

# **General Grammar Booklet**

**for European Language Learners**

Do you know a noun from a pronoun?  
What sort of thing is a direct object?  
Ever heard about agreements?  
What is grammar, anyway?

**Humanities  
Programme**

Imperial College

# Introduction

As an introduction to this workshop I would like to ask you the following questions:

- Can you write and speak coherently?
- Are you aware of your language as you use it? (i.e different registers, synonyms)
- Are you aware of the functions that words play in sentences? For example, if you say "My throat hurts". Can you substitute the word "throat" by "finger"? (My finger hurts) and still make sense. But if you replace "throat" with "immediately" ("My immediately hurts") will it still make sense?

As you have already noticed, you already know grammar in an intuitive way. This workshop will just introduce you to the way linguists, teachers, writers and journalists analyse the language and present it to students, readers and general public. In the course of the workshop, you will be taught some jargon and will be provided with reinforcement exercises for you to experiment with the way the English language works. This will enable you to transfer this knowledge to the foreign languages you learn. As you go along, you will be shown indicated in which communicative situations certain jargon is frequently used.

## Learning grammar

A sentence can be analyzed in two different ways:

1. Studying individual word categories types and deciding how they behave in some contexts.
2. Studying the sentence structure and how different words fit into it.

This workshop will start by showing show you the very basics of word categories and structures that can be useful to a complete beginner.

## WORD CATEGORIES

Words that make up sentences can be divided into 9 word categories according to their function:

- Four categories (noun, verb, adjective and adverb) have meaning. The other five (determiners, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, interjections) are there to provide some information to the sentence (time, space, possession, etc).
- Some languages like German, Italian and Spanish display some grammatical features not existing in English. These special features will be examined separately by lecturers who will work with you in groups of students doing the same language.

Due to time constraints, this workshop will focus on the word categories that have meaning.

# Nouns

## What is a noun?

A noun is a naming word for:

a person



a witch

an animal



a rabbit

a thing



a ball

a place



a forest

a feeling



fear

a quality



greed

Nouns are labels we attach to everything in the world around us in order to help us differentiate one place from another (beach and school), one feeling from another (sadness and joy) and one thing from another (radio and television). How many nouns can you find in the sentences below?

### Exercise 1

1. Switch your computer on.
2. Some bacteria escaped from the lab today.
3. Fish and chips make an excellent meal.
4. Qualities like patience and tolerance are good for friendship.

→ Sometimes nouns can be mistaken for similar words. For example, the word "shout" can act as a noun or another word category called "verb". In the following examples, can you tell whether "shout" is a noun or a verb?

### Exercise 2

1. "Don't shout at me"
2. Give me a shout when you are ready"

How many nouns can you find in the sentences below?

### Exercise 3

music	cat	early
book	computer	cake
run	book	printer
piano	ugly	colour

You may also find out if a word is a noun by asking "What is it?". If the answer is "It is a..." chances are that the word you are looking at is a noun.

Example:

if we say We drove down the alley

the question "What is a drove?" cannot be answered with "It is a ...", but asking "What is an alley?" would lead to reply "It is a little road".

Most nouns name things that can be seen, touched or perceived with the senses. They are called **common nouns**. Names used for non-material things are called **abstract nouns**. Names used to talk about people, specific places, companies, etc are called **proper nouns**.

## Proper nouns

Nouns that describe the names of particular people, places, rivers, mountains, countries, days of the week, months, festivals and the titles of books and films are called **proper nouns**. They always begin with a capital letter.



Mei

Sony

Quantas

Easter

Oxfam

Levi's

United Nations

March  
Tuesday







Frampton Castle

**All nouns have two features: gender and number.**

**1 Number:** nouns are either singular or plural.

## SINGULAR AND PLURAL NOUNS

Individual nouns	Collective nouns
Nouns are either <b>singular</b> (only one) or <b>plural</b> (more than one).	Collective nouns describe a group of things.
 <p>One man, one tree one island</p>	 <p>Three cats under the stars</p>
 <p>a queue of people</p>	 <p>a bunch of herbs</p>



Common nouns are divided into countable and uncountable. **Countable nouns** refer to names that can be counted by units:

one CD → two CDs  
one lecturer → two lecturers

You can recognize them because they can be turned to plural and have numbers. Uncountable nouns are applied to things such as liquids, that need to be broken down or put in containers for us to be able to count them (a bottle of water, or a piece of furniture).

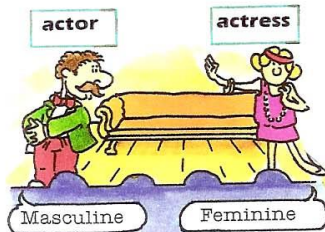
Many common nouns are arranged in bunches forming **collective nouns**. For example, we can talk about a sofa, a bed and a table individually, but when they form a group, we refer to them as "furniture". Many collective nouns are also uncountable. You can recognize them because they usually need "some" in front. Try and practice matching the correct uncountable noun with an individual one in the box below.

### Exercise 4

Individual-countable	Collective-uncountable
suitcase	literature
kiss	water
novel	affection
shirt	furniture
sofa	clothing
bottle of water	luggage



**2 Gender:** a noun is either masculine, feminine or neuter in gender. The same way we talk about



male and female animals or people, some languages also like to divide words into genders. English nouns do not have genders, with a few exceptions (i.e. occupations) as seen in the picture. Although genders only make sense for people, animals or plants (as things like objects, feelings and places don't have sex), in practice you should note that the meaning of some words in European languages change dramatically according to their gender.

If you are learning a foreign language, it would be wise to remember new nouns with their articles. For example:

Spanish: El libro (the book, masculine) - La libra (the pound, feminine)  
Italian: Il posto (the place, masculine) - La posta (the mail, feminine)

# PRONOUNS

## What is a pronoun?

A pronoun stands in place of a noun or a noun phrase, such as:



The cat scratched the velvet curtains. **It** scratched **them**.



The girl with the spotty hat clapped. **She** clapped.

## Useful pronouns

I	you	he	she	we
they	me	us	it	them
her	him	mine	his	hers
my	ours	yours	your	theirs



Jane is painting the door. **She** is painting **it**.



The children drank their hot chocolate. **They** drank **theirs**.

Sometimes speakers refer to people or things not by its actual name, but by another shorter word that stand for the original name. This word is called pronoun and performs a very useful function: avoiding repetition. Think of the text in the box below. The person who wrote it made it sound uninteresting and repetitive. Could you replace "Britney Spears" by single shorter words?

### Exercise 5

"I really like Britney Spears. Britney makes great music and is very attractive. Of all the singers, I admire Britney the most. I have bought tickets for Britney's new concert".

Can you spot the pronouns in these sentences? →

### Exercise 6

1. I don't know his name. Is it Thomson?
2. She collected his parcel. Hers would arrive later.
3. "To whom does the printer belong?" he asked happily.
4. "The printer is mine", he colleague replied.
5. He has a car. It is brand new. We love it!

There are many different types of pronouns. The most commonly used are the personal pronouns:

I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they

Language lecturers will use them very frequently, when introducing the verbs and will talk about "first, second and third persons". If you wonder what that means have a look at the box below.

## First, second and third person

Different types of text are written in a particular person.

★ In the first person, the writer talks about himself or herself, using the pronouns **I**, **we**, **my** and **our**.

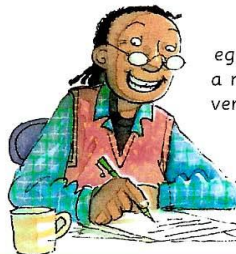
eg **I** met **my** friend.

★ In the second person, the writer talks to you. Sentences begin with a verb, with "you" left out.

eg **Fold** the paper in half.  
**Cut** along the fold.

★ In the third person, the writer tells what happened to other people, using the pronouns **he**, **she**, **it**, **they**, **his**, **her** and **their**.

eg **They** found a ring. **It** was very shiny.



## THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Some pronouns are male or female. They always agree with the nouns that they replace.

The **girl** runs.  
**She** runs fast.

The **boy** climbs.  
**He** climbs high.

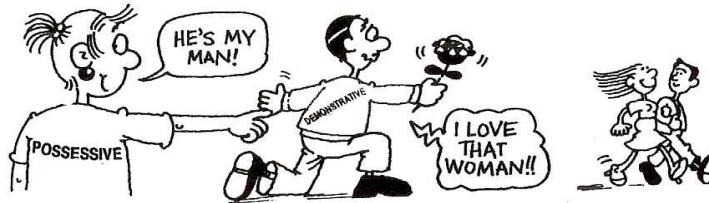


- Pronouns can be singular or plural. They agree with the noun or nouns they replace.

**Dad** makes a cake. **Birds** eat worms.  
**He** makes it. **They** eat them.



# Determiners



Nouns quite often have other words attached to them that place them in context by giving information such as to whom do they belong, how many are there, whether they have appeared before in conversation and so on. They are called determiners (and also adjectives). Here are some examples:

## Determiners

Definite articles	the
Indeterminate:	a-an
Possessive	my, your, his, her, our, your, their
Demonstrative	this - these, that - those
Indefinite	any, some
Numeral	one, two, three...
Interrogative	what?, which?, how much?, how many?

## + noun "College"

The college
A college
My college
This college
Any college
Three colleges
Which college?

Determiners are not used in the same way in most languages in the world. Some languages have hardly any determiners, others like French, Italian and German have a wide variety and use them very often in situations in which English would not.

## **Agreements**

Determiners have their ability to match all aspects of the noun. If a noun is feminine and plural, its determiners will have to be feminine and plural. This is what your language tutors call **agreement**.

Example: *Ma mère est allée a la bibliothèque* (My mother went to the library)  
*Ma* is feminine and singular like *mère*

Exercise 7 (in language groups)

## **Determiners and pronouns**

Pronouns resemble determiners very much to the extent that they look similar and both agree with the name in terms of gender and number. Can you tell the difference in this example?

### **Determiners**

This is my pen  
 determiners always appear  
 in front of a noun

### **Pronouns**

This is mine. (= my pen)  
 Pronouns always stand alone

# ★ ADD AN ADJECTIVE

## What is an adjective?

An adjective tells you more about a noun, such as:

its size



a **small** chick

its shape



a **rectangular** tray

its colour



a **golden** key

its feel



a **soft** blanket

its character



a **fierce** crab

its weight



a **heavy** hamper

→ More tips:



### THINGS TO REMEMBER

To test whether a word is an adjective:

- Does it say more about a noun?  
eg the **sad** girl
- Can you put it in front of a noun?  
eg The girl feels **sad**.
- Can you put it after verbs such as **is, are, feels, looks, gets** or **seems**?  
eg The girl **looks sad**.

1. Adjectives have some common endings:

- ful: wonderful, careful
- ous: dangerous, jealous
- al: magical, classical
- ible: responsible
- ive: creative

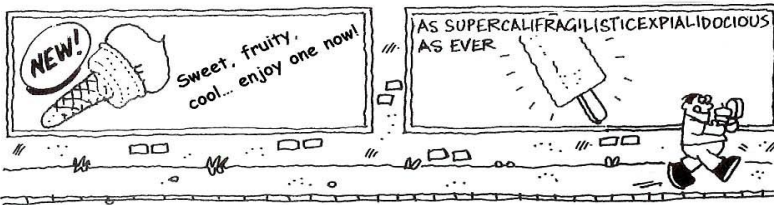
2. Adjectives (like adverbs) can appear in comparisons and can end in **-er** and **-est** (tall, taller, tallest).

3. Adjectives answer the question: "What is it like?"  
Example: The **angry** policeman shouted at the cat.  
What did the policeman look like? **Angry**.



Adjectives add colour and spark to conversations and make stories more vivid. They are the stars of advertising. Can you spot the adjectives in the images below?

### Exercise 8



Adjectives will appear in your language books when talking about nationalities, describing people, shopping for clothes and food and describing the weather. You can see below some common adjectives:

<b>Colour:</b>	red wine, blue screen, blue denim
<b>Size:</b>	big book, long journey
<b>Nationality:</b>	Spanish omelette, Chinese whispers
<b>Flavour:</b>	sweet chilli, aromatic crispy duck
<b>Temperature:</b>	hot soup
<b>Wheather:</b>	windy day, cold dry night.
<b>Shape:</b>	square monitor
<b>Character:</b>	funny story, talkative personality, magic carpet
<b>Age:</b>	young boy, Victorian building
<b>Material:</b>	metal rod, plastic cover, velvet clothes

In this page you are going to meet some old friends, Asterix and Obelix. You can practice your adjective spotting once more by highlighting the adjectives in the boxes:

Exercise 9

"The year is 50 BC. Gaul (France) is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well not entirely ..... one small village of brave Gauls still resists the invaders. And life is not easy for the Roman legionaires who camp outside their lively village."

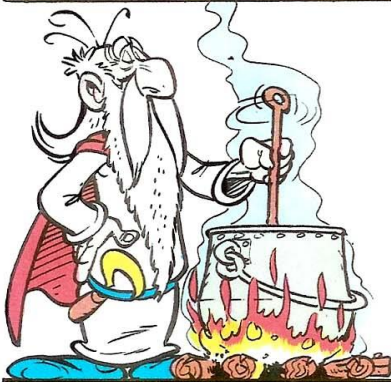


## a few of the Gauls

Asterix, the hero of these adventures. A shrewd, cunning little warrior; all perilous missions are immediately entrusted to him. Asterix gets his superhuman strength from the magic potion brewed by the druid Getafix...



Obelix, Asterix's inseparable friend. A menhir delivery-man by trade; addicted to wild boar. Obelix is always ready to drop everything and go off on a new adventure with Asterix – so long as there's wild boar to eat, and plenty of fighting.



Getafix, the venerable village druid. Gathers mistletoe and brews magic potions. His speciality is the potion which gives the drinker superhuman strength. But Getafix also has other recipes up his sleeve...

### Agreements

Adjectives, like determinants and pronouns, are closely related to nouns. Unlike English, adjectives have to match the gender and number aspects of the noun in most European languages.

Example: Je voudrais un kilo de pommes rouges.  
I'd like to have a kilo of red apples.

The adjective rouges is feminine and plural because it qualifies the noun pommes (feminine and plural)



# Verbs

## ☆ BE THERE, DO THAT

### What is a verb?

A verb is the word that tells you what is happening in a sentence.



He **rows** ashore.



She **likes** this book.



The jungle **is** dense.



She **feels** excited.

Verbs are usually called “action words” because they usually describe someone or something in action, but they can also reveal a state (psychological, position, illness) or a feeling.

Peter <b>runs</b> a marathon	(action, simple tense)
Peter <b>is</b> very tall	(state)
Linda <b>has</b> lots of friends	(state)
Peter <b>is</b> unwell	(feeling)
The competitors <b>appeared</b> attractive	(state-feeling)

Can you spot the verbs below?

### Exercise 10

- Mum has crashed the car.
- The cheff is tossing a pancake.
- Dad has made the tea.
- The postman seemed unhappy that morning. He had to deliver a big parcel.

→ Verbs are the most important word in a sentence; without it a sentence does not make any sense. Look at sentences below; they have no meaning:

“He tea” and “She awkwardly”

Add verbs to give meaning to these words:

### Exercise 11

- The dog ..... at the cat. Looks, barks.
- The girl .....by the water. Waited, stood

### Exercise 12

Try each of these verbs to make a sentence. See how the meaning of the sentence changes:



sees  
climbs  
finds  
gazes at  
reaches  
trudges up



The man **dreams about** the mountain.

→ A verb is usually made up of more than one word. For example:

He is talking  
They have worked  
We shall be running.  
I was reading.  
You will be late.  
Would you like a cup of tea?

These are called auxiliary verbs. They help to talk about the future, past or present. They form the tenses.

# ☆ USING VERBS

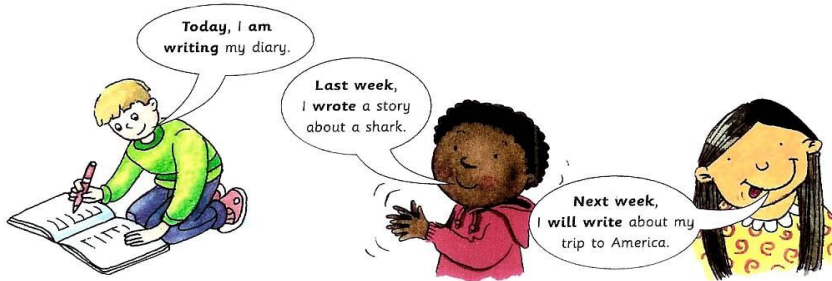
## What is a verb tense?

A verb is the word that tells you what is happening in a sentence. The tense of the verb tells you **when** something happens.

★ The **present** tense tells you that an event is happening now.

★ The **past** tense tells you that an event has already happened.

★ The **future** tense tells you that an event will happen in the future.



## Practice filling in the missing auxiliary verbs and say what tense is used in each sentence:

### Exercise 13

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. We ..... going on holiday soon.     | Tense: |
| 2. They ..... working for hours.       | Tense: |
| 3. The baby ..... been crying all day. | Tense: |
| 4. The dog ..... barking.              | Tense: |
| 6. We ..... see you tomorrow.          | Tense: |

## Verb agreements

As explained in the lines above, the verb is the dynamic centre of the sentence. It represents the action initiated by a person or thing called the subject.

Example: The builders are finishing the house.

SUBJ V

The thunder is setting the house on fire.

SUBJ V

The verb has to agree with the subject (please refer to Personal pronouns). If the subject is plural the verb has to be plural and vice-versa. You can practice this by checking the following sentences and spotting any agreement mistakes:

### Exercise 14

1. These tomatoes is ripe.
2. James and Lucy is getting married today.
3. Neither John nor his friend is coming to my party.
4. Year 1 Spanish are very noisy.
5. There is some shoes.
6. Ann and Will have bought a flat.



### THINGS TO REMEMBER

- The verb ending changes according to the subject.







I play. He plays. We play.  
I am. She is. We are.



Make some sentences by taking each **subject** in turn and choosing a **verb** and an **object** that makes sense.

**Exercise 16**

For example: She sees the jewellery.

Subject	Verb	Object		
I	plays			
You	make	fire	cake	jumper
He	mends			
She	see	jewellery	recorder	fish tank
We	cut			
They	finds			
My friend	eats			
His mum	cleans			

Now you know that some verbs need an object to make sense and some others don't. The verbs needing an object are called **transitive verbs**. The verbs that need no object are **intransitive verbs**. Try to form sentences by matching the actors to the actions of the following sentences. Say which verbs are transitive and intransitive.

**Exercise 17**

For example:  
The menacing alien fell into the garden pond.



**Actors**



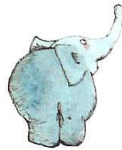
The happy king



The brave princess



The busy robot



The forgetful elephant



Merlin, the magician



The genie of the lamp

**Actions**

- ... lost the magic key.
- ... scared away the monsters.
- ... was frightened by the loud thunder.
- ... yelled loudly.
- ... tripped over the fallen tree trunk.
- ... fought the fiery dragon.
- ... danced all night.
- ... gave me a present.
- ... smiled happily.
- ... looked back.
- ... disappeared.



When in doubt...remember!

**THINGS TO REMEMBER**

- To discover whether a word is a verb, see whether you can change its tense.
- Some verbs in the past tense end in **-ed**, such as looked, lived, explained.
- ✧ Check that the verb ending agrees with the subject.



# Adverbs

## What is an adverb?

An adverb gives extra meaning to a verb or a sentence. An adverb can tell the reader:

### How?

He swims **strongly**.

### Where?

He swims **away**.

### When?

He swims **today**.



★ Many adverbs are made by adding **-ly** to an adjective, eg **badly**, **slowly**, **softly**, **strangely**.

★ The adverbs **very**, **quite**, **really**, **more**, **most** and **as much as** can say more about an adjective.



They are quite useful because they tell you about where, how and when something is happening.

For example: "Ben returned" is a sentence that makes complete sense.  
But Ben returned home quickly yesterday is much more precise.

### Exercise 18

Hunt for adverbs

Find the adjectives in this passage and say which kind of information do they tell about the text:

"Look at that octopus!" shouted the captain **fearfully**.

"It's MASSIVE!" exclaimed the bosun.

Jenny asked **anxiously**, "Could it climb aboard?"

"I doubt it," said One-eyed Jim, **reassuringly**.

"It's coming closer," shrieked Aunt Alice.

"It looks very angry," Pirate Pete said **grimly**.



### Exercise 19

Change the adverbs

Make this text more exciting by replacing quietly with some of the adverbs in the box:

softly      silently      inaudibly  
attentively      carefully  
alertly      calmly      closely  
vigilantly      furtively  
cautiously      slyly      slowly

**Quietly**, the explorers landed on a grassy bank. Jane peered **quietly** at some footprints, while Leo **quietly** watched a monkey. Neither of them noticed the jaguar stalking **quietly** along a branch, nor the alligator **quietly** swimming towards them.

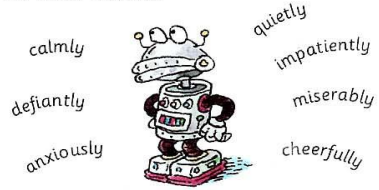
## Types of adverbs

- Manner: How do you drive? Slowly, quickly, fast, happily.  
 Time: When did you arrive? Yesterday, today, late, early.  
 Place: Where is the library? far away, close.  
 Intensity: Very quickly, rather slowly, too hot, fairly sunny,  
 /quantity highly intelligent, don't entirely agree, just right.  
 Distance: How far? We walked all the way home  
 Duration: How long is the strike lasting? Indefinitely  
 Frequency: How often do trains depart from this station? Daily  
 How often will I be paid? Monthly

## What a difference!

An adverb can change the meaning of a sentence. Try finishing the sentence below with each different adverb. See how each adverb alters the meaning.

The robot waited...



### Exercise 20

#### How do they do it?

Pick one of the characters below. Then choose one of the actions (verbs) from the purple box, and one of the adverbs from the blue box. Finally, write down your sentence.

eg **Granny dances badly.**



verbs	adverbs
dances	slowly
splashes	loudly
eats	badly
jumps	grumpily
calls	fast
smiles	naughtily
plays	lazily
behaves	happily
creeps	wearily
sings	well

## Adverbs and adjectives

Adverbs can be mistaken by other word categories such as adjectives and prepositions. In order to find out if a word is an adverb, you can make use of the following tips:

Adjective	Adverb
<p>1. It qualifies a noun:                      He is a <u>hard</u> <u>player</u>.                      I took an <u>early</u> <u>train</u>.</p>	<p>1. It qualifies a verb, adj. or another adv:                      He <u>plays</u> <u>hard</u>.                      The train <u>arrived</u> <u>early</u>.</p>
<p>2. In some European languages it agrees with the noun:                      El niño <u>está contento</u>.                      Los niños <u>están contentos</u>.</p>	<p>2. It does not agree with any word (invar.).                      El tren <u>está cerca</u>.                      Los trenes <u>están cerca</u>.</p>
<p>3. It answers the question                      "What is it like?" "The policeman shouted angrily at the wild cat"</p>	<p>3. It answers the questions:                      "how? where? when?"                      "Ben returned home quickly yesterday"</p>
<p>4. May have some special endings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ noun + ous: danger/dangerous</li> <li>▪ noun + ible/able: favour/favourable</li> <li>▪ noun + al: magic/magical</li> <li>▪ noun + ful/less: care/careful -less</li> <li>• verb + ive: create/ creative, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>4. May have some special endings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ adjective + ly: sure/surely, exceptional/exceptionally</li> </ul> <p>though many look like adjectives as seen above.</p>

# Conjunctions

## ★ JOINING AND CONNECTING WORDS

### What are conjunctions?

Conjunctions are words which join two short sentences to make a longer one.

I like cats **but** I prefer dogs.

Dad gave us a puppy **and** he bought a lead and a collar too.

We play with the puppy at home **or** we take it out for walks.



Conjunctions also link words together and help to make famous pairs such as "fish and chips", "young yet intelligent", "your money or your life". Here are some commonly used conjunctions:

### Useful conjunctions

and	but	when	because
if	while	since	although
so	until	when	though

Many conjunctions come in pairs such as:  
both...and, nor...neither.

→

Can you fill in the missing conjunctions in the sentences below?

### Exercise 21

1. Henry got up late ..... he was on holiday.
2. He wanted to have a bath ..... the water was cold.
3. She smiled ..... I greeted her.
4. I haven't spoken to my sister ..... I saw her last summer.
5. Celia could not decide ..... it was true ..... not.
6. The child is ..... laughing ..... crying.

Rewrite these sentences. Leave some as they are and join others with conjunctions to make them read better.

### Exercise 22

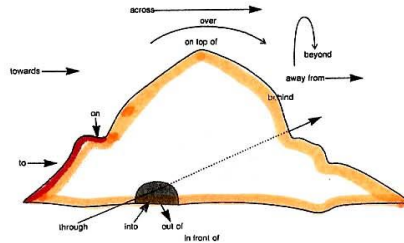
It was a crisp, snowy day. The sun was shining. We decided to go for a walk. We walked across the fields. The sky darkened. An icy wind started blowing. It began to snow again. The snowflakes fell thickly. We couldn't see where we were going. We couldn't find our way home.



# Prepositions

Prepositions are words that often tell you where is one thing, what position is it in or when is it happening. Common prepositions are:

in    on    under    to  
 after    before    near  
           around    beside  
 about    up    beyond  
           on top of    between



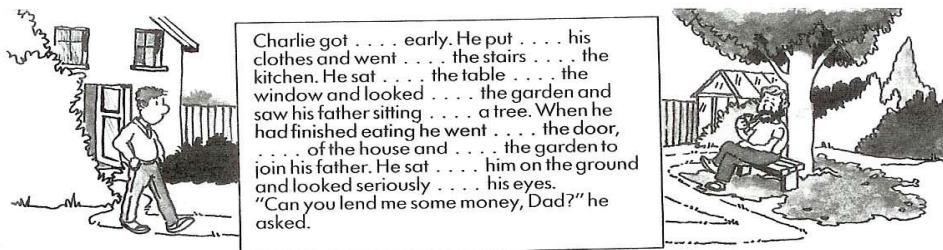
## Exercise 23

Try and underline the prepositions in the following notices:



## Exercise 24

Can you think of suitable prepositions to fill the gaps below?



As you can see from the example above, prepositions tend to be followed by two or three words. However, when a preposition follows a verb and is part of its meaning it is considered like a part of the verb, a phrasal verb.

Example: "He chased the thieves up the road" (preposition)  
 "He chased the order up" (phrasal verb).



# Cases

In languages like German, Russian or modern Greek, nouns and accompanying words (adjectives and determiners) change their form (especially their endings) according to their grammatical function. They show different forms (called **cases**) according to whether they are functioning as subject (nominative case), direct object (accusative case), indirect object (dative case) or possessor (genitive case). Languages with cases are called **inflected languages**.

This feature, that existed in many old languages such as Latin, has been lost in English and most Western European languages and therefore the study of inflected languages seem a daunting task for most students. However, some cases still exist in English pronouns and structures used to show possession. Perhaps you have already noticed that the pronoun **who** changes to **whom** and **whose** according to its function in the sentence.

To facilitate the understanding of cases to students of Central and Eastern European languages, the exercise below has been included in this workshop. Try to fill in the gaps with the pronouns **who, whom, whose** and explain their functions in each sentence.

1. .... ordered the pizza?
2. To ..... it may concern.
3. I asked the neighbours ..... letters were these.
4. .... do I have to ask the keys for?

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