

**This tip sheet's sole purpose is to educate writers on terminology used when referring to parts of sentences—specifically noun and verb phrases.*

A phrase is a group of related words which work together as a unit but lack either a subject, verb or both.

There are several types of phrases, two of which are addressed in this tip sheet.

A **verb phrase** is a phrase that consists of a main verb and one or more helping verbs.

Some common helping verbs are:

to be: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

to do: do, does, did

Other helping verbs include: may, might, must, can, could, should, will, would

Helping verbs add meaning to other verbs. Some helping verbs change the time expressed by the key verb. Others, such as *should* and *might*, are used to indicate obligation, possibility, ability, or permission:

The student is going to Florida for Spring Break.

The firm will probably not hire an accountant this month.

You should edit your own composition.

A **noun phrase** is made of a noun and all its modifiers. It can function in a sentence as a subject, an object, or a complement. Some noun phrases begin with an infinitive (i.e., *to go*) or a gerund (i.e., *going*); this type of noun phrase is always singular:

The small dog with long floppy ears is barking. (Noun with modifiers)

To sail the seven seas was her lifelong dream. (infinitive phrase acting as a subject)

Dieters prefer to dine on green salad. (infinitive phrase acting as an object)

My greatest fear is drowning in my bathtub. (gerund phrase acting as a complement)

For additional information on phrases, see the tip sheet on prepositional phrases.