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English Grammar

By Jeffrey Coghill and Stacy Magedanz



Wiley Publishing, Inc.

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I dedicate this book to my daughter, Caroline; my parents, Bob and Trudy; and my sister, Kay. Without their support, I could not do what I love.

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—Jeffrey Coghill

To my mother, the English teacher, who taught me to love both reading and writing.

—Stacy Magedanz

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Study Guide Checklist

- 1. Take the Pretest, which will test your initial understanding of this workbook's subject matter.
- 2. Use the answer sections of the Pretest to guide you to the chapters and chapter sections you need to review.
- 3. Familiarize yourself with the content of the chapters you need to review.
- 4. Take the self tests provided in the chapters, including the Chapter Problems and Supplemental Chapter Problems located at the end of each chapter.
- 5. If, upon checking your answers to the Chapter Problems and Supplemental Chapter Problems, you find you have some errors, go back to the specific section(s) of the chapter and review the section(s) again.
- 6. Take the Customized Full-Length Exam, which tests your overall knowledge of English grammar. The Customized Full-Length Exam presents various levels of difficulty with directions on which questions to answer.
- 7. Review chapter sections as directed in the Customized Full-Length Exam.
- 8. Explore the Glossary and Abbreviations appendix.

Introduction

The grammar of a language is the set of rules that govern its structure. Grammar determines how words are arranged to form meaningful units. Every language has its own distinctive grammar, and people who speak a language from early childhood onward intuitively understand its structure in much greater detail than could ever be explained in one book. So why do people study grammar?

To understand the study of English grammar, it is helpful to know something about its history. Relatively few English grammar books existed until the eighteenth century, when the intellectual spirit of the Enlightenment prompted numerous writers to “scientifically” examine the English language. Unfortunately for future generations of students, instead of looking at what English actually does, most of these writers focused on what they thought English ought to do. With this idealized vision in mind, they set out to improve, perfect, and defend English. They based many of their rules about English grammar on the patterns of other languages that they considered to be perfect models—especially Latin and Greek—which had for centuries been the languages of science and learning in Europe. In some cases, they simply invented rules that appear to have been based on nothing but personal preference. These rules spread and were accepted as authoritative, regardless of whether they reflected how most people used the language. This was the rise of *prescriptive* grammar, which tells how English should be, rather than how it actually is. Prescriptive grammar is still alive and well. More than one self-appointed grammar expert has made a career out of lamenting the decline of the English language and criticizing other people’s grammar “mistakes.”

The modern science of linguistics, which studies the structure and function of language, has little use for the ideas of prescriptive grammar. Linguists focus on *descriptive* grammar, which simply describes how a language works and attempts to explain why. Descriptive grammar acknowledges that different types of language usage exist, but does not consider one kind of usage better or worse than any other kind.

So when we talk about grammar, we are really talking about two different things. On the one hand, grammar represents the deep structures of a language, the rules that govern how words fit together and how they do not. On the other hand, grammar also represents socially determined ideas about what is “correct.” Most grammar handbooks include a mix of these two types of grammar. Grammar handbooks teach about basic grammatical structures, but they also pass on ideas about what is considered an acceptable use of language for a well-educated person. This book is no different.

Languages are much like living creatures; they are not always neat and logical, and they grow and change over time. Words acquire new meanings, and old words die out. A grammar usage that is acceptable in one century might be totally unacceptable in the next. Ideas about acceptable usage also vary among English-speaking countries; for example, an expression that sounds perfectly normal to an American might sound bizarre to an Australian. As languages grow and change, grammar rules also change. However, prescriptive grammar rules tend to become frozen in time, repeated by editors and teachers from year to year, even when the rules do not reflect the current practice of the majority of English writers and speakers.

In this book, we have tried to point out some of these old and outdated rules. We have tried to distinguish between rules that have to do with pure grammar—the structure of English itself—and rules that really state preferences about style. We have also tried to distinguish between formal, written English (where the rules are more strict) and the more informal, spoken variety of English (where the rules of conversational give and take are much looser).

Most people work with a variety of language styles (and sometimes a variety of languages) throughout their daily lives. English usage varies by geographic area, by ethnic or national group, or even by age group. A teenager from New York and an elderly farmer from Nebraska probably use quite different styles of language when they speak to their friends. Being able to recognize and correctly use the appropriate style of language for a particular situation is a real and highly valuable skill.

Students who are native speakers of English rarely think about the structure of the language they use. For these students, becoming aware of the patterns of their language can help them think in new ways about how they express themselves. The ability to write and speak in clear, simple, and engaging language can be learned, but not without examining the mechanics of English. Understanding grammar rules can help writers and speakers use language in a way that will make their ideas heard and help them communicate with the largest possible audience. Sophisticated writers and speakers also know when to break the standard rules to give their expression special impact. Understanding some basic grammar principles is also an enormous help to English speakers attempting to learn other languages whose grammatical structures might be radically different from English.

Students approaching English as a foreign language need a basic framework to help them learn it. English is such a rich language that no one could teach—or learn—all its marvelous variations. Studying basic English grammar provides a starting point for these students, one that will serve them well in many situations.

We, as teachers, editors, writers, and speakers of English, see great value in the study of grammar. We hope that the readers of this book will find it valuable as well.

Jeffrey Coghill and Stacy Magedanz

Directions: Questions 1-1 through 1-10

Give the plural forms of the following nouns.

Analysis

Building

Porch

Reference

Cross

Absence

Speaker

Page

Man

Erratum

Directions: Questions 1-11 through 1-20

In the following sentences, give the possessive form of each word indicated.

_____ (Seattle) lights were beautiful at night.

_____ (Bob) and _____ (Tom) radio show is excellent.

The _____ (Evans) house was painted just this week.

My _____ (mother) and _____ (father) trip was cancelled because of bad weather.

_____ (Sandra) and _____ (Maureen) computers are not online today.

_____ (Joe), _____ (Matthew), and _____ (David) new telephones are in the warehouse.

My _____ (sister) new washing machine and dryer were delivered over the weekend.

By the sound of the last bell, the _____ (teacher) patience has worn thin.

A dog that belonged to the _____ (Davis) was found safe.

For now, _____ (Janice) work was halted to begin another project.