

IGCSE English Language

Technical Skills: Grammar

Grammar is boring!

- I don't know why I have to learn grammar, it's so boring and I already know how to write.

(run on sentence. Use 'and', 'because', 'but', 'or', or 'yet' to join sentences)

- Chris and me talk once a week about becoming pilots.

(incorrect pronoun use. Take out the other person's name and see if it sounds right)

- I seem to have misplaced my shoe, however it will turn up eventually.

(adverbs like 'however' do not join sentences. 'However' should always start a sentence, and be followed by a comma.)

- Having many dangling participles, the student did not get the grade she wanted for her essay.

(dangling participle. The descriptive phrase at the beginning of the sentence should be immediately followed by the noun or pronoun it describes.)

What is grammar and why does it matter?

Grammar ‘embodies three dimensions...morphosyntax (form), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (use)’ (Diane Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

It is “the branch of language study or linguistics which deals with the means of showing the relation between words as used in speech or writing, traditionally divided into the study of inflections (or morphology) and of the structure of sentences (syntax), and often also including phonology” Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1996)

So, basically, grammar is the study and use of our working language. We all use grammar if we read, write, and speak English. If you have a good understanding of English grammar rules, you are less likely to make common mistakes and more likely to communicate effectively.

Grammar Rules for English (1)

1. Recognize and understand the ‘parts of speech’

There are eight parts of speech:

- verbs
- nouns
- pronouns
- adverbs
- adjectives
- prepositions
- conjunctions
- interjections

A part of speech describes a word as it is used in a sentence, as words will become different parts of speech depending on how they are used.

**For example: He left the room. [verb] I write with my left hand. [adjective]
Take a left at the next road. [noun]**

Grammar Rules for English (1)

Verbs – are action or state words. Verbs are ‘doing’ or ‘being’ words.
I jumped out of my skin when I saw the spider on the ceiling.

Nouns – describe a person, place, thing, event, or idea. Nouns can be the subject or object in a sentence.

Vicky used her imagination to design her dream house.

Pronouns – replace nouns. Pronouns usually replace the noun that has been previously mentioned.

Shirley cannot be serious about anything. She always giggles.

Adverbs – describe or modify verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

You simply do not understand how extremely excited I am about the Olympics.

Grammar Rules for English (1)

Adjectives – describes or modifies the noun. The adjectives ‘a’, ‘an’, and ‘the’ are special adjectives called articles.

That was an interesting article about teenagers.

Prepositions – link nouns and pronouns to other words. Prepositions can be used to represent time, position, and direction.

I have been going to school for years.

Please put the hat on your head.

The ball went through the window!

Conjunctions – join clauses, sentences or words together.

I like orange juice but I don't like eating oranges.

Interjections – short word or phrase used to express emotion.

Oh! Who made the mess in the kitchen?

Grammar Rules for English (2)

2. Understand sentences and sentence structure.

- A sentence consists of words that express a complete thought, and will contain a **subject** and **predicate** (containing the verb).

I run. **That drink was** refreshing. **There is a fly in my soup.**

- Sentences can be **declarative** (statement), **interrogative** (question), **exclamatory** (exclamation), or **imperative** (command).

He hit the ball.

Did he hit the ball?

He hit the ball!

Hit the ball!

Grammar Rules for English (2)

Sentence structures depend on the number and type of clauses within; they can be **simple**, **compound**, **complex** or **compound-complex**.

Michele likes to read.

Michele likes to read **and** watch television.

When Michele reads an interesting book, she forgets all about television.

Michele is in front of the television again, **so** the book **that she last read** is back on the bookshelf.

Grammar Rules for English (2)

Sentences can be short and concise. This type of sentence gets the point across, can speed up reading, create tension or emphasis. However, overuse of short sentences can become monotonous.

Sentences can be long and fluent to express a combination of thoughts, give a great deal of information, or offer palpable descriptions.

So, vary **sentence lengths** in paragraphs to make writing (and reading) more interesting.

Sentences can begin with the **subject**, or the **predicate**. Vary the starting structure of sentences (when you are clear about correct sentence structure). Try to start sentences with a different word, as it is easy to fall into the habit of beginning all sentences the same way.

Grammar Rules for English (3)

3. Use of correct tenses

The tense of a verb indicates when the action occurs. This can either be in the present, the past, or in the future. The six common tenses in English are:

present

past

future

present perfect

past perfect

future perfect

I listen.

I listened.

I will listen.

I have listened.

I had listened.

I will have listened.

The **infinitive** is the basic form of the verb, from which most other verb tenses can be formed.

Participles are added to verbs in the present or past tenses. In the present participle, parts of the verb *to be* is used with the infinitive verb; -ing is added to the infinitive. In the past participle, parts of the verb *to have* is used with the infinitive verb; -ed is added to the infinitive.

Grammar Rules for English (3)

Of course, there are always exceptions to the rules. The irregular verbs have different forms and will need to be learnt.

(You can look up irregular verb forms in grammar books, or online at good language websites like Purdue Online Writing Lab)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/605/1/>

In addition, verb tenses can be in the **active** or **passive voice**, or can show continuous or completed actions.

Confident writers should research other verb forms so that they are able to improve the calibre of their writing.

Grammar Rules for English

Common grammar usage mistakes can make a difference. At best, grammatically incorrect work can seem like carelessness by the writer; at its worst, badly written work can be misinterpreted incorrectly and portray the writer in an unfavourable light.

So, to put your best work on paper (either handwritten or typed), take care to avoid common grammar usage mistakes such as:

- Apostrophe use
- Pronoun error
- Subject/verb agreement

Look at grammar books, or English usage books, or check Internet resources such as:

www.copyblogger.com/grammar-goofs/

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/WAC/EnglishGuide/Critical/grammar.html>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/601/04/>

Where to go from here...

This short presentation on Grammar only touches on the basics in order to help those that might need focus on particular areas. If you are working on a more advanced understanding of complex grammar and usage rules to improve the calibre of your written work, make sure to:

Research grammar and usage in the English Language in books, reference books, or on educational Internet sites.

Always check over your work for common mistakes. If you take pride in your work, always proofread before 'publishing' your work (yes, even emails and texts).

Challenge yourself to eliminate a grammatical mistake that you often make (For me, the dangling participle usually catches me out), and then write with a new-found quality in your work.

Grammar resources

INTERNET SUGGESTIONS:

www.grammarbook.com/grammar/cnt_gram.asp

www.dailywritingtips.com/english-grammar-101-all-you-need-to-know/

www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm

Grammar resources

- Worksheets created by Eddis Tutorial Services, LLC.
- Reading good books to be exposed to high-quality written work that can be mirrored in your own writing (see book lists for IGCSE English Literature, for example)
- Find some amusing books on grammar, or find mistakes in everyday written work.