Word level: the parts of speech

Nouns

A noun is the name of a person, place, thing or idea.

Australia is a noun.   **Fun** is a noun.

There are many kinds of nouns. The four main ones are: *common nouns, proper nouns, abstract nouns* and *collective nouns*.

Common noun

A common noun is the name of any ordinary thing you can see and touch.

Here are some examples of common nouns:

dog	hat	ball
water	apple	car

The toy **dog** is made of metal.
Common noun

Proper noun

A proper noun is the special name of a person, place or thing. Proper nouns start with capital letters.

Here are some examples of proper nouns:

Mia	Canberra	Sydney Opera House
Captain Cook	China	

The **Sydney Opera House** is big.
Proper noun

Collective nouns

A collective noun is the name given to a group of persons or things.

Here are some examples of collective nouns:

team	herd	swarm
litter	bunch	flock

A **litter** of puppies.
Collective noun

Other types of nouns

Abstract nouns

An abstract noun is the name of something you feel, or something that could exist in your mind. You cannot see or touch an abstract noun.

Here are some examples of abstract nouns:

hope	sadness	joy	truth
love	kindness	greed	idea

Concrete nouns

A concrete noun is a noun that you can see or touch, like tree, hat or nose. It is the opposite of an abstract noun.

Here are some examples of concrete nouns:

floor	man	hill
ocean	ball	head

A concrete noun is a type of common noun.

Technical nouns

A technical noun is a noun that is used in a specific area of study. We only tend to use technical nouns when we are speaking or writing about particular topics.

Here are some examples of technical nouns:

fraction	oxygen	galaxy	triceratops

Non-technical nouns are also called *everyday nouns.*

A bear is a large **mammal**.
Technical noun

Terms-of-address nouns

A term-of-address noun is a noun we use when we are talking or writing to someone. It is a special type of proper noun.

Here are some examples of terms-of-address nouns:

Mrs Chin	Alex	Your Honour	Sir

Count or countable nouns

A count or countable noun is a noun that can be counted, such as *apple, leg* or *dog*.

We saw three **dolphins**.

I like **apples**.

Mass or non-countable nouns

A mass or non-countable noun is a noun that cannot be counted, such as fun, traffic or homework. For example:

You might say: The teacher gave us **more homework**. ✓

But you would never say: The teacher gave me ~~**three homeworks**~~. ✗

What heavy **traffic**!
Mass or non-countable noun

Verbal nouns (Gerunds)

Sometimes, a word can have more than one 'job'. A verbal noun, or gerund, is a verb ending in *-ing* that is used as a noun. In other words, it is an action word that is used to name something. (See Verbs, pp. 17–29.)

> REMEMBER
>
> A verb is a doing, being or having word!

Running is good exercise.	In this sentence, **running** is a verbal noun. It looks like the verb *to run*, but acts like a noun. It is the subject of the verb *is*.
I like **eating**.	In this sentence, **eating** is a verbal noun. It looks like the verb *to eat*, but acts like a noun. It is the object of the verb *like*.

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I am good at **dancing**.	In this sentence, **dancing** is a verbal noun. It looks like the verb *to dance*, but acts like a noun. It is the object of the preposition *at*.
I went on a **walking** tour.	In this sentence, **walking** is a participle. It acts as an adjective, describing the noun *tour*.

Modal nouns

A modal noun shows a degree of possibility, certainty or obligation. That is, something that is possible, certain, or that you should do.

Here are some examples of modal nouns:

probability   certainty   necessity   chance

Compound nouns

A compound noun is made up of two or more words. These words may be joined together, as in *teabag* or *snowman*; or hyphenated, as in *self-control* or *brother-in-law*.

These are compound nouns:

bookshelf   thumbnail   goldfish

knife-edge   half-brother   sister-in-law

Sometimes when a group of words has a special meaning, we call them compound nouns, even though they are not joined together and do not have a hyphen. *Baked beans* and *human being* are compound nouns.

Noun group

A noun group is a word or a number of words based around a noun. It can consist of a single noun, a single pronoun, or a single noun with words built around the noun. A noun group can also include a clause. (See Groups, p. 38, Clauses, p. 42.)

In the following sentences, the noun groups are highlighted:

REMEMBER

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. Pronouns include words like he, she, I, me, you, they, them.

Dogs bark.

They bark.

Those dogs bark.

Those big dogs bark.

Those big dogs that live next door bark.

Noun groups are sometimes called *nominal groups* or *noun phrases*.

Noun phrase

A noun phrase is a phrase that does the work of a noun. (See Phrases, p. 38.)

These are noun phrases:

eating apples

going fishing

playing tennis

Playing tennis is fun!
Noun phrase

Noun clause

A noun clause is a subordinate clause that does the work of a noun. It can be either the subject or the object of a verb. A noun clause contains a subject and a verb of its own, but does not make sense by itself. (See Clauses, p. 42, Finite verbs, p. 20, Subject and object, p. 6.)

> **REMEMBER**
>
> A principal clause is a group of words that makes sense on its own. A subordinate clause is a group of words that gives meaning to the main clause of a sentence, but it cannot stand on its own.

What I saw at the movies was scary.	In this sentence, **What I saw at the movies** is a noun clause. It contains a subject (**I**) and a verb (**saw**), but it does not make sense on its own.
You must see **the game that is on TV tonight**.	In this sentence, **the game that is on TV tonight** is a noun clause. It contains a subject (**the game**) and a verb (**is**), but it does not make sense on its own.

More about nouns

Person

Nouns and pronouns have person. There are three types of person:
first person, *second person* and *third person*.

- **First person** refers to the person who is speaking: *I*, *me*, *mine,* etc.
- **Second person** refers to the person who is being spoken to: *You*, *yours*, etc.
- **Third person** refers to the person being spoken about: *he*, *she*, *it*, *mum*, *dad*, *Tom*, etc.

The superhero is flying.

Third person

All nouns are in the third person. They are always 'spoken about'. (See More about Pronouns, p. 11.)

Number

A noun has number. It can be *singular* or *plural*. Singular means one. Plural means more than one.

apple **singular**   apples **plural**

Forming the plural

In English spelling, the plural is formed in different ways. Always use your dictionary to check, if you are not sure.

Many singular nouns add **-s** to make the plural:

boy ➤ boy**s**   girl ➤ girl**s**   toy ➤ toy**s**

Others add *-es*:

beach ➤ beach**es**   fox ➤ fox**es**   church ➤ church**es**

If a noun ends in *y* and has a consonant before the *y*, the plural drops *-y* and adds *-ies*:

baby ➤ bab**ies**   lady ➤ lad**ies**   ruby ➤ rub**ies**

Nouns ending in *-f* or *-fe* make the plural in two ways.

- They add *-s*:

  chief ➤ chief**s**   roof ➤ roof**s**

- They change *-f* to *-v* and add *-es*:

  knife ➤ kni**ves**   loaf ➤ loa**ves**

In some cases, both plural forms are acceptable:

   handkerchief ➤ handkerchief**s** ➤ handkerchie**ves**

   hoof ➤ hoof**s** ➤ hoo**ves**

Nouns ending in *-o* form the plural in two ways.

- They add *-s*:

  piano ➤ piano**s**   merino ➤ merino**s**

- They add *-es*:

  potato ➤ potato**es**   tomato ➤ tomato**es**

Compound nouns form the plural in two ways.

- They add *-s* to the end of the compound:

  spoonful ➤ spoonful**s**

- They add *-s* to the first part of the compound.

  sister-in-law ➤ sister**s**-in-law

Some singular nouns that come from foreign words
change their endings altogether:

   crisis ➤ cris**es**   plateau ➤ plateau**x**

Some singular nouns change their vowels to form the plural:

   woman ➤ wom**e**n   man ➤ m**e**n

Sometimes they change their consonants as well:

   mouse ➤ m**ice**   louse ➤ **li**c**e**

Some singular nouns do not change to form the plural at all:

   deer ➤ deer   sheep ➤ sheep

Gender

Nouns can be *masculine* (male) or *feminine* (female).

Some nouns are neither masculine nor feminine. These are called *neuter*. Masculine, feminine and neuter are a noun's gender.

Some nouns can be either masculine *or* feminine. These nouns are said to be *common gender*.

EXAMPLES OF NOUNS AND THEIR GENDER			
Masculine	Feminine	Common gender	Neuter
boy	girl	child	rock
man	woman	human	tree
father	mother	parent	drink

Nominalisation

Nominalisation is the process of making nouns from other parts of speech. For example, the verb *lose* becomes *loss*; the adjective *high* becomes *height*; the verb *dwell* becomes *dwelling*.

Some words can be nouns or verbs, depending on what their job is in a sentence. For example, the word *jump* can mean 'a jump' (noun) or 'to jump' (verb).

I did a huge **jump** on a trampoline.   I like **to jump** on a trampoline.
Noun   **Verb**

Case

Nouns and pronouns have case. Case refers to the relationship between nouns (or pronouns) and verbs. (See Pronouns, below.)

There are three main cases:

- The *subjective case* refers to the subject of a verb. The subjective case is sometimes called the *nominative case*.

- The *objective case* refers to the object of a verb or preposition.
  The objective case is sometimes called the *accusative case*.

- The *possessive case* shows ownership of something.

Ahmed borrowed
Stephen's book.

In this sentence, **Ahmed** is in the subjective case. It is the subject of the verb *borrowed*. **Book** is in the objective case. It is the object of the verb *borrowed*. **Stephen's** is in the possessive case. It tells us who owns the book.

REMEMBER

The subject is the person or thing who performs the action of the verb.
The object is the person or thing who has the action of the verb done to them.

How do we find the case of a noun?

Subjective case	Ask **who** or **what** in front of the verb. *Who borrowed the book?* *Answer: Ahmed*
Objective case	Ask **who** or **what** after the verb. *Borrowed **what**?* *Answer: the book*
Possessive case	Ask **whose**. **Whose** *book was it?* *Answer: Stephen's*

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that is used instead of a noun.

Maria is my friend.
She will be having a birthday party on Saturday.

In the first sentence, Maria is a noun. In the second sentence, the word **she** is used instead of Maria. **She** is a pronoun.

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