A Glossary of Grammatical Terms

This glossary is an alphabetical guide to the grammatical terms used in this book, as well as to other helpful words. Some entries contain references to other terms or to chapters of the text in which they are discussed in detail. For further cross-references, you should consult the index.

abstract noun   A noun that refers to an idea or quality that cannot be identified by one of the senses. Examples are *shame*, *delight*, and *tolerance*. See also *concrete noun*.

action verb   See *verb* and Chapters 2 and 3.

active voice   See *voice*.

adjective   A word that modifies (limits or describes) a noun or pronoun. "The concert was *long*, but it was *exciting*." (The adjective *long* modifies the noun *concert*, and the adjective *exciting* modifies the pronoun *it*.) See Chapters 2 and 10.

adjective clause   A dependent clause that modifies a noun or pronoun. "The delegates *who voted for the amendment* changed their minds." (The adjective clause modifies the noun *delegates*.) See Chapter 8.

adverb   A word that modifies (limits or describes) an adjective, a verb, or another adverb. "He cried *softly*." (*Softly* modifies the verb *cried*.) "They are *extremely* wealthy." (*Extremely* modifies the adjective *wealthy*.) "He left the room *very* hurriedly." (*Very* modifies the adverb *hurriedly*.) See Chapters 2 and 10.

adverb clause   A dependent clause that modifies an adjective, verb, or another adverb. "I think of her *when I hear that song*." (The adverb clause modifies the verb *think*.) "He became angry *because he had forgotten his keys*." (The adverb clause modifies the adjective *angry*.) "The band played so loudly *that I got a headache*." (The adverb clause modifies the adverb *so*.) See Chapter 8.

agreement   The correspondence of one word with another, particularly subjects with verbs and pronouns with antecedents. If the subject of a sentence is singular, the verb is singular ("My *tire* is flat"); if the subject is singular, pronouns referring to it should also be singular ("The *carpenter* forgot *his* hammer"). Plural subjects require plural verbs, and plural pronouns are used to refer to plural antecedents. ("My *tires are* flat." "The *carpenters* forgot *their* tools.") See Chapters 4 and 7.

antecedent   A word or group of words to which a pronoun refers. "Jimmy, *who* used to play in a rock group, decided *he* would go back to college to complete *his* degree." (*Who*, *he*, and *his* all refer to the antecedent *Jimmy*.) See Chapters 2 and 7.

appositive   A word or phrase following a noun or pronoun that renames or explains it. "London, *the capital*, was bombed heavily." "The author *Mark Twain* lived in Connecticut." In the first example, *the capital* is a nonessential appositive because it is not needed to identify the word it follows. In the second example, *Mark Twain* is an essential appositive because it is needed to identify the general term *author*. Only nonessential appositives are set off by commas. See Chapters 6 and 11.

article   *A*, *an*, and *the* are articles. *A* and *an* are indefinite articles; *the* is a definite article. Articles are usually regarded as adjectives because they precede nouns. See Chapter 2 and "A Checklist for the ESL Writer," pages 280–306.

auxiliary verb   A helping word (or words) used to form a verb phrase. The most common auxiliary verbs are forms of *be* (*am, are, is, have been*, and so on) and *have* (*had, has,* and so on); others include the various forms of *do, can, shall, will, would, should, may, might,* and *must*. See Chapters 2 and 5.

case   The form of a pronoun or noun to show its use in a sentence. Pronouns have three cases: the *nominative* or subject case (I, *he, she, they*, and so on), the *objective* case (*me, him, her, them*, and so on), and the *possessive* (*my, his, her, their*, and so on). Nouns change their spelling only in the possessive case (*Larry's, man's*, and so on). See Chapter 6.

clause   A group of words containing a subject and a verb. A clause may be either independent or dependent. Independent clauses may stand alone as simple sentences. The dependent clause must be joined to an independent clause. "The restaurant was closed by the health department because the chef had hepatitis." (*The restaurant was closed by the health department* is an independent clause; *because the chef had hepatitis* is a dependent clause.) See Chapter 8.

collective noun   A noun that names a group of people or things, such as *army, committee, flock*. Collective nouns usually take singular verbs ("The troop *was* ready to leave") except when the individual members are thought of ("The class *were* arguing among themselves"). See Chapters 4 and 7.

colloquialism   An informal word or expression more appropriate to speech than to writing. See "A Glossary of Usage," pages 311–315.

comma-splice   The misuse of a comma between two independent clauses in a compound sentence. "Herb's sister studied architecture in college, she designed the new office building downtown." Comma-splices can be corrected by substituting a semicolon for the comma or by inserting a coordinating conjunction after the comma. See Chapters 8, 9, and 11.

command   See *imperative sentence*.

common noun   A noun that names a general category or class of people, places, or things: *city, tool, song*. Common nouns are not capitalized except when they begin a sentence. See Chapters 2 and 11.

comparative degree   The "more," "less,'" or *-er* form of those adjectives that can be compared. See Chapter 10. See also *positive degree* and *superlative degree*.

comparison   A statement about the relation between two (or more) things or the change in the spelling of adjectives and adverbs to show degree. The degrees of comparison in English are positive (*slowly* and *loud*), comparative (*more slowly* and *louder*), and superlative

(*most slowly* and *loudest*). Some modifiers cannot be compared: *round, dead, unique, full,* and so on. See Chapter 10.

complement   A word or expression that completes the sense of a verb, a subject, or an object. See *direct object, indirect object, predicate adjective, predicate noun,* and *predicate pronoun.*

complete subject   See *subject.*

complex sentence   A sentence containing one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. "The grain embargo *that was announced last year* was criticized by the farmers." (The dependent clause is italicized.) See Chapters 3 and 8.

compound   Two or more words or word groups linked to form a single unit. For instance, two nouns can form a compound subject. "*Merchants and businesspeople* were united in their opposition to the new tax." Two verbs can function as a compound predicate. "She *danced and sang* in the leading role." See Chapter 3.

compound-complex sentence   A sentence containing at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses: "Although the demand for oil has declined, the price of gasoline continues to climb, and the OPEC nations threaten a new price hike." See Chapter 8.

compound sentence   A sentence with two or more independent clauses but no dependent clauses. "She wanted to read the book, but someone had previously borrowed it." See Chapters 3 and 8.

compound subject   Two or more subjects governed by the same verb. "*You and I* should meet for coffee tomorrow." See Chapter 3.

compound verb   Two or more verbs governed by the same subject. "The crowd *threw* beer bottles and *cursed* the referee." See Chapter 3.

concrete noun   A noun naming something that can be perceived by one of the senses. Examples are *butter, elevator, scream,* and *buzz.* See also *abstract noun.*

conjugating a verb   A way of showing all tenses of a verb. See Chapter 5 and pages 288–292.

conjunction   A word that connects words, phrases, and clauses. See also *coordinate conjunction, subordinate conjunction,* and Chapter 2.

conjunctive adverb   An adverb that connects independent clauses after a semicolon. "I had looked forward to seeing the movie; *however,* after reading the reviews I changed my mind." See Chapters 9 and 11.

contraction   A word formed from the union of two words, with an apostrophe replacing the missing letters: *hasn't* (*has not*), *I'm* (*I am*). See Chapters 6 and 11.

coordinate adjectives   Two or more adjectives of equal importance that modify the same noun. "The *tall, scowling* doorman finally let us in." See Chapter 11.

coordinate conjunction   A word that connects two or more words, phrases, or clauses of equal rank. The most common coordinate conjunctions are *and, but, so, for, nor,* and *or.* See Chapter 2.

correlative conjunctions   Pairs of conjunctions used to join parts of a sentence of equal rank. The most common correlative conjunctions are *either . . . or; neither . . . nor; not only . . . but also;* and *both . . . and.* See Chapters 2 and 10.

dangling modifier   A modifier that has no word in the sentence for it to modify. It is left "dangling" and consequently ends up modifying an unintended word, as in the following: "Raising his bow triumphantly, the violin concerto ended in a crescendo." See Chapter 10.

dangling participle   A participle serving as a modifier that has no word in the sentence for it to modify. "Looking out the window, a car drove by." See Chapter 10.

declarative sentence   A sentence that states a fact or makes a statement. "The capital of Kentucky is Frankfort." See Chapter 11.

demonstrative pronoun   A word used as an adjective or a pronoun that points out an item referred to. The demonstrative pronouns are *this, that, these*, and *those*. See Chapters 2 and 6.

dependent clause   A group of words containing a subject and verb but unable to stand alone. A dependent clause must be subordinated to an independent clause in the same sentence. "*If you are on the honor roll*, you may be eligible for reduced insurance rates." See Chapters 3, 8, and 9.

direct object   A word that receives the action of the verb. "She helped *him* with the math problem." "I pried the *lid* off the can." See Chapter 6.

elliptical construction   A construction in which one or more words are omitted but understood. "He is heavier than I (*am*)."

essential modifier   A word or group of words necessary for the identification of the object being identified. "The man *with the checkered vest* wants to talk to you." Essential modifiers can be words, phrases, or clauses; they are not separated from the words they modify by commas. See Chapters 8 and 11.

exclamatory sentence   A sentence expressing emotion, usually followed by an exclamation point. "Stop that yelling!" See *imperative sentence* and Chapters 2 and 11.

formal language   Language appropriate to formal situations and occasions, as distinguished from informal language and colloquialisms.

fragment   See *sentence fragment*.

fused sentences   See *run-on sentence*.

gender   The grammatical expression of sex, particularly in the choice of pronouns: *he* (masculine), *she* (feminine), and *it* (neuter), and their related forms. See Chapter.

gerund   The "ing" form of a verb when it is used as a noun. "*Jogging* is one of the most popular forms of exercise among Americans." See Chapter 5.

helping/auxiliary verb   See *auxiliary verb*.

imperative sentence   A sentence expressing a command. "Please turn off your motor." See Chapter 11.

indefinite pronoun   A pronoun that does not refer to a specific person or thing. Some of the most common indefinite pronouns include *anyone, someone, few, many*, and *none*. See Chapters 4, 6, and 7.

independent clause   A group of words containing a subject and a verb and capable of standing alone. Also called a *main clause*. See Chapters 3 and 8.

indirect object   The person or thing receiving the direct object, and usually placed in a sentence between an action verb and the direct object: "Jay's lawyer gave *him* several documents to sign." See Chapter 6.

infinitive   The base form of the verb preceded by *to*: *to hesitate, to think, to start*, and so on. See Chapters 2, 3, and 5.

informal language   Language appropriate to informal situations and occasions. Informal language often uses contractions and colloquialisms.

intensive pronouns   Pronouns that end in *-self* or *-selves* and emphasize their antecedents: *myself, yourself, himself, ourselves*, and so on. See Chapter 6.

interjection   A word or phrase expressing emotion but having no grammatical relationship to the other words in the sentence. Interjections include the following: *Yes, no, oh, well*, and so on. Also called an *exclamation*. See Chapter 2.

interrogative pronoun   A pronoun that is used to form a question: *who, whom, what, which, whose.* "*Who* wants to play softball? " See Chapter 6.

intransitive verb   A verb that does not require an object. "They slept." See also *transitive verb* and Chapter 5.

inverted sentence   A sentence that is not in the usual word order of subject-verb-object. "Angry and dejected was he." See Chapter 3.

irregular verb   A verb that forms its past tense or past participle by changing its spelling: *bring* (*brought*), *think* (*thought*), and *run* (*ran*). See *regular verb* and Chapter 5.

linking verb   A verb that connects a subject in a sentence with another word (usually a noun, pronoun, or adjective) that renames or describes the subject. "The bacon *was* crisp." "You *seem* bored." Common linking verbs are *to be, to seem, to become, to feel*, and *to appear*. See Chapters 2, 3, and 5.

main clause   See *independent clause*.

mass noun   A noun referring to something usually measured by weight, by degree, or by volume rather than by count. Mass nouns are nouns that cannot be counted such as *assistance* (we don't say *one assistance, two assistances*, and so on), *money*, and *height*.

misplaced modifier   A word or group of words misplaced in the sentence and therefore modifying the wrong word. "I watched the parade *standing on the balcony*." See *dangling modifier* and *squinting modifier* and Chapter 10.

modifier   A word or group of words describing or modifying the meaning of another word in the sentence. See Chapter 10.

nonessential modifier   A word or group of words modifying a noun or pronoun but not essential to the meaning of the sentence. Nonessential modifiers are set off by commas. "My father, *who was born in Illinois*, was a metallurgical accountant." Also called *nonrestrictive modifier*. See Chapters 8 and 11.

nonrestrictive modifier   See *nonessential modifier*.

noun   A word that names a person, place, thing, or idea. See Chapter 2.

noun clause   A dependent clause functioning as a subject, direct object, predicate-nominative, or indirect object in a sentence. "He told me *what I wanted to hear*." See Chapter 8.

number   The form of a word that indicates one (*singular*) or more than one (*plural*). See Chapters 4 and 7.

object   A word or group of words receiving the action of or affected by an action verb or a preposition. See *direct object, indirect object*, and *object of preposition*.

object of preposition   A word or group of words following a preposition and related to another part of the sentence by the preposition. "Vince drove his motorcycle across *the United States*." See Chapters 2 and 6.

object pronoun   A pronoun that is used as an object. It may be used as an object of a preposition ("Sit by *me*"); the object of a verb ("Call *us* for more information"); or as an indirect object ("Fiona gave *me* the flowers"). See Chapter 6.

parallel structure   Structure where all items in a series are in the same grammatical form. See Chapter 10.

participle   The "ing" form of a verb (the *present participle*) when it is used as an adjective (a *swimming* pool), or the "d," "ed," "t," or "n" form of a verb (the *past participle*) when it is used as an adjective (the *painted* house). See Chapters 3 and 5.

passive voice   See *voice*.

past participle   See *participle*.

person   The form of a pronoun or verb used to show the speaker (first person: *I am*), the person spoken to (second person: *you are*), or the person spoken about (third person: *she is*). See Chapter 7.

personal pronoun   A pronoun that changes its form to show person: *I, you, he, she, they*, and so on. See Chapter 6.

phrase   A group of words lacking both a subject and a verb. See Chapter 9.

plural   More than one. See also *number*.

positive degree   The form of the adjective or adverb that makes no comparison: *heavy* (positive degree); *heavier* (comparative degree); *heaviest* (superlative degree). See also *comparative degree* and *superlative degree*.

possessive pronouns   Pronouns that show ownership: *my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our*, and so on. See Chapters 2 and 6.

predicate   The verb, its modifiers, and any objects in a sentence. The predicate makes a statement about the subject of the sentence.

predicate adjective   An adjective that follows a linking verb and modifies the subject. "We were *happy* to get the news." See Chapters 2 and 10.

predicate noun   A noun that follows a linking verb and names the subject. "Harry is the *captain* of the lacrosse team." See Chapter 6.

predicate pronoun   A pronoun that follows a linking verb and identifies the subject. "My closest friend is *you*." See Chapter 6.

preposition   A word that shows a relationship between its object and another word in the sentence. Common prepositions include *at, by, from, to, behind, below, for, among, with*, and so on. See Chapter 2.

prepositional phrase   A preposition and its object: *on the table, above the clouds, for the evening*, and so on. See Chapter 2.

present participle   See *participle*.

progressive form   A form that expresses action that continues to happen. See Chapter 5.

pronoun   A word that takes the place of a noun or another pronoun. See Chapters 2 and 6.

pronoun antecedent   See *antecedent* and Chapter 7.

pronoun form   The form of a pronoun based on its use. Pronouns change their forms when they are used as subjects or objects or to show possession. See also *case* and Chapter 6.

pronoun reference   See *antecedent* and Chapter 7.

proper adjective   An adjective formed from a proper noun (*Italian* painting, *African* nations, and *Irish* whiskey). Proper adjectives are usually capitalized except in phrases like "china cabinet" or "french fries."

proper noun   A noun referring to a specific person, place, or thing. Proper nouns are capitalized: *Denver, Mr. McAuliffe*, and *Taj Mahal*. See Chapters 2 and 11.

reflexive pronoun   A pronoun ending in *-self* or *-selves* and renaming the subject. Reflexive pronouns are objects of verbs and prepositions. "He perjured *himself*." "They went by *themselves*." See Chapter 6.

regular verb   A verb that forms its past tense by adding *-d*, or *-ed*: *start/started* and *hope/hoped*. See also *irregular verb* and Chapter 5.

relative pronoun   A pronoun that introduces an adjective clause. The relative pronouns are *who, whom, whose, which, that, what*, and *whatever*. See Chapters 6 and 8.

restrictive modifier   See *essential modifier*.

run-on sentence   Two independent clauses run together with no punctuation to separate them: "Her uncle works as a plumber in Des Moines he used to be a professor of philosophy in Boston." The run-on sentence is corrected by placing a semicolon or a comma and coordinate conjunction between the two clauses. See Chapter 9.

sentence   A group of words containing a subject and a verb and expressing some sense of completeness. See Chapters 3 and 9.

sentence fragment   A group of words lacking an independent clause and therefore unable to stand alone. See Chapter 9.

sentence types   Sentences classified on the basis of their structure. There are four types of sentences in English: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. See also *complex sentence, compound sentence, compound-complex sentence, simple sentence*, and Chapters 3 and 9.

simple subject   See *subject*.

simple sentence   A sentence containing one independent clause. See Chapters 3 and 8.

slang   An informal word or expression not accepted in formal writing by careful or educated users of the language. Slang is usually short-lived or temporary and should be used sparingly.

split infinitive   An infinitive with a modifier between the *to* and the verb. Split infinitives are avoided by most careful speakers and writers. Examples are *to really want* and *to hardly hear*.

squinting modifier   A modifier that makes the meaning of a sentence ambiguous because it can modify either of two words. "We stood around *nervously* waiting to be introduced." "I asked them *politely* to leave." See Chapter 10.

standard written English The English of careful and educated speakers and writers. See Chapter 1.

subject   The part of the sentence about which the predicate makes a statement. A *simple subject* does not include any modifiers; a *complete subject* includes modifiers; and a *compound subject* consists of two or more subjects. See also *predicate* and Chapter 3.

subordinate clause   See *dependent clause*.

subordinate conjunction   A word that joins a dependent clause to an independent clause. See Chapters 2, 3, and 8.

superlative degree   The *most, least*, or *-est* form of those adjectives and adverbs that can be compared: *most beautiful, least valid*, and *greatest*. See also *comparative degree, comparison*, and *positive degree*.

tense   The form of a verb that shows the action as being in the past, present, or future times. The most common tenses are simple present, present perfect, simple past, past perfect, simple future, and future perfect. See Chapters 2 and 5 and pages 288–292.

transitive verb   A verb that requires an object in order to complete its meaning: "We *saw* the accident." "They *helped* their neighbors." See also *intransitive verb*.

verb   A part of speech that describes action or a state of being of a subject and thereby tells what a noun or pronoun does or what it is. See Chapters 2 and 5.

verb phrase   A verb that consists of helping verbs and a main verb. "Sal *will* not *arrive* on time." "I *may have lost* your jacket." "We *have won* the lottery!" See Chapters 2 and 3.

voice   Transitive verbs can be either in the *active voice* or in the *passive voice*. When the subject in the sentence performs the action described by the verb, the verb is in the active voice. "Reverend Jackson performed the ceremony." When the action described by the verb is done to the subject, the verb is in the passive voice. "The ceremony was performed by Reverend Jackson." See Chapter 3.