



WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

OPEN CLASS WORDS 1

Word classes help us to categorise words according to what they do (function), their linguistic properties (form), and their meanings (semantics).

Open classes are lexical groups that can be expanded by the addition of new words – these will often reflect changes in society, culture or science and technology.

By recognising different word classes, linguists can draw useful conclusions about language use in different spoken and written contexts.

Adjectives

words that add descriptive detail to nouns – they can be

- **defining** e.g. wooden, Victorian, small, triangular or
- **evaluative** e.g. lonely, unpleasant, beautiful, spoilt.

What is distinctive about adjectives?

1. they usually come **in front of a noun**
e.g. the snowy mountain, the strange box
2. they can come **after verbs** such as to be, to seem, to appear, to look, to taste
e.g. the food looks delicious, the colours are vivid
3. they occur in a **particular order** when they are listed: quantity, value/opinion, size, physical quality, age, shape, colour, origin, material
e.g. a savage (value/opinion) little (size) pigeon, the fluffy (quality) oval (shape) red (colour) cushion
4. they can be used to compare two nouns (**comparative** adjectives have an *-er* inflection, or use *more* + adjective)
e.g. faster, sweeter, more valuable
5. they can be used to compare more than two nouns (**superlative** adjectives have an *-est* inflection, or use *most* + adjective)
e.g. fastest, sweetest, most valuable

Where do we find them?

In descriptive writing (e.g. travel writing, novels), adjectives add detail, and build mood and atmosphere. In persuasive texts (e.g. advertising) they promote products/services. In opinion texts, (e.g. reviews, diaries, political speeches), they communicate attitudes and points of view. In information texts (e.g. reports, textbooks), they provide factual detail.

Nouns

words that label specific people, places and occasions using a capital letter (proper) e.g. Frank, Cardiff, Easter

words that label people, things and ideas/emotions (common) e.g. lawyer, dog, fear

Common nouns are divided into

- **concrete nouns** (e.g. tree, book, river)
- **abstract nouns** (e.g. courage, imagination, curiosity).

What is distinctive about nouns?

1. they can usually be combined with *the/some*, and can be modified by an adjective
e.g. the gloomy cave, some creative ideas
2. they can be **singular** or **plural** – plural nouns have an *-s/-es* inflection OR a distinctive form
e.g. ships, potatoes, stories, mice, sheep
3. they can be marked for **possession** (singular nouns have *-s* inflection, plural nouns have *-s'*)
e.g. the girl's book, the girls' books
4. they can be formed by hyphenating or joining words together to create **compound** nouns
e.g. policeman, haircut, passer-by, output

Where do we find them?

Nouns are one of the most commonly occurring word classes. In information and instruction texts (e.g. science textbooks, recipes, DIY), concrete nouns refer to equipment and parts/ingredients. In descriptive writing (e.g. travel writing, novels, poetry, articles), concrete nouns establish the setting and physical details of people; abstract nouns establish the way people feel and think. In persuasive texts (e.g. speeches), abstract nouns communicate a speaker's message.

Sample analysis: extract from a novel

The proper noun "Stamford" establishes the specific setting in this description, while concrete nouns build a sense of the physical landscape ("churches") and the weather ("snow", "wind") as the unnamed people travel through the town. Other concrete nouns such as "sound", "howling" and "noise" appeal to the senses while the abstract noun "night" and the adjectives "deserted", "dismal" and "dark" create the gloomy atmosphere.

The **night** and the **snow** came on together. There was no **sound** to be heard but the **howling** of the **wind**, for any other **noise** was made **inaudible** by the **thick snow** which covered the **ground**. The **streets of Stamford** were **deserted** as they passed through the **town**; and its **old churches** rose, **dismal** and **dark**, from the **whitened ground**.