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978-0-521-51832-1 - English Grammar: Understanding the Basics
Evelyn P. Altenberg and Robert M. Vago
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English Grammar

Understanding the Basics

Looking for an easy-to-use guide to English grammar? This handy introduction covers all the basics of the subject, using a simple and straightforward style. Students will find the book's step-by-step approach easy to follow and be encouraged by its non-technical language. Requiring no prior knowledge of English grammar, the information is presented in small steps, with objective techniques to help readers apply new concepts. With clear explanations and well-chosen examples, the book gives students the tools to understand the mysteries of English grammar as well as the perfect foundation from which to move on to more advanced topics.

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*To my husband, Jim, my daughters, Jen and Alli,
my mother, Lilo, and in memory of my father, Hans
and
To my son, Joel, so that he might read this book and
understand what his father was trying to teach him*

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Introduction

Our goal in this book is to help you learn about English grammar in as simple and straightforward a way as possible. The book was inspired by our students, most of whom panic when we say words like *adjective*, *subject*, and *passive*. We believe that panic will be replaced by knowledge and confidence as readers work their way through this user-friendly book.

Who is this book for? It's for anyone who needs or wants to understand English grammar. That includes readers who: (1) want to improve their writing; (2) are studying a foreign language; (3) are or want to be teachers; (4) are learning English as a second language; (5) are or want to be professionals such as speech–language pathologists and attorneys; (6) are interested in how English works. The book is self-guided and self-paced; it can be used alone or as part of a course.

The workbook approach used here will move you beyond simply labeling words to an understanding of how the different pieces of a sentence fit together. To help you achieve this understanding, we present information in small steps, with many opportunities to apply each new piece of information in exercises before you move on to the next step.

Like all languages, English is a collection of dialects. While society views some of these dialects as having more social prestige than others, when we look at them objectively we find that all dialects are equal linguistically. That means that all dialects have grammatical rules, and the grammatical rules of one dialect are no more precise, pure, or logical than the grammatical rules of another dialect. Nonetheless, in this book we focus on the grammar of Standard American English because it is widely known and because writing requires a knowledge of formal, standard English.

We deliberately limit this introductory book in both content and complexity. Wherever possible, we provide you with a simple rule of thumb to use. However, we don't claim to cover all of English sentence structure. A clear understanding of what usually works will give you a foundation for recognizing and understanding the exceptions. Our aim is to provide you with the basics.

This book will clarify English sentence structure and provide you with a useful reference book that you can turn to long after you've completed the exercises. It will also provide you with a solid foundation for more advanced study.

So take a deep breath and turn the page. We predict that it won't hurt a bit. In fact, you may be surprised to find out how easy *English Grammar* can be.

How to use this book

What are the features of this book that will help you use it effectively?

- We assume no prior knowledge of English grammar. Depending on your background and interest, you can either work the book through from cover to cover or just read about selected topics.
- We utilize user-friendly, easy-to-understand language, avoiding excessive technical terminology.
- Information is presented in lesson format; most lessons are short, helping to make the material manageable.
- Numerous exercises allow you to test yourself after new information is presented; the exercises gradually incorporate more knowledge while building on prior information.
- Each exercise has a sample item done for you, to help you with the exercise.
- Each exercise is separated into two parts: *Getting started* and *More practice*. With each *Getting started* part, we provide a page reference to the answers, so you'll immediately know whether or not you're on the right track. For *More practice* items, answers are provided on the accompanying website.
- In addition to exercises, each lesson contains easy to find *Quick tips*. These provide convenient "tricks" to help you master the material or highlight the main concepts in each lesson.
- We've also included short sections called *To enhance your understanding*. These sections are intended for those of you who are interested in more than basic information. These sections can easily be skipped by beginners; they're not necessary for understanding any material later on in the book.
- Throughout the text, ungrammatical sentences are identified with an asterisk (*) at the beginning.

How is this book organized?

- The book has three parts: Part I deals with types of words, Part II with types of phrases, and Part III with types of sentences.
- Each part is divided into units and each unit is subdivided into related lessons.
- Each lesson contains ample *Test yourself* exercises. Each exercise has ten questions, with answer keys provided at the end of each unit and on the accompanying website.
- A review matching exercise with an answer key is included at the end of each part.
- Additional review exercises for each unit are provided on the companion website.
- For easy reference, the end of the book contains a list of all *Quick tips*, a detailed glossary, and an index.

Website: www.cambridge.org/altenberg-vago