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.