Aggie Grammar Guide: Glossary

The following list has common grammar terms and symbols that are referenced in the lessons. Terms and symbols are bolded when they occur in examples.

Symbols

Ø (null sign)
This symbol means "null" or "none" and is used to indicate the absence of a feature. In a discussion about commas, the **Ø** symbol in the following sentence would indicate the lack of a comma between the words "though" and "it."

- Example: Even though **Ø** it was hidden, I saw it.

* (asterisk)
This symbol means "ungrammatical." When it appears before a sentence, it indicates English speakers would find the entire sentence ungrammatical.

- Example: *Dog jumped.

( ) (parentheses)
Parentheses indicate the words within them are optional. They are also used for explanations.

- Example: She did her work **(**in the morning**)**.

In this example, the parentheses indicate that the phrase "in the morning" is not grammatically necessary.

Adjective

You can use many adjectives to describe a single noun or pronoun. They can only occur before a noun/pronoun or after certain verbs as a complement. However, not all adjectives can occur before a noun/pronoun or after a verb. When choosing an adjective, make sure your sentence is logical and grammatical. You can identify an adjective by using the following tests (the adjectives are in bold).

Only adjectives can be modified with very:

- Example: The sentences in the articles are not very **complex** or **long**.
- Example: The very **complex** sentences in the article are not long.

Only adjectives can logically fit into the sentence frame "[Noun/pronoun] seems _____.":

Consider the example sentence: "Perhaps they leave this small yet meaningful detail aside because attending school for several years seems tedious." We can use this test to determine which words are adjectives and which are not.

- Example: It seems **tedious**. ("Tedious" is an adjective.)
- Example: *It seems **school**. ("School" is not an adjective.)
- Example: It seems **meaningful**. ("Meaningful" is an adjective.)
- Example: It seems **small**. ("Small" is an adjective.)

- Example: *It seems **detail**. ("Detail" is not an adjective.)

Most adjectives can describe the varying degree of a noun (gradability). Note that some adjectives are irregular (e.g. **good**, **better**, **best**) and some are absolute, which means they are not gradable (e.g. **dead**, **impossible**). If you are unsure, check a dictionary for alternate possible forms. Different forms for comparative (a greater degree) and superlative (the greatest degree) adjectives exist depending on if you have a 1-syllable adjective or a multi-syllable adjective.

For 1-syllable adjectives, add **–er + than** for the comparative and **the –est** for the superlative.

- Example (comparative): The sentences in this article are **longer than** in the one I read yesterday.
- Example (superlative): The sentences in this article are **the longest** I've ever read.

For multi-syllable adjectives, add **more** before the adjective for the comparative and **the most** before the adjective for the superlative.

- Example (comparative): The sentences in this article are **more complex** than in the one I read yesterday.
- Example (superlative): The sentences in this article **are the most complex** I've ever read.

Adjectives can be comprised of more than one word. Hyphenate a multi-word adjective when it comes before a noun/pronoun to tell the reader you are treating it as a single concept. However, do not use a hyphen when the first word ends in **–ly** or when the adjective comes after a verb.

- Example: The **time-consuming** process was very difficult.
- Example: It is really a **time consuming** and painful process.
- Example: With this new innovation, bicycles could now have two **similarly sized** wheels that would still be as effective as having one huge wheel.

Adverb

An adverb can add extra information to a verb, adverb, adjective, or a clause. You can identify an adverb using any of the following tests:

Only adverbs can answer questions like when, where, how, why, or to what extent something happens.

- Example: How did the student walk to class? The student **quickly** walked to class.
- Example: When is the exam? We will take the exam **tomorrow**.

Adverbs can sometimes be formed by taking the adjective form and adding **–ly**. Other common adverbs function as subordinating conjunctions (transitional words) that form dependent adverbial clauses.

- Examples of adjectives to adverbs: quick → **quickly**; happy → **happily**; sad → **sadly**; thorough → **thoroughly**.
- Examples of subordinating conjunctions: moreover, therefore, however, additionally, whereas, while, because, since, although

Adverbs can occur in most places in a sentence, except never in between a verb and its object.

- Example: The teacher reads essays **often**.
- Example: **Often,** the teacher reads essays.
- Example: The teacher **often** reads essays.
- Example: *The teacher reads **often** essays. (ungrammatical)
- Example: Many people do not know how to **completely** maintain a culture in a community. (When you place an adverb between an infinitive, such as "to maintain," this is called splitting an infinitive. Some consider this acceptable stylistically and some do not, so check with your professor before using this form.)

Clause

A clause is a string of words with both a subject and a verb. The two clause types are independent and dependent.

An independent clause is a complete sentence. It can stand alone or can be part of a more complex sentence.

- Example: **Finals are hard**.
- Example: I believe that **finals are hard**.
- Example: Despite the fact that I studied a lot, **finals are hard**.
- Example: **Finals are hard** because **the quarter system is short**.
- Example: **Finals are hard**, but **I am optimistic**.

A dependent clause (sometimes called a *subordinate clause*) has a subject and verb, but cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. It must be connected to an independent clause. See the glossary entry for conjunctions for examples of words that start dependent clauses.

- Example: **Despite the fact that I study a lot**, finals are hard.
- Example: Finals are hard **because the quarter system is short**.
- Example: **Unless I study**, I will fail this test.
- Example: I know I will pass my classes **once I start studying**.

Complement

A complement is a component that is required to make a phrase or clause grammatically complete. Complements always occur after the part of speech they are completing (the complement head) and are named for that part of speech. In each of the below examples, the complement head is italicized and the complement is bolded.

Subject complements are nouns or adjectives occurring in sentences with a linking verb (e.g., "to be", "seem", "feel") and provide additional information to describe the subject.

- Example: *Bold terms* are **important terms**.

Object complements are nouns, adjectives, infinitives, or gerunds that function as the direct/indirect object (some sources refer to this as a verb complement) and/or help complete the meaning of the object in some way.

- Example (direct object): The article *mentions* **the dilemma of fox squirrels' overpopulation at UC Davis**.
- Example (completing an object): The authors' use of vocabulary makes *the content* **simpler to comprehend**.

Adjective complements are nouns or prepositional phrases that help complete the meaning of an adjective in a sentence.

- Example: Because she didn't go to college, it was so *hard* **for her to find a job**

Preposition complements (also called objects of the preposition) are nouns that help complete the meaning of a preposition in a sentence.

- Example: All the evidence is provided *from* **the information** the researchers found *in* **their study**.

Conjunction

Conjunctions are words or phrases that join together clauses, phrases, or words to increase sentence complexity and variety. How they are punctuated will depend on the function of the conjunction in the sentence (Check the Commas and Semicolons chapter for more detailed rules). English has three major types of conjunctions: coordinating, adverbial, and subordinating.

Coordinating conjunctions join two or more parallel words/phrases/clauses. There are seven coordinating conjunctions: **for**, **and**, **nor**, **but**, **or**, **yet**, **so** (FANBOYS). The parallel elements are in bold below.

- Example: I often eat outside the MU **or** at a table inside the Silo.
- Example: My old **yet** reliable bike is a perfect substitute for a car.
- Example: I bought a brighter bike light, **but** I still don't like to ride at night.

Adverbial conjunctions join two or more independent clauses with a semicolon before the conjunction and a comma following it. They can also start a sentence while providing a transition from the previous sentence. Common adverbial conjunctions include **also, besides, otherwise, nevertheless, therefore, and however.**

- Example: She wanted to adopt a puppy**; however,** she couldn't afford one.
- Example: He graduated with excellent grades**. Thus,** he got a job soon after graduation.

Subordinating conjunctions make a clause dependent, which means it is a fragment, and must be attached to an independent clause with the correct punctuation. Common subordinating conjunctions include **since**, **because**, **although**, **though**, **as**, and **while**.

- Example: **Whenever** I have trouble in my classes**,** I visit the AATC.
- Example: I decided not to attend the party **until** I had finished my homework.

Determiner

A determiner is a word that acts like an article (it precedes a noun or adjective + noun). Articles (**a, an, the**) are types of determiners, but there are many more as well.

- Example: **this**, **that**, **whose**, **my**, **your**, **his**, **her**, **their**

Sometimes a word can be used as either a pronoun or determiner, depending on whether it replaces a noun or precedes a noun.

Gerund

A gerund is a verb that functions as a noun in a sentence. To form a gerund, add **-ing** to the end of the verb. Gerunds can occur in any position that a noun phrase can occupy within a sentence and always function as singular nouns. Gerund usage is typically idiomatic, so you will have to consult a reference guide or memorize when it is appropriate to use a gerund.

- Example: She often goes **climbing** with her boyfriend.
- Example: **Being** stopped by the police is not usually a good experience.
- Example: **Belonging** and ability are two of the negative thoughts students carry with them when they first enter college.
- Example: People use their mobile phones for **conducting** business.

Helping Verb

Helping verbs, also known as auxiliary verbs, help the main verb to function in some way. They always precede the main verb and indicate the tense/agreement instead of the main verb. English has three kinds of helping verbs: forms of **to be** and **to have**, **do**-support, and modal verbs. Each can form a contraction with "not" to make a negative sentence. In each of the below examples, the helping verb is bolded and the main verb is underlined.

Forms of **to be** (**am, is, are, was, were, being, been**) and **to have** (**has, have, had**) help form perfect, progressive, and passive verb forms. The main verb that follows is always in its participle form. See the Verb Tense and Form and Passive Formation chapters for more details.

- Example (perfect): Different countries **have** shared similar foods.
- Example (progressive): Citations of students' discussions on the Facebook group show what students **were** talking about.
- Example (passive): My question **was** appreciated by the professor.
- Example (contraction): I **wasn't** willing to go shopping yesterday.

Forms of **do** (**do, does, did**) indicate emphasis, make a negative statement when no other helping verbs are present, or ask a question. The main verb that follows is always in its base form.

- Example (emphasis): America **does** have a large population.
- Example (negative): The media anticipated the dangers and risks. → The media **did not** anticipate the public response.
- Example (ask a question): How **do** electric motors work in hybrid cars?
- Example (contraction): She **doesn't** think the class is very useful.

Modals change the tone of the verb and the sentence, and the verb that follows is always in its base form. If that verb is a form of **to be** or **to have** (see the Verb Tense and Form chapter), then the main verb will be in its participle form. Common English modal verbs include **can, could, should,**

may, might, would, must, will, have to, need to. Check a dictionary to learn what each modal means.

- Example (present tense, modal of possibility, negative): Italians **might not** use tomato sauce when making pizza.
- Example (past tense, modal of past ability): I **could have** gone to school, but I went to the beach instead.
- Example (future tense): I **will** pass all my classes next quarter.
- Example (contraction): I **can't** eat peanuts because I'm allergic to them.

Idiom

An idiom is a group of words in which the meanings of the words individually do not match the meaning of the group as a whole. Idioms have a figurative meaning, rather than a literal meaning, and must be memorized. See the Appendix: Academic Idioms & Phrases for a list of common academic idioms and their usage.

- Example: I am **looking forward** to relaxing on Saturday. ("to look forward to" means to want something to happen or to be excited about something happening in the future)
- Example: A plane ticket to New York costs **an arm and a leg**. ("an arm and a leg" refers to something that is very expensive.)
- Example: In the United States, freedom of religion and freedom of speech go **hand in hand**. ("hand in hand" means to occur together).

Infinitive

An infinitive is a verb that functions as a noun, adjective, adverb, or complement (a phrase or word that completes the meaning of a subject, verb, or object) in a sentence. To form an infinitive, use the base form of the verb and add **to** before it. Some sentence structures allow you to use the bare infinitive (the base form of the verb) without the **to** preceding it. Infinitive usage is typically idiomatic, so you will have to consult a reference guide or memorize when it is appropriate to use an infinitive and what role it is playing in the sentence.

- Example: **To help** communities is in everyone's best interest.
- Example: The research is conducted **to improve** the lives of adolescents. (This infinitive is a shortened form of "in order to.")
- Example: I was shocked **to receive** the acceptance letter from UC Davis.
- Example: He argues that Russian associations help **justify** the cooperation between civil society and state.

Noun

Based on meaning, a noun is a person, place, thing, or idea. You can identify a noun using any of the following tests.

Only nouns can be preceded by adjectives.

- Examples: tall **building**, clear **decision**

Only nouns (except non-count nouns) can be made singular or plural.

- Examples: **eye → eyes**, **child → children**

Only nouns (except abstract nouns) can be made possessive.

- Examples: **doctor**'s, **highways'**

Some words can be either nouns or verbs depending on their role in a sentence.

- Example (noun): I took notes so I would have a **record** of that conversation.
- Example (verb): I will **record** that conversation in my notes.

Object

An object is something that comes after a verb (usually a noun) that receives the action in a sentence. Objects are either direct or indirect.

A direct object is the noun/pronoun (or noun phrase) in a sentence that follows the verb and directly receives the action (bolded below).

- Example: Miguel returned **his library book**.
- Example: The crowded train with a broken door entered **the station**.

An indirect object is something that receives the direct object of a sentence. It occurs after the verb but before or after the direct object in a sentence (bolded below).

- Example: I gave the library book **to Miguel**.
- Example: I gave **Miguel** the library book.

Sometimes, the meaning of the other parts of the sentence (e.g., verb, subject, direct object) can tell you which position to use, while sometimes the choice is a matter of style.

Participle

A participle is made from the base form of a verb. It is used as part of the verb. A participle is either in present or past tense form.

- Present participle (ends in **-ing**): **confusing**, **choosing**, **bringing**
- Past participle (ends in **-ed**, **-en**, or is irregular): **confused**, **chosen**, **brought**

Phrase

A phrase is one or more words that act as a unit. Phrases are never a complete sentence because they don't have both a subject and a verb. Two phrase types are noun phrases and prepositional phrases.

- Noun phrase (a noun/pronoun and any other words that describe the noun): **sandwich**, **a tasty sandwich**, **a tasty sandwich with a side of chips**
- Prepositional phrase (a preposition + noun phrase): **in the classroom**, **at the university**, **on my desk**

Possessive

The word "possessive" means to show ownership of one noun over another. This can be indicated using a possessive pronoun, a possessive determiner, or an apostrophe.

- Possessive pronoun: **Ours** was boring.
- Possessive determiner: **His** speech was boring.
- Apostrophe: **Nicole's** speech was boring.

Preposition

A preposition is a word that shows a grammatical function or time/space relationship between a noun/pronoun and another word in the sentence. Common prepositions are: **around, between**, **into**, **off**, and **through**.

- Example: I walked **to** the store.

In this sentence, the preposition "to" shows the spatial relationship between the verb **walked** and the noun **store**.

- Example: She seemed happy **for** me.

In this sentence, the preposition "for" does not have a time or space meaning but rather expresses a grammatical function (linking an adjective and a noun). Other prepositions that fall into this category are: **at**, **by**, **from**, **in**, **of**, **on**, and **with**.

Pronoun

A pronoun is a substitute for a noun and refers to a previously mentioned noun. Pronouns cannot be preceded by articles or determiners. There are three main categories of pronouns, depending on whether the pronoun is acting as a subject, object, or possessive:

- Subject pronouns: **I**, **you**, **he**, **she**, **it**, **we**, **they**, **who**, **whoever**
- Object pronouns: **me**, **you**, **him**, **her**, **it**, **us**, **them**, **whom**, **whomever**
- Possessive pronouns: **mine**, **yours**, **his**, **hers**, **ours**, **theirs**, **whose**

See the Pronoun chapter for these and other categories of pronouns. See the Relative Clauses chapter for more information specifically on **who**, **whom**, and **whose** and other relative pronouns.

Proper noun

A proper noun is a type of noun that refers to a unique or official name of a person, place, company, or document. Sometimes **the** is part of the official name. A proper noun can be one or more words. Proper nouns are always capitalized.

- Example: **The United States**, **Davis**, **Chancellor Katehi**, **Apple**, **The Bill of Rights**, **The Davis Enterprise**

Subject

The subject is the noun/pronoun (or noun phrase) in a sentence that does the action or exists in a state of being (in bold below).

- Example: **Miguel** returned his library book.

- Example: **Studying** is exhausting.
- Example: **The crowded train with a broken door** entered the station.

Verb

A verb shows an action or a state of being. There are many irregular forms of verbs. You can identify a verb using the following test.

Only verbs have different forms for tense and agreement with the subject.

- Example: (tense): I **swim**. I **swam.**
- Example: (agreement): I **swim**. She **swims**.

Verbs are either transitive or intransitive.

A transitive verb requires a direct object in order to form a complete idea.

- Example: We **observed** the lecture.
- Example: *We **observed**. (ungrammatical because something needs to be observed)

An intransitive verb cannot be used with a direct object because the verb is not directing its action towards a noun. Prepositional phrases like **at the people** are not direct objects.

- Example: We **laughed**.
- Example: We **laughed** at the people.
- Example: *We **laughed** the people. (ungrammatical)

Some verbs can be either transitive or intransitive.

- Example: I **walked** the dog (transitive). I **walked** to the store (intransitive).