**Written Expression 1st Year**

**Lesson Two : Phrases**

A phrase is a building block of a sentence. It is a group of words that act as a part of speech but cannot stand alone as a sentence. A phrase is any group of related words that, unlike a sentence, has no subject- predicate combination. The words in a phrase act together so that the phrase itself functions as a single part of speech. For example, some phrases act as nouns, some as verbs, some as adjectives or adverbs. Remember that phrases can’t stand alone as sentences. There are nine sorts of phrases:

**1. Noun Phrase**

A noun phrase can be described as any phrase consisting of a noun as its head ( or central constituent ) and is capable of functioning as subject or object in a sentence. Examples in which the head nouns are in bold type, are :

– There is a beautiful **garden.**

– Let us sit in **the garden.**

A noun phrase is also defined as a phrase that consists of a pronoun ( e.g I ) or a proper noun ( e.g Younes ) or it can be a common noun (e.g room, watch ) as a head. It is not permissible in English to delete the noun head. The head of the noun phrase can be preceded by the following elements:

**•An adverb** which modifies a complete noun phrase, **e.g** even, simply, really, or what

**Eg:** what a scandal.

**•A predetermined** , **e.g** all ( of ) , some ( of ) , both ( of ) , etc.

**•A determiner such as** : (the, a, this, my, etc.).

**•A superlative** ( tallest), **a comparative** ( taller); or **an ordinary word** ( next ) or a

**cardinal number** ( three ) or **a quantifier** ( money ) or **a qualifier** ( some).

**•An ordinal number**, e.g fourth.

**•Adjectival modifie**r: an adjective may be modified by an adverb, e.g simply, really.

**•A modifier describing composition**. e.g wood, vegetable.

**•A modifier to describe origin or style.** e.g British, outside.

**•A modifier which describes purpose / beneficially** e.g: rabbit in rabbit food.

The noun phrase is used in one of the clausal functions of subject, object or predictive. However, it can also represent many other functions (most of them are part of other clausal elements ) as illustrated by the following examples:

\* **Adjunct** in a clause.

Eg : Mary arrived **the day** before yesterday.

**\*Modifier** in an **adjective** phrase.

Eg: The nail was **two inches** long.

\* **Modifier** in an **adverb** phrase.

Eg: Mary arrived **a whole day** later.

\* **Modifier** in a **prepositional** phrase.

Eg: The wreck was discovered a mile under **the sea**

**\* Opposition**

Eg: I finally met her sister, a distinguished **anthropologist**.

**2. Adjective Phrase**

The adjective phrase is a syntactic structure with an adjective as its focus (head). An adjective phrase describes or qualifies a noun or its replacement. The head adjective of the phrase is commonly the last word , which may be one in series of qualifying elements usually come before the head adjective , they may also follow it .

Eg: It was **cold** , **biting** , **snowing** weather ( before the noun )

Circle **ready-made** from the hands of chances ( after the noun ).

An adjective phrase is a prepositional phrase that modifies a noun or a pronoun . This phrase

answers the question **which on**e ? The adjective phrase follows right after the noun or pronoun that it modifies or describes. Generally, if you cannot logically move the prepositional phrase within the sentence, it is most often an adjective phrase . Remember that an adjective phrase contains no verb.

Eg: Some programs **at our local library** were requested last week .

( which programs ? the ones in our local library )

These girls **in this photograph** are my friends . ( which girls ? the ones in the

photograph ) .

**3. Verb Phrase**

A verb phrase is defined as any phrase that contains a verb as its head. It is characterized by the most significant features that it includes the auxiliary verb which precedes the verb (e.g. words, like, could, should , might , have , be and do ) and the negation word not ' and it also contains anything which follows the verb in the same sentence . Verbs are words that demonstrate an action such as drink , walk , smell , write , etc .They function as a connector between the subject of the verb and the information about the subject . This information is usually descriptive .Verb phrases take the verb as one step , plus the complement , object or adverb . Verb phrases as in he was running to the shop comprise the verb (running ) and the complement ( to the shop ).

**4. Adverb Phrase**

The adverb phrase is defined in several ways depending on its position , function, and form. Adverb phrases are the most complex according to the syntactic functions they express . They can be individual or multiple words elements. They might be related to the syntactic circumstances of the process of the wider proposition , but they can represent personal comments , interpersonal formula, and textual links; for example, slowly , fairly, smoothly , enough , more powerfully than the other car are examples of adverbs.

An adverb phrase is also regarded as a sequence of words that provides information generally referring to the time , place , manner and degree , in which an action , state or event occurs . In this case , adverb phrases give contextual information and express our thoughts and assumptions about a specific action , event , or state . Although an adverb phrase may include only an adverb as its head , it can also contain modifiers ( usually another adverb) , which come before the head , and qualifiers , which follow the adverb .

Eg: I could no longer say that I was a professional teacher .

I'd always perceived myself as being a professional person.

In syntax , the adverb phrase has several functions due to its position with the other

constituents of the English sentence .

- **An adverb phrase can modify a verb .**

Eg : We rode during the vocations ( When we rode ) .

**- An adverb phrase can also modify an adjective** .

Eg : The boy was upset by the weather . ( the adverb phrase modifies the adjective " upset " ).

**- An adverb phrase has the function of modifying an adverb** .

Eg: The ceremonies began early in the noon . ( the adverb phrase modifies the verb " began" )

**- An adverb phrase can act as a predicate adverb** .

Eg: The books are on the table . ( on the table ) is a complement for the verb ( are ) . It tells

where the books are.

**5. Prepositional Phrase**

A prepositional phrase is a group of words containing a preposition or sequence of prepositions followed by a noun phrase or the equivalent like **by** Sunday , **out of** the classroom . Here , the proposition is the head of the phrase and the noun is its complement or object . The accurate application of this term depends on what is classed as a preposition and what is classed as the equivalent of the noun phrase .

Eg: **Before** breakfast , **since** eating breakfast , or **before** I had eaten breakfast.

Prepositional phrases can act as adverbs or adjectives . When they are used as adjectives , they have the function of modifying nouns and pronouns at the same way individual – word adjective does . When they are used as adverbs , they modify adjectives , verbs, and other adverbs , at the same way single – word adverbs clauses do .

Eg: The cupcake **with** sprinkles is ours .

The cupcake **with** colorful sprinkles is ours .

**6. Infinitive Phrase**

The infinitive phrase is a phrase that starts with ( to ) and a verb or verb phrase . It may also contain one or more complements as well as modifiers . Infinitive phrases may have the function as nouns or as modifiers . The verb in an infinitive phrase does not tell anything about any subject in a direct way ; it does not change form to show agreement . The underlined words illustrate this type of phrase .

Eg .To finish her work is a good thing .

An infinitive phrase can also be regarded as a group of words consisting of the particle

( to ) and ( the base form of the verb ) and may contain objects and other complements and

modifiers to make a verb phrase called an infinitive phrase . This phrase can have the function

of a noun , an adjective or an adverb . The infinitive phrase is constructed with the verb in the

infinitive form .

Eg . To avoid burning another bag of popcorn , Bernard pressed his nose against the

microwave door .

An infinitive phrase is recognized as such by the infinitive that begins it . Like all other phrases, an infinitive phrase may include extra words, more phrases or a combination of

objects , individual – words modifiers , and other phrases . These functions will be explained

as the following:

**a . Infinitive phrases have the function of the subject .**

Eg: To take an apple pie demands both patience and the right ingredients.

Baking an apple pie demands both patience and the right ingredients.

**b. Infinitive phrases act as objects of verbs.**

She wanted to go ; she wanted what ? To go

**c. Infinitive phrases serve as objects of gerunds and participles.**

Eg: Known to be ruthless, the great warrior took no prisoner .

**d. Infinitive phrases have the function of modifiers.**

Eg: To understand myself completely will take more effort than I'm writing to invest.

e . **Infinitive phrase act as complements** .

Eg: . I regard her to be the best candidate for the job .

**7. Participle Phrase**

A participle phrase is a group of words ( verb phrase ) containing a participle and its complementing elements that can have the function of an adjective or adjective phrase . A participle phrase can be used with helping verbs to make a clarification of tense or voice . All verbs have the forms of present participle and past participle . The underlined words represent participle phrases .

Eg: I saw Arthur running for the bus.

Disappointed, she left the room quickly.

Participle phrases are also regarded as syntactic structures functioning as sentence constituents containing a head present participle or past participle as its focus . In this sense,

the head participle will be a non - finite verb form while present and past participles have the

non – finite verb forms expressing actions . As we saw , although participles frequently occur

by themselves , they can also function as the headword in participle phrases .

Eg: Burned on each side , the toast was inedible .

Participle phrases have three main types :

**\* Present participle within suffix .**

Eg: The existing local government system in northern Ireland was established following the

local government .

**\* Past participle with – ed suffix .**

Eg: The different specialized branches of the science of medicine correspond to equally

specialized medical professions dealing with special organs of diseases.

**\* Past participle with irregular V**

Eg: The chosen president was very intelligent, in my opinion.

Present participle phrases are verb forms used as adjectives . They frequently end in – ing . Individual adjectives , adjective clauses , or prepositional phrases used as adjectives are commonly in a fixed slot , that is they do not have the ability to move around . Present participle phrases used as adjectives can take the different slot in a sentence :

1 . If the phrase is in the first position of a sentence , it should modify the subject , and it must be followed by a comma .

Eg: Giving the soil good moisture , the rain slowly fell during the night .

2. If the present participle phrase takes the position inside the sentence , it should have a comma before and after it if it is not essential to the sense of the sentence . It is , therefore ,

named , as a non – restrictive phrase .

Eg: The rain , giving the soil good moisture , slowly fell during the night .

3 . If the present participle phrase takes the position inside the sentence and it is essential to

the sense of the sentence , it is regarded restrictive and demands no comma .

Eg: Everyone driving a car must have a license ( or driver 's license ) .

4. If the present participle phrase comes at the end of the sentence and immediately follows

the word it modifies it needs no comma to precede it.

Eg: we sat in our tent , watching the bald eagle overhead.

**8. Gerund Phrase**

A gerund phrase may look like a participial phrase because gerund phrases begin with the -ing form of a verb (riding, seeing, talking, etc.) and have objects and modifiers. But a gerund phrase always acts as a noun in a sentence, not as an adjective. Like other nouns, a gerund phrase can serve as the subject of a sentence, the object of a verb or preposition, or the complement of a linking verb. In the following example, the gerund phrase riding the black stallion acts as a noun and is the subject of the verb terrified.

Eg: Riding the black stallion terrified Hugh.

In the next sentence, the gerund phrase seeing the suspect is the direct object of the verb reported. Notice that the entire phrase, not just the word suspect, is the direct object.

Eg: The police officer reported seeing the suspect.

Here, the gerund phrase talking often and loudly is the object of the preposition by.

Eg: The senator made his reputation by talking often and loudly.

Calling Uncle Roberto is a gerund phrase acting as the subject of the sentence. Asking

for trouble is a gerund phrase acting as a complement of the linking verb is.

Eg: Calling Uncle Roberto is asking for trouble.

**9. Absolute Phrase**

An absolute phrase is a group of words that modifies an independent clause as a whole. An absolute is made up of a noun and its modifiers (which frequently, but not always, include a participle or participial phrase). An absolute may precede, follow, or interrupt the main clause. An absolute phrase is a phrase that modifies a whole **independent** clause (a full sentence); not just one word. It generally combines a noun and a participle, so it can be as short as two words, or sometimes have other modifiers and objects, too.

Absolute phrases are not full sentences on their own, but they can add very important

details to sentences that make them more informative or relevant.

Eg: Their slender bodies sleek and black against the orange sky, the storks circled high above

us.

An absolute allows to move from a description of a whole person, place, or thing to one aspect or part. Note that in traditional grammar, absolutes (or nominative absolutes) are often

more narrowly defined as "noun phrases...combined with participle. The **absolute phrase** that

adds a focusing detail is especially common in fiction writing, much more common than

in expository writing.

Nominative absolutes are related to nonfinite verb phrases. They consist of a subject noun phrase followed by some part of the predicate: either a participle form of the main verb or a complement or modifier of the main verb.

Absolutes have traditionally been called nominative because the absolute construction begins with a noun phrase as its headword. Nevertheless, they function adverbially as sentence modifiers. Some [absolutes] explain reasons or conditions for the action described in the main clause; others describe the manner in which the action of the main clause is performed.

Absolute phrases always have a noun (as the subject), but don’t have a finite verb (a verb

that works with the subject to make a full sentence). Usually, they also have a participle, plus

other modifiers and objects.

▪Eg: Sally waited for her friends to arrive, **muffins baking in the oven.**

▪**Muffins baking in the oven,** Sally waited for her friends to arrive.

▪**Her muffins freshly baked,** Sally waited for her friends to arrive.

▪Sally waited for her friends to arrive, **her muffins freshly baked and ready.**