

WORD FORM GROUPS AND THEIR FUNCTION

Understanding how basic units of meaning in English are formed, helps us to orientate ourselves when we are listening or reading.

Basic units of language are **word form groups** such as: **noun phrases** (*the scientists; the pollution problem; the internet*); **verb phrases** (*had discussed; was raining*); **preposition phrases** (*at the conference; in the morning*) and others.

Knowing how the various word form groups **function** together in a sentence helps us to express our ideas more clearly, and helps with our comprehension of spoken and written English.

The different functions are exemplified in the sentence *'The scientists (**subject**) had discussed (**verb**) the pollution problems (**direct object**) at the conference' (**adverbial**).*

Types of word forms

There are five word form groups:

- noun phrases,
- verb phrases,
- preposition phrases,
- adjective phrases and
- adverb phrases.

STUDY TIPS

Having a good understanding of word form groups and their function in a sentence is particularly helpful for completing gap-fill type questions in the Listening and Reading sections of the IELTS test.

This will enable you to quickly determine the kind of word you would be listening for in the listening passage or looking for in the reading text.

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Noun phrases

A noun phrase consists of a noun, which is the headword, and often includes a determiner and/or modifier.

Noun phrase		
(determiner)	(modifier)	noun
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ articles (<i>a, an, the</i>) ▪ possessive adjectives (<i>my, your, his, her, its, our, their</i>) ▪ demonstrative adjectives (<i>this, these, that, those</i>) ▪ quantifiers (<i>some, any, each, every, neither, both</i>) ▪ numbers (<i>first, second, one, three, five</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ adjectives (<i>small, important, red, solid</i>) ▪ nouns (<i>garden, shoe, computer</i>) ▪ possessive forms (<i>brother's, Phillip's</i>) 	<p><i>a small lamp</i></p> <p><i>this computer factory</i></p> <p><i>his brother's bicycle</i></p>
Other forms: noun + preposition + noun		
noun	prepositions: <i>of, from, on, with</i>	noun
Examples: <i>the painting of the young girl; the scientist from the institute; the course on creative writing; the problem with environmental pollution</i>		

Verb phrases

A verb phrase has a main verb, and can also have one or more auxiliary verbs.

Verb phrase		
		Examples
1. main verb	—	<i>is, are, read, finish, see</i>
2. one or more auxiliary verbs	main verbs	<i>is reading, should be recommending, had returned, doesn't work</i>
3. main verb	main verb	<i>want to give; suggest reading</i>
4. phrasal verb	—	<i>bring back; come up with</i>

Preposition phrases

A preposition phrase consists of a preposition and a noun or a noun phrase.

Preposition phrase		
preposition	noun phrase	Examples
at, by, down, during, for, from, in, into, of, on, up, with	<i>the cinema; several reasons; the point of view; the night; foot</i>	<i>at the cinema; for several reasons; from the point of view; into the night; on foot</i>

Adjectives phrases

An adjective phrase has an adjective, and is sometimes preceded by one or more adverbs.

Adjective phrase		
(adverb)	adjective	Example
<i>too, very, not very, slightly, quite, more, less, rather, completely, somewhat, significantly</i>	<i>warm, beautiful, higher, low, young, sad, rewarding, challenging, enjoyable</i>	<i>challenging; too warm; slightly higher; rather sad; somewhat challenging; quite low</i>

Adverb phrases

An adverb phrase has an adverb, and is sometimes preceded by one or more adverbs.

Adverb phrase		
(adverb)	adverb	Example
<i>too, very, not very, slightly, quite, more, less, rather, only, completely, somewhat, significantly</i>	<i>quickly, often, slowly, occasionally, generally, twice, seldom, never</i>	<i>seldom; too often; more slowly; only twice</i>

Function of word forms

The function of the different word forms depends on its position in the sentence. A basic sentence structure consists of a **subject** and a **verb**. Apart from the subject and verb, other functions are: an **object**, a **complement** or an **adverbial**. Each of these functions plays an important part in the structure of the sentence, and follows a particular word order.

Subjects

The subject of the sentence is usually a noun phrase, and precedes a verb phrase.

Function	subject	verb
Form	noun phrase	verb phrase
	Their son's friend	has arrived.
	She	laughed.
	question sentences, e.g. Where were they singing?	
	they	were singing
	<i>-ing</i> forms of verbs and infinitives can also function as subjects	
	Smoking	kills.
	To learn	helps.

Verbs patterns

Depending on the type of verb, a sentence can have both **direct** and **indirect objects** or none at all.

Intransitive verbs do not have an object. Some common intransitive verbs include:

happen wait come go fall sleep

Structures with intransitive verbs may have **adverbials**.

An adverbial provides information about when, how, why or where something happens, and can be a preposition phrase, noun phrase or adverb phrase.

Function	subject	intransitive verb	adverbial
Form	noun phrase	verb phrase	preposition phrase; noun phrase; adverb phrase
	John's parents	came	to the celebration. Tuesday evening. there.

Transitive verbs have direct objects.

A **direct object**, which is usually a noun phrase or pronoun, is placed after the verb.

Function	subject	transitive verb	direct object
Form	noun phrase	verb phrase	noun phrase; pronoun
	The scientists I	discussed met	the issues. them.

Some verbs can have both a direct and indirect object.

Indirect objects, which are usually noun phrases or preposition phrases, tell us who or what is the receiver. Some common verbs, which can take two objects, are:

give send bring buy keep show

Function	subject	transitive verb	direct object	indirect object
Form	noun phrase	verb phrase	noun phrase; pronoun	noun phrase; preposition phrase
	The teacher	gave	the students	a test.
	The teacher	gave	a test	to the students.

Complements

Some verbs are followed by complements.

There are two kinds of complements: subject complement and object complement.

Subject complements, which can be noun phrases, adjective phrases or preposition phrases, identify, describe or tell us about the subject.

Verbs, which occur with a complement, are called *linking* or *copular verbs*. Some common linking verbs are:

be stay seem appear feel look
smell taste become make

Function	subject	subject-complement verb	subject complement
Form	noun phrase	linking verb phrase	noun phrases, adjective phrases preposition phrases
	Chris	was	very quiet.

Object complements, which can be noun phrases or adjective phrases, describe the qualities of the object. They follow the verb and direct object. Some of the verbs with which object complements occur are:

think keep consider imagine like
prefer prove call want appoint elect
name hold make

Function	subject	object-complement verb	direct object	object complement
Form	noun phrase	verb phrase	noun phrase; pronoun	noun phrases; adjective phrases
	The committee	elected	Charles	the Managing Director.