

# Basic English Grammar Module

## Unit 1A: Grammatical Units

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### Objectives of the Basic English Grammar module

As a student at any level of University study, when you write your assignments or your thesis, your writing needs to be grammatically well-structured and accurate in order to be clear. If you are unable to write sentences that are appropriately structured and clear in meaning, the reader may have difficulty understanding the meanings that you want to convey. Here are some typical and frequent comments made by markers or supervisors on students' written work. Such comments may also appear on marking sheets which use assessment criteria focussing on your grammar.

- *Be careful of your written expression.*
- *At times it is difficult to follow what you are saying.*
- *You must be clearer when making statements.*
- *Sentence structure and expression poor.*
- *This is not a sentence.*
- *At times your sentences do not make sense.*

In this module we are concerned with helping you to develop a knowledge of those aspects of the grammar of English that will help you deal with the types of grammatical errors that are frequently made in writing.

### Who is this module for?

All students at university who need to improve their knowledge of English grammar in order to write more clearly and accurately.

### What does this module cover?

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Unit 1A	Grammatical Units: the structure and constituents of the clause/sentence
Unit 1B	The Noun Group: the structure and constituents of the noun group
Unit 2A	The Verb Group: Finites and non-Finites
Unit 2B	The Verb Group: Tenses
Unit 3A	Logical Relationships between Clauses
Unit 3B	Interdependency Relationships between Clauses
Unit 4	Grammar and Punctuation

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## References

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## Objectives of Unit 1A

In this first unit you will learn about:

- the structure of the clause/sentence and how to identify its different parts
- some of the typical problems that students have with sentence-level grammar

Subsequent units will explore these different parts of the sentence in more detail. If you want to study how paragraphs operate, you should study a different ILP module, namely, Cohesive Writing.

### Exercises

These are marked with the icon ★ and you should try to complete them before checking your work in the **Answer Key**, marked ★★.

### Answer Key to all Exercises

This can be found at the end of the Unit.

## 1.0 What is grammar?

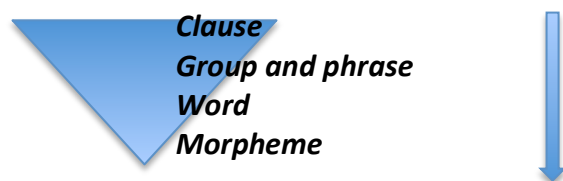
### *Constituency and Rank*

The main parts of the grammar we are concerned with in this module are the parts or constituents of the sentence: **clauses, phrases, groups, words** and **morphemes**. **Constituency** is the compositional structure of language. It is a form of order in language, where higher units are made up of smaller ones. For example, a clause is made up of smaller units like phrases and groups, which are in turn made up of words. The hierarchy of units is called a **rank scale** and each step in the hierarchy is one **rank** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:9).

The lexicogrammatical ranks are:

- **clause**
- **phrase / group** – constituents of a clause
- **word** – constituents of a phrase or group
- **morpheme** – constituents of a word.

They are ordered from highest to lowest with clause as the highest rank to morpheme as the lowest rank, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Diagram of rank scale**

As Figure 1 shows, each rank is a part of the rank above it. Thus, a morpheme is part of a word, a word is part of a group or phrase, and a group or phrase is part of a clause.

Although the clause is the highest grammatical rank, it may combine with a second or more clauses to form a **clause-complex**. Note that a sentence and a clause-complex are not necessarily the same since a sentence may consist of one clause only, or several clauses. The following sentence, for instance, contains two clauses:

**Globalisation has brought enormous opportunities for investment but it has exposed serious risks.**

This clause complex is made up of two clauses. The **clause boundary** is marked with two upright lines like this ||.

**Globalisation has brought enormous opportunities for investment || but it has exposed serious risks.**

The clause complex is broken into two clauses joined by the conjunction ‘but’.

<b>Clause 1</b>		<b>Clause 2</b>
<b>Globalisation has brought enormous opportunities for investment</b>	but	<b>it has exposed serious risks.</b>

Each clause consists of groups and phrases, which in turn consist of words:

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Clause 1</b>							
Clause	Globalisation has brought enormous opportunities for investment							
Group	Nominal group		Verb group		Nominal group			
Group/Phrase	Nominal group		Verb group		Nominal group		Prepositional phrase	
Word	Noun	Verb	Verb	Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Noun	

Each word consists of one or more morphemes. The word “globalisation” is derived from a base word and three morphemes.

<b>globe</b>	<b>glob-al</b>	<b>glob-al-ise</b>	<b>glob-al-is-ation</b>
base word	base word + morpheme	base word + morpheme+ morpheme	base word + morpheme+ morpheme+ morpheme

Much of the complexity in academic writing is built up through adding morphemes to words (word morphology).

Thus the basic unit of meaning is the clause. The clause has parts and sub-parts which consist of groups, words and morphemes. Clauses can combine to form clause complexes.

As we have seen, one unit can be enclosed within another, for example, a phrase can be part of a group, or a group can be part of a phrase. In the example above, the phrase “for investment” is part of the larger nominal group “enormous opportunities for investment”.

***Why is it important to know about constituency and rank scale?***

Understanding rank scale and constituency is a way into the grammar to explore how language is organised. This understanding will help you identify problems in your writing and where they occur, at the level of the clause or below it in the lower ranks. One of the most common problems in student writing involves incorrectly formed

clauses, so an understanding of rank scale and constituency is important for accurate clause construction. Next, we will look at each rank in more detail.

## 1.1 Clause

How do we recognise clauses?

- A clause usually expresses a **single idea**, ie. it is a group of words which seem to “go together”.
- A clause contains a **main (content) VERB**.

eg. *This relatively inert gas **HAS** many applications*

It is quite easy to identify clauses in a sentence if the sentence contains only one clause: the capital letter at the beginning of the sentence signals the beginning of the clause and the full stop at the end of the sentence indicates the end of the clause.

It is a little more difficult identifying clauses in the “clause-complex” kind of sentence. There are three main clues where one clause ends and another begins:

- **Conjunctions**  
eg. *and, when, if*, etc. often appear at the beginning of a clause.
- **Relative pronouns**  
eg. *which, that, who, where*, also may appear at the beginning of a clause.
- **Punctuation**  
eg. commas (“,”), colons (“:”) and semi-colons (“;”), may signal a clause boundary.

eg. *Here it **BECOMES** photodissociated  
**and** **BECOMES** reactive,  
**which** **IS** one of its most distinguishing characteristics.*

Together, these features (a main verb, conjunctions, relative pronouns, and punctuation) help us distinguish clauses in the sentence. Two other examples are shown below:

**So that** they **COULD** **REDUCE** costs  
**and** **INCREASE** productivity,  
chemists **INVENTED** chlorofluorocarbons. (3 clauses)

**Because** it **IS** abundant  
**and** **LASTS** for a long time,  
it usually **OUTLIVES** its purpose  
**and** **MIXES** with the atmosphere  
**when** **RELEASED** from its containers. (5 clauses)

Now you will have some practice in identifying clauses.

## ★ Exercise 1

Read the following sentences and say how many clauses they contain. Follow the procedure below.

- First, underline the main verb in each clause of the sentence.
- Then, circle any conjunctions and/or punctuation which suggest clause boundaries.
- Finally, use the symbol || to mark the clause boundaries (INCLUDE THE CONJUNCTION IN THE SECOND OR THIRD CLAUSE).

1. *Children are not born with standards for evaluating behaviour, social skills or moral values.*
2. *As I have suggested, the non-addicted parent is involved in a co-dependent relationship with the addicted child.*
3. *Over this period, the population in Waverley decreased by 2.8%, while the population in the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area increased by 5%.*
4. *If we conceptualise caring as a finite set of caring behaviours, then caring can be examined in the traditional scientific way, even though this approach may not be acceptable in some circles.*
5. *This space constraint has led to a number of problems and these do not seem capable of being resolved although everyone is willing to be involved.*

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Do all commas indicate a clause boundary?
- Do all conjunctions indicate a clause boundary?

#### 1.1.1 Typical problems with forming clauses

##### *Sentences of one clause:*

1. Incomplete sentence (the verb is missing)

*An assessment of the association between the disease outcomes and the characteristics of differing socio-economic groups.*

**Corrected version:** *An assessment of the association between the disease outcomes and the characteristics of differing socio-economic groups is needed.*

2. Incomplete sentence (subject is missing)

*Naturally, delayed in finding a first job.*

**Corrected version:** *Naturally, he was delayed in finding a first job.*

**Sentences of more than one clause:**

3. There is confusion between different types of clauses. Some clauses cannot stand independently as sentences. They need to be linked to other clauses in order to make their meaning complete, e.g.

*They have little disposable income. Because they are unemployed.*

**Corrected version:** *They have little disposable income because they are unemployed.*

Because they are unemployed is what is called a “subordinate” or “dependent” clause. The use of the conjunction “because” signals that another clause is needed to complete the argument.

- If you are having difficulty in identifying subjects and verbs and sentences of one clause you should work on Unit 2 “**The Verb Group**” in the Basic English Grammar Module.
- If you are having difficulty in constructing sentences of more than one clause you should work on Unit 3 “**Relationships Between Clauses**” in the Basic English Grammar Module

The next rank down from clauses includes both phrases and groups. A phrase has been referred to as a “shrunk clause” whereas a group can be thought of as a “bloated word”. Both phrases and groups can be part of the clause structure, e.g. *for a long time, their purpose*. We will look at these two units separately, starting with phrases.

## 1.2 Phrase

There are several different kinds of phrases, e.g. prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases, and so on. The kind of phrase we will be looking at here is the **prepositional phrase**.

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, such as *for, with, by, to, at, in*, etc, followed by a noun group, e.g.

*Because chlorofluorocarbons last **for a long time**, they usually outlive their purpose.*

<i>for</i>	<i>a long time</i>
<b>preposition</b>	<b>noun (or noun) group</b>

Prepositional phrases modify either a verb or noun.

When they **modify a verb** they tell us about the **circumstances** surrounding the



action or happening suggested by the verb. These “circumstantial” prepositional phrases answer questions such as *when?* (time), *where?* (place), *how?* (manner), *why?* (reason), and so on.

When they **modify a noun** they give us more information about that noun as explained below.

## ★ Exercise 2

- Underline the prepositional phrases in the following sentences.

Brazil country report <sup>1</sup>.

1. The interest rate in Brazil fell from 25% in 2003 to 11.25% in 2006.
2. Disposable annual incomes rose by 3.1% between 2002 and 2006.
3. Brazilian consumers have begun to spend more money on luxury items than on essential goods.
4. Throughout this decade, consumption has been steadily growing.
5. Consumer credit card access has led to higher spending in the retail sector.
6. The government is optimistic about Brazil’s economic future.

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from student report with permission.

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

### Phrase-Complex

Just as clauses may group together into clause-complexes, phrases also may group together into “phrase-complexes”, i.e. phrases which “go together” or are dependent on one another in some way, e.g. the prepositional phrase complex in the following clause answers the question “How did he move?”

*He moved **in silence and without hesitation.***

#### 1.2.1 Typical problems in using prepositional phrases

Inappropriate preposition:

*Health inequalities tended to flourish towards the Aboriginal population.*

**Corrected version:**

*Health inequalities tended to flourish within the Aboriginal population.*

The use of the preposition “towards” indicates direction whereas what is needed is a preposition indicating place.

**1.3 Group**

There are a number of different types of groups in English, as shown below.

Type of Group	Examples
Noun	<i>the classes, those biology classes, those two biology classes we attended last week</i>
Verb	<i>took, had taken, would have taken</i>
Adverb	<i>quickly, more quickly, much more quickly</i>
Conjunction	<i>even if, as soon as, almost as soon as</i>
Preposition	<i>right behind, immediately in front of</i>

So what is a group? A group is basically an extension of a word: **a group of words** with a particular function in the clause. A group consists of a **Head** word plus any words which add information to the Head, i.e. **Modifiers**. The Head usually presents the most crucial information in the group.

	Modifiers		Head
Noun	<i>those</i>	<i>biology</i>	<i>classes</i>
Verb	<i>would</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>taken</i>

In this Basic English Grammar module we will concentrate on two of these groups, **the noun group** and **the verb group**, since these are the most critical to academic writing style.

**1.3.1 Noun Group**

A noun group is a group of words whose **Head word is a noun**. Any additional information related to that noun is expressed in the form of **Modifiers**. These may come either before the Head — **Pre-Modifiers** — or after the Head — **Post-Modifiers**.

Pre-Modifiers		HEAD	Post-Modifiers
		<i>CFCs</i>	
<i>a</i>	<i>long</i>	<i>time</i>	
		<i>they</i>	
	<i>their</i>	<i>purpose</i>	
<i>those</i>	<i>biology</i>	<i>classes</i>	<i>we attended last week</i>

Post-Modifiers in the noun group are in most cases a phrase or a clause. These are described in more detail in the Basic English Grammar Module 1B *The Noun Group*.

★ Exercise 3

- Underline the noun groups in the following sentences.
  - Circle the head noun.  
(Remember that a noun group can consist of a single noun!)
1. *Several policies have been set by the government, at all levels, to assist low-income households.*
  2. *The lowest nutrient intake values have been found among those people who had never attended school or gone beyond primary school.*
  3. *Because the agar solution tends to evaporate during subsequent incubation, the edges of the coverslip were sealed to the slide with paraffin.*
  4. *One of the policies produced by the Waverley Municipal Council aimed at retaining the function of boarding/lodging houses as low income accommodation and controlling the establishment of tourist accommodation was gazetted in the Waverley Local Environmental Plan in 1985.*

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

*Noun group complex*

Like the clause-complex and the prepositional phrase-complex, a “**noun group-complex**” consists of several units which depend on one another, e.g.

*Advice and comments will be sought from the senior members of the staff.*

In such cases, the group has two Heads:

<i>Advice</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>comments</i>
Head		Head

★ Exercise 4

- Underline the noun group-complexes in the following examples.
  - Circle the Heads of these groups.
1. *These include such activities as smoking, alcohol consumption, overeating and sexual promiscuity.*

2. *The sample of amino acid or other growth factor being assayed need not always be in solution.*
3. *DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell.*

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

### 1.3.2 Verb Group

The verb group consists of a **Head** verb plus any **Pre-modifiers** (auxiliaries, modals or particles).

Premodifiers		Head	
		<i>was</i>	<i>submerged</i>
<i>has</i>	<i>not</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>established</i>
	<i>may</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>correlated</i>
			<i>lasts</i>

#### ★ Exercise 5

- Underline the verb groups in the following text.
- Circle the Head verb in each verb group.
- Use these verb groups (and the other cues, e.g. punctuation and conjunction) to locate the clause boundaries in sentences with more than one clause.

*If we look at the structure of any cell, we can see a nucleus. The nucleus is the cell's controlling centre and directs the cell's activities. Without it a cell will die. The instructions for the cell's activities are contained in the chromosomes. Chromosomes can be seen under a light microscope when a cell is dividing. On biochemical analysis we discover that chromosomes are composed of proteins and the nucleic acid DNA. DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell. Each type of organism has a particular number of chromosomes in each of its nuclei.*

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

#### Verb Group-Complex

A “verb group-complex” consists of several verb groups which are dependent on one another, e.g.

*A fundamental aim of higher education is **to enrich and empower** its graduates by fostering in them generic skills and attributes that will enable them **to participate in and contribute** more effectively to society in the coming years.*

★ Exercise 6

- Underline the verb group-complexes in the following sentences.
  - Circle the Heads in each group.
1. *Each organism was grown in nutrient broth and cells in log-phase growth were centrifuged, washed and resuspended in double-strength minimal medium.*
  2. *In some disciplines, women equal or even outnumber their male colleagues.*

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

If you are having difficulty identifying verb groups you should work on either Unit 2A: **The Verb Group: Finites and Non-Finites** in the Basic English Grammar Module or 2B: **The Verb Group: Tenses** in the Basic English Grammar Module.

1.4 Word

The grammatical unit that is familiar to most people is the **word**. In traditional grammars, words are placed in a number of different word classes (Table 1, p. 13).

★ Exercise 7

Classify the words in our sample sentence in the spaces provided below.

<i>Because</i>	<i>CFS's</i>	<i>last</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>long</i>	<i>time</i>

<i>they</i>	<i>usually</i>	<i>outlive</i>	<i>their</i>	<i>purpose</i>

★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

**Word-Complex**

A “word-complex” consists of two or more words which are dependent on one another, e.g. *I will be staying **three or four** days.*

**Table 1. Word Classes in English**

Word class	Sub-class	Description	Example
<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Concrete</b>	These are words which refer to things or people, i.e. things that are real, visible, or touchable.	<i>rock, table, student</i>
	<b>Abstract</b>	These are nouns which refer to abstract concepts.	<i>insanity, interpretation</i>
<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Personal</b>	Personal pronouns take the place of or refer to a noun. To find out who or what they refer to we have to look elsewhere in the text or the context.	<i>she, they, it</i>
	<b>Relative</b>	Relative pronouns refer to someone or something that has already been mentioned.	<i>who, whom, which, that, those</i>
	<b>Possessive</b>	Possessive pronouns are used to indicate that something belongs to someone or is associated with them.	<i>mine, yours, etc.</i>
	<b>Demonstrative</b>	Demonstrative pronouns refer to specific people or things.	<i>this, that, these, those</i>
<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Descriptive</b>	Adjectives which assign qualities and attributes to nouns.	<i>blue, nice, quick</i>
	<b>Possessive</b>	Adjectives which indicate that the noun belongs to someone or something or is associated with them.	<i>his book, her lecture, my grandmother, Australia's policy..</i>
	<b>Demonstrative</b>	Adjectives which suggest which noun is indicated, based on near or far, and singular or plural.	<i>these (books), those (books), this (book), that (book).</i>
<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Main verbs</b>	These are verbs of "doing", "happening", "being" etc.	<i>do, be, go, write</i>
	<b>Auxiliaries &amp; Modals</b>	These provide additional information about the verb, e.g. tense, probability	<i>may have (gone), is (going)</i>
<b>Adverbs</b>		Adverbs modify the verb by suggesting Circumstances accompanying the action or event.	<i>often, slowly</i>
<b>Articles</b>		Articles provide information about how to identify a particular noun being referred to in a noun group.	<i>the, a</i>
<b>Prepositions</b>		Prepositions express a circumstantial relationship between a noun group contained in a prepositional phrase and the rest of the clause.	<i>to (the station), for (Bob)</i>
<b>Conjunctions</b>		Conjunctions show logical connections between clauses, phrases, groups and words.	<i>and, but, so</i>

**Typical problem**

The wrong word class is used for the context (see also Unit 1B: Noun Group for discussion of derivational morphology).

*The worker is fired and becomes unemployment.*



★ ★ You can now check the answers in the Answer Key at the back of the unit.

You have now completed a brief overview of the main parts of the grammar that make up the English sentence. In the following units, the grammar will be discussed in more detail as it relates to the typical problems that students have with their writing. You will learn how to identify these problems so that you will then be able to edit and correct your own writing more effectively.



# Unit 1A: Answer Key to Exercises

## ★ ★ Exercise 1: Answer

**Key:** Relevant conjunctions and punctuation in bold; clause boundaries are marked ||.

**1. (1 clause)**

Children are not born with standards for evaluating behaviour, social skills or moral values.

**2. (2 clauses)**

As I have suggested, || the non-addicted parent is involved in a co-dependent relationship with the addicted child.

**3. (2 clauses)**

Over this period, the population in Waverley decreased by 2.8%, || while the population in the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area increased by 5%.

**4. (3 clauses)**

If we conceptualise caring as a finite set of caring behaviours, || then caring can be examined in the traditional scientific way, || even though this approach may not be acceptable in some circles.

**5. (3 clauses)**

This space constraint has led to a number of problems || and these do not seem capable of being resolved || although everyone is willing to be involved.

## ★ ★ Exercise 2: Answer

Underline the preposition phrases in each sentence.

Brazil country report <sup>1</sup>.

1. The interest rate <u>in Brazil</u> fell from 25% in 2003 to 11.25% in 2006. (5)
2. Disposable annual incomes rose <u>by 3.1% between 2002 and 2006</u> . (2)
3. Brazilian consumers have begun to spend more money <u>on luxury items</u> than <u>on essential goods</u> . (2)
4. <u>Throughout this decade</u> , consumption has been steadily growing. (1)
5. Consumer credit card access has led to higher spending <u>in the retail sector</u> . (1)
6. The government is optimistic <u>about Brazil's economic future</u> . (1)

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from student report with permission.

★ ★ Exercise 3: Answer

**Key:** Noun groups have been underlined; the Head word is in bold; double underlining suggests noun groups within noun groups.

1. Several **policies** have been set by the **government**, at all levels, to assist low-income households.
2. The lowest nutrient intake **values** have been found among those **people** who had never attended school or gone beyond primary school.
3. Because the agar **solution** tends to evaporate during subsequent incubation, the edges of the coverslip were sealed to the slide with paraffin.
4. One of the **policies** produced by the Waverley Municipal Council aimed at retaining the function of boarding/lodging houses as low income accommodation and controlling the establishment of tourist accommodation was gazetted in the Waverley Local Environmental Plan in 1985.

★ ★ Exercise 4: Answer

**Key:** Noun group-complexes have been underlined; the Head words are in bold.

1. These include such activities as **smoking**, alcohol **consumption**, **overeating** and **sexual promiscuity**.
2. The sample of amino **acid** or other growth **factor** being assayed need not always be in solution.
3. DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs **the growth, differentiation and functioning** of a cell.

★ ★ Exercise 5: Answer

**Key:** Verb groups have been underlined; the Head word is in bold.

If we **look** at the structure of any cell, || we can **see** a nucleus. The nucleus **is** the cell's controlling centre || and **directs** the cell's activities. Without it a cell **will die**. The instructions for the cell's activities are **contained** in the chromosomes. Chromosomes **can be seen** under a light microscope || when a cell **is dividing**. On biochemical analysis we **discover** || that chromosomes are **composed of** proteins and the nucleic acid DNA. DNA **contains** coded chemical instructions || and **directs** the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell. Each type of organism **has** a particular number of chromosomes in each of its nuclei.

★ ★ Exercise 6: Answer

**Key:** Verb group-complexes have been underlined; the Head words are in bold.

1. *Each organism was grown in nutrient broth and cells in log-phase growth were **centrifuged, washed and resuspended** in double-strength minimal medium.*
2. *In some disciplines, women equal or (even) **outnumber** their male colleagues.*

(NB. *even* is an adverb which modifies the verb group but is not part of the verb group.)

★ ★ Exercise 7: Answer

<i>Because</i>	<i>CFC's</i>	<i>last</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>long</i>	<i>time</i>
conjunction	noun (concrete)	verb (main)	preposition	article	adjective (descriptive)	noun (abstract)

<i>they</i>	<i>usually</i>	<i>outlive</i>	<i>their</i>	<i>purpose</i>
pronoun (personal)	adverb	verb (main)	pronoun (possessive)	noun (abstract)

★ ★ Exercise 8: Answer

<i>different</i> (adjective)	<i>differently</i> (adverb)
<i>cell</i> (noun)	<i>cellular</i> (adjective)
<i>regulate</i> (verb)	<i>regulation</i> (noun)
<i>description</i> (noun)	<i>describe</i> (verb)
<i>model</i> (noun)	<i>model</i> (verb)
<i>respiration</i> (noun)	<i>respiratory</i> (adjective)
<i>measuring</i> (verb)	<i>measurement</i> (noun)