

50

**to improving
your Grammar**

STEPS

Study Book

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Garnet
EDUCATION

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction	0
Unit A. What is grammar?	
1. What is grammar for and why is it important?	0
2. What are word classes?	0
3. What grammar should I learn and how should I learn it?	0
4. Is the grammar of my own language similar to English?	0
5. What is the difference between informal and formal grammar?	0
Unit B. How can I use nouns and pronouns effectively?	
6. What are nouns and how do they work in English?	0
7. What are pronouns and how do they work in English?	0
8. What is the difference between countable and uncountable nouns?	0
9. How can I make more complex noun phrases (pre-modification)?	0
10. How can I make more complex noun phrases (post-modification)?	0
Unit C. How can I use verbs effectively?	
11. What are verbs and how are they used in English?	0
12. What different types of verbs are there?	0
13. What is meant by 'tense' and 'aspect'?	0
14. How do I know which verb form to use??	0
15. What are the active and passive voices and how are they used in English??	0
Unit D. How can I use adjectives and adverbs effectively?	
16. What are adjectives and how can I use them?	0
17. What are adverbs and how can I use them?	0
18. What are comparatives and superlatives and how can they be used?	0
19. Where in a sentence should adjectives and adverbs be positioned?	0
20. What more complex forms of adjectives can I use?	0
Unit E. How can I use other word classes effectively?	
21. What are conjunctions and connectors and how can they be used to link ideas?	0
22. What are prepositions and how are they used in English?	0
23. What are determiners and how are they used in English?	0
24. How are articles used in English (1)?	0
25. How are articles used in English (2)?	0

Unit F. How can I write good sentences?

- 26. What have you learnt so far about sentence structure? 0
- 27. What are phrases? 0
- 28. What are clauses? 0
- 29. What are the main types of sentence in English? 0
- 30. How can I write better sentences and avoid mistakes? 0

Unit G. What grammar should I use for specific purposes?

- 31. What grammar should I use to show possibility and probability? 0
- 32. How can I use phrasal verbs correctly? 0
- 33. What grammar should I use to show relationships in time? 0
- 34. What grammar should I use to talk about negatives? 0
- 35. What grammar should I use to ask questions? 0

Unit H. What general grammatical issues do I need to consider?

- 36. What is agreement? 0
- 37. What grammar can I use to increase my cohesion? 0
- 38. Why should I be precise in my choice of grammar? 0
- 39. How can I use grammar for emphasis? 0
- 40. What are the most common grammatical mistakes in English and how can I avoid them? 0

Unit I. How can I punctuate and spell correctly?

- 41. What is punctuation for? 0
- 42. When should I use commas? 0
- 43. When should I use colons and semi-colons? 0
- 44. When should I use hyphens? 0
- 45. How can I improve my spelling? 0

Unit J. What is academic grammar?

- 46. How can prefixes and suffixes help your academic English? 0
- 47. How should I use nouns in academic English? 0
- 48. How should I use verbs in academic English? 0
- 49. What other constructions are commonly used in academic English? 0
- 50. What are the key points about grammar to remember? 0

Answers 0

Glossary 0

Appendix 1. Document list 0

Appendix 2. Extension activities 0

Appendix 3. Additional information 0

Appendix 4. Useful hyperlinks 0

Introduction



'Ill-fitting grammar are like ill-fitting shoes. You can get used to it for a bit, but then one day your toes fall off and you can't walk to the bathroom.'

Jasper Fforde (1961–)
British novelist

Overview of this book

50 steps to improving your grammar is different to many of the grammar books which you may have read before. Many grammar books are long, full of text and have long, complicated explanations. The idea of reading one of these books is unexciting. *50 steps to improving your grammar* tries to build on the success of the approach used in *50 steps to improving your academic writing* by presenting key information in a simple, easy-to-follow format, where there are lots of opportunities to practise what you have learnt. It is hoped that this approach to learning grammar will make the whole process more interesting.

Structure of the book

The 50 steps in this book are divided into ten units (A–J), each of which contains five steps. Each unit has a different area of grammatical focus, representing the major areas of English grammar. By the end of the 50 steps, you should understand why grammar is important, be confident in knowing how to use the different word classes (e.g., nouns, verbs, adverbs) and have a clearer idea of what grammar to use in different situations. The ten units of the book are listed below. The specific steps can be found in the Contents on page **XXX**.

Unit A. What is grammar?

Unit B. How can I use nouns and pronouns effectively?

Unit C. How can I use verbs effectively?

Unit D. How can I use adjectives and adverbs effectively?

Unit E. How can I use other word classes effectively?

Unit F. How can I write good sentences?

Unit G. What grammar should I use for specific purposes?

Unit H. What general grammatical issues do I need to consider?

Unit I. How can I punctuate and spell correctly?

Unit J. What is academic grammar?

Structure of each step

Each step is made up of four pages and follows the same pattern, which is as follows:

Quotation

Directs you to the key learning point of the text and familiarizes you with the subject (see above).

A. Reflection (1/2 page):

Evaluates your existing understanding of the topic through targeted questions.

B. Contextualization (1/2 page):

Demonstrates the importance and relevance of the topic through a presentation of the learning point in context.

C. Explanation (2 pages):

Explains the topic in detail, delivered by answering the specific questions posed in Part B. The structure of each step is 'interrogative'; that is, each section asks you a particular question, which it then answers. In Part C, you will also come across a number of special features, designed to increase your understanding of the subject matter, namely:

- *Glossary link*: shows you that this word or phrase is found in the extensive Glossary at the back of the book. The Glossary provides definitions about key grammatical terms used in the text. The first time each term is used in Part C, it is highlighted in red.
- *Example sentences from Parts A / B*: are often examined in more detail in Part C. These sentences are highlighted in green.
- *Grammar box*: provides useful lists of information and additional examples.
- *Answer box*: gives answers to questions asked in Part A / Part B which are not answered in the text.
- *Note*: gives information which you may already know, but which is relevant to the point being discussed.
- *Top Tip*: provides useful advice, often related to common problems.
- *Links to steps*: indicates other steps (e.g., ►Step 17), where this information is also discussed and analyzed.
- *Summary box*: summarizes the step in three key points.

D. Activation (1 page):

Application of what you have learnt through a range of test activities.

The answer key to the questions posed in Part D Activation of each step can be found on pages XXX-YYY. The Glossary can be found on pages XXX-YYY.

The English used in this book

The two main varieties of English referred to in this book are British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) as they are both commonly taught in the classroom.

(Editor's note: this book is predominantly written in BrE, but with AmE *-ize* rather than BrE *-ise* spellings.)

How to use this book

Each of the steps should take you between 45 minutes and one hour to complete (roughly 10–15 minutes for Parts A and B, 20–25 minutes for Part C and 15–20 minutes for Part D). Exactly how long you spend will depend on the precise details of the step and your existing level of knowledge.

The structure of the book means that you can decide how best to use it. If you are already aware of your areas of weakness in grammar and feel you only need support in certain key areas, then you should focus on those particular steps. If, however, you feel you need more support, it will be more beneficial to follow through the book from beginning to end. However, each step is 'stand alone', meaning that it makes sense if you look at it in isolation.

However you use this book, it is important that you try to apply what you learn as much as you possibly can. As noted at the beginning, grammar is not something theoretical which you can just learn for tests and then forget. To improve the quality of your speaking and writing in English, you must constantly try to apply the knowledge and skills you gain.

What is grammar for and why is it important?



'Grammar is the greatest joy in life, don't you find?'

Lemony Snicket (1970–)

American author (real name Daniel Handler)

A Reflection

Why did you buy this book? Explain your reasons in the box below.

B Contextualization

In 1979, William Safire wrote his 'Fumblerules of Grammar'. Fifteen of these 'rules' are outlined below, showing some of the most common grammatical mistakes in English.

Read the 'rules' and identify what grammar problem he is talking about in each case. When you have done this, think about whether you make any of these mistakes in your own speaking or writing.

1. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
2. Don't use no double negatives.
3. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
4. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn't.
5. Reserve the apostrophe for it's proper use and omit it when its not needed.
6. No sentence fragments.
7. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
8. A writer must not shift your point of view.
9. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!!
10. Hyphenate between sy-llables and avoid un-necessary hyphens.
11. Write all adverbial forms correct.
12. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
13. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
14. One-word sentences? Eliminate.
15. capitalize every sentence and remember always end it with a full stop

Write each number from the list above in the appropriate column, according to the type of mistake which is being made.

Using the incorrect form of the word	Using an incorrect sentence structure	Using punctuation incorrectly	Using poor style
3	6	1	2

c Explanation

Why did you buy this book?

People want to learn English – and English grammar – for many reasons. You may be studying English at school; you may need to improve it to perform well at university; you may need it in your work or business life; or you may need it for conversations with friends or a loved one. Indeed, you may need it for a combination of these reasons. Whatever the reason(s), it is very useful to know what you are trying to get out of this book at this early stage. If you do this, you are likely to be more motivated in your study; if you are more motivated, you are more likely to learn more and become better at using English grammar. It may also help to think about any specific grammar problems you have, so you know some of the particular areas you need to address.

What areas of grammar will this book focus on?

- As the name suggests, this book provides a step-by-step guide to help you improve your grammar. To do this, it tries to:
- build on your existing knowledge of grammar;
- focus on the most important areas of grammar that will help you communicate more effectively in English;
- check your understanding of these key areas of grammar with clear activities and exercises;
- show you that English grammar is not as difficult as you might think.

Why is grammar important?

Take a look at the quotation at the beginning of this step. Now consider whether you agree with it or not. The answer to this question is probably no. For most people, grammar is **not** the greatest joy in life. In fact, for many people grammar is difficult and confusing. And, since you have bought this book, you may well disagree with this statement! However, even if you do find grammar difficult, it is still very important for improving your English. Three of the most important reasons why grammar is important are as follows:

1. **Good grammar helps make your meaning clear.** If your writing contains grammatical mistakes, it may be difficult to understand exactly what you mean. Small grammatical mistakes can have a significant impact on the meaning of what you say. This is particularly important in English, where the majority of people who use it are not **native speakers**. The possibility of misunderstanding is therefore higher.
2. **Good grammar helps you look professional.** Good grammar definitely helps to create a good impression. People often react negatively to speech or writing which contains a lot of grammatical mistakes. If you want to use your English to impress people, you need good grammar.
3. **Good grammar means that people take you more seriously.** If you make regular grammatical mistakes in how you say something, people may also assume that what you say is also not worth listening to. Although this may not be true, people may make this assumption.

What are some common grammatical problems, and how will this book address them?

William Safire's list of grammatical problems highlights some of the main types of grammatical problems which students of English face. The purpose of this book is to help you solve these and many other problems. The 15 specific problems identified can be categorized as follows:

Using the incorrect form of the word	Using an incorrect sentence structure	Using punctuation incorrectly	Using poor style
3, 11, 13	6, 14	1, 4, 5, 7, 10, 15	2, 8, 9, 12

The Fumblerules are corrected (highlighted in yellow) in the table below. In each case, an explanation of the problem is given, and links to the various steps in which this issue is discussed are given. Note that in some cases more than one correction is possible.

Rule	Correction(s)	Solution / Comments
1	Avoid run-on sentences. They are hard to read.	A full stop is used to separate the sentences . A semi-colon could also have been used (►Steps 41 and 43).
	Avoid run-on sentences because they are hard to read.	Conjunctions can also be used to link clauses together (►Step 21).
2	Don't use any double negatives.	Where there is already a negative in the sentence (i.e., <i>don't</i>), no further negative is needed – so use a positive forms instead (i.e., <i>any</i>) (►Step 34).
	Use only a single negative.	An alternative is to invert the sentence and write it in a positive way.
3	Verbs have to agree with their subjects.	The subject is plural, so the auxiliary verb should also be plural (►Step 36).
4	Use the semicolon properly; always use it where it is appropriate and never where it isn't.	A semi-colon separates independent clauses , meaning that it is more like a full stop than a comma (►Steps 41 and 43).
5	Reserve the apostrophe for its proper use and omit it when it's not needed.	Apostrophes are used in two main ways – to show missing letters and for possession. The first its is a possessive pronoun , whilst the second one is the contracted form of <i>it is</i> (►Step 41).
6	There should be no sentence fragments.	Every sentence needs a subject and a verb (►Step 29).
7	Avoid commas that are not necessary.	Commas are commonly misused, even by native speakers (►Step 42). The problem here is that the comma is preceding a defining relative clause and they can only come before non-defining relative clauses (►Step 28).
8	A writer must not shift his or her point of view.	Consistency is important. In this example, the subject 'writer' is 3 rd person and so the pronoun should also be 3 rd person (not <i>your</i> , which is 2 nd person) (►Step 7).

D Activation

1. Complete and comprehend.
Why is grammar important? Summarize in your own words.

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2. Check your understanding.
Sentences 1–5 contain similar mistakes to the ones outlined in Part B. Match them up with the feedback given in a–e.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. No verb, no sentence | a. This is a run-on sentence. This means that two sentences are incorrectly combined as one. |
| 2. Full stops are needed at the end of a sentence
this is important | b. It can be confusing to overuse negative forms. Use positive forms where possible. |
| 3. The use of negative forms doesn't make your English any clearer | c. The verb does not agree with the subject. |
| 4. The use of longer noun phrases at the start of a sentence are confusing | d. Contractions and exclamation marks are considered to be informal. |
| 5. Don't use informal grammar in written English! | e. This is a sentence fragment, meaning that it is not complete. |

3. Create your own.
Rewrite sentences 2–5 above in a more appropriate, grammatically correct way.
Example: 1. No verb, no sentence – Every sentence must contain a verb.

2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

What are word classes?



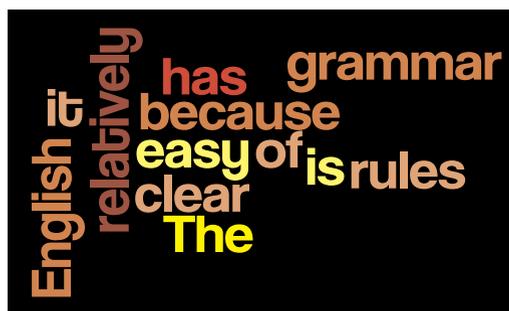
‘Then suddenly, he was struck by a powerful but simple little truth, and it was this: that English grammar is governed by rules that are almost mathematical in their strictness!’

Roald Dahl (1916–1990)

British novelist, short story writer, poet and screenwriter

A Reflection

Rearrange the following words so that the sentence makes sense.



B Contextualization

Read the following passage. Examples of all the word classes (= parts of speech) of English can be found here.

Two examples of each word class are shown in the table. Write at least three additional words in each group.

Many books about grammar have been published. Although some of them are very clear and easy to follow, many are really difficult to understand. Therefore, many students are bored or scared by grammar. The purpose of *50 steps to improving your grammar* is to change this. I hope it succeeds, because grammar is important.

Each of the steps has four parts: reflection (where you hopefully identify what you already know about the subject), contextualization (where you see that grammar point in context), explanation (where the main points of the step are clearly outlined and explained) and activation (where you practise the points learnt).

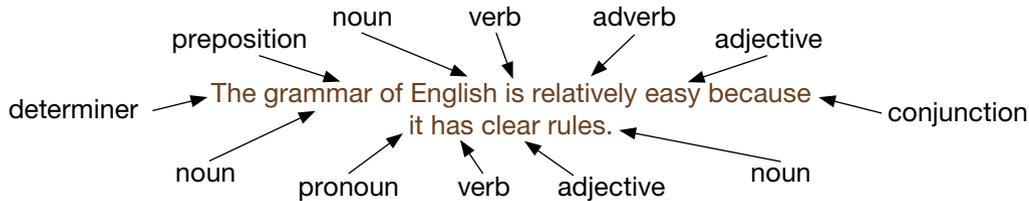
Word class	Examples
Noun	books, grammar ...
Verb	have, published ...
Adjective	clear, easy ...
Adverb	very, really ...
Pronoun	them, you ...
Preposition	about, of ...
Conjunction	although, therefore ...
Determiner	many, the ...

C Explanation

What are word classes?

Word classes (sometimes called ‘parts of speech’) are the basic bricks of language. Each word class has a particular job to perform. For your English to make sense, you need to understand the function of each type of word, and how the different word classes relate to each other. If you do not understand what a word is supposed to do, it is unlikely that you will be able to use it correctly.

There are eight main word classes in English. In some languages, there are clues in the word as to what class it is (e.g., information at the beginning or end of a word). In English, the context is very important. The sentence below, from Part A, contains each of the eight word classes.



The table below shows the functions of these word classes, and provides further examples from Part B. (**Note:** not every word from the text is included.)

Word class	Text examples	Function
Noun	books, grammar, students, purpose, explanation	In its basic, general form, a noun is a person, place or thing. At a more advanced level, it may refer to ideas, feelings, qualities, events and organizations. Nouns are the most commonly used part of speech.
Verb	have, published, are, change, identify	Put simply, a verb is a ‘doing’ or ‘action’ word. It often describes what happens in a sentence.
Adjective	clear, easy, difficult, bored, scared	An adjective describes / modifies nouns and pronouns.
Adverb	very, really, already, hopefully, clearly	An adverb describes / modifies verbs (as well as adjectives and other adverbs).
Pronoun	them, you, it, this, some	A pronoun replaces / represents a noun.
Preposition	about, of, to, by, in	A preposition shows the relationship (e.g., in terms of place or time) between other word classes, most often between nouns and verbs.
Conjunction	although, therefore, or, and, because	A conjunction shows the relationship between clauses in a sentence (e.g., in terms of time, cause and effect, transition, etc.).
Determiner	many, the, each, that, an	A determiner appears at the beginning of noun phrases, telling us whether the information is new or familiar, or how much of something there is.

What is the difference between an 'open' and 'closed' word class?

The word classes noted above can be divided into two major types, namely **open** (or lexical) and **closed** (or functional). Each of these word classes is looked at in more detail in other steps. Word classes which are open are **nouns** (►Steps 6–10), **verbs** (►Steps 11–15), **adjectives** and **adverbs** (►Steps 16–20). Word classes which are closed are **pronouns** (►Step 7), **conjunctions** (►Step 21), **prepositions** (►Step 22) and **determiners** (►Steps 23–25). The two main differences between the two groups are as follows:

- There are a fixed number of words in closed classes. This means that once you have learnt the prepositions, conjunctions, determiners and pronouns of English, you never have to learn any more! However, there are new open class words being invented all the time (e.g., see ►Step 6 for recent nouns, and ►Step 11 for recent verbs).
- Closed class words are also called function or grammar words because their job is to show the relationship between words in the open/lexical class. These words do not describe anything unless they are related to a lexical word. For example, *in*, *on* and *at* do not describe times or places by themselves; they only do this when used in phrases such as *in London*, *on time* or *at school*.

Can a word be in more than one class?

Yes, particularly with nouns and verbs. Many common words can be both nouns and verbs, for example, *answer*, *break*, *cook*, *email*, *face*, *laugh*, *miss*, *order*, *run*, *set*, *train* and *visit*. Some words may also be in more than one closed class, or even be in an open as well as a closed class. For example, *each* can be an adverb (*They cost \$20 each.*) and a determiner (*Each day I learn more.*). *On* can be a preposition (*The TV is on the table.*), an adverb (*Turn on the TV.*) or an adjective (*Your favourite TV show is on.*).

Grammar box: word roots

There may be more than one type of word in each class which has the same **root**. For example, both *cook* and *cooker* are nouns: the former means a person who makes food, whereas the latter refers to the machine in which food is cooked.

How can a word change class?

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb
clarity	clear / clarify	clear	clearly
depth	deepen	deep	deeply
help	help	helpful	helpfully
sadness	sadden	sad	sadly
success	succeed	successful	successfully

Many words belong to groups of words which share the same root. One root can be used to make different words which belong to different word classes. Understanding the relationship between these words can be extremely useful for building your vocabulary and avoiding mistakes. The table shows some common examples. Knowing what **suffixes** are usually found in each class can help with word building. Common suffixes for each of the open word classes include:

D Activation

1. Complete and comprehend.

- (i) Answer this question in 20 words or fewer: *What are the main differences between open and closed word classes?*

(ii) Write the name of a word class in the following gaps.

- a. An _____ adds information to nouns or pronouns.
b. A _____ shows the relationship between different word classes, usually nouns or verbs.
c. A _____ shows the relationship between clauses.
d. A _____ replaces a noun.
e. An _____ generally provides more information about a verb.
f. A _____ indicates the action in a sentence.

2. Check your understanding.

What class are the following words in? Use a dictionary if needed.

Note: some words may be in more than one class.

Word	Class(es)	Word	Class(es)
computer		development	
justify		around	
fasten		while	
fast		some	

3. Create your own.

Answer the following questions. Use a dictionary if necessary.

- a. What is the verb form of *computer*? _____
b. What is the adjective form of *colour*? _____
c. What is the name of the person whose job is cleaning? _____
d. What are the noun and verb forms of *special*? _____ and _____
e. What is the noun form of *refuse*? _____
f. What is the adjective form of *misery*? _____
g. What is the adverb form of *obvious*? _____
h. What is the adverb form of *clear*? _____

What grammar should I learn and how should I learn it?

'Knowing about grammar offers a window into the human mind and into our amazingly complex mental capacity!'

Brock Haussamen (1945–)
Retired English professor, author and social activist

A Reflection

What is your reaction to the following quotations?

I should use the kind of grammar found in books.

Making mistakes is a natural part of learning grammar.

I should learn to use the grammar native speakers use.

Which of the following sentences would you be more likely to say?

Note: these sentences are limited to **British English (BrE)** and **American English (AmE)**, which are both commonly taught in the classroom.

Have you seen my phone?

Did you see my phone?

My team are winning.

My team is winning.

They've gotten a new car.

They have got a new car.

I'll be home at the weekend.

I'll be home on the weekend

B Contextualization

Each of the sentences below has slightly different grammar from its pair. In each case, identify how the meanings differ.

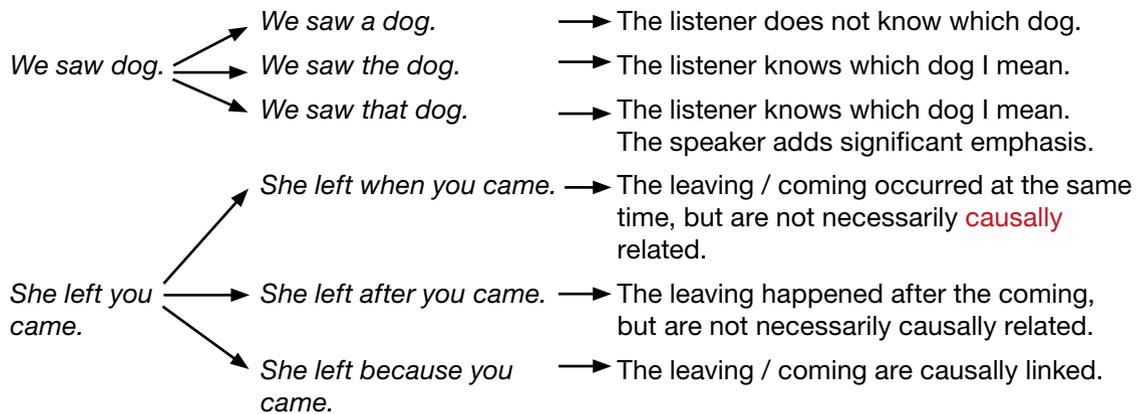
Sentence 1	Sentence 2	Difference in meaning
<i>Sam likes football.</i>	<i>Sam liked football.</i>	Sentence 1: shows Sam's current feeling. Sentence 2: shows this was true in the past, but is no longer the case.
<i>He's leaving tonight.</i>	<i>He may be leaving tonight.</i>	
<i>You're silly.</i>	<i>You're being silly.</i>	

C Explanation

What difference does grammar make to a sentence?

Without grammar, our sentences would not make any sense. If we understood some of the words, we might be able to get a **general** understanding of what was being said, but not a **detailed** one. As the quotation at the beginning of this unit suggests, to be fully human, we need the ability to use complex grammar.

When sentences lack grammar words, it may sometimes be possible to understand their meaning. It is possible to guess the meaning of the example *bus come / late work*. However, we could easily use other grammar words to interpret the meaning of the sentence in a different way, for example: *Although the bus didn't come, I wasn't late for work*. We could also put a range of grammatical words in the other sentences, each of which expresses very different meanings. For instance:



The sentences in the table in Part B clearly show just how important grammar is. In each case, the two sentences have **almost** the same grammar. However, the small differences significantly change the meaning and **emphasis** of each sentence. This can be called the **'butterfly effect'** in grammar. One small flap of the butterfly's wings (i.e., one small grammatical change) can cause a storm (i.e., significantly alter a sentence's meaning).



Sentence 1	Sentence 2	Difference in meaning
<i>He's leaving tonight.</i>	<i>He may be leaving tonight.</i>	In Sentence 1, this is definitely happening – there is a specific plan for him to leave tonight. In Sentence 2, however, it is only a possibility. The modal verb may (►Step 31) changes the meaning.
<i>You're silly.</i>	<i>You're being silly.</i>	Sentence 1 talks about a permanent fact (i.e., You are silly all the time). In Sentence 2, the silliness is only temporary (i.e., You are not always silly, but you are the moment.).
<i>Do you have a paper?</i>	<i>Do you have paper?</i>	In Sentence 1, the noun <i>paper</i> is countable , being used as an abbreviation for <i>newspaper</i> . In Sentence 2, paper is uncountable (i.e., what you write on).

What kind of English grammar should I learn and how should I learn it?

'I should use the kind of grammar found in books.'

There are two ways in which people view grammar. One group believes that there is a set of specific rules and principles (found in books) which people should follow at all times. Another group believes that language changes over time, and that people should use the kind of grammar which people actually use (found in real life).

This book believes that whilst it is very important to understand the basic rules and 'building blocks' of a language, it also strongly believes that the whole point of learning grammar is so that you can be understood. Therefore, it has to reflect the kind of language people are actually using in day-to-day life.

'I should learn to use the grammar native speakers use.'

The first question to ask here would be: *What kind of native speaker?* Whilst there are many different varieties of English (e.g., British English, American English, Australian English, Indian English), most of their differences are in vocabulary and pronunciation rather than grammar. This said, there are a few noticeable grammatical differences between the two varieties of English which are most commonly taught in the classroom, namely British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). Four such differences are highlighted below.

Grammatical area of difference	British English examples	American English examples
In AmE, the present perfect (►Step 14) is not commonly used – past simple is used instead.	<i>Have you seen my phone?</i>	<i>Did you see my phone?</i>
In AmE, collective nouns (nouns referring to groups of people or things) are grammatically singular. In BrE, they can be singular or plural.	<i>My team is/are winning.</i>	<i>My team is winning.</i>
Past simple and past participle verb forms may differ between BrE and AmE.	<i>dive-dived-dived get-got-got</i>	<i>dive-dove-dived get-got-gotten</i>
The use of prepositions differs between BrE and AmE in particular phrases.	<i>I'll be home at the weekend.</i>	<i>I'll be home on the weekend.</i>

'Making mistakes is a natural part of learning grammar.'

Students of English often get concerned about the number of mistakes they make. However, in the same way that you made mistakes when you learnt your mother tongue, you will also make them when learning another language. It does not matter if you make mistakes, so long as you learn from them. It is important not to get worried or upset if you do make such mistakes – if you do, the speed at which you will learn English will decrease.

Summary

1. Very small changes in grammar can have a significant impact on the whole sentence.
2. You should accept that you will make mistakes when learning grammar – so long as you learn from these mistakes, this is fine!
3. Although there are some grammatical differences between different English varieties, they are not that significant.

D Activation

1. Complete and comprehend.

Match each person A–E to the correct sentence 1–5.

Woman A

'I now work in an office, but back in 2013 I was a barista.'



Man B

'I am bored in my current job. I'd enjoy serving customers and selling coffee.'



Man C

'I work in an office. I like going to cafés.'



Woman D

'They really liked my interview, and offered me a job. I start tomorrow.'



Woman E

'So that's two coffees, a sandwich and a bottle of water?'



1. He does not work in a café.
2. She's going to work in a café.
3. She's working in a café.
4. She worked in a café.
5. He'd like to work in a café.

2. Check your understanding.

Match the sentences 1–5 from Exercise 1 with their grammatical structures and meaning.

1. He does not work in a café.
 2. She's going to work in a café.
 3. She's working in a café.
 4. She worked in a café.
 5. He'd like to work in a café.
- a. The past simple talks about events which occurred in the past, and are now finished.
 - b. The modal verb indicates a desire or wish.
 - c. The negative word implies the opposite meaning, and the present simple a fact.
 - d. The auxiliary verb shows that there is a specific plan / intention.
 - e. The present continuous describes something which is unfinished.

3. Create your own.

The box below contains open class words. Add as many different combinations of grammar words as you can to make different sentences. One example has been done for you.

answer phone ring

Example: *I answered the phone because it was ringing.*

Sentence 1: _____

Sentence 2: _____

Sentence 3: _____