What have I learnt so far about sentence structure?
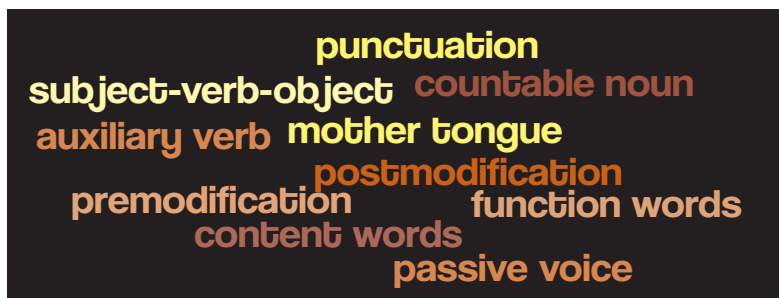
'With sixty staring me in the face, I have developed inflammation of the sentence structure …'

attributed to **James Thurber (1894–1961)**
American writer and cartoonist

A Reflection

The following words and phrases have all been used in the first 25 steps of this book. Think about what they mean.

> punctuation
> subject-verb-object countable noun
> auxiliary verb mother tongue
> postmodification
> premodification function words
> content words
> passive voice

B Contextualization

All of the terms in the table below have been discussed in the first 25 steps. Try to identify at least one example of each in the text below.

> China has the largest population of any country in the world, at around 1.4 billion. The capital city is Beijing, which in 2008 hosted the Olympic Games. Other large cities include Shanghai and Chongqing. They both have a population in excess of 10 million. One of the things which China is most famous for is its Great Wall. It is popularly supposed to be the only man-made object that can be seen from space.

1.	proper noun	China	5.	preposition of time	
2.	verb in the present simple		6.	regular past simple	
3.	article		7.	subject pronoun	
4.	superlative adjective		8.	relative pronoun	

See feedback on the above on page 109.

C Explanation

What has been taught in the first 25 steps about sentence structure?

If you have worked through the first 25 steps of this book, you already know quite a lot about SENTENCE structure (SYNTAX). Since this step comes halfway through the book, its purpose is to highlight some of the key points about sentence structure which have already been covered. If you do not understand some of these points, you might want to go back to the relevant steps and refresh your understanding, or look up the key words in the *Glossary* at the back of the book.

▶**Step 1** raises four key mistakes which have a negative impact on the overall quality of a sentence, namely: using the incorrect form of a word, using an incorrect sentence structure, using incorrect PUNCTUATION and using a poor STYLE.

▶**Step 2** gives an overview of the different word classes in English: NOUN, VERB, ADJECTIVE, ADVERB, PRONOUN, DETERMINER, CONJUNCTION and PREPOSITION. It also looks at the difference between OPEN and CLOSED WORD CLASSES. These groups of words have to be in balance within a sentence.

▶**Step 3** focuses on how small changes in grammar can have a significant impact on a sentence.

▶**Step 4** discusses how your MOTHER TONGUE (first language) can influence your English. This is true both at the word and the sentence level. Whilst there may be similarities to English in the way sentences are constructed in your own language, there are likely to be many differences as well.

▶**Step 5** looks at the difference between formal and informal grammar, and discusses how GENRE may affect the way in which English is written or spoken.

▶**Steps 6, 7 and 8** look at different categories of nouns and pronouns and how they are used. Nouns are the building blocks of a sentence.

▶**Steps 9 and 10** introduce NOUN PHRASES. Noun phrases can help make sentences more complex and detailed. Step 9 looks at PREMODIFICATION (where information in the form of adjectives, participles and other nouns are added before the noun), and Step 10 focuses on POSTMODIFICATION (where additional information appears after the main noun).

▶**Step 11** introduces verbs. Since every sentence must contain at least one verb, understanding how they work is critical.

▶**Step 12** looks at different ways of categorizing verbs. For example, they can be TRANSITIVE or INTRANSITIVE, MAIN VERBS or AUXILIARY VERBS, STATIVE or DYNAMIC, and REGULAR or IRREGULAR.

▶**Steps 13 and 14** examine the 12 verb forms of English, looking in particular at TENSE (when something happens) and ASPECT (how something happens). These steps also discuss the verb forms which are most commonly used in sentences.

▶**Step 15** shows that there is more than one possible **WORD ORDER** in English. Verbs can sometimes be put into the **PASSIVE VOICE** (object-verb-subject) rather than the **ACTIVE VOICE (SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT)**.

▶**Steps 16 and 17** introduce adjectives and adverbs, two major word classes which have an important role to play in sentences. The former adds information to nouns, while the latter provides more information about other words, usually verbs.

▶**Step 18** focuses on **COMPARATIVE** and **SUPERLATIVE** forms of adjectives and adverbs.

▶**Step 19** discusses where adjectives and adverbs should be positioned in a sentence. Word order is critically important in sentence construction.

▶**Step 20** looks at more complex forms of adjectives, including **ADJECTIVE PHRASES**.

▶**Step 21** focuses on conjunctions and other **LINKING WORDS**, looking at the ways in which **CLAUSES** and sentences can be linked.

▶**Step 22** gives an overview of how prepositions are used. Prepositions have a very important function in the sentence: they show the relationship between content words such as nouns and verbs. Using prepositions incorrectly can make it very difficult to understand sentences.

▶**Step 23** focuses on determiners, a word class which provides key information about nouns.

▶**Steps 24 and 25** look in more detail at **ARTICLES**, a very commonly used type of determiner.

Feedback on Part B

The relevant words for each category are marked in the passage with the numbers from the table (i.e., 1 = proper noun, 2 = verb in the present simple, etc.).

China[1] has[2] the[3] largest[4] population of any country in the[3] world, at around 1.4 billion. The[3] capital city is[2] Beijing[1], which[8] in[5] 2008 hosted[6] the[3] Olympic Games[1]. Other large cities include[2] Shanghai[1] and Chongqing[1]. They[7] both have[2] a[3] population in excess of 10 million. One of the[3] things which[8] China[1] is[2] most famous[4] for is[2] its Great Wall[1]. It[7] is popularly supposed to be the[3] only man-made object that[8] can be seen from space.

Summary
1. You already know more about English sentences than you probably think you do.
2. To be able to write a good sentence, you need to have a good understanding of the different word classes, and how they work together.
3. The normal order of words in English is subject-verb-object.

UNIT F Sentence structure

Step 26

D Activation

1. **Complete and comprehend.**

   Answer the following questions. If you are unsure, check the relevant step to find the answer.

   a. Is the normal word order of English the same as in your mother tongue? If not, what problems might this create?
   b. What is the usual position for adjectives?
   c. Where in a sentence do adverbs normally go?
   d. What do relative pronouns do?

2. **Check your understanding.**

   Fill in the table about the word classes of English with the correct information.

Word class	Examples	Function
Noun		*Refers to people, places or things*
Verb		
Adjective		
Adverb		
Pronoun		
Preposition		
Conjunction		
Determiner		

3. **Create your own.**

   Reorder the jumbled words to make sentences. Sometimes it may be possible to reorder the words in more than one correct way.

a. brown jumped dog a over quick the fox lazy	*The quick brown fox jumped over a lazy dog.*
b. I to the yesterday shops went	
c. met the they at museum the café next to	
d. was Terry flatmate returned working his when	
e. black ball got its off ran the dog and	

What are phrases?

> 'I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram.'
>
> **Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)**
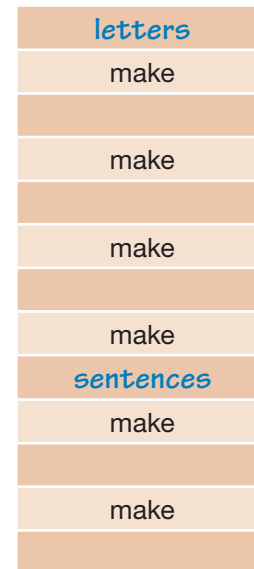> *Irish playwright and poet*

A Reflection

Place the words in the box in the correct place in the diagram on the right.

| letters   whole texts   words   phrases   clauses |
| paragraphs   sentences |

Look up the following words in a dictionary, and explain in your own words what they mean.

phrase _____

_____

_____

clause _____

_____

_____

letters
make
make
make
make
sentences
make
make

B Contextualization

There are different types of phrases in English. A noun phrase, for example, is a phrase in which the main word is a noun, e.g., *my friend Sam*.

Read the passage. Write each highlighted phrase in the appropriate column.

My friend Sam went to the café because he was hungry. As he was waiting for his food, he saw a well-known celebrity in the corner. The food arrived quite quickly, but Sam kept looking at the woman. Eventually, the celebrity's friend arrived. He had arrived really late and she was very clearly annoyed.

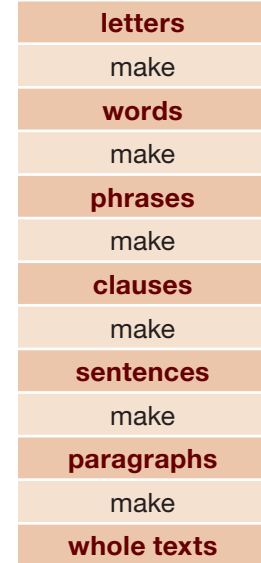| Noun phrase	Verb phrase	Prepositional phrase	Adjective phrase	Adverb phrase
My friend Sam				

c Explanation

What is a phrase?

The diagram on the right shows the hierarchy of written English – the different components and the relationships they have with each other. To make your written English clear, it is important to know how these components fit together. This step focuses on **PHRASES**, while ▶Step 28 looks at **CLAUSES** and ▶Steps 29 and 30 look at whole **SENTENCES**.

Four key facts about phrases are as follows.
1. **A phrase is a group of words which works as a single unit.** Phrases can be thought of as the 'building blocks' of a sentence.
2. **Unlike a clause, you cannot have a phrase by itself in a piece of writing.** A phrase must be combined with another phrase to make sense. Phrases are only ever used by themselves in informal speaking or very informal pieces of writing, where different conventions may apply.
3. **A phrase consists of two parts: the HEAD WORD(S) and the dependent words.** The head word is the main idea, whereas the job of the dependent words is to add more information.
4. **The number of words in a phrase can vary hugely.** For example, a noun phrase can be just one word (e.g., *I, Angela*), or it can be many words (e.g., *the large green tree which is in the corner of the field*).

letters
make
words
make
phrases
make
clauses
make
sentences
make
paragraphs
make
whole texts

Top tip

Thinking about written English as a series of phrases (rather than isolated words) can help your reading become quicker and more successful, and your writing clearer and more accurate.

What is a noun phrase?

NOUN PHRASES were looked at in detail in ▶Steps 9 and 10. Refer back to these steps if necessary.

What is a verb phrase?

The head word in a **VERB PHRASE** is a **MAIN VERB**. As in a noun phrase, information may come before or after the main verb in order to create the whole verb phrase. Consider the main verb *eat,* for example. Additional words which may precede it include:

■ **AUXILIARY VERBS** (including **MODAL VERBS**)**:** *I **did** eat it. I **have** eaten some. I **am** eating it. I **may** eat some. I **will** eat some.*

■ **NEGATIVE WORDS:** *I **never** eat it.*

■ **ADVERBS:** *I **already** ate dinner. I **willingly** ate it.*

The two most common structures which follow the main verb are as follows.

■ **OBJECTS:** When the main verb is **TRANSITIVE**, a **DIRECT OBJECT** is required: *I never eat **bread**.* Depending on the verb used, and the context, an **INDIRECT OBJECT** may also be needed: *I gave **her** my **bread*** – here, *bread* is the direct object and *her* is the indirect object.
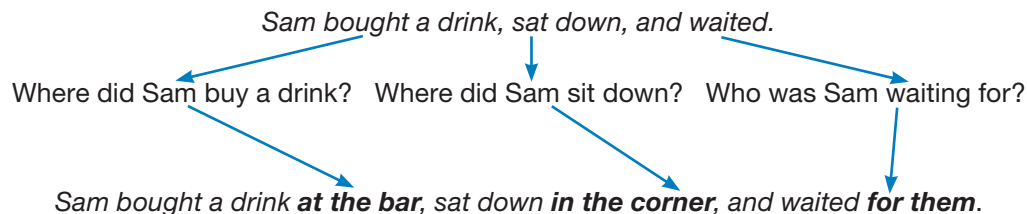
■ **COMPLEMENTS:** Some verbs, such as *seem*, *be*, *feel* and *appear* cannot take a direct object, but do require other information. There are many different types of **COMPLEMENT** which can follow these verbs, the simplest of which is an adjective such as *happy*.

What is a prepositional phrase?

Phrases in which a **PREPOSITION** (▶Step 22) is the main word are very useful. They can provide more information about the nouns and verbs in a sentence. Three key facts about **PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES** (PPs) are as follows.

1. When it adds information to nouns, the PP acts like an adjective. For example, in *Who is that person **in the car**?* the PP gives information about the person.
2. When it adds information to verbs, the PP acts like an adverb. For example, in *Could you tell me **in the morning**?* the PP says how and when the telling should take place.
3. PPs never contain the subject of the sentence.

PPs can turn **SIMPLE** or **COMPOUND SENTENCES** into **COMPLEX SENTENCES**. The best way to add PPs is to write the basic sentence, and then ask a question about each part. For example:

Sam bought a drink, sat down, and waited.

Where did Sam buy a drink?   Where did Sam sit down?   Who was Sam waiting for?

*Sam bought a drink **at the bar,** sat down **in the corner,** and waited **for them**.*

What is an adjective phrase?

ADJECTIVE PHRASES have already been looked at in detail in ▶Step 20, where the various grammatical constructions which can be used to make adjective phrases are outlined in detail. These include adverb + adjective (*very good*), adjective + **PRESENT PARTICIPLE** (*good-looking*), adverb + **PAST PARTICIPLE** (*well-known*) and adjective + noun (*last-minute*).

What is an adverb phrase?

An **ADVERB PHRASE** is an adverb composed of two or more words. Like an adverb (▶Step 17), the grammatical job of an adverb phrase is to modify a verb, adjective or another adverb. Very often a **QUALIFIER** (a word, often an adverb, which increases or decreases the meaning of the main adverb) is combined with an adverb to make an adverb phrase.

■ Qualifiers which 'decrease': *He comes to visit **only** occasionally. The food arrived **quite** quickly. She was **somewhat** happier.*

■ Qualifiers which 'increase': *She was **very** clearly annoyed. He had arrived **really** late.*

An adverb phrase can appear at the beginning, middle or end of a sentence.

Summary
1. There are five main types of phrase: noun, verb, prepositional, adjective and adverb.
2. Phrases cannot exist by themselves in writing, although they may in informal contexts.
3. Phrases are composed of a head word and dependent words.

UNIT F Sentence structure

Step
27

113

D Activation

1. **Complete and comprehend.**

    Write out in detail the grammatical construction of each of these phrases from Part B.

Phrase	Phrase type	Construction
a. my friend Sam	noun phrase	possessive adjective + countable noun + proper noun
b. he was waiting	verb phrase	
c. for his food	prepositional phrase	
d. well-known	adjective phrase	
e. quite quickly	adverb phrase	

2. **Check your understanding.**

    Divide the following sentences into their constituent phrases.

    a. The old dog was asleep in front of the fire.

    [The old dog] [was asleep] [in front of the fire].

    b. My parents have always supported me and my brother.

    _____

    c. Your birthday present is going to be a holiday in Los Angeles.

    _____

    d. I used to work in a factory next to a river.

    _____

3. **Create your own.**

    Write phrases with the same structure as in Exercise 1.

    a. my friend Sam: your dad Dave, her boss Misha, his girlfriend Nigella

    b. he was waiting: _____

    c. for his food: _____

    d. well-known: _____

    e. quite quickly: _____