

Phrase Resource

Phrases are groups of words that do not contain both a subject and a verb. Collectively, the words in the phrases function as a single part of speech.

Prepositional Phrase: A preposition plus its object and modifiers.

Prepositions

To, around, under, over, like, as, behind, with, outside, etc. Prepositional phrases may function as adjectives or as adverbs.

Adjective prepositional phrases tell *which one, what kind, how many, and how much*, or give other information about a noun, a pronoun, a noun phrase, or a noun clause.

The store around the corner is painted green. (Which store is it? The store around the corner.)

The girl with the blue hair is angry.

Adverb prepositional phrases tell *how, when, where, why, to what extent, or under what condition* about a verb, an adjective, an adverb, an adverb phrase, or an adverb clause.

Oscar is painting his house with the help of his friends. (How is he painting his house? With the help of his friends.)

Sally is coloring outside the lines.

Infinitive Phrase: The word “to” plus a verb. Infinitive phrases can function as adjectives, adverbs, or nouns.

To dance gracefully is my ambition. (subject of sentence)

Her plan to become a millionaire fell through when the stock market crashed. (modifies plan; functions as an adjective)

She wanted to become a veterinarian. (noun – direct object of “wanted”)

John went to college to study engineering. (tells why he went, so it’s an adverb)

Appositive Phrase: Renames, or identifies, a noun or pronoun. When it adds information that is nonessential, it is set off by commas.

My teacher, a woman with curly hair, is very fat.

Bowser, the dog with the sharp teeth, is coming around the corner

Participial Phrase: A participle is a verb form (past or present) functioning like an adjective. The phrase is the participle plus its modifiers.

Blinded by the light, Sarah walked into the concert hall.

Swimming for his life, John crossed the English Channel.

Gerund Phrase: A gerund is an “-ing” verb form functioning as a noun. The phrase is the gerund plus its complements and modifiers.

Walking in the moonlight is a romantic way to end a date. (subject of a sentence)

He particularly enjoyed walking in the moonlight with his girlfriend. (direct object)

He wrote a poem about walking in the moonlight. (object of the preposition)

Walking the dog is not my favorite task. (subject)

Absolute Phrase (also called a *nominative absolute*): An absolute phrase is a group of words consisting of a noun or pronoun, an “ing” or “ed” verb form, and any related modifiers. Absolute phrases modify the whole sentence rather than a particular part of it.

They are always set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma or pair of commas (or dashes) because they are parenthetical elements.

An absolute phrase, very simply put, is an independent clause with the “was” or “were” omitted. Absolute phrases are valuable in constructing concise, layered sentences.

Their minds whirling from the avalanche of information provided by their teacher, the students made their way thoughtfully to the parking lot.

His head pounding, his hands shaking, his heart filled with trepidation, the young man knelt and proposed marriage to his sweetheart.

The two lovers walked through the garden, their faces reflecting the moonlight, their arms twined about each other, their footsteps echoing in the stillness of the night.

Note: An **independent clause** has a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence. A **dependent, or subordinate, clause**, has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. It often begins with a subordinating conjunction such as *when, because, although, while, since*, etc.