

English Grammar

by John Mason and staff of ACS Distance Education



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CREDITS

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PREFACE

We all use language in some form, and many of us effortlessly combine words to effectively communicate with others. For most people spoken communication is easy, but written communication is difficult. This is because good writing requires good grammar. In spoken communication the speaker uses non-verbal cues such as intonation, pauses, body language, rhythm, inflection and more to help communicate meaning. In writing, however, these cues are unavailable. Instead, we rely on punctuation, proper syntax, and grammar to enhance our communication and reduce misunderstandings.

It is important to understand that while we talk about grammar in terms of syntax and punctuation in this book, true grammar is actually the combination of structures that underpin a language. In this context, however, grammar is a tool through which we can improve our writing. Grammar provides a coherent structure for the expression of thoughts and ideas. By following grammatical rules we are able to compile logical sentences that make sense to the receiver.

Consider the following paragraph:

when we write without punctuation it can become difficult to decipher the exact meaning of a paragraph you can not tell if something being asked is a question like what do you think it is sometimes difficult to make sense of what someone is trying to get across you would also miss out on things like demonstrating possession like it is janes ball and it would be confusing to see a list such as i like dogs horses cats guineapigs but not snakes

Communication via mobile phone, internet, chat apps, and other digital technologies has become commonplace. In an office environment people often communicate with each other via email. Proper punctuation and grammar help determine the meaning of the message.

Consider receiving an email with the following punctuation. How does punctuation affect meaning?

Can you finish the report by the end of the day?
 Can you finish the report by the end of the day...
 Can you finish the report by the end of the day!
 Can you finish the report by the end of the day !?/?
 Can you finish the report by the end of the day!!!!

Different types of writing have different requirements for formality and accuracy. For example, in formal or academic writing you will need to have a high level of accuracy; in a text or email to a friend you can be more relaxed.

This book is primarily written to help English speakers improve their grammar, particularly in written communication. It is also useful for English as a second language speakers, as a tool to help clarify some of the rules to follow in both spoken and written language. This book as an excellent reference tool that is easy to understand and use.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: THE COMPONENTS OF LANGUAGE

Language is made up of different types of words, including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections.

- Nouns are words that represent things (e.g. something you can see, touch, hear etc. Nouns can be a place, a living creature, an object, and more.)
- Pronouns are words that stand in for nouns (e.g. “she”, “he”, “it”)
- Verbs are “doing words”, or words that indicate something happening (e.g. “run”, “go”, “appear”, “build”)
- Adjectives are descriptive words – words that say something about a noun or pronoun (e.g. “quick”, “brown”, “sneaky”, “sweaty”)
- Adverbs are words that say something about a verb such as indicating how, when, where, etc. (i.e. they add to the verb – “quickly”, “patiently”)
- Prepositions connect words in a way that denotes a relationship between different words in a sentence (e.g. come home after you finish – “after” relates to both “come” and “home”)
- Conjunctions links different words or phrases in a sentence (e.g. “and”)
- Interjections are words that express a feeling. They add emphasis to the central idea in a sentence, or draw attention to a particular aspect of a sentence (e.g. “wow”, “hooray”, “oh”, “ouch”, etc)

WHERE DO WORDS COME FROM?

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF WORDS:

1. Eponyms

Eponyms are words that are created by naming something after a person – e.g. a place or thing named after the person who discovered it. Alzheimer’s disease, for example, was named after Alois Alzheimer, the person credited with identifying the first published case of presenile dementia.

Other examples include:

Achilles’ heel – after the Greek hero Achilles

Adam’s apple – after the biblical Adam

Asperger Syndrome – Hans Asperger

Halley’s Comet – Edmond Halley

2. Systematically Constructed Words

These are words that have evolved from other languages. They are most commonly created systematically using other words, or parts of (or derivations from) other words, typically from Ancient Greek or Latin. An example of this is the word “dichotomy”, from the Greek *dichotomia*. It is estimated that over 60% of modern English is derived from Ancient Greek and Latin.

Yet English is comprised of words from many languages, deriving words from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and via a host of Romance languages (languages in the Latin language group). Many other words have simply entered the English language through use or as loan words. These include words such as “pizza”, “lasagne”, “bon voyage”, “bazaar” and more.

Words derived from Latin:

- “Antique” derived from “antia”
- “New” derived from “nova”
- “Fame” derived from “fama”
- “Long” from “longa”

Words derived from Ancient Greek:

- “Dinosaur” from the Greek words for “terrible lizard”
- “Bacterium” from the Greek word for stick, as bacteria look like sticks

When we consider scientific and technological words, we find even more have a Greek or Latin origin. These include words such as “anaesthetic”, “adrenal”, “neuralgia”, “amniocentesis”, and many more.



STRUCTURE OF WORDS

Most words are comprised of three parts:

1. THE WORD ROOT

This is usually the middle of the word and provides its core meaning.

2. THE PREFIX

Prefixes are usually at the start of a word and may identify or modify a part of the core meaning. Not all words have prefixes.

3. THE SUFFIX

This comes at the end and modifies the core meaning (e.g. what it is interacting with or what is happening to it). A suffix is sometimes called a postfix or ending as it comes at the end of the word. Not all words have suffixes.

Prefixes can be attached to nouns and adjectives. When a prefix that ends in a consonant is placed before a word that begins with a consonant, the ending of the prefix may be changed to that of the word itself. This is known as assimilation and can be seen in the word itself. “Ad-” before “similis” becomes “assimilis” rather than “adsimilis”.

A NOTE ON INFIXES

Infixes are inserted into the middle of a word. This may be done to change a singular word into a plural one (e.g. “passerby” to “passersby”). It may also be done to intensify meaning or draw attention to a particular concept (e.g. “fan-freaking-tastic”).

A NOTE ON CIRCUMFIXES

Circumfixes encircle a word. They use a prefix and a suffix. They are not common in modern English, usually only appearing in “en- -en” or “em- -en” pairs (e.g. “enlighten”). They are also found in older constructions such as “a-caroling” or “a-wassailing”.

PREFIX EXAMPLES

PREFIX	MEANING	APPLICATION IN A WORD
a-	without, absent	atheist, arrhythmia, anaemic
ab-	away from	abnormal, aberrant
acro- or acr-	to do with the extremities	acrodermatitis, acrocyanosis

PREFIX	MEANING	APPLICATION IN A WORD
ad-	towards, to, near	adduction, adhesion
ai-	Always	
amb -, ambi-	around, round about	ambient, ambidexterous
amphi-	both, of both kinds, on both sides, around	amphibia, amphigam.
an- (also, a-)	absence or deletion of	anaemia, abortion
ana-	up, back, again, anew	anabaptism, anabolic, anagram
ante-	before, preceding	antecedent, anterior, antenna
ant, anti-	opposite, against, in exchange, instead, rivaling	antihistamine, antibiotic, anticlimax
ap-	before	appetite, appraise, appendage
ar-	pertaining to	
arch-	chief, pre-eminent, leading,	arch nemesis, archbishop, archetype
auto -	self	autobiography
cardio- or cardi-	heart	cardiorespiratory, cardiac
cat-, cata-, cath-	down, away, wrongly, mis-, entirely, down upon, according to, alongside of, thoroughly	catacomb, cataclysm, catalepsy
cato-	beneath	cathocathartic
chori-	assunder, apart	choripetalus, chorister
circum-	around	circumnavigate, circumvent, circumvolution
co-	with, together	codependent, collect, composite
contra-	opposing, against	contraindication, contrast
cyt-	to do with the cell	cytology, cytoplasm
dis-	asunder, away, apart, utterly, not	dissimilar, disapprove
de-	downwards, outwards	decending, degenerate, devolution
derm or derma	to do with the skin	dermatosis, dermabrasion

PREFIX	MEANING	APPLICATION IN A WORD
di-	between, away from	dichotomy, dicotyledon,
dia-	through, thoroughly, apart, across	diabolical, diagnostic, diameter
dicho-	in two	dichotomy, dichromatic
dys-	bad	dysfunctional, dyspepsia, dysharmony
ect-, ecto-	outside, outward	ectothermic, ectoderm
eh-, ef-	without, not, lacking, from out	effusive, efface
em-, en-	before, in, within	embalm, enclose
endo-, ento-	within	endometriosis, endocrinology
e- , ex-	out, forth, upward, thoroughly	exposition, exclamation, expectorant
ep-, epi-	upon, on, at, on the ground of	epidemic, epidermis
eu-	well, good, of	euphoria, eulogy, euphonium
extra-	on the outside, beyond, over and above	extraordinary, extravagance, extravaganza
gastro- or gastr-	to do with the stomach	gastronome, gastroenteritis, gastroscope
hama-	together with	hamadryad
hemi-	affecting one half	hemisphere, hemistitch
hetero-	different	heterosexual, heterodyne, heterozygote
hyper-	larger, more significant	hyperactive, hyperplasia
hypo-	lesser, deficient, below normal (opposite of hyper-)	hypotension, hypoplasia
il-	not, contrary	Illiterate, illegal
im-	not	immaterial, immoderate, immodest, immovable, immune
in-	not	insane
infra-	below	infrasternal, infrared