

What do I need to know?

Phrases 2

Phrases are groups of connected words (or a single word in a sentence that could have others added to it) that function as a grammatical unit.

Adjective phrases are made up of a head adjective by itself, or with pre-/post-modifiers. They can occur before a noun or after a copula verb.

Adverb phrases are made up of a head adverb by itself, or with pre- and post-modifiers. They can occur in a range of positions.

Adjective phrases

- an adjective and any associated modifiers

e.g. happy, quite happy, so totally happy, happy to see you, happy that you could come

What is distinctive about adjective phrases?

1. **Simple** adjective phrases have a head word (an adjective)

e.g. anxious, awkward, sensitive, sad, golden.

2. **Complex** adjective phrases can have **pre-modifiers** (adjectives or degree adverb modifiers) e.g. **bright blue** (Adj), **awfully hot**, **very bad** (Adv) OR

post-modifiers (prepositional phrases, non-finite infinitive clauses, comparative clauses or that noun clauses, the first word signposts the form)

e.g. **cold in my bones** (preposition = PrepP)

too **awkward to carry on** (to + verb = NFCI)

much **funnier than I am** (sub conj 'than' = CompCI)

relieved that we're home (sub conj 'that' = NCI).

3. Adjective phrases can occur before a noun

(**attributive**) or after a copula verb (**predicative**).

e.g. A [rather **vicious**] fight was in progress.

attributive AdjP

The river grew [**too strong** to contain any longer].

predicative AdjP

Where do we find them?

Adjective phrases are used frequently to build mood and atmosphere, provide specific detail, and to communicate attitudes. In descriptive writing (e.g. blogs, novels, travel writing, articles), they are used creatively to engage the reader. In speeches and advertising, they are used persuasively to manipulate the audience. In a predicative position, adjective phrases carry additional semantic weight.

Adverb phrases

- an adverb and any associated modifiers

e.g. closely, so closely, closely indeed, more closely than you think, too closely for comfort

What is distinctive about adverb phrases?

1. **Simple** adverb phrases have a head word (an adverb)

e.g. carefully, also, never, perfectly, usually, then.

2. **Complex** adverb phrases can have **pre-modifiers** (degree adverbs, also called intensifiers)

e.g. **almost** there, **so** unexpectedly, **very** probably

OR **post-modifiers** (prepositional phrases, non-finite infinitive clauses, comparative clauses, noun clauses: the first word signposts the form)

e.g. **unfortunately for me** (preposition = PrepP)

too **slowly to win** (to + verb = NFCI)

more **quickly than I expected** (sub conj = CompCI)

so **suddenly that I screamed** (sub conj = NCI).

3. Adverb phrases provide information about **time** (when? how often/long?), **manner** (how?), **place** (where?), and **degree** (to what extent?). They most commonly **modify** verbs, but they can also modify adjectives (e.g. **extremely** hard), nouns (e.g. **quite** a party), prepositional phrases (e.g. right down the cliff) and sentences (e.g. We **certainly** should be grateful), or **link** sentences (e.g. however, thus).

Where do we find them?

Adverb phrases provide precise information in reports, and narrative detail in novels. They create time scales in speeches and signal speaker attitudes. They can occur in the front, middle and end of a sentence. When they are foregrounded, they carry additional semantic weight.

Sample analysis: extract from a report

At 09:36 on Wednesday 4 September 2017, **two** workers were hit and **fatally** injured by a vehicle at a **busy** junction. The men were carrying out **regular** maintenance. Both were **almost certainly** wearing ear defenders because one of them was using a **noisy** power tool. **Subsequently**, **acoustic** measurements have shown they **probably** would not have heard the vehicle. There was no **formally** appointed look-out, **therefore** making the collision **inevitable**.

This report uses attributive adjective phrases to provide specific information; the defining cardinal number ('two') and descriptive references ('busy', 'regular', 'noisy', 'acoustic') are factual. Manner adverbs, like 'fatally' and 'formally', fulfil a similar referential function. The linking adverb phrase 'therefore', on the other hand, establishes consequences and is typical of formal report writing. Given assessments are being made about what took place, adverb phrases like 'almost certainly' and 'probably' have an evaluative function.