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978-1-316-51464-1 — A Student's Introduction to English Grammar
2nd Edition
Rodney Huddleston , Geoffrey K. Pullum , Brett Reynolds
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A Student's Introduction to English Grammar

SECOND EDITION

A new edition of a successful undergraduate textbook on contemporary international Standard English grammar, based on Huddleston and Pullum's earlier award-winning work, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002). The analyses defended there are outlined here more briefly, in an engagingly accessible and informal style. Errors of the older tradition of English grammar are noted and corrected, and the excesses of prescriptive usage manuals are firmly rebutted in specially highlighted notes that explain what older authorities have called 'incorrect' and show why those authorities are mistaken. Intended for students in colleges or universities who have little or no background in grammar or linguistics, this teaching resource contains numerous exercises and online resources suitable for any course on the structure of English in either linguistics or English departments. A thoroughly modern undergraduate textbook, rewritten in an easy-to-read conversational style with a minimum of technical and theoretical terminology.

Rodney Huddleston was educated at Cambridge and Edinburgh, and taught English language at the University of Queensland for the majority of his career before beginning a decade of full-time work leading the team that produced *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (*CGEL*) in 2002.

Geoffrey K. Pullum, a co-author of *CGEL*, was educated at York, Cambridge, and London, and has taught linguistics at University College London, the University of California, and the University of Edinburgh.

Brett Reynolds was educated at Temple University in Tokyo and is a professor at Humber College, Toronto, specializing in academic English and the teaching of English as a second language.

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Preface for the Student

In a sense, you already know English grammar. You must, in some unconscious way, if you're reading this. But being able to do something is different from understanding exactly what's being done. Knowing how to walk isn't the same as appreciating the anatomy of the human leg. The study of grammar involves developing an explicit account of how sentences are put together.

This involves investigation. The principles of English grammar are not set down in detail somewhere in some authoritative source, like etiquette rules or legal statutes. They have to be discovered through research, theory formation, and testing. Figuring out how to state the right set of principles and generalizations – even for English, which is almost certainly the most studied language in the world – is a deep and complex academic enterprise in which new results are still emerging.

That's not the impression you would get from the thousands of websites and popular books that claim to give advice on English grammar. They treat English grammar as known doctrine. And, to be frank about it, they repeat useless definitions formulated hundreds of years ago and propose baseless prohibitions and restrictions. Often they're inaccurate or even self-contradictory. This book breaks with a tradition going back centuries and presents a consistent analysis of English grammar that takes account of what's been discovered in modern linguistic research.

Studying English grammar is practically valuable, but it's also intellectually fascinating. It will give you a deeper insight into sentence structure, opening up new approaches to interpreting, appreciating, and using English effectively. That's not to say it will magically improve your writing or public speaking; but it will provide a solid basis for making progress toward that goal.

It will also provide you with some protection from the grammar bullies. Most English speakers have encountered nitpickers who seize upon sentences that they say are 'bad grammar'. Not just unintended slips of the tongue or typing errors; everybody makes those occasionally; they're making mystifying accusations about perfectly ordinary expressions, and calling them grammar errors. The beliefs held by these nitpickers are often grounded in myth rather than fact and refutable just by looking at examples of competent writing or speech. This book aims to help you resist bad advice from ill-informed error-spotters and usage snobs.

It means learning some new concepts and terms. If you're being advised to avoid passives, or get rid of adjectives, or shun split infinitives – familiar but misguided

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warnings offered by thousands of writing tutors – you at least need to know what passives and adjectives and infinitives are, and what the facts are about how they are used. Then you can decide whether you want to follow the advice.

Along the way, this book will introduce you to some genuinely unexpected things about the English language. Too often grammar has been treated as a necessary set of dry instructions about fiddly details. That is nothing like what we present in this book. We've found it stimulating and intriguing to work on figuring out how sentence structure works and meaning is expressed. We hope it will be for you.

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Preface for the Instructor

This book is designed to provide the basis for a one-semester course on the grammatical structure of the English language. It's aimed at departments of English as well as theoretical or applied linguistics. This new edition has been thoroughly revised throughout, with a view to increasing the accessibility of the book for students. We do draw extensively on discoveries made during the past century of linguistic research on English, but we don't presuppose prior acquaintance with linguistics, let alone a specific theoretical orientation or framework. We explain technical terms as they are introduced, and minimize arcane concepts and notations.

Despite thousands of changes, improvements, and updates, the structure of the book remains essentially the same as in the first edition, with one exception: we have added a new Chapter 8, surveying the types of adjuncts occurring in the structure of clauses. This has the happy consequence that the topics of the chapters now align exactly with the content of *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum et al., Cambridge University Press, 2002; henceforth *CGEL*), the much larger reference grammar on which this book is based. So for anyone who wants greater detail about any topic in this book, student or instructor, the first course of action is simply to consult the chapter with the same number in *CGEL*.

The book is suitable for use with students of any English-speaking background, and the first edition has been used by many instructors at universities around the world. The authors, between them, have decades of experience teaching this material in Britain, Australia, Canada, and the USA. Although the two great dialect clusters of English – British and Australasian (BrE) and North American (AmE) – do differ syntactically in a few minor ways, the differences are almost always a matter of preferences rather than prohibitions, and they give rise to remarkably few difficulties for exposition. In a few clear cases we briefly discuss AmE/BrE divergence, but it's not a primary focus. The only thing that will look distinctively British to American readers is the spelling, where a dialect-defining binary choice had to be made. But seeing BrE spellings like *centre*, *colour*, and *signalling* (as opposed to AmE *center*, *color*, and *signaling*) shouldn't faze any literate American.

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to some general issues relating to the linguistic study of English. Chapter 2 introduces some crucial concepts and provides a brief survey of the content of the entire book – a rapid summary of what will be

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subsequently covered in more detail, the idea being to introduce much of the terminology and give a sense of where to look for particular phenomena. The detailed content of the book is in the fourteen subsequent chapters. Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 deal with the major lexical categories – verbs, nouns, determinatives, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions – and the structure of the phrases that they head. (Chapters 3 and 5 are unavoidably lengthier than any others, because of the complexity of the verb system and the structure of NPs, and might need to be allotted double the class time spent on other chapters.) Chapter 4 describes the structure of simple, positive, active, declarative, non-coordinate clauses with no special stylistic reordering, which we call 'canonical clauses' – a term that we do not take to have theoretical significance, but use solely an expository convenience. (Those acquainted with the American linguistics of the 1950s may correctly see in it an echo of the notion of 'kernel sentence'.) The idea is to describe canonical clauses first, and then systematically tackle the ways in which other clauses diverge.

Chapters 9 to 16 present a step-by-step introduction to the ways in which clauses may diverge in structure from canonical ones: negation (Chapter 9), non-declarative clause types (Chapter 10), subordination (Chapter 11), relativization (Chapter 12), comparison (Chapter 13), non-finiteness (Chapter 14), coordination (Chapter 15), and the discourse-sensitive 'information-packaging' constructions that for many syntacticians are the most interesting part of English syntax (Chapter 16). We have relegated word-internal structure (inflectional morphology, the basics of lexical word formation, and the associated spelling rules) to an appendix published online.

This text is not advanced in the sense of needing prerequisite courses, but it is by no means a popularization. It is intended as the basis for a serious and detailed introduction to English grammar for undergraduates and masters-level students. Covering it all would be a substantial diet for a semester, because our coverage is unusually complete: rather than cherry-picking phenomena that highlight points of syntactic interest, we cover virtually the entire range of constructions found in sentences of contemporary English. Some instructors (especially those on ten-week rather than fifteen-week terms) have found it best to omit specific chapters from the course: it is possible to skip such topics as negation (Chapter 9), comparatives and superlatives (Chapter 13), or coordination (Chapter 15) without the gaps causing much trouble. And some adopters have told us they like to reorder things so that the interesting and important material of Chapter 16 on discourse-sensitive syntactic constructions is reached earlier.

The exposition is very deliberately informal in style. Too many scholars have felt obliged to write sentences like 'One should not imagine, however, that such locutions are unattested' when they could have said 'But you shouldn't think people never say that.' We've tried to lean toward the latter style. Syntax can be hard enough without dense expository prose making it harder. A modern textbook should employ what we call normal style – roughly the kind of conversational

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language most instructors would use when explaining something in the classroom. We don't want to encourage one of the most damaging errors made by English teachers in the past: confusing formality with correctness, and consequently condemning features of ordinary conversational Standard English as 'bad grammar'.

We have also reduced the terminological burden a bit in this edition. Unfamiliar terms that did not do a lot of heavy lifting have been removed. For example, we have avoided the use of the term 'catenative' for the chained-together subjectless nonfinite clauses seen in *tends to try to seem to avoid being noticed*, though the coverage of important topics like raising in Chapter 14 is basically unchanged.

We have not attempted to cover topics like historical change, sociolinguistic variation, or the structure of non-standard dialects. Semantics is discussed only very informally, and we touch only lightly on anaphora, deixis, and ellipsis (*CGEL*'s Chapter 17); the interpretation of sentences with omitted or reduced parts connects to difficult questions in syntax, semantics, discourse, logic, and pragmatics that we feel are best covered in a second-level course. And we don't cover punctuation (*CGEL*'s Chapter 20), despite its critical importance for literacy, because its fixed and conventional nature – often stipulated in publishers' style sheets – makes it very different from the living and evolving phenomena of syntax that we are primarily concerned with.

A central aim of this text is to clarify the data that any theory of English syntax must be able to describe. In assessing the facts of usage we have regularly had recourse to standard data sources like the British National Corpus (BNC) and the enormously useful corpora made available by Mark Davies through **english-corpora.org**: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), News On the Web (NOW), the iWeb corpus, and others. But we don't try to illustrate with corpus examples throughout, or provide sources for the attested sentences we do use. The examples would nearly always have had to be adapted anyway, for brevity or to remove puzzling distractors. It could be a very useful exercise for students to test our descriptive generalizations by carrying out their own corpus investigations.

We have included more exercises than the first edition had. We would advise instructors to consider what they want to accomplish with exercises and make selective use of our suggestions. The exercises vary a great deal in depth and complexity. Some are quick and easy, but others are essay or research questions that may take the student many hours to complete, and students should be warned of that. Online multiple-choice exercises and other materials will be made available online using the Avallain e-learning platform. These will be accessible through the Cambridge University Press website at www.cambridge.org/SIEG2 and in some cases can be integrated directly into local learning management systems, permitting limited immediate feedback for students.

We provide a number of Usage Controversy Notes covering points where English speakers disagree with each other about what to call 'correct'. But we decided not to

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include end-of-chapter bibliographic notes on sources or further reading in the book itself, given the open-ended nature of that enterprise; instead, we plan to provide such notes in an online document on the Cambridge University Press website at www.cambridge.org/SIEG2.[1]

Linguists will see that we reject some assumptions quite widely held in twentieth-century generative linguistics. The differences are sharp and explicit enough that they should provide grounds for discussion without causing confusion. For example, we do not believe subordinators ('complementizers') or coordinators ('conjunctions') are heads, and we treat *every day* as a noun phrase headed by *day* rather than a determinative phrase headed by *every*. For instructors in linguistics departments, our decisions on such points do not by any means preclude the possibility of their theoretical pros and cons being discussed as part of the course. For others, such stands on theoretically controversial points will matter little and may pass unnoticed. The important thing is that we are consistent: the assumptions we adopt are maintained throughout. That does not mean we are legislating a theoretical view: it is always possible to stop and ask whether certain facts about syntax are better explained under one theoretical conception rather than another.

One of the most important points we draw from our linguistics backgrounds, and try to impart to the reader, is that grammatical study is (or ought to be) a matter of discovery rather than legislation or pontification. Too often English grammar has been regarded as a collection of timeless edicts defining what is 'proper', or reduced to a short list of tips and hints for the insecure. This is unfortunate, because the grammars of English published over the last two or three centuries have created a descriptive tradition that we see as gravely flawed. In this book we reject much traditional dogma. Since the late eighteenth century, when Lindley Murray sold a million copies of his grammar textbook (largely plagiarized from Robert Lowth's three decades earlier), students have been told that nouns are words that name things; that pronouns are words that stand in place of nouns to avoid repeating them; that prepositions stand before nouns to relate them to other nouns; that the subject says what the sentence is about; that the object can be defined via the weird phrase 'receiver of the action'; that relative clauses are 'adjective clauses' because they 'describe nouns'; and so on. It is high time serious courses on the structure of English broke away from repeating such time-worn nonsense.

However, when we depart from the tradition, we do so in a strict and consistent way, following *CGEL*. Adopting even a minor change in our analyses can lead via a ripple of consequences to a contradiction. Working out the consequences of such potential revisions could lead to interesting ideas for final-year honours

[1] One other temptation we have resisted is adding subsidiary points in footnotes. Lovers of arcane footnotes, if there are any, will be saddened to discover that this is the only footnote in the book.

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dissertations or master's theses that take the study of English syntax further. Nothing would please us more than seeing students working from this book improve on our description through their own research.

Finally, like all authors we have ended up with many debts, more than we can explain in detail. We particularly thank Jim Donaldson for many thoughtful comments; Aileen Bach, Michael DiPetta, and Peter Evans for comments, corrections, and proofreading; John Payne for advice and clarification on many syntactic points; John Joseph for discussion of the concept of Standard English; and Bryan Garner for useful discussion of controversial usage. We have naturally spent less time with our nearest and dearest than we could have done if we were not working on this book, and we thank them for their tolerance (they know who they are). And for obvious reasons, given that we completed this revision in the years 2020 and 2021, we thank everyone in the business of public health and vaccine production.

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Abbreviations

CATEGORIES

AdjP	adjective phrase
AdvP	adverb phrase
$Clause_{REL}$	relative clause
Crd	coordinator
D	determinative
DP	determinative phrase
Intj	interjection
N	noun
N_{PRO}	pronoun
Nom	nominal
NP	noun phrase
P	preposition
PP	preposition phrase
Sbr	subordinator
V	verb
VP	verb phrase

FUNCTIONS

Comp	complement
Det	determiner
ExtMod	external modifier
Mod	modifier
O	object
Obj	object
O^d	direct object
O^i	indirect object
Pred	predicate
PredComp	predicative complement
S	subject
Subj	subject

OTHER

AmE	American English
BrE	British English
CGEL	*The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*

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do_{aux}	auxiliary verb ***do***
do_{lex}	lexical verb ***do***
if_{c}	conditional preposition *if*
if_{i}	interrogative subordinator *if*
sg	singular
too_{x}	*too* with the meaning "excessively" rather than "additionally"
we_{D}	the determinative *we* as in *We voters disagree.*
we_{P}	the pronoun *we* as in *We disagree.*
you_{D}	the determinative *you* as in *You politicians are all alike.*
you_{P}	the pronoun *you*
§	section

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