

Four-Level Analysis

Grammar shows us the logic of language. It lets us think about language in four different ways, which we will call four *levels*. Each level is simple in nature, even though it may have many details to explore. The four levels are:

Parts of Speech: There are only eight kinds of words: two main kinds and six others.

Parts of Sentence: Each idea has only two sides: the subject and the predicate.

Phrases: Words can make little groups and act as a unit.

Clauses: We can make one idea per sentence, or we can combine ideas.

We will study each of these four levels in detail, but to begin, even though it will be somewhat mysterious, let us look at a **four-level analysis** to preview what we will learn in the following chapters. The principle of four-level analysis is to separate the four levels of grammar and put each level on its own line. Line one will be for the eight kinds of words, the **parts of speech**. Line two will be for the **parts of sentence**: the subject, simple predicate, direct object, and other parts. Line three will be for **phrases**: little groups of words that act like single words. Line four will be for **clauses**: groups of words that have their own subject and predicate. Four-level analysis looks like this:

	Itsy	bitsy	spider	went	up	the	water	spout.
Parts of Speech	adj.	adj.	n.	v.	prep.	adj.	adj.	n.
Parts of Sentence			subj.	AVP				
Phrases					-----prep. phrase-----			
Clauses	-----one independent clause----- a simple declarative sentence							

Even without yet knowing what these abbreviations mean, we see that these four levels give us a clear but deep view of a sentence—of how we think.

You need grammar. Sometimes someone will say that you do not really need to know grammar in order to be a good academic writer. That sounds comforting, but it is false. You cannot fake academic writing. There are national standards for grammar and punctuation, and both teachers and professors expect them because the principles are true; by following the standards, you write more clearly. If you do not know your grammar, then when you write

academic papers, you are only guessing, and your errors will appear on every page you write. You will be guessing at your sentence structures, guessing at your punctuation, guessing at whether your verb agrees with your subject. It will be a frustrating nightmare. Grammar is the easy solution. There are only four levels of grammar, so it is much easier to learn the four levels than it is to spend years trying to compensate for not knowing grammar.

Once you understand these four levels of our language, you can do things that were impossible before. You can write clear sentences. You can say things in fewer words, which makes ideas stronger. You can avoid junk modifiers that make sentences wordy and boring. You can understand how to make a sentence more beautiful. You can avoid mistakes that cause you to say things you did not mean to say.

If you want to be good at academics and make good grades in challenging high school and college classes, you can use four-level grammar to write excellent papers. You can avoid grammar mistakes, vocabulary problems, and punctuation errors. You can escape the dependence on others for writing and proofreading; you can check your own work and enjoy academic independence.

Another benefit is self-knowledge; grammar teaches us about our minds. Remember, sentences do not appear in nature; sentences emerge from within us, and the shapes of sentences come from the needs of logic that lie deep inside our minds. **Sentences are the mind—in language.** Grammar is a magic lens for self-exploration; it really does teach you how you think.

All of these benefits come directly from understanding the four levels of language.

