A phrase is a group of words which does not contain a main verb: Eg.
- over the road; after the concert; a fine day; to the park; running for the bus

Phrases do not have main verbs but they sometimes have participles, either
- present participles ending in –ing or
- past participles ending in –ed, -en, -t, -k

Participles cannot function as main verbs on their own: they need auxiliary verbs to ‘help them out’. Eg
- talking about poetry = phrase
- They were talking about poetry = sentence
- eaten a meal = phrase
- I have eaten a meal = sentence

Exercise 1

Say whether each of the following is a phrase or a sentence, giving reasons for your answers. Then convert the phrases to sentences.

1. a really useful book
2. fried eggs
3. she put on her running shoes
4. some singing lessons
5. they found Sally’s handbag
6. the good-looking gentleman in the long coat with the fur collar
7. you win
8. now I know the difference between phrases and sentences
Types of Phrases

A phrase is a group of words which together form a structural unit. There are different kinds of phrases and they are named according to the class of the most important word they contain. This is called the headword.

- **Noun Phrases**

  A noun phrase is a group of words in which the most important word is a noun or a pronoun. A noun phrase may consist of one word:

  \[ \text{Eg. Fire! Run!} \]

  Or several words:

  \[ \text{Eg. the big black dog at the gate} \]

  ‘Dog’ is the most important word here and is therefore the headword. ‘The big black’ are words which tell us more about the dog and as they come before the headword they are said to **premodify** the noun. ‘At the gate’ are words which tell us more about the dog (where it is) and as they come after the headword they are said to **postmodify** the noun.

  So:

  - **Noun Phrase** = the big black dog at the gate
  - **Headword** = dog
  - **Premodifier** = the big black
  - **Postmodifier** = at the gate

**Exercise 2**

- Identify the headwords, premodifiers and postmodifiers in the following noun phrases:

  1. the mean-looking bouncer at the nightclub door
  2. a slinky black dress in the shop window
  3. the purple grapes on the drooping vines
Noun Phrases in Apposition

We sometimes find two or more noun phrases acting together as a single element of clause structure. There are two ways in which this can be done:

- by co-ordination, where there is no identity of meaning between the noun phrases
  
  eg. I saw an elephant and a tiger.

- by apposition, where the two noun phrases have the same meaning
  
  eg. Mr Smith, my neighbour, called to see me.

Other examples of noun phrases in apposition are:

- one noun phrase provides a rewording of the other:
  
  eg. he’s a philologist, that is, a linguist.

- one noun phrase expresses an attribute of the other:
  
  eg. I saw the waiter, a rather seedy type.

- one noun phrase includes the other:
  
  eg. I like big films, for example ‘Gandhi’.

Exercise 3

Underline the noun phrases in apposition:

1. I asked my bank manager, Mrs Jones, for a loan.

2. The Personnel Manager, an exceptionally pleasant woman, interviewed the job applicant.

3. He’s a philatelist – a stamp-collector.
PHRASES

- **Prepositional Phrases**

  A prepositional phrase is one in which a preposition is the headword. Prepositional phrases often contain noun phrases:

  *Eg* *at the gate*

  *at* is the preposition but *the gate* is a noun phrase.

**Exercise 4**

- Circle the preposition (which will be the headword) and underline the prepositional phrases.

  1. I’ll meet you in the library.
  2. I’m going to see my aunt at the airport.
  3. On the whole, I’m pleased to see you.
  4. You’ll find a Post Office round the corner.

- **Adjectival and Adverbial Phrases**

  These usually consist of an adjective or adverb preceded by one or more intensifiers.

  *Eg* *Tomorrow will be very much warmer.*

  *Very much* is an intensifier. In this example the headword is the adjective *warmer* and the intensifiers are *very much.*

**Exercise 5**

- Underline the adjectival and adverbial phrases. Say which type each phrase is.

  1. The bathroom was very hot and steamy.
  2. Giant goldfish eat rather quickly.
  3. The monster looked big and green.
  4. He was received rather enthusiastically.