A glossary of grammatical terms for teachers

The following are the minimum terms and concepts with which you should be familiar in order to be able to understand, analyse and describe grammar and structure in English.

Term	Gloss	*Example*
a-adjective	A special kind of adjective beginning with *a-*. These adjectives are always used predicatively (q.v.)	*The dog is asleep* *NOT* *The asleep dog*
Absolute adjective	Adjectives which cannot be made stronger or weaker	*A perfect meal* *NOT* *A more perfect meal*
Absolute tense	A tense which is fixed in time and not relative to any other time	*He came yesterday*
Abstract noun	A noun referring to an intangible concept	*happiness*
Accent	Stress or a diacritic (q.v.) mark	*café* *coffee*
Adjective	A word which modifies a noun phrase	*The large dog*
Adjective phrase	A group of words doing the work of an adjective	*The very large, black dog*
Adjunct	An adverbial which is part of the main structure of a clause	*She drove the car quickly out of the car park*
Adverb	A word which modifies a verb, an adjective, another adverb or modifies a verb phrase	*She walked quickly* *The book was very expensive* *He usually drives too slowly*
Adverb of degree	An adverb telling you to what extent	*I really enjoyed the book*
Adverb of frequency	An adverb telling you how often (often subsumed into the adverb of time category)	*He usually goes home at 6*
Adverb of manner	An adverb telling you the way something happens	*It quickly became dark*
Adverb of place	An adverb telling you where an action or state exists	*I came inside*
Adverb of time	An adverb telling you when something happens	*She left then*
Adverb phrase	A group of words doing the job of an adverb	*They walked home slowly and sadly*
Adverbial	Any word or phrase which modifies a verb phrase	*He went into town* *Honestly, I don't know*
Agent	In passive clauses, the causer or doer of the action	*The window was broken by them*
Anaphoric	Referring back	*John liked it but he couldn't afford it*
Antecedent	The noun phrase to which a later pronoun refers	*The yellow car was beautiful so I bought it*

Anticipatory it	The word *it* used to fill the subject slot when the real subject occurs later	*It is difficult to speak French well*
Apposition	Two words or phrases having the same reference	*My brother, the butcher*
Article	A class of determiners (q.v.) which modify noun phrases for number or reference	*She bought a house* *They have an idea* *I am the boss here*
Aspect	Descriptive of how an event or action is perceived relative to time, e.g., progressively, continuously, habitually or repeatedly	*She has arrived* (perfect aspect) *They left* (simple aspect) *She was cycling* (progressive aspect)
Attributive	Describing adjectives coming before nouns or directly after nouns	*The black horse* *The president elect*
Auxiliary verb	A verb which has no meaning alone but works with main verbs to express speaker perception or aspect (q.v.). There are two types: primary auxiliary verbs which form tenses and aspects and modal auxiliary verbs (q.v.)	*I have done the work* *I must go home now*
Base form	The form of the verb from which other inflected forms are derived	The verb *speak* is intransitive
Case	The way to describe what a noun phrase is doing in a sentence in terms of its relationship to other parts of the phrase	*They saw me* (subject or nominative case) *They saw me* (object or accusative case) *That's my car* (possessive or genitive case)
Cataphoric	Referring forwards	*When he got to it, the shop was closed*
Classifier or class adjective	A type of adjective which cannot be modified with, e.g., *very* and cannot have superlative or comparative forms and which tells us what type of thing the noun is	*A sports car* *A school book*
Clause	Traditionally, a verb plus its predicate. Alternatively, a group of words containing a finite verb form	*He went because I asked him to*
Cleft	A clause which has been divided into two parts, assigning a verb to each noun phrase	*What I liked most were the dancers*
Collective noun	A noun which refers to a group of things or people	*The army* *A group*
Comparative	The form which is used to show a greater or lesser degree of a quality	*A bigger house* *A more beautiful cat*

Complement	A phrase which completes the meaning of a verb or other element	The house _in the corner_ (prepositional phrase complement) He is _the boss_ (noun complement of a copular verb)
Complex sentence	A sentence which has at least one main and one subordinate clause	_I came so I could help_
Compound sentence	A sentence which has two equal clauses	_I came and I talked to her_
Compound-complex sentence	A sentence which has at least one main and one subordinate clause and one equal clause	_I came and I talked to her although she was very angry_
Concessive	A phrase or clause which refers to a circumstance which should make the main action impossible but does not	_She went despite the rain_ _They left although the concert was not finished_
Concord	Agreement between subject and verb form	_The jury is out_
Conditional	A clause whose truth is contingent on the truth of another	_Give me the money and I'll buy it for you_ _Come if you can_
Conjunction	A word to join two ideas (clauses, verbs, nouns etc.)	_She went home because she felt ill_ _We ate bread and butter_
Content word	A word which has meaning when standing alone (compare function word)	_house, bring, pretty, usually, French_
Continuous	An aspect of a verb tense to describe something on-going	_She thinks I love her_ _They are working in Italy_
Coordinating conjunction	A word which joins two equal and potentially independent clauses, phrases or nouns	_They were happy but I was sad_ _We had bread and butter_
Copular verb	A verb which joins two nouns together, a noun and an adjective or a noun and a prepositional phrase	_She became a teacher_ _They grew tall_ _She was in the garden_
Correlating conjunction	A conjunction in two parts to join equal ideas	_She was not only angry but also sad_
Count noun	A noun which can have a plural and take a plural verb	_The cats are in the house_
Count pronoun	A pronoun which stands for a count noun	_Do you have any?_ _I don't have many._
Declarative	The mood of the verb which refers to a positive assertion	_I want the money_ _Do you like the music?_
Demonstrative	A class of determiner telling us what noun we are talking about	_This house_ _That garden_ _Those cars_ _These people_

Demonstrative pronoun	A pronoun which stand for a demonstrative plus its noun	*This is my wife* *Those are his friends*
Dependent clause	A subordinate clause	*She had enough money although she wasn't rich*
Determiner	A word which comes before a noun to say what we know about it	*Many people* *The car* *My house* *Those children*
Diacritic	In many languages, these are small marks or accents on letters which may or may not affect pronunciation	*café* *während*
Direct object	The first object of a verb	*He spent the money*
Direct speech	The actual words spoken	*He said, "Hello, Mary."*
Disjunct	An adverbial indicating the speaker's (angle) attitude or evaluation	*Unfortunately, he lost all his money* *Economically, the country is doing fine*
Distributive	A class of determiner which describes how something is apportioned	*They gave chocolate to all the children*
Ditransitive	Describing a verb which can take more than one object	*He gave her the book*
Downtoner	An adverbial which lessens the effect of an adjective	*She is slightly sad*
Dummy subject (empty subject)	The words *it* or *there* used to make a subject which carries no reference	*It's raining* *There's a house on the hill*
Durative	An aspect expressing a continuous state or action	*The professor is writing a book but is on holiday now*
Dynamic	Describing: Verb use Adjective use Type of passive clause	 *Be quiet, I'm thinking* *He's being stupid* *The window got broken*
Ellipsis (n.) / elide (v.) / elision (n.)	Describing the omission of an item	*He came and talked to me* (eliding the pronoun) *I want the French cheese, not the Greek* (eliding the object)
Exclamation	A sentence expressing anger or surprise etc.	*How wonderful!*
Finite form	A verb or a clause marked (even by zero) for tense, number or gender	*She drank the tea* *They play tennis*
Fronting	Moving an item to the initial position in a clause	*Under no circumstances can you leave early*
Function word	Words which have no meaning when alone but make the grammar work	*prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, determiners etc.*

Gender	A grammatical term for the class of a noun: usually feminine, masculine or neuter but there are others	*The gender of house in French is feminine (la maison), in Spanish the word for garden is masculine (el jardín) and in German the word for house is neuter (das Haus)*
Genitive	The possessive case	*That's <u>my</u> pen*
Gerund	A noun formed from a verb with the suffix *-ing*	*I gave up <u>smoking</u>*
Gradable	Describing adjectives which can have *very* in front of them or make a comparative	*A very <u>nice</u> house* *The <u>highest</u> mark*
Gradience	Describing words (especially function words) appearing in more than one word class	*He doesn't much like cheese (adverb)* *How much money do you need? (determiner)*
Grammar word	See Function word	
Habitual	An aspect of a verb describing what we usually do	*I <u>used to go</u> to the cinema a lot* *I <u>play</u> tennis on Sundays*
Idiom	A lexical chunk used as a single concept which can variably be understood by understanding its constituent lexemes and is variably fixed	*It's <u>turned up its toes</u> (died / become useless)*
Imperative	The form of the verb used to tell someone what to do or make offers	*<u>Go</u> home* *<u>Don't tell</u> her* *<u>Have</u> some cake*
Impersonal pronoun	A pronoun without an identifiable personal referent	*<u>No-one</u> is home*
Indefinite pronoun	A pronoun which does not stand for a particular thing or person	*<u>Somebody</u> is at home* *Can <u>anyone</u> help me?*
Indicative	Denoting a mood of a verb expressing a statement of a fact	*She <u>felt</u> tired*
Indirect object	The second object of a ditransitive verb (dative case)	*He gave <u>me</u> the money*
Indirect speech	A clause is which the words said are reported not *verbatim*	*He <u>greeted Mary</u>*
Infinitive	A non-finite verb form often preceded by *to*	*I came to <u>help</u>* *We should <u>go</u>*
Inflection	A change to a word to denote person, tense or number	*She speak<u>s</u> well* *Three apple<u>s</u>*
Instrumental	Describing the means	*He hit it <u>with a hammer</u>* *They came <u>by bus</u>*
Intensifier	An adverbial which increases the meaning of an adjective	*That's <u>really</u> interesting* *She's <u>very</u> tired*

Interjection	A word class signifying emotional state	*Wow!* *Really!* *Oh.*
Interrogative	A question form	*Do you know her?*
Interrogative pronoun	A pronoun which makes a question form	*Who came?*
Intransitive	Describing a verb which cannot have an object	*She stood alone.*
Inversion	The reversal of subject and auxiliary following certain adverbials (also applied to the formation of a question form)	*Never have I seen such stupidity* *Can you come?* *Scarcely do I work that hard*
Iterative	An aspect of a verb describing repeated actions	*They have been ringing the bells* *They keep asking questions*
Lexical verb (aka content verb)	A verb that is not an auxiliary but has meaning standing alone	*She wept*
Lexical word	A word which carries significance rather than performing a grammatical function	*She went to the post office*
Linking verb	See copular verb	
Locative	The case or grammatical form which refers to place	*The house is on the corner*
Marked (opp. unmarked)	Distinguished in some way, e.g., for person, number or tense	*Twenty people* *She speaks* *They shouted*
Mass noun	A noun which can have no plural and takes a singular verb	*The milk is in the fridge*
Mass pronoun	A pronoun which stands for a mass noun	*Do you have any?* *I don't have much.*
Modal auxiliary verb	A verb which tells us how the speaker feels about the main verb	*I should talk to her* *It may rain again*
Modifier / Modification	A word or phrase which changes the meaning of another word or phrase	*Three cats* *That person over there* *The car with the yellow roof*
Mood	The nature of a verb that signifies the speaker's attitude toward the likelihood, existence, or desirability of the verb's action: indicative (q.v.), imperative (q.v.), and subjunctive (q.v.).	*The car broke down* (indicative) *Go away* (imperative) *If I were in your shoes* (subjunctive)
Morpheme	The smallest meaningful unit of language	*He was protest-ing* (4 morphemes) *The house-s were paint-ed* (6 morphemes) *He was at the bank* (5 morphemes)

Multi-word verb	A phrasal Prepositional or Phrasal prepositional verb	*He <u>worked out</u> the solution* *He <u>abstained from</u> voting* *He <u>put up with</u> the noise*
Negative / Negation	A sentence or verb form which refers to something not happening	*It didn't rain* *I <u>deny</u> taking any*
Negative pronoun	A pronoun which stands for a negative noun phrase	*<u>Nothing</u> was broken* *<u>No child</u> went hungry*
Nominal	Appearing in the function of a noun	*I'm surprised by <u>his reluctance</u>* <u>(nominal noun phrase)</u> *I enjoy <u>speaking to large groups</u>* (nominal verb phrase)
Noun	A word for a person, place, thing, feeling or characteristic	*John* *London* *hammer* *happiness* *stupidity*
Noun phrase	A group of words acting as a noun	*<u>The old man</u> sailed the boat*
Object	The thing the verb acts on (accusative case)	*The old man sailed <u>the boat</u>*
Omission	See ellipsis	
Operator	An auxiliary that performs a grammatical operation	*<u>Have</u> you seen John* *<u>Do</u> you need any help*
Participle	A non-finite verb form ending in *-ed* or *-ing* (or irregular in the case of past participles only) making up a verb acting as an adjective or in the perfect or progressive aspect	*The <u>interested</u> parties* *She has <u>finished</u> her book* *They are <u>painting</u> the house again* *The <u>broken</u> door*
Particle	Usually, a preposition or adverb in a multi-word verb	*He got <u>over</u> the illness* *I objected <u>to</u> his idea*
Passive	A clause in which the subject undergoes the action	*They <u>were arrested</u>*
Past participle	See participle	
Patient	The receiver of the action of a verb in the passive	*<u>The postman</u> was bitten by the dog*
Perfect	An aspect of the verb describing its relationship to another time	*He <u>has arrived</u> (describing the relationship to the present)* *He <u>had arrived</u> (describing the relationship to the past)*
Perfect participle	*having* + a past participle	*<u>Having read</u> the book, he gave it to me*
Person	A grammatical category which indicates who something is about	*I <u>gave</u> it away (zero inflection)* *She <u>gives</u> it to charity (-s inflection)* *I spoke to <u>them</u> (third-person plural pronoun)*
Personal pronoun	A pronoun for a person or persons	*Give it to <u>me</u>*

Phrase	A group of words with one job in a sentence	He went to the shops (prepositional phrase) The three boys left (noun phrase) They carefully opened the box (verb phrase)
Plural	More than one	8 horses
Possessive case	The indicator of ownership, description or origin	My house The government's policy John's letter The people of France
Possessive determiner	A determiner showing possessive case	That is her house
Postpositions	In some languages, the link between the verb and the noun goes after the noun	She went the road across
Predicate	The part of a clause that indicates what the subject does, what is done to the subject, or what is being said about the subject	She went to London He was arrested John is rumoured to be wealthy
Predicative	Describing an adjective which comes after the noun and is linked to it by a copular verb	She was happy They became very tired
Prefix	A morpheme (q.v.) which is affixed to the beginning of a word	discourage
Preposition	A word which links the verb to a noun or adverbial	He walked across the park She arrived at six
Prepositional phrase	A group of words which includes the preposition and its noun complement	over the bridge under the river
Primary auxiliary verb	An auxiliary verb which forms a tense, voice or aspect with a main verb	It was destroyed I got my car cleaned I have been to London
Pro-form	A word which substitutes for a noun, phrase or clause	I picked up the vase and put it on the table She likes the play and so do I
Progressive	The aspect of the verb which shows that something is ongoing	I am writing this sentence
Pronoun	A word which stands for a noun	Give me it
Proper noun	A noun for a person, place or job	The President Mr Smith The Alps
Prospective	The aspect of a verb which relates a time to a future time	I am going to London tomorrow She was going to see me
Quantifier	A determiner which tells us how much of a noun	three horses several people

Question tag	A phrase attached to the end of a positive or negative sentence to make it a question	*You are coming, <u>aren't you</u>?* *You aren't going to eat that, <u>are you</u>?*
Reflexive pronoun	A pronoun used when the subject and object are the same	*He photographed <u>himself</u>* *She poured <u>herself</u> some coffee*
Relative adverb	The adverbs when, where or why used to define a preceding noun	*That's the house <u>where</u> he lived* *That was the moment <u>when</u> I decided*
Relative clause	A clause starting with a relative pronoun (q.v.) which serves to define or identify a preceding noun	*That's the man <u>who spoke to me</u>* (defining relative clause) *The books, <u>which I no longer needed</u>, I gave to charity* (non-defining relative clause)
Relative pronoun	A pronoun used in a complex sentence to refer to the object or the subject	*They have found the car <u>which</u> was stolen* *The man <u>who</u> asked is here today*
Relative tense	Tenses which only make sense in relation to other times	*She <u>has completed</u> the work (so now it is finished)* *She <u>will have spoken</u> to him*
Reported speech	See indirect speech	
Reporting verb	Verbs used to form indirect speech	*He <u>complained</u> about the food* *She <u>said</u> she would come later*
Semi-modal verb	A verb which has a modal function but may be alternatively formed as a lexical verb	*She <u>didn't dare to / dared not</u> ask*
Simple sentence	A sentence which only has one subject, one verb and sometimes one object	*She cried* *She opened the book*
Singular	One. Mass nouns and one only of count nouns are singular	*A horse came across the road* *The milk is in the fridge*
Stative	Describing the state of: Adjectives Verbs Passive constructions	 *He is <u>old</u>* *He <u>imagines</u> it's true* *The door <u>is broken</u>*
Structure words	See function words	
Style	The level of formality	*Gimme a light* (informal) *Would you please follow me?* (formal)
Subject	The doer of a verb (nominative case)	<u>*The man*</u> *broke the glass.*
Subjunctive	The mood of a verb indicating that the statement is contrary to fact	*I wish he <u>were</u> more polite*
Subordinating conjunction / Subordination	A conjunction which shows that one event or action depends on another event or action	*Tell me <u>if you see him</u>* *I must talk to him <u>when</u> I see him*

Substitution	Replacing an item with another	*He liked the car so he bought it* (pronoun substitution) *He told me to go and I did so* (verbal substitution)
Suffix	A morpheme (q.v.) added to the end of a word	*resentment*
Superlative	The form of an adjective or adverb which means the most or least	*The tallest boy in the class* *The most expensively dressed man*
Tag question	See question tag	
Temporal	Referring to time	*He left as soon as I arrived* (temporal subordinate clause)
Tense	The form of the verb marked for time or aspect	*He walked*
Transferred negation	Negating the projecting verb rather than its complement	*I don't think he will come* (compare: *I think he won't come*)
Transitive	Describing a verb which must (or can) take one or more objects	*She smokes* (intransitive) *She smoked a cigarette* (transitive)
Uncountable	See mass noun	
Ungradable	Describing an adjective which cannot be made greater or less with *very*	*A wonderful meal* *A horrible accident*
Universal pronoun	A member of the *every-* and *all* series of pronouns	*Everyone was happy* *All were on time*
Unmarked	See marked	
Verb	The action, state or event in a sentence	*She came late* *It rained* *She was happy*
Verb phrase	A group of words acting as a verb	*She slowly drove the car home*
Voice	Indicative of the relationship between verbs and noun phrases	*He spent the money* (active) *The money was spent* (passive)
Wh- word	The words *what, who(m), when, where, why, how* and *which*	*Where is your car?* *Who told you?*
Word order (canonical)	The usual way a language puts words into a sentence. Languages are often different in terms of word order	*She broke the pen* (subject-verb-object) *The open book* (adjective-noun) *Two lions* (determiner-noun)
Zero	An invisible grammatical form	*They arrive* (zero verb inflection) *I eat potatoes* (zero article)