EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING PARTS OF SPEECH

Source: http://cla.calpoly.edu/~jrubba/syn/Syntax_PofS.html

Use the four tests below to find out which of the following words are nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. Make sure the word passes the meaning test ("more than one", "action underway" for each suffix as well as being able to take the suffix. For practice’s sake, put each word through all the tests for each part of speech. If the word passes the tests for more than one category, that means it belongs to more than one category. If a word passes only a few or no tests for any particular category, make a note of it. This means the word belongs to some other category than the four you are testing for. When you are done, check your answers against the key at the bottom of the page. Also, check your answers against a dictionary. Do the dictionary’s categorizations differ from yours for any words?

1. fight  4. organize  7. party  10. green  13. high
2. survey  5. together  8. shoot  11. brotherly  14. eagerly
3. very  6. nation  9. draw  12. concise  15. certain

TESTS FOR NOUN

A. Suffix tests: ( = morphological tests)
(1) Can you add an -s to the word, with the result meaning 'more than one'?
Ex.: desk + s = desks means 'more than one desk' TEST PASSED = 'desk' is probably a noun
(2) Can you add -'s to the word, with the result meaning 'belong to'?
Ex.: cat + 's = cat's means 'belonging to the cat', as in 'the cat's tail' TEST PASSED = 'cat' is probably a noun

B. Sentence-slot tests: ( = syntactic tests)
(3) Can the word appear alone after an article or determiner such as a, an, the, some, this, my?
Ex.: 'The desk' sounds OK; TEST PASSED = 'desk' is a noun
'Verry' sounds OK; TEST PASSED = 'very' is a noun

Example of a word that fails: 'explore'
Suffix tests: 'explores' is an English word but doesn't mean 'more than one explore' ; 'explore's' is not an English word, e.g. *the explore's goal
Sentence-slot tests: 'The explore' doesn't sound right. ALL TESTS FAILED; 'explore' is not a noun

TESTS FOR VERB

A. Suffix tests: ( = morphological tests)
(1) Can you add an -s to the word, with the result meaning 'someone does the action'?
Ex.: explore + s = explores means 'someone does the action of exploring' TEST PASSED
(2) Can you add -ing to the word?
Ex.: explore + ing = exploring TEST PASSED

B. Sentence-slot tests: ( = syntactic tests)
(3) Can the word follow helping verbs such as 'will ____', 'should ____'?
Ex.: will explore, should explore sound OK; TEST PASSED
We conclude that 'explore' is a verb. Try these tests with 'desk' to see if it qualifies as a verb.

TESTS FOR ADJECTIVE

A. Suffix tests: (= morphological tests)
(1) Can you add -er to the word with the result meaning 'more of the quality', a higher degree of the quality named by the word?
Ex. tall + er = taller means 'more tall' TEST PASSED
(2) Can you add -est to the word, with the result meaning 'having the highest degree of the quality named by the word'?
Ex. tall + est = tallest means 'highest degree of tallness' TEST PASSED

B. Sentence-slot tests: (= syntactic tests)
(2) Can you use 'more' and 'most' in front of the word when the word fails to accept '-er' and '-est'?
Ex. more + expensive = more expensive means higher degree of expensiveness TEST PASSED
(3) Can you put the word in the blank in a sentence like this: The house seems _______. (You need to substitute a different word for 'house' sometimes).

TESTS FOR ADVERB

Adverb is the most difficult of these four categories to test.

A. Suffix tests
(1) Same as for adjective.

B. Sentence-slot tests
(2) ‘More’ and ‘most’ tests as for adjective.
(3) Can you put the word in the blank following one of these verbs (supply a subject for the sentence that fits the meaning of the word being tested: (These verbs are verbs which can be followed ONLY by adverbials. Any single word which can follow them is an adverb.)

______sneak / behave / vanish______ (adverb slot)
Examples: They sneaked quietly. Children sometimes behave wildly.

Answer Key:

RETURN TO EXERCISE

Key to Parts of Speech exercise. Some of your answers may differ based on your usage. Usages you recognize as ‘slang’ count as valid categorizations.

1. fight V, N
2. survey V, N
3. very none
4. organize V
5. together Adv, A*
6. nation N
7. party N, V
8. shoot V, N**
9. draw V, N‡
10. green A, N
11. brotherly A, Adv‡‡
12. concise A
13. high A, N #
14. photo shoot, turkey shoot
15. a natural high

*She is the most together person I know. ** photo shoot, turkey shoot ‡ The game ended in a draw. ‡‡ For some people, this is only an adjective. # a natural high