**Lecture 3: Using the Language**

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## 1. A Historical Overview

English has many more words than most other languages: for example, the *Concise Cambridge Dictionary* has 300 pages for Italian-English, but 500 pages for English-Italian. Why?

The wealth of vocabulary is the legacy of its history. The basis of the language is Anglo-Saxon, a relatively obscure Germanic dialect brought to England in the 5th century. The Norman Conquest in 1066 (the best-known date in English history) brought about the defining influence of Norman French: over the next 200 years Anglo-Saxon (the language of the peasants) absorbed a huge number of French words and became English. Thus, it gained a large number of words from the mainstream Romance languages descended from Latin.

By *high medieval times** English had become the common tongue of nobleman and peasant alike, but the languages of learning were still largely Greek and Latin. That is why English absorbed large numbers of often technical and scientific terms from these languages.

*\***Middle Ages**: period in European history between the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century and the Renaissance in the 15th. Among the period's distinctive features were the unity of W Europe with the Roman Catholic Church, the feudal organization of political, social, and economic relations, and the use of art for largely religious purposes. It can be divided into 3 sub-periods:

The *early Middle Ages* (5th-11th centuries), when Europe was settled by pagan Germanic tribes who adopted the vestiges of Roman institutions and traditions, were converted to Christianity by the Church (which had preserved Latin culture after the fall of Rome), and who then founded feudal kingdoms;

The *high Middle Ages* (12th-13th centuries, which saw the consolidation of feudal states, the expansion of European influence during the Crusades, the flowering of scholasticism and monasteries, and the growth of population and trade;

The *later Middle Ages* (14th-15th centuries), when Europe was devastated by Black Death and incessant warfare, feudalism was transformed under the influence of incipient nation-states and new modes of social and economic organization, and the first voyages of discovery were made.

(Reference from The Wordsworth Encyclopedia, Helicon Publishing Ltd, 1995)

The spread of the British Empire gave English an influx of words from many languages. Some, like *char* (*dated Brit. infml.* for 'tea'), brought back from India by soldiers, remained colloquial, while others, like *bungalow* or *khaki* went directly or indirectly into standard usage.

However, the greatest modern influence has been American. Especially in the last 70 years, there has been a lease-lend of words which has helped maintain the vigour and versatility of the language. To it we owe hundreds of such useful expressions as *boom, slump, bulldoze, paperback, grapevine, commuter, breakeven*, etc.

English is the most widely used language in the world: 60% of the world's radio programmes and 70% of the letters written every day are in English. It is the international language of air traffic and of the United Nations.
A vigorous language is constantly changing. New words come into use, new meanings evolve (i.e. *escalate*, in the Vietnam war). Some words become archaic and disappear – perhaps to reappear! *Obscene*, for example, was dismissed as somewhat archaic by the Oxford English Dictionary in 1933, but was restored to general use recently.
The structure of the language changes, too, and there is no good reason for clinging to rules of grammar which no longer reflect current usage. *The function of the structure* of *language is to support the meaning, not to restrict expression.*
The English language, like society, manners and fashion, has become more informal since the Second World War, and many words and constructions which would once have been unacceptable in standard English are now established. For example, *different to,* and *different than,* as well as *different from,* are now acceptable forms. The distinction between *due to* and *owing to* has disappeared, and the rules about *will* and *shall* are fast disappearing.
*'Correct English' is, in short, whatever is widely acceptable in current usage. But 'Good English' is something else again.* Despite the large vocabulary (the average vocabulary of a person in Britain is 13,000 words), we still often have difficulty in expressing ourselves clearly. We use the wrong words – those that do not express what we mean, those which are not understood by our recipient, or which antagonize him. Sometimes we merely use so many words that the meaning is lost in them: we can't see the wood for the trees. To be aware of the many ways in which language can be misused is the first step towards using the language more effectively.

## 2. The Wrong Words

*Jargon* cannot be better defined than in the words of H.W. Fowler:

> *Jargon is talk that is considered both ugly-sounding and hard to understand; applied especially to the sectional vocabulary of a science, art, class, sect, trade or profession, full of technical terms…the use of long words, circumlocution and other clumsiness.*

There are two kinds of language identified here. First, the *special terminology* that develops within any group: lawyers, social workers, computer staff, medics, pilots, and

so on. The use of these technical vocabularies can be both irritating and incomprehensible to outsiders, but within the group they act as a kind of spoken shorthand, a concise and precise way of expressing a concept (i.e., *siblings, software, hardware, etc.)*

In a world of increasing specialization and technology, these technical vocabularies are not only defensible, they are necessary. Mathematicians, lawyers, systems analysts and accountants need the precision and brevity of their own 'languages.'

What is indefensible, however, is to use your special vocabulary on outsiders who are not familiar with your jargon. Not only will you fail to communicate, you will bore or antagonize your 'receivers.'

The second variety of jargon, defined by Fowler as *the use of long words, circumlocution and other clumsiness*, is a sure way of losing, or at least obscuring  meaning in a fog of words. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with using long words (*circumlocution* is certainly one, but shorter than '*longwinded and roundabout ways of saying things*'!). However, too many long words do make it difficult to understand what we are reading or hearing (see the description of the Fog Index below).

The letter of which the following is an extract won a booby prize of two pounds of tripe from the Plain English Awards Committee:

> *We would advise that our policy does exclude as contingency consequent upon a condition which is receiving or awaiting treatment at the date of issue of the policy.*

The same letter ended ironically:

> *We hope this clarifies the situation.*

The following excerpt from a real letter illustrates clumsiness of expression:

> *In response to your card regarding the above order and the non-delivery of one box of 352 Typing Paper, we are writing to inform you that this has currently met an out of stock situation and that delivery cannot be met until the end of February.*

***Cliches*** are those expressions which, due to their original popularity, have been overused, and have lost their force and vigor as a consequence. Harold Macmillan's expression, *a wind of change*, which originally referred to a new direction in African politics, but is now applied to any minor event, is an example. Other clichés, often with a less respectable history, may commit the offence of circumlocution too: *at this moment in time* and *in this day and age* for *now* are particularly irritating.

***Slang***, like clichés, changes with fashion. How many slang words for money can you recall? *Readies, lolly, dough, bread, cabbage.* Good English is what is appropriate to the circumstances, and slang has its place in familiar chat. It is out of place in most business communication: it is obvious that too informal a choice of language in, say, a company report would not inspire confidence.

**Pompous** people seek to add weight (at the expense of losing the point) by using long words, and too many words, for example:

> *Passengers are requested not to communicate with the driver while the vehicle is in motion.*

Pompous writers habitually use such expressions as *in connection with* when *about* might be more appropriate. They *ameliorate, acquaint, terminate* and *assist* when they could *improve, tell, end,* and *help*!
Churchill used the simplest, most direct, language in his plea for brevity:

> *To do our work we all have to read a mass of papers. Nearly all of them are far too long. This wastes time, while energy has to be spent in looking for essential points.*

**Negative expressions** often cause an emotive response from the recipients, and need to be used with care, i.e.:

> *I am afraid he is not available.*

This is a rejecting statement whose rejection is emphasized by the word 'afraid.' It is better to say *'I am sorry, he's not available,'* which at least implies a polite degree of sympathy.
*Disappointment* is a particularly negative word and a sentence beginning with 'I am sorry to disappoint you…' may be more upsetting to the receiver than if the word had been omitted.
*Unfortunately* is another depressing expression: '*Unfortunately we were not able to get in touch'* makes a negative statement even more negative.
It is often preferable to avoid negatives altogether. *'We cannot deliver in three weeks'* is totally negative and may lose you a customer. Put another way, *'Can you give us five weeks for delivery?'*, it invites the receiver's cooperation.

**Ambiguity** is a particularly offensive fault in business writing, when content is often factual. *Smith told Jones he had been promoted* is an example of ambiguity caused by a careless use of pronouns. Other kinds of ambiguity may have a second meaning which is contradictory, i.e.:

> *Nothing acts faster than…*(a well-known headache pill) ☺

### Emotive Language

It is very difficult to convey information, ideas, and especially opinions, without 'coloring' them with some personal feeling or emotion. We usually betray our own opinions or attitudes by our choice of words. It is not wrong to do this, but it may evoke an unfavorable reaction in other people and thus affect their acceptance or rejection of

our communication. Consider the following statement, which highlights a typical lack of objectivity by the average human:

> *I am determined, you are obstinate, he is pig-headed.*

Politicians are natural users of emotive language; it is in their speeches that we so often find fact and reason clouded or lost in rhetoric. For example, the use of biblical imagery, *the journey through the wilderness, the pilgrimage* to their vision of *the New Jerusalem,* can lend an aura of sanctity, rightness, or inevitability to their policies and ideals.

## 3. Too Many Words

Even if we have disciplined ourselves not to use technical jargon to the uninitiated, have avoided dishonestly using emotive language (rather than reason) to persuade, have used long words with discretion, avoided slang and cliché, there are still many pitfalls in the use of language.
Of these, in business and commerce, one of the worst offences (because it wastes time) is to use more words than necessary to convey our meaning, as, for example:

> *Broadly speaking, this may have the ultimate effect of doubling in numbers the total of orders dispatched outwards in a single day.*

This sentence has many superfluous words. *'Broadly speaking'* is surely implied in the rest of the sentence. How else can one double but in numbers? *'Outwards'* is implied in the word *'dispatched'*. **Tautology** is the technical (JARGON!) word for expressions like these, when the meaning is repeated, i.e.:

> *This unique ornamental vase, the only one of its kind…*

A more economical version of the sentence above would read:

> *This may have the effect of doubling the number of orders dispatched in a single day.*

While the word *single* is implied in the expression *in a day*, it has been retained because it adds *force* to the sentence.

A major cause of 'too many words' or verbosity is the over-use of modifiers, i.e. adjectives and adverbs:

> *The complete implementation of this overall programme will inevitably necessitate extensive demands on the available resources of the appropriate committees and other bodies concerned.*

The difficulty – not to say tedium – inflicted on the readers of such writing is self-evident. The surest way to bore people is to write, or say, too much. Such absurdities as *the true facts* only cast doubt on the truth of the facts presented.

Another communication which won a 'tripe' award was from a British Rail employee who took 158 words to explain why a particular train had no buffet service. And a third 'tripe' award went to a local government official who devoted 104 words to asking a local resident to trim his hedge.

## 4. The Fog Index

All misuse of language obscures the meaning of the communication (message). Several methods have been devised to measure the readability of written language; the Fog Index is one such. Readability is affected by:

- The average length of the sentences, in words
- The percentage of simple words
- The percentage of verbs expressing forceful action
- The proportion of familiar words
- The proportion of abstract words
- The proportion of personal references
- The proportion of long words.

The Fog Index is based on the count of the number of words of 3 or more syllables in a hundred-word sample of the passage being checked, as well as of the average sentence length.

To determine the reading difficulty of a passage you will need to:

- Select samples of 100 words each
- Calculate the average number of words in the sentences of your sample by counting the number of complete sentences and dividing that into the number of words
- Count the number of words of three or more syllables, excluding words with a capital letter, compounds such as bookkeeper and words ending in *–es* or *–ed*
- Add the average number of words per sentence and the number of words of three syllables or more, and multiply by 0.4.

This gives the Fog Index, which is graded as follows:

| Index | Reading Level |
|---|---|
| Less than 10 | easy reading |
| 11-12 | the top 20% of 12-year-olds |
| 13 | the top 20% of 16-year-olds |
| 14-16 | first-year university student |
| 17 | university graduate. |

This index can usefully be used in checking company communications, for example, to ensure that they are comprehensible to the workers. A British Leyland memorandum to workers, which concerned an ultimatum about productivity, reportedly had an index of 17: hardly likely to be effective in securing the workers' cooperation. Indeed, it is claimed that the only management-to-worker communication which fell below an index of 13 was a memo wishing all employees a Happy New Year! ☺ British Leyland has in the past notoriously suffered from poor industrial relations. Could ineffective communication have been one of the causes?

Some recent American research found that:

Only 4 % of readers will understand a sentence of 27 words
But 75 % of readers will understand a sentence of 17 words
And 95 % of readers will understand a sentence of 8 words.

## 5. The Right Words

We have already defined the use of good English in business as the use of language appropriate to the circumstances.

That is the target – how can one achieve it?

First, the reader should be considered. Readability must be balanced so that the reader can easily understand the message without any feeling of being talked down to. Our existing relationship with the reader is another defining factor. To a stranger there must always be more formality than to a colleague or friend. To someone much lower or higher in the hierarchy than ourselves there must be more formality than with our equals.

Use simple words whenever appropriate. Generally prefer to *begin* something, not *commence;* don't *transmit* (except in the technical sense) but *send;* agree to *use*, not to *utilize*.

Use shorter expressions. Don't write a letter *with regard to, with reference to, in connection with, or in respect of,* but *about* your subject.

Prune modifiers, i.e. adjectives and adverbs, from your writing. Don't let it become inflated by unnecessary words.

Use active verbs, not passive ones, for example:

Not *A meeting will be held by the Board next week.*
But *The Board will meet next week.*

Generally use personal pronouns rather than the impersonal form, for example:

Not *The task would be capable of determination when the appropriate tools be made available to those concerned,*
But *Give us the tools and we will finish the job.*

<u>Try to be positive, not negative</u>. For example:

> *The project failed* (Not *The project was not successful*).
> *The company has abandoned the plan* (Not *The company will not now proceed with the plan).*

Finally, <u>Be flexible and keep an open mind</u>. 'Rules' about language are meant to be guidelines, not straightjackets. The long word may express our meaning more precisely than a short one. Modifiers are invaluable in expressing shades of meaning, for example:

> *I was concerned.*
> *I was very concerned.*
> *I was most concerned.*

The passive impersonal form may be useful: *It has been decided that…* may be less damaging to a relationship than *I have decided* (it may also be used to avoid responsibility, or 'pass the buck.')

## Our choice of words should be governed by considering not "What do I want to say?" but "What result do I want to get?"

### 6.  Style & Tone

**Style** is a combination of choice of words, characteristics and structure of language, and there are so many possible variations that we each develop a method of writing which can be as distinctive as fingerprints.

Style is not a mannerism that you can take on at will, like mimicking an accent or gesture. In the words of Eric Partridge, the author of a popular grammar textbook 'Usage or Abusage,' "…it is that which one *is* when one writes; so far from being compelled to seek it, one cannot avoid it."

Obviously we can, and do, adapt our style to the circumstances, the subject and the receiver. But something of ourselves will show through – our style will communicate to the receiver something about ourselves as persons. A pompous person is likely to reflect pomposity, a good-humored  one – affability, and a meticulous, precise person will dot his *i*s and cross his *t*s in even his most informal note. The following examples convey very different personalities:

> *Have you got any jobs vacant at your place?*
> *I would respectfully submit myself for the appointment of clerical assistant advertised in the 'National.'*
> *I was interested to read your advertisement in the 'Post Courier' for a clerical assistant.*
> *I am in receipt of details about a vacancy for a clerical assistant in your company.*

**Tone** is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'a particular quality, pitch, modulation or inflexion of the voice expressing … affirmation, interrogation, hesitation, decision and some feeling and emotion.' Usually it will in effect underline or emphasize the meaning of the words used. In written language the tone conveys the feelings of the communication.

The tone of a communication will reflect what is being said, but it can also add a great deal of meaning. A reprimand might be cool, cold, angry, heated, impersonal or detached in tone. A congratulation is likely to be warm and enthusiastic, but could also be cool and formal. In much business writing a factual, neutral tone is appropriate, but remember that sincerity is an essential of tone, however formal the context.

### `7. Sentence Structure

In Elizabethan 16th century England sentences were about 45 words long. In Victorian England (19th century) they were about 30 words long. Modern sentences average 20 words or less. Shorter sentences are more dynamic and vigorous, but if all our sentences were short, our speech would become boring, and thus less effective.

A typical sentence is a statement composed of *subject* (what we speak about) and *predicate* (what we say about the subject).

The *subject* of the sentence is the thing we talk about with all its modifiers, e.g.:

> ***The definition of experience*** *is knowledge acquired too late.*

The *predicate* is made up of the verb (expressing action performed or received by its subject), together with all the words that go with that verb:

> *The definition of experience **is knowledge acquired too late**.*

We have distinguish types of sentence structure:

- *Simple:* one subject, one predicate (See Appendix I): *All great truths begin as blasphemies.*

- *Compound:* two or more simple sentences joined by a conjunction: *You can twist perceptions,* but *reality won't budge.*

- *Complex:* one main clause plus subordinate modifying clauses: *Everything you can imagine is real.*

- *Compound-complex:* at least two main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses: *I have kleptomania, but when it gets bad, I take something for it.* Or: *Saina has the key that opens this cabinet, but she is not here today.*

Varying our sentence structure makes our communication more effective, it helps keep the interest of the receivers.

But however long or short the sentence, it should preferably express only one <u>main idea</u> – several ideas jammed into one sentence make 'decoding' and comprehension far more difficult, e.g.:

> *Saying that, while he accepted medical evidence that asbestosis was associated with the cause of death of a Washington chemical worker, John Henry Thompson, aged 40, of 51 Pattenson Town, the Coroner, Mr. Williams, indicated at the inquest at Chester-le-Street last night that the final decision whether the disease caused or contributed to death would rest with the Pneumoconiosis Medical Panel.*

A useful way of determining optimal sentence length is to try speaking your sentence aloud. If you can't manage it comfortably with one breath, then it needs 'pruning.'

## 8. Paragraph Structure

As with sentences, so with paragraphs; the most important quality is <u>unity</u>. A paragraph should have only one theme. This subject may be stated or implied in the opening sentence and then expanded, qualified or illustrated in succeeding ones. Sometimes the so-called *topic sentence* comes at the end of the paragraph, to sum up what has gone before. Too many ideas thrown together in a paragraph confuse the reader. We need to remember that sentence and paragraph structure contribute equally with the choice of words to the clarity of what we write.

**Summary:**

1. **In order to communicate effectively, you must know:**
     1. **Your subject (*what* you want to say)**
     2. **Your purpose (*why* you want to say it, what result do you want to get?)**
     3. **Your receiver(s)/audience.**

2. **Effective business communication must be:**

     i. **Clear**
     ii. **Concise**
     iii. **Coherent**

## 9. Assignments

- Read the following passage and work out its Fog Index. Then rewrite it in much simpler language and calculate the Fog Index of what you have written.

Language is the primary instrument of communication and the extent to which this volume is concerned with language is with that of our native tongue. The observation has been presented in the previous sections that the ineffectual utilization of English can be a hindrance or even a prevention of the process of communication, but that the observation of the regulations regarding the usage of English will be of assistance in the conveyance of information. There will be sectional interests who may present the argument that the rigidity of the regulations of language is a deterrent to improved communication.

(98 words)

- What do you understand by the term 'readability'? How would you assess the readability of a lengthy printed document intended for unskilled workers?

- What is the importance of concise writing in business communications?

- Define precisely the meaning of the word 'cliché' and give 5 examples of clichés with which you are familiar.

- Redundancies often creep into written communication. What types of redundancies are the most common?

- The following notice on a staff notice board caused great offence. Why?

> Employees are herewith instructed that any requests pertaining to vacation dates must be submitted to the Divisional Personnel Manager, copies to the employee's immediate superior and to the Managing Director. No employee will be given permission to take holidays at any time not already scheduled on the holiday rota unless a month's notice is given and the immediate superior allows it. This ruling is effective immediately and applies to all holidays from Monday of next week. Any employee with holidays booked for the coming month must renegotiate them.

Rewrite it and compare your version with that given in the Answers Section p. ….


**10. Reference Section: Basics of Syntax & Sentence Analysis**

Language skills, as we know, are vital for effective communication. One may know the meaning of all the words in a language, but still be unable to communicate effectively, if one does not know how to put these words together in a sentence.
*Syntax*, or the arrangement of words in the sentence, is determined primarily by word *functions,* otherwise called *Parts of Speech.*

Here are a few basic concepts that we need in order to understand the mechanics of sentence structure. We shall call them our 'tools' for sentence analysis:

**Concept # 1: Parts of Speech**. The most important concept in our approach to sentence analysis is that of 'Parts of Speech.' These are *functions* of words, phrases, or whole clauses within the larger context of the sentence:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | *Function* |
| Nouns | - name things (What? Who?) |
| Pronouns | - stand instead of nouns (What? Who? etc.) |
| Adjectives | - describe (modify) nouns (Which?) |
| Verbs | - name actions or states of being |
| Adverbs | - modify verbs (How? Where? When? Why? etc.) |
| Conjunctions | - join similar grammatical items (words, phrases, clauses, etc.) |
| Prepositions | - show 'positions' of things in space and time |
| Interjections | - expressions of feelings and attitudes interjected, or 'thrown into' the midst of a clause (they are our 'raisins in the cake' ☺). |

All the hundreds of thousands of words in a language fall into these eight (8) groups, *depending on **how they function** in the sentence*. Thus,

***Part of Speech** is **the grammatical function of a word/group of words.***

Some English words may have only one function (for example, *and* as a conjunction). Others may have several functions (for example, *fancy*, which is a noun in the phrase *'flights of fancy'*, a verb in *'Fancy that!'* and an adjective in *'a fancy hat'*).

Other examples:
A characteristic feature (noun)
To feature in a film, etc. (verb)
A feature film (adjective)

Ann came in early (adverb)
She is an early bird! (adjective)

In the so-called 'developing' countries the divide between the rich and the poor is ever increasing. (nouns)
The poor people get poorer, whereas the rich elite gets richer. (adjectives)

Figure of speech (noun)
It is difficult to figure out his meaning. (verb)
Figure skating (adjective)

These are examples of single words fulfilling different functions. However, whole *groups of words* often work together as one unit, fulfilling one function. They then form *phrases* or *clauses*. What are they? We already know that both are groups of words. But before considering the difference between them, we need to understand the concept of *clause* and consider the basic sentence structure.

**Concept # 2: Clauses and their Basic Structure Pattern (S/FiniteV/C)**. Clauses are groups of words that have a **Subject** (what we speak about) and a **Finite Verb** (what we say about the Subject). The Finite Verb conforms to its Subject in number and person: this **Subject-Verb Agreement** is essential to sentence grammaticality. Both Subject and its Verb may have modifiers.

Basic Sentence Pattern: (S/V/C). Most declarative English sentences follow the S/V/C pattern: the Subject + its modifiers (what we speak about) fill the first slot / the Finite Verb and its modifiers fill the second slot / and Compliment (optional) takes the third slot (S/V/C). Compliment may be made up of:

- o Zero Compliment
- o Predicate Adjective (PA)
- o Predicate Noun (PN)
- o Direct/Indirect Object (DO/IO)

Together /V/C make up the Predicate, or what we say about the Subject. The 'heart' of the predicate is the finite verb, which may be separated from its Subject by modifiers (other words, phrases, or even clauses). It is important that the Subject-Verb Agreement is maintained despite the intervening words: without the Subject-Verb Agreement the sentence becomes ungrammatical (as in 'Mary am a clever girl').

Examples:

S        / V /   C (PN)
Ignorance / is / the mother of devotion. (Robert Burton)

S        / V /  C (PA+or+PA)
Nothing / is / good or bad/.
Conj /    S₂      /   V₂      / C (DO)
But / thinking / makes / it.

(Shakespeare)

**Concept # 3: the Difference between Phrases and Subordinate Clauses**. Both are groups of words that function as one part of speech (a noun, an adjective, or an adverb). In order to understand and diagram sentence structure correctly, we must be able to *recognize* clauses and differentiate them from *phrases,* which are not shown in our schematic clause diagrams.

Since both subordinate clauses and phrases may function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs within the larger framework of the sentence, then what is the difference between them? The difference between them is *structural*: clauses contain at least one *finite* verb, whereas phrases do not:

***Adj. Phrase***: 'It is a mark of an educated mind *to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.*' (Aristotle) [N.B.: the prepositional phrase 'without accepting it' functions as an adverb modifying the verb 'to entertain' within the framework of the larger adjective phrase which modifies the noun 'mark.' Neither of these phrases contains a finite verb.]

***Adj. Clause***: 'A man *who has committed a mistake and doesn't see it,* is committing another mistake. (Confucius, 'Success and Failure') [Here the Adj. Clause contains two finite

verbs, 'has committed' and 'doesn't see,' joined together by the conjunction 'and'; this clause modifies the noun 'man' in the main clause.]

**Concept # 4: The Two Essential Aspects of Both Phrases and Subordinate Clauses: Their Form and Function.**.
In our analysis of the more complex units of speech (phrases and clauses) we must consider their two different aspects that make them what they are:

- *function*, or relation to other words within a larger framework (noun, adjective, or adverb; naming or modifying), and

- *form*, or structural pattern. Phrases may be or may not be introduced by prepositions, but they never contain a finite verb. Clauses, on the other hand, may or may not be introduced by relative pronouns or subordinating conjunctions, but they always have their 'autonomous' nexal pattern (S/ finite V/ C).

Both phrases and subordinate clauses may function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. The presence/absence of a *finite* verb within a particular group of words that functions as one part of speech determines whether it is a phrase or a clause.

**\*Prepositional Phrases:** Simply put, a prepositional phrase is a preposition plus a group of words without a finite verb in it that answers the question 'what?' after it. The list of words that can function as prepositions:

About, Above, Across, After, Against, Along, Among, Around, As, At, Before, Behind, Beneath, Beside, Between, Beyond, By, Despite, During, Except, For, From, In, Inside, Into, Like, Near, Of, Off, On, Onto, Outside, Over, Since, Through, To (not the particle 'to' indicating the infinitive form of the verb!), Toward, Under, Until, Up, Upon, With, Within, Without, Aside from, As to, Because of, Instead of, Out of, Regardless of, But (when it means 'except'), Past (when it means 'by')

In sentence analysis, it is helpful to eliminate prepositional phrases in order to see the main S/Finite V/C patterns more clearly. If the group of words following a preposition does contain a nexal pattern (S/Finite V/C), then the preposition introduces a subordinate clause, which must be reflected in the nexal diagram, for example:

//They/ traveled / in *what appeared to be thick fog.*
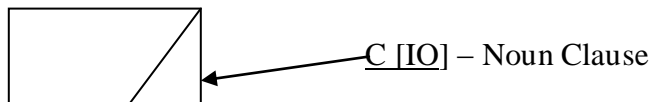


C [IO] – Noun Clause

**Concept # 5: the Difference between Main and Subordinate Clauses:**

*Subordinate* clauses may function in three ways within the larger sentence framework:

- *Noun clauses* <u>name</u> something/somebody in the main clause, i.e., 'The most incomprehensible thing about the world is <u>that it is comprehensible</u>.' (Einstein)

- *Adjective clauses* <u>modify</u> (describe) nouns in the main clause, for example: *The person* <u>who knows how to laugh at himself</u> will never cease to be amused.

- *Adverb clauses* <u>modify</u> verbs in the main clause, i.e., 'We *don't see* things <u>as they are</u>. We *see* things <u>as *we* are</u>.' (Anais Nin)

*Main* clauses, however, do not have such function:

- 'I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.' (Confucius)

**Concept # 6: the Finite Verb**. The finite verb is a verb that has a Subject which defines its form (*number* and *person*). Subject-Verb Agreement is what makes a sentence.

**Concept # 7: the Infinitive Verb.** This is the base form of the verb (as listed in dictionaries). Infinitive verbs have no subjects, or 'doers' – they simply signify actions or states of being, and thus function as nouns, giving names to these actions or states of being. They are usually preceded by the particle 'to' when used in sentences, except after modal verbs (can, must, may, might, could, should, would, etc.). Example (infinitives are in italics):

A diplomat is someone who can *tell* you *to go* to hell and make you happy *to be* on your way.

**Concept # 8: Compounding.** Compounding means joining of two or more *similar* items by compound conjunctions 'and,' 'or,' 'but,' 'either … or,' and 'neither … nor.' These conjunctions are often used to join **equal grammatical constructions** – subject and subject, object and object, adjective and adjective, verb and verb, etc. Whatever grammatical construction appears before one of these words should also appear after it.

**Concept # 9: Ellipsis.** Ellipsis is simply the omission of understood words in a sentence (reduction). For example,

[You] Help! [me]

[You] Put your thinking cap on [your head]!

*Practical Examples of Sentence Analysis: Diagramming of Clauses*

<u>Three Steps of Analysis</u>: First eliminate prepositional phrases, then identify the S/finite V/C patterns, and finally determine how these S/V/C patterns relate to each other.
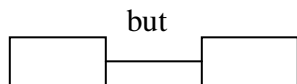
**Symbols:**

main clause
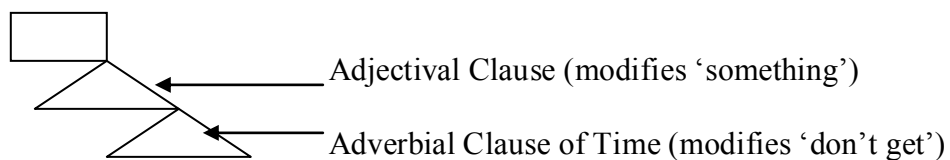
subordinate clause (noun, adjective, or adverb)

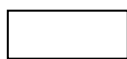1. //All great truths / begin as blasphemies//.

2. //You / can twist / perceptions//, but // reality / won't budge//.
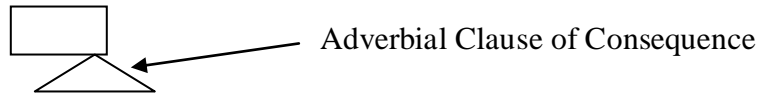
but

3. //Experience / is / something // you / don't get / until just after /you / need / it//.

Adjectival Clause (modifies 'something')

Adverbial Clause of Time (modifies 'don't get')

4. //Absence of proof / is not / proof of absence//.

5. //I / think //, //therefore / I / am//. (Rene Descartes)
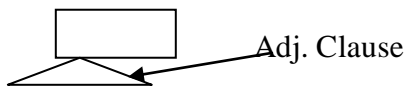
Adverbial Clause of Consequence

6. //The definition of experience / is / knowledge acquired too late//.
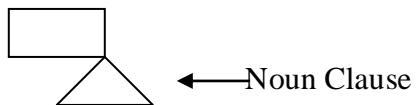
7. //Drawing on my fine command of language, / I / said / nothing//.*

    * Here the adverbial phrase precedes the Subject.

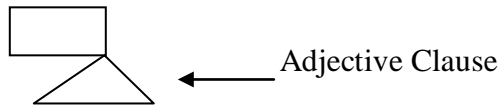8. //Everything  // you / can / imagine // is / real // (Picasso).

Adj. Clause

9. //True knowledge / exists in knowing / that /you / know / nothing// (Socrates).

Noun Clause

10. //The important thing / is / not to stop questioning // (Einstein).

11. // Knowledge and belief / are / two separate tracks // that / run parallel to each other and never meet, except in the child// (Godfried Bomans: Buitelingen II).

Adjective Clause

12. //Brain / is / an apparatus // with which /we / think / we / think// (Ambrose Bierce).

Adj. Clause

Noun Clause embedded within an Adj. Clause