. When we begin a phrase *with* a **PREPOSITION**, we call that phrase a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**².

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

Before the cat bit the dog, no one thought such a thing possible.

When the cat bit the dog, everyone talked about it all evening.

After the cat bit the dog, and after everyone talked about it all evening, everyone knew such a thing could happen.

Of all the crazy things that ever happened in my life, I think I'll never hear of a cat biting a dog.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

The cat, with its sharp teeth, bit the dog.

The cat jumped onto the dog, and then gave him a playful nip.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

The cat bit the dog on the ear.

The cat lies beside the dog.

²For the different types of prepositional phrases, see the Index of How Prepositions Work on page 247.

EXERCISES ON PREPOSITIONS

Fill in the missing **preposition**:

1. She took the candy _____ the baby.
2. I typed my notes _____ the computer.
3. I saw the performance _____ my girlfriend.
4. I planted a fig tree _____ my new garden.
5. We ate _____ the new restaurant on Delancy Street.

EXERCISES ON THE PREPOSITION OF

To get used to using this strange “**of**,” in each sentence below we have just left “**of**” out. All you have to do is fill it in. It’s simple, it’s obvious, but hopefully it will help you to hear and to feel when to use “**of**.”

1. He got out _____ his car to talk to George.
2. She took two _____ the candies he offered her.
3. The table was made _____ Brazilian oak.
4. Out _____ all the exercises in this book, this is the strangest!
5. Out _____ all the **PREPOSITIONS** we have studied, “**of**” is the strangest!

Chapter Review: Parts of Speech

Articles:

We have only three **ARTICLES**. They are:

- **A**
- **An**
- **The**



Conjunctions:

The two main conjunctions are:

- **And**—joins things together
- **But**—separates things one from another

Interjections:

We use **interjections** in a sentence to add emphasis.

Prepositions:

Describe the *relationship* between two **nouns**; modify a noun in the sentence.

HINTS ABOUT PREPOSITIONS:

- **PREPOSITIONS** *always* come before a noun.
- **PREPOSITIONS** often tell us:
 - **WHERE** something is or
 - **WHEN** something happens.
- The most difficult **PREPOSITION** of them all is: **of**.

Prepositional Phrases

When we begin a phrase *with* a **PREPOSITION**, we call that phrase a **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE**.