Introduction to Phrases and Clauses

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Phrases and their Characteristics

- A phrase may consist of a single word or a group of words.
- A phrase can be moved as a unit to a different position.
  Eg. [A detective] [will check] [the validity of the complaint]
  (CNN.com)
  [The validity of the complaint] [will be checked] [by [a
detective]]
- Embedding: When we place a set of brackets inside another this
  means that one phrase is embedded.
Difference in phrase structures show up in differences of meaning.

E.g.: [They] [passed] [the table [with [the two men]]].

[They] [passed] [the table] [with [the two men]].
Syntactic Roles of Phrases

Phrase types differ in their internal structure and also in their syntactic roles.

Eg. 2: [I] [love] [the dark handsome guys]
(Cinema Italiano- Kate Hudson)

[The dark handsome guys] [love] [me]
Phrases in Use

Complexity of phrase structures:

- Academic Writing
- Newspaper and Fiction
- Conversation
I'm Michael Meeks, Specialist Michael Meeks, and this is my 9/11th story. On September eleventh, 2001, I was in the 8th grade. I look back at it now and it is so weird that it's been ten years ago. It really does seem like it happened yesterday. I was in Mr David Hanshell's science class when (I first) he first turned on the TV and he told us "It looks like a plane has hit the WTC in New York" and, you know, we saw the smoke and everything coming out of the building. Just like anybody else at the time, because the second plane hadn't hit it yet, we thought it was an accident."
08: 46 North tower crash

American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston crashed into the upper floors of the north tower of the World Trade Center at 08:46 Eastern Daylight Time (1246 GMT). It hit the building between the 95th and 103rd floors.

Thousands of people were already at their desks in both towers. About 80 chefs, waiters and kitchen porters were also in the Windows on the World restaurant on the 106th floor. Many who worked for firms located in the crash zone were killed instantly. Those on the floors above were already doomed, their escape routes cut off by fire.
Academic Writing

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States have been popularly hailed as so profound that social and political life in the country will “never be the same again.” This shortsighted view of history aside, it remains true that peace movement organizations—like other social organizations and political institutions—have struggled to respond not only to the attacks, but also to a cultural climate and a political landscape that have changed in significant ways. The attacks and the government’s responses raised fears and unleashed a powerful but uncritical brand of American patriotism. Bringing to justice those responsible for the 9/11 attacks became widely understood as a just cause. Those opposing war found few
Types of Phrases

- Noun Phrases
- Verb Phrases
- Adjective Phrases
- Adverb Phrases
- Prepositional Phrases

Head: Obligatory/main word

Semantic Nature of Phrases: Specify and/or elaborate the meaning of the head word.
Noun Phrases

- Head: Noun
- The head can be preceded by determiners and accompanied by modifiers.

Eg.: His thick English book

Determiner Modifiers  Head
An abstract head noun can be followed by complements, which complete the meaning of the noun.

That-clauses: “I kind of like [the idea that women aren’t members of The Masters]” (CNN.com)

Infinitive to-clauses: “I don’t have [the right to give him one]” (Breakfast at Tiffany’s)
Besides common nouns, noun phrases can be headed by proper nouns as well as adjectives.

- **Proper nouns:** “Well, it’s still too early to go to Tiffany’s” (Breakfast at Tiffany’s)

- **Pronoun:** “I like to feel that I belong to the things you love” (Gone with the Wind)

- **Adjective:** “It’s the romantic in me”
Noun phrases take the role of subject or object in a clause (but they can also take the syntactic role of predicative, complement -in a prepositional phrase- or adverbial.)

\[
\text{Subject} \quad \text{VP} \quad \text{Object}
\]

Eg.: “[I] [hear] [the horses’ thunder]” (The Battle of Evermore- Led Zeppelin)
Verb Phrases

- They have a lexical or primary verb as their head (main verb). The main verb can stand alone or be preceded by auxiliary verbs.

- Finite verb phrases: distinction of tense / include modal auxiliaries

- Non-finite verb phrases: no tense / can’t occur with modal auxiliaries

- Verb Phrases are the essential part of a clause, referring to a type of state or action. They are often split into two parts.
Clown – Mariah Carey

I should've left it at, how ya doin’
I should've left it at
I like your music too, and

I should've never called [you] back

When you pursued me

I should've never given [you] [my fuckin’ two way]

I should've never listened
To your woeful stories
The ones I’m sure you
Told a thousand times before me
You should've never intimated
We were lovers
When you know very well
We never even touched each other

(…)
Adjective Phrases

- They have adjectives as head, and optional modifiers, which normally answer the question about the degree of quality.

- Eg.: Gorgeous, so gorgeous, gorgeous enough

- Adjectives can also take complements.

- Eg.: “And so unaware that it may not last forever” (Ashley - Gone with the Wind)
Most important roles of adjective phrases: modifier and subject predicative.

Eg.: Modifier before a noun-attributive adjective: “‘You’re such a nice guy’ means I’m gonna be dating leather-wearing alcoholics (...)” (Friends - The one with the Thumb)

Eg.: As a subject predicative: “This is so unfair” (Friends - The one with the Thumb)

Eg.: Adjective phrases modifying nouns can be split into two parts by the noun head:

Eg.: “He’s a really tough player to beat” (Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English)
Adverb Phrases

They are like adjective phrases in structure, but the head is an adverb. They can also be followed by optional modifiers or complements.

Eg.: “There used to be a greying tower alone on the sea” – (Existencial there) Seal, Kiss From a Rose
Eg.: “Gold would have bounced anyway, but maybe not so quickly.” – Peter Hillyard
Eg.: Murderously and other adverbs.
Harry: Umm, clearly I'm interrupting. I feel badly. Let me... What are you drinking?
Harmony: Bad.
Harry: Bad? Sorry... feel...?
Harmony: You feel bad.
Harry: Bad?
Harmony: Badly is an adverb. So to say you feel badly would be saying that the mechanism which allows you to feel is broken.
Perry: Go. Sleep badly. Any questions, hesitate to call.

Harry: Bad.

Perry: Excuse me?

Harry: Sleep bad. Otherwise it makes it seem like the mechanism that allows you to sleep...

Perry: What, fuckhead? Who taught you grammar?

Badly’s an adverb. Get out. Vanish.
Prepositional Phrases

Preposition + noun phrase / preposition + complement clause (Wh/ing)

E.g.: I only want a job in the field in which I've majored

E.g.: I need to have my nails done after doing so many dishes

Works as a link to the preceding structures and can be extended by adverbial particles.

E.g.: “Back to the future”

E.g.: And the photographer told her to move slightly to the right.

Syntactic roles: as an adverbial; modifier or complement following a noun; or they can occur in prepositional verbs.

E.g.: I've always wanted to work for Coca-cola. I wonder if I can drink free soda all day.

E.g.: Regardless, I still want to find a proper job in my field.

Stranded prepositions: What are you looking at?
Clause Elements and Clause Patterns

- The clause is the key unit of syntax and it can occur independently.
- The key element of a clause is the **verb phrase**.
- **Valency**: Controls the kinds of elements that follow the verb.
- **Major valency patterns**: intransitive \((S+V)\); monotransitive \((S+V+DO)\); copular \((S+V+P \text{ and } S+V+A)\); ditransitive \((S+V+IO+DO)\) and complex transitive \((S+V+DO+OP \text{ and } S+V+DO+A)\)
Clause Elements

(Verb Phrase)
The subject is a noun phrase.
It occurs with all types of verbs.
Subject Pronoun are in the nominative case.
It precedes the verb phrase. (except in clauses with inversion)
It determines the number of the verb phrase.
It can be moved after the verb (with transitive verbs) to make the passive.

Concerning to meaning:
It denotes the most important participant in the action.
It generally represents the topic
Dummy Pronoun: English uses it as a pronoun that fills the place of the subject but has no content.
Object

- It is a noun phrase
- It usually follows the verb
- It only occurs with transitive verbs.
- It’s pronoun is in the accusative case:
  *Eg.: “I love to watch them as they cruise (...)” (Cinema Italiano- Kate Hudson)*
- The object of a noun phrase can be moved to become the subject of the corresponding passive clause.
**Direct Objects**

- It generally follows immediately after the verb and it denotes the entity affected by the action or process of the verb.
  
  *Eg.: “I love the Black & White/ I love the play of lights.”* (Cinema Italiano - Kate Hudson)

- Sometimes English verbs require a direct object even though it has no meaning.
  
  *Eg.: “If I can make it there I can make it anywhere.”* (New York, New York - Frank Sinatra)
**Dummy Pronoun ("it") as direct object**

**WE HEARD YOU LIKE BURGERS, SO WE PUT BURGERS IN YOUR BURGER.**

**HAVE IT YOUR WAY**
i’m lovin’ it ™
Because you’re worth it.

L’Oreal Paris
Indirect Objects

- It occurs after ditransitive verbs, and comes before the direct object.
  Eg.: “I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse” (The Godfather)

- Semantically, indirect objects denote people receiving something or benefiting from the action.
  Eg.: “I am not giving you a cigarette” (Friends- The one with the Thumb)
Make it Happen - Mariah Carey

Not more than three short years ago
I was abandoned and alone
Without a penny to my name
So very young and so afraid
No proper shoes upon my feet
Sometimes I couldn’t even eat

But still I had to keep on going

Never knowing \{if I could take \*it\}\*

*dummy pronoun

If I would make it through the night
I held on to my faith
I struggled and I prayed
And now I’ve found my way

Chorus:
If you believe in yourself enough
And know what you want
You’re gonna make it happen
Make it happen

(…)

[Image of Mariah Carey]
A predicative can be:

a) an adjective phrase: “She’s wonderful, my girl, she’s so wonderful” (She’s so Wonderful - Sam Cooke)

b) a noun phrase: “Girl, you’ll be a woman soon” (Girl, you’ll be a woman soon - Urge Overkill)

c) a prpositional phrase: “Dude, you said Mernie was out of your league (...)” (She’s out of my League - 2010)
Subject Predicatives (Subject Complements)

- They characterize or specify the subject noun phrase.
- The main verb has to be a copular verb.
- It immediately follows the verb phrase.

Eg. 1: “He is the essence of the Italian style” (Cinema Italiano - Kate Hudson)
Eg. 2: “So, I think Allan will become the yardstick (...)” (Friends - The one with the Thumb)
Eg. 3: “I’m in love, I’m in love” (Accidentally in love - Counting Crows)
Eg. 4: “So sad you seem tired” (Polyethylene - Radiohead)
Object Predicatives (Object Complement)

- They characterize and specify the **direct object noun phrase**.
- It generally follows the direct object.
- The main verb has to be a **complex transitive verb**.

**Eg. 1:** “My name’s Forrest Gump. People call me *Forrest Gump*”

**Eg. 2:** “A charming couple who fear that such an angel lost could find herself in **trouble**”  
( *I want more* - Elton John)
Adverbial

Adverbial: adverb, adverbial phrase, adverbial clause

A – Obligatory Adverbials (required by certain verbs)
These adverbials follow certain patterns:

$S + V + A$

The book is on the table.

“The primary symbolic systems to which he refers are “rudimentary-prelinguistic symbolic systems in which gestures and sensory and perceptual occurrences of all sorts function as signs.” – (CHOMSKY, Noam, Language and Mind, p. 11)

$S + V + DO + A$

Melody put her tired feet on the ottoman.

“Notice that this justification, offered by a respected Labor Party dove, places these actions squarely under the rubric of international terrorism by any reasonable definition” – (CHOMSKY, Noam. Necessary Illusions, p. 429)
B – Optional Adverbials

Occur widely as optional elements in a clause. There can me one or more. They can be placed in different positions, thus creating different patterns.

Strangely, I feel much better these days than when I was younger.
Long Verb Phrases

- Hand it over! - Kiss Kiss Bang Bang
- This detective, he shook me, punched me and asked me the same questions. – The Detective
Truly Peripheral Elements

- Conjunctions
- Parentheticals
- Prefaces
- Tags
- Inserts
- Vocatives
Conjunctions

“Though McKenzie coaxed a double play out of Keenan Cook, Hoelsher scored on the play.” (NOLA.com)
Parentheticals

“Tulane exits the weekend with one C-USA win (versus Memphis a week ago) (...)” (NOLA.com)

On the (rare!) occasion when you use a Latin abbreviation, be sure to punctuate it correctly.

The bodegas (wine cellars) of the Rioja are an essential stop on any visit to northern Spain.

“Not to — Oh heck, I forgot!” – The Detective
They are noun phrases placed before the subject and have the same reference as a pronoun in the clause.

“This girl, she can draw, she can paint (...)” (This boy - James Morrison)

“The French, they are a funny race” (1955)
Tags

- She’s thankful enough that grumpy old lady. – (The Detective)
- “Judge me by size, do you?” – Star Wars
- “Death is a natural part of life it is.” – Star Wars
Inserts

Inserts are words that are used in spoken discourse with different functions. Even though they are considered as ‘extra words’, grammatically, the eight major classes of inserts are:

- **Interjections:** Oh, now I see what you mean!
- **Greetings:** Hello, my name's John Willoughby.
- **Discourse Markers:** Well, I'm starving. What's for dinner?
Attention getters: Hey, I remember you... Weren't we in Mr. Willoughby's class together last semester

Response getters: I'll call you Monday, okay

Response forms: Right. Then I'll have everything ready and pick you up at the airport.

Polite formulas: Thank you. I'll never forget your classes, Mr. Willoughby.
(little tear)

Expletives: Fuck! Mr. Willoughby is the toughest professor I've ever had! I'm sure I'm gonna flunk.

Note: expletives are usually taboo words and/or offensive words.
Conjunctions

Also note that inserts can have different roles in different situations:

**Can you bring me two dozen eggs from the store? Okay** – response form.

**Okay, then you bring me two dozen eggs from the store.** – discourse marker

**Bring me two dozen eggs from the store, Okay?** – response getter

**Inserts usually occur at the beginning of an utterance, except for hesitators, which occur in the middle of speech: erm…/ uhm…../ you know/ anyway…**
They can also be 'stand alone' elements or loosely attached:

Okay.

Okay, I'll bring you the dozen eggs!
Vocatives

- “So, you little Italian devils” (Be Italian- Fergie)
- “What are they up to, Maggie? I’ll tell you what they’re up to, boy of mine.” (Cat on a hot tin roof)
Something’s gotta give

1

The sweet, uncomplicated Satisfaction
(noun phrase headed by an adjective – adjetivo substantivado)

(subject)

of the younger woman.
(prepositional phrase) [subject predicative]
If she lives within a mile of here, she's rich.

[subject] + [copular verb] + [Obligatory adverbial]
(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (adverb phrase)
I’d like to meet your mother.

(subject) + [ditransitive verb] + [indirect object]
(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (noun phrase)

-notice a special kind of verb phrase with modal auxiliary.
She's great. She's totally brilliant.
But [conjunction] she's not your type.

-the same structure is repeated 3 times:
(subject) + [copular verb] + [subject predicative]
(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (adjective phrase)

-modifier: degree of quality
“totally brilliant”

-we can divide the last phrase into smaller units:
“(She’s) not your type” – indirect object
I don't have a type.

[subject] + [monotransitive verb] + [direct object]
(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (noun phrase)
we will spend absolutely no time in whatsoever.

(subject) + (copular verb) + (optional adverbial)
(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (adverb phrase)
When I first started auctioneering, someone told me...

...if I was nervous, I should just picture the audience in their underwear.

This gives that a whole new meaning.

\[
\text{[subject]} + \text{[monotransitive verb]} + \text{[direct object]}
\]

(noun phrase: pronoun) + (verb phrase) + (noun phrase)

-we can divide the last phrase into a smaller unit:

“(...) that a whole new meaning” – [object predicative]