



In the Context of English Language Learning

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# Introduction

I've been teaching English in France since 2009, and in that time I have probably witnessed every confusion, every exception, every grammar explanation possible. This does not make me a linguist or academic expert in any way, but it has given me a deep insight into the psychology of grammatical study from the student's perspective. So, when I'm often asked, "Which grammar book should I buy to study at home?" I'm at a loss. The choice is vast. However, with a little examination, I've seen that most books have the same flaws in common: overkill in their level of detail or a lack of simple and comprehensible explanation, not to mention grammar exercises with the same point drilled in ten to twenty decontextualised examples.

An experienced language trainer has their own way of describing grammar, and mine comes from my experience with French learners mixed with my professional study of grammar reference books from industry heroes like Michael Lewis, Jeremy Harmer, Jim Scrivener, David Crystal, etc. Since I can't find any other book that summarises these rules and explanations in a satisfactory way, I decided to write one myself. This book is therefore mainly destined for language trainers, to help them gain a better grasp of the grammar they will inevitably be required to teach. It could, of course, also be used by a language learner, but the descriptions are not really designed or structured to be practically used in a language learning context. The goal here is to help teachers think differently about grammar, so that they may update or adapt their existing method of language presentation, to better equip them to deal with questions like, "But why is it like that?" or, "What about this exception?"

Though you may not always agree with my perspective on certain rules and tendencies, I hope you view this book more as a means of provoking thought than a strict or definitive guide to English grammar. I sometimes use examples compared with French grammar for illustration, as this is the context in which I teach and with which I am the most familiar. I feel understanding English grammar compared to another language's is one of the best ways to gain a deep and intimate insight into the way grammar functions in general. Furthermore, in the section "Origins" of the "What is grammar?" section, I offer a comical example of how grammar can be viewed from its most fundamental perspective. Afterwards, I explore grammar subjects in the order I think most natural to approach them, starting with basic syntax and ending with idioms and metaphor. Thank you for taking the time to read my work, and please feel free to get in touch with me to share your thoughts:

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## Why use a Grammar book?

The way most of us were brought up in school regarding languages has poisoned our perception of how to learn. Most of us believe that if we read grammar rules and complete example sentences we can improve our ability and accuracy in speaking. Improving your technical knowledge is one thing, converting that to practical ability is another. Allow me to draw a parallel:

Let's imagine a similar situation: I want to learn to drive, I buy my first car and my wife agrees to accompany me for driving practice. Before I do this, I pick up The Highway Code and a book about Linear Dynamics and Internal Combustion, thinking this will help me change gears or turn the wheel more accurately. You would say I'm mad, and you'd be right.

I like this analogy for language learning, as a grammar book is like the Highway Code and real-life speaking practice is like sitting in the car seat and hitting the road. If you want to improve your precise, explicit knowledge of road etiquette and manoeuvres, nothing can replace that book. But if you want to learn how to make the car move, you have to get out there and drive.

By now you should see how I view grammar instruction and books such as this one. This is a language learner's Highway Code of English. It will help them be more accurate and participate in the game of conversation with more accuracy, but they still have to get out there and physically practise. This book is a stop-and-check tool, how a learner can know if what they said to the man in the pizza shop today was, as well as successful in securing a solution to their hunger and laziness, accurate and appropriate. This will generate lightbulbs above learners' head and that prized realisation moment of, "Ah, so that's why!"

To conclude, I want to make one thing painfully clear: reading the concepts in this book alone will not make your learners speak better English; nor will any grammar book, or text book for that matter. This is not just my opinion, this is the result of years of research into communicative language teaching. The only thing that will help a language learner communicate more effectively is experiencing communication scenarios first-hand, in the real world, with living people. That being said, this book will help your learners:

- deepen their knowledge of how English works
- reaffirm and strengthen concepts they were already familiar with
- increase their communicative confidence
- draw their attention to potentially 'fossilised' mistakes in their language
- increase their communicative potential in real-life situations

# Tips

Studying independently has never been easier than today. Not only do a multitude of digital resources exist, many of them are free. We also know a lot more about how we learn language, and many strategies and techniques exist to help us learn in a more communicative way. Below are a few recommendations.

## Chunking

Many of us, when learning a new language, carefully consider each individual word as a unique and separate entity, making memorisation time-consuming. You'll find some examples in this book of the idea of 'chunking', coined by Michael Lewis (1986) to describe cutting up sentences into little bricks to analyse, as opposed to dissecting them into a multitude of individual lifeless words. This is an excellent method to memorise otherwise grammatically complex expressions and phrases which are commonplace in everyday English. For example, imagine I'm a French person encountering this expression in English class with the task of translating and analysing it:

"Would you be so kind as to write me just the smallest of examples?"

Most students immediately opt for a word-for-word translation, like so:

"Seriez-vous aussi gentil que de m'écrire juste le plus petit des exemples?"

Which, perhaps not to you, but to a French person would seem strange or at least unnatural. Now let's try cutting up the sentence into chunks, which we will then consider as new entities, almost like whole words themselves as opposed to compositions. We must take into account: the sense of the chunk; the communicative objective of the chunk; the communicative function of the chunk; essentially the reason that the chunk exists in the first place, then find that equivalent in our second language:

Would you be so kind as to	write me	just the smallest of examples?
Form of politeness; request; sentence head	Main action with object	Object of the request; mitigated with adjectives and adverbs to sound less demanding
Auriez-vous la gentillesse de	m'écrire	un petit exemple, s'il vous plait?

Through chunking, translation becomes more what we would say in a particular situation or context in the second language, rather than what each isolated word means. In the end, an isolated word doesn't really mean anything, as we would never find it floating alone in the communication space. Words are always accompanied by other words (cotext) and a communicative situation (context). Not only that, but through chunking we obtain a much more natural feeling for what is grammatically right in a language, as ready-made chunks represent examples of accurate grammar, able to be recalled when reassurance is needed.

If you accept this novel concept, take action from now on by noting any new vocabulary you find as you study in at least the smallest of chunks, better still with some indication of the context or function in parentheses. This will help you later on when you come back to revise vocabulary you may have spotted once only, then rarely or never used again. Recalling a memory with the chunk it was found in and the context will make revising vocabulary a much easier task. So I urge you: forget about what we were taught in school about vocabulary learning, start fresh, and chunk!

## Personalising

Almost all of us go through school thinking that contrived examples are the natural way to learn language. I remember my GCSE French exam, for which I got an A\* by the way, where I confidently explained to the examiner how much I loved playing football at the weekends. I think at that point I hadn't played football in nearly a decade. How could I have lied in such a way? One simple reason: I wasn't speaking with the examiner, I was speaking at him. The examiner wasn't interested in learning about my hobbies, only that I prove my ability regurgitate the sentences prescribed in the syllabus for the sole objective of assigning me a grade.

As a result, speaking a foreign language is often an idea completely disconnected from speaking in general. We disassociate the ability to communicate with other human beings and learning foreign language. This leads to situations like in the UK at the moment where languages are disappearing from the secondary school curriculum, and students leave school without any thought to how they will survive in an internationally connected economy.

We must treat learning foreign vocabulary and grammar not as a scholarly subject apart from our daily communication, but as an extension of it. Our ability to communicate is improved in general by expanding our vocabulary, whether it be native or foreign words. This learning is more efficient and long-term when we use personal and meaningful examples. So how can I present examples to you in this book in keeping with this logic? Simply, my examples mean something to me, whether conveniently describing the task at hand, or sharing something person with you, the reader. Sometimes I'll ask you to write your own examples to practice, which you should try at all costs to make if not meaningful, at least true.

Take the example of the Present Simple. Which example do you prefer:

“Brian is in the kitchen.”

“The Sun is the brightest star in our sky.”

Neither example is particularly interesting, unless you're an astrologist or kitchen fanatic, but we know the Sun and its basic properties in our native language, and so this immediately makes understanding the second example more intuitive given our existing frame of reference. Brian, who on earth is Brian? A question posed by famous French comedian Gad Elmaleh, as this example is familiar to French students from their secondary education.

This example probably means nothing to us, as it is decontextualised and, moreover, false. In a universe of infinite probability and chaos, Brian could be anywhere. In Quantum Mechanics, Brian could be in several places at once. Anyway, you get my point, forget about Brian. Make your examples personalised, and your vocabulary memorisation will improve.

## Learning

When it comes to language, no one is incapable. Even still, many people I've taught over the years have thought the contrary, whether due to secondary school trauma or years of professional criticism. Whatever you think you know about your learning abilities, you can learn a language. Everyone in the world is a master of at least one language, and there exists no evidence that we can't do it as adults once we surpass our inhibitions. Although it's a cliché: your biggest enemy to your success is, ultimately, yourself.

So, with that cheery thought in mind, how can you take full advantage of your learning capacities? First, remember that everyone is different. Ask yourself what motivates you to learn, how do you like to discover information, how do you store that information? You might find that, like me, you enjoy educational videos or documentaries, and prefer to store information as visual memories. Perhaps you like listening to the radio or presentations, and store and recall information as sound. Perhaps you like 'getting your hands dirty', and store data from the resulting creations. These learning strengths are called, respectively, visual, audio and kinaesthetic.

If you fall into one of these categories, you can tailor your learning strategies to suit your learning style. For visual learners: keep a learning diary; write examples; draw pictures; take photos and describe them using the words you learn. For audio learners: listen to examples; record yourself saying them; have conversations with people and put what you've learned into practice. For kinaesthetic learners: make some flash cards (vocabulary cards with English on one side, and your translation on the other) or cut up your examples into chunks and rearrange them to revise grammar and sentence construction.

I can't stress the point here enough: everyone is capable of learning a language. If you had reason to doubt yourself in the past, start fresh, believe in yourself, and you will prove it.

# The internet

Nowadays we have one of the biggest resources for language study at our fingertips, but many of us don't know where to start. Here are a few useful websites to keep in mind for your English learning and general, and for use with this book:

[www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) - The most comprehensive online multilingual dictionary I know, with single word, multi-word and idiomatic translations, as well as an active forum where users post questions on specific translations. A free app for your phone / tablet is also available.

[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) - Sometimes the only true way to know if the word we're using is the right one is to check its definition(s) in a monolingual dictionary. This site is extremely comprehensive and informative, with a thesaurus (synonym dictionary) available to further expand your vocabulary.

[www.englishpage.com](http://www.englishpage.com) - If my grammar explanations aren't extensive enough for you, this site has the answer. It's a free resource which has many my grammar points in greater detail, as well as quizzes to test yourself. The quizzes are not very interactive, but provide an opportunity to stop and check what you're studying.

[www.phrases.org.uk](http://www.phrases.org.uk) - The meaning and history of many idiomatic expressions can be found in this user created library of explanations and theories. Not all idioms have been accounted for, and some can be difficult to search for without knowing exactly the words to use. Still, the explanation of the phrases they do have is extensive.

[Quizlet](#) / [Memrise](#) / [Duolingo](#) / [Padlet](#) - These are just three of the hundreds of apps available on the internet today for improving your English vocabulary. Quizlet is a flash-card system. Memrise uses a special memorisation schedule to help vocabulary be retained for longer. Duolingo uses game-based concepts to keep vocabulary acquisition fun and motivating. Padlet is a digital sharing platform that allows recording your own video and audio files. Each of these apps merits testing and exploration to know if they are to be shared with learners as methods of extra-curricular practice.

Before, I would have been hesitant about including a section on internet resources, thinking that many readers would avoid it being uncomfortable with digital content. These days though, use of the internet is so prevalent in our everyday lives it would be foolish not to take advantage of it to further progress our learning. Nothing can substitute for face-to-face conversation, but strengthening your preparation for these encounters with e-learning is definitely worth consideration.

# What is grammar?

## Definition

The Collins World English Dictionary provides several definitions for the word “grammar.” Which one is the most correct for you?

1. the branch of linguistics that deals with syntax and morphology, sometimes also phonology and semantics
2. the abstract system of rules in terms of which a person's mastery of his native language can be explained
3. a systematic description of the grammatical facts of a language
4. a book containing an account of the grammatical facts of a language or recommendations as to rules for the proper use of a language
5. the use of language with regard to its correctness or social propriety, esp in syntax: the teacher told him to watch his grammar

You're probably reading this book with one of the above definitions in mind, or perhaps you really have no idea. Anyway, it doesn't help to simply know the definition of a word; we need to see it, touch it, taste it, feel it to truly understand its meaning. Michael Swan's (2010) British Council conference talk inspired me to write the following example:

## Origins

Once upon a time, there were two simple cavemen: Ug and Er. Ug wishes to recount to Er that their mutual friend Ag was killed by a lion, and grunts or gestures will not suffice. Ug points to a cave painting of a lion and says “Rar,” which will henceforth be their word for lion. Ug mimes being strangled and says “Ooh” which will now be their first verb, “kill.” Now Ug has all the necessary words to recount his story, but what happens next? Catastrophic ambiguity:

“Ag Rar Ooh,” says Ug, to a confusion look from his colleague. Who killed whom? Should Er celebrate a successful lion hunt, or being mourning his friend? Is Ug ordering Er to go kill Ag and the lion himself? Without a commonly agreed framework on the relationship between the words used, comprehension is impossible. Let us choose the popular subject-verb-object sentence to resolve this ambiguity:

“Rar Ooh Ag”

i.e. Rar is the actor, Ooh is his action, and Ag is on the receiving end.

If we said “Ag Ooh Rar,” it would be Ag who killed the lion instead.

Though this is not the only way we could have organised our sentence. Let’s experiment with changing the verb ending. Say we agree that the actor takes the suffix -a, and the object takes the suffix -o. We could simply attach these to our original sentence like so:

“Rara Ooh Ago.”

Now if we can change the syntax, it will have no effect on meaning, for example:

“Ago Rara Ooh.”

Even though Ag is first in the sentence order, the -o suffix tells us he was the receiver of the action, and so was killed by the lion.

Now Er understands the basics of Ug’s perilous tale, but was it a past, in progress, or future action? Er and Ug have yet to decide on a system of ‘tense’, or the time when the action took place. Imagine the word “la” means in the past. Our sentence would become:

“Rar Ooh Ag La.”

Interesting, but let’s return to our choice of using suffixes, this time the verb ending -la will indicate past tense:

“Rar Oohla Ag.”

We have given the verb a sense of ‘pastness’. Now, let’s decide on a further suffix to indicate ‘aspect’, in other words the events relationship with time. Imagine, years in the future, Ug wishes to tell his grandchildren the story of Ag’s death. He chooses a new suffix, -pah, to indicate that the action occurred long ago, or in a time disconnected from the present:

“Rar Oohlapah Ag.”

My invented language is really starting to take shape. I hope this has made you think about the nature of grammar, which is not a pre-fabricated set of rules, but a naturally evolving common agreement between people speaking the same language. Thinking of grammar as an evolution helps justify its chaotic state, with so many ‘exceptions’ and inexplicable tendencies. If I have succeeded even a little, you’re ready to continue with my unique take on grammar explanation.

# Syntax

## The English Sentence

As above, English uses syntax, or word order, to define actors and receivers of actions. Look at a simple sentence:

I	often eat	pizza for dinner, especially Calzones.
Subject (actor)	verb (action)	Object(s) (receiver)

Reversing the position of the actor and receiver causes the addition of an auxiliary verb to indicate that change, as well as the verb taking the past participle form. Notice the addition of 'by' before the object:

Pizzas	are	made	by using a floury dough, tomato sauce, vegetables and often meat.
Subject (receiver)	auxiliary (grammatical)	Verb (past participle)	object (receiver)

Of course, the more we play with grammar and complexity, the possibilities for sentence construction become endless. It is however always important to keep this basic syntax in mind to help us psychologically deal with complex sentences. Consider this example:

“I had always considered myself a terrible writer before I took a training course involving strict written work.”

Don't panic, let's break it up into parts:

I	had always	considered	myself	a terrible writer	before	I	took	a training course involving strict written essays.	
Sentence 1					Linking word	Sentence 2			
Subject	auxiliary verb	verb	object 1	object 2		Subject	verb	object	

See how we can still find that simple relationship even in the midst of such a seemingly complicated sentence? I don't expect you to study the above sentence or remember its breakdown into grammatical parts, but I want you to realise that remembering the importance of syntax in English will save you a lot of trouble later on in your training. There are more important tenants like this to remember in this section.

## The importance of Auxiliary Verbs

Changes of tense, aspect and syntax more often involve manipulation of the auxiliary verb than the main content verb. This makes familiarity with auxiliary verbs a key objective before attempting high level grammatical constructions. Consider the following examples of positive and negative sentences, paying careful attention to the auxiliary verb:

Subject	Auxiliary verb	Verb	Object
I	am	thinking	really hard about examples that don't involve food.
I honestly	wasn't	intending	to write anything about pizza.
But I really	can't	think	of any.
Probably because I	haven't	eaten	dinner yet, that's the worst time to ask me for examples.
I certainly	hadn't	eaten	anything when I first made this table about gnocchi recipes.

You can see straight away that the position of the auxiliary doesn't change, it stays there are a constant reminder of what tense we're in and the positive or negative grammar of the sentence. To take advantage of this, we must train ourselves to recognise the auxiliary as a key word in everything we say and hear.

### Basic tendencies

In considering the below table, remember that the Present and Past Simple aspects (see Simple section in Aspects) do not necessarily need an auxiliary verb in positive sentences, though they do in negative and question forms. Also remember that the

verb to be functions as both auxiliary and verb in one neat package, so not additional auxiliary is necessary. Finally, multiple auxiliary verbs are possible in complex grammatical constructions, hence Auxiliary 1 and Auxiliary 2 to help understand their position. That being said, the first auxiliary remains the word to consider for tense, negation and questions.

Positive	Subject	Auxiliary1	(Auxiliary2)	Verb	etc.
Negative	Subject	Auxiliary1 + not	(Auxiliary2)	Verb	etc.
Question	Auxiliary1	Subject	(Auxiliary2)	Verb	etc.

## Would that it were...

Languages are living, evolving creatures. As such, reading literature from 200, 100 or even 50 years ago throws up words and sentence constructions that seem strange or alien to us. Some of these examples can still be found in grammar books today with explanations and examples, despite the fact that they are rarely used in modern every-day communication. Still, I feel readers would feel cheated if I didn't at least mention them with a short explanation:

“I wouldn't keep reading if I were you.”

Vestige of English subjunctive. Nowadays, saying “if I was” is acceptable.

“If we are to make sense of these examples, we'll need an encyclopaedia.”

i.e. If we want to make sense of these examples

“Had I stuck to my principles, this part wouldn't exist.”

Conditional construction, normally “If I had stuck”

“Should we run into any confusion, I refuse to take the blame.”

Conditional construction, normally “If we run into...”

“We shan't be seeing any more examples today, I can promise you.”

Negative form of “shall”, rarely used outside of England, normally “won't”

I recommend you appreciate these examples for their historical prestige, but do not attempt to form such constructions yourselves. Modern equivalents for almost all examples of this kind exist, and to use such outdated forms may confuse your listener, especially given that most English speakers in the world today are not native-speakers. Moreover, it is improbable that you will meet such examples in the course of your English-speaking career. Keep them in mind as attractive examples of poetic language, and nothing more. Let's now get back to normality with a look at how nouns work.

## Nouns

Nouns, that is to say the words we use to identify physical or metaphysical things in our world, have no gender in English. Hallelujah, you might have just said, but isn't it a little bit sad to lose that element of language?

In any case, English gradually lost its masculine, feminine and neuter genders somewhere in the "Middle English" period, or between the 12th and 15th centuries. That means we have no agreement between nouns, adjectives and possessive forms, even for animate objects like men and women. This fact will be important to keep in mind as you progress through the next sections.

## Plurality

Forming plural nouns in English is fairly simple, as there is no agreement between nouns and articles etc., so the only thing that changes is the noun itself. We form the plural with the simple addition of an (+s). For example:

I have only one oven in my kitchen, but in an ideal world I'd have two ovens.

In the case of nouns ending in soft, 'breathy' sounds, we often add (+es):

My wish is to help you understand English, though it is one of many wishes, I also want world peace...

Last of the regular cases is nouns ending in y, where the y is replaced by (+ies):

My friend recently had a baby, so that makes two cute little babies I currently know.

Notice that I said regular cases above. There are many irregular cases of plural nouns in English. Below is a list of the most common you're likely to encounter:

analysis	analyses	man	men	fish	fish
crisis	crises	woman	women	sheep	sheep
index	indices	foot	feet	child	children
person	people	tooth	teeth	mouse	mice

I left out one irregular case as it occurs in quite a few nouns, specifically nouns ending in a single f or fe which are replaced by (+ves). Look at these idiomatic expressions:

We're as thick as thieves (a thief).

That's an old wives' tale (a wife).

In practice, most plurals are simple to form in English, and form a very small part of our communication considerations. Keep this section in mind to make reference to should you ever be writing and have any doubts.

## Countability

There exist nouns which we can count, and nouns which we cannot count, often called countable and uncountable respectively. Countable nouns refer to objects that have a fixed shape or size allowing us to count them separately. Uncountable nouns refer to objects with an unfixed size which we often measure rather than count. Look at these examples:

	Quantity	Noun		Countable?
I have	plenty of	time	to finish this section.	No, must be measured, e.g. in seconds or minutes.
I've spent	10	minutes	on this table so far.	Yes, precise word to define a 60 second period.
I've been to England	many	times	for work.	Yes, fixed word for one occasion or event.

Notice how time appears twice, once as an uncountable noun representing time in general (minutes, hours, etc.) and again as a countable noun meaning an occasion or instance of time. It is not uncommon in English for a word to have multiple definitions, and so it is inevitable that some words will fall into both categories. These categories are important to keep in mind as later on in this section we will discuss quantity, where some words are restricted to only countable or uncountable nouns.

## Spelling and Pronunciation

English spelling deserves at least a section of its own, and a little explanation, as it can be easy to become frustrated and desperate when confronted with so many exceptions. Why, for example, do we spell daughter or eight with a gh which is not pronounced? Why do we pronounce architect or archive with a /k/ sound, while arch or archer uses the /ch/?

Most words in modern use in the Oxford English Dictionary have either Latin, French or Germanic origins. We're in reality a mix of Viking, Roman and Norman-French heritage. There are very few words that originate from the 'native' languages of the British Isles. At the advent of printing in the late 1400s, there was no universal agreement on spelling in English. From then on, educated scholars of ancient Latin and Greek would intermittently impose spelling conventions and modifications to reflect what they believed was the 'correct' form of certain words.

This logic was not uniformly applied. For example, at some point in history, someone decided that reverting to the Greek pronunciations of arkhitekton and arkheia or Latin architects and archivum would be more correct than the French pronunciation with which they had entered our language. On the other hand, archer and arch conserved their French pronunciation, never being reverted to the original Latin pronunciation of arcus or 'bow'. It is very difficult therefore to find logic or conformity in the spelling of English words, and you may find yourself frustrated, especially in writing.

Here are some typical examples of this spelling and pronunciation disorder in English. Bare in mind that this list is not here to give you a comprehensive guide on English spelling, just to demonstrate a few of its unusual tendencies:

Word	Origin	Spelling notes	Pronunciation
debt	Latin <i>debitum</i>	Originally spelt <i>dette</i> , changed to reflect Latin spelling, but not pronunciation	/det/
island	Old English <i>igland</i>	Spelling changed to reflect related Latin word <i>isle</i> from Latin <i>insula</i>	/aye-lund/

ghost	Old English gastlic	Silent h added by Dutch printers, more similar to Dutch spelling	/gohst/
knight	Old English cniht, unknown West Germanic origin, similar to Dutch knecht	k slowly became a silent letter, as did gh after 1600	/nahyt/

Consider as well these examples of single phonemes represented in various different spellings thanks to chaotic attempts to regularise English spelling. Again, it is not at all exhaustive:

Phoneme	Different examples
/eɪ/	plate, wait, weight, straight, great, vein, play, they, ballet, café
/ɒ/	sauce, bought, always, tall, crawl, saw
/e/	head, any, said, Wednesday, friend, leisure
/i:/	eat, even, ceiling, field, police, people, me, key, ski
/aɪ/	bite, style, height, island, sign, my, high, pie, buy, I, eye

What lesson can we learn from this? Perhaps that English pronunciation is largely phonetic, but the spelling of the phoneme cannot be trusted. So learning spelling must be done only when also learning pronunciation, and words must simply be memorised without any thought to rules or regularities, as this will surely lead to disappointment and frustration.

## Articles

English has a definite and indefinite article, the and a respectively. The definite article is used to indicate that the noun being described is either clearly unique, or known to both speaker and the listener. The indefinite article is the opposite, that is to say, a noun that is nonspecific and/or new information for the listener. Sounds complicated, I know, but let these fantastic examples help with that. You will see that I am a space geek, and a British citizen, though I'm not sure if that's a good combination:

“We are familiar with the Moon (our moon, the one we both know) and the planets in our solar system (specific planets, followed by the precision in our solar system), but do you know a planet (here’s something new for you) called Kepler-62e? It’s one of the planets scientists think could support human life (specific planets, followed by a precision).”

“The Queen had her Diamond Jubilee in 2012, marking the 60th anniversary of her reign (a specific anniversary, with the precision of her reign). It was a public holiday (nonspecific) in the United Kingdom.”

Notice how I use The Queen with no further precision, suggesting you’ll automatically know which one, but there are several queens in the world. So how do you know which one I mean? Firstly, I told you I’m British, so you would normally assume I mean the British queen. Secondly, I mention the UK in the text, for which incidentally there is also no precision as there is only one United Kingdom in the world. All in all I think it is highly likely that you will know which queen I mean, though if I hadn’t I would have said The Queen of England to be precise.

Finally, some nouns in English take no article at all. These are often collective terms or proper names, or when referring to something very general, for example:

“I love pizza. Technically, France has the best pizzas in the world, not Italy as you’d expect.”

Whether or not you dispute my culinary assertion, you can see how my mention of pizza refers to all pizza, not a specific one, so is a very general word. France is also a proper name of a country, though some countries still take an article as their name more of a description, such as The United States of America, or The Democratic Republic of Congo.

It can be difficult to be sure if a word should or shouldn’t take an article, as exceptions do exist (e.g. ~~the~~ NASA, the CIA), so in summary I recommend, as with many grammatical items, memorising them as they are encountered as opposed to trying to predict their behaviour based on similar words.

## Basic tendencies

<p>The definite article the is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• when the object is known to both speaker and listener.</li><li>• when a precision follows to define the object</li><li>• when the object is named, or clearly unique</li></ul>	<p>The indefinite article a is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• when the object is new to the listener</li><li>• when the object is nonspecific or one of many</li><li>• never when the object is plural</li></ul>
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<p>The article no is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used to emphasise the absence of lack of an object</li> <li>• not used when a negative verb construction is more natural (e.g. I don't have a motorbike, <u>not</u> I have no motorbike)</li> </ul>	<p>No article is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with most proper names</li> <li>• with very general words</li> <li>• when another modifier is used (e.g. some, no,)</li> </ul>
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## Quantity

Perhaps we take for granted how important our ability to define precise and imprecise quantities is. How would economics exist, how would we trade or negotiate, how would we manage our conception of time and distance? You get my point, quantity is important. Precise quantities are easy as they nearly always concern numbers:

“I've drunk two cups of coffee today, which is normally my caffeine limit.”

“One year is 8,765.81 hours, one more piece of useless information for you.”

Imprecise quantities are more difficult to imagine out of context, as they very often are defined or restricted by our existing knowledge about the objects they describe. Consider these examples:

“I've got some money in my pocket.”

“I've got a little money saved away.”

The first example makes you think of wallets or small change, which normally wouldn't exceed 50 euros for example. You wouldn't carry 1000 euros and say you've got some money, unless you're Paris Hilton. The second example makes you think of banks and savings accounts which, even though a little seems a smaller word than some, would in practice be considerably more than 50 euros. Even a small savings account should be a few hundred at least. So the context and the attached noun have a direct effect on our conception of these imprecise terms, making their meaning relative to the object they define.

a lot of	C / UC	a few	C
loads of	C / UC	a couple of	C

many	C	a few	C
much	UC	a little	UC
several	C	a / an / (numbers)	C

## Some and Any

Confusion often arises between the quantifiers some and any as many grammar books misrepresent them as positive and negative forms respectively. It is true that often some is used for affirmations and any is used in negation, but this is a tendency as opposed to a fixed rule. Consider the following examples:

	Quantifier	Noun	
I'll take	any	opportunity	that comes my way.
I don't answer	any	calls	from unknown numbers.
I like	some	Justin Bieber songs.	
But I don't like	some	of the new Daft Punk songs.	

As you can see, the fixed rule touted in most grammar books doesn't hold up, as the above examples can hardly be described as exceptions. So what is the difference between some and any?

- Some can be used for any definite or limited quantity greater than zero.
- Any can be used for any indefinite or unlimited quantity from zero to infinity.

That sounds complicated, but think of it this way:

I get into a taxi. The driver asks me, “Where to buddy?” to which I respond “Somewhere.” The driver, confused, will responds “Ok, but where exactly?” as somewhere is a definite location which I have not specified. I could have said, “Somewhere that sells cigarettes,” which the driver would have understood.

Now imagine I get in to the same taxi and when asked “Where to?”, I respond “Anywhere.” As long as the driver is subservient and spontaneous enough, he’ll understand that as “Just drive,” as the choice of destination is indefinite. Who knows where I’ll end up?

Has that helped? Yeah, I thought not. Well, at least we tried, good game everyone...

## This, that, these and those

So far we have discussed articles that are used to psychologically identify objects. There are also words that can identify through demonstration, look at these examples:

“This part of the book deals with articles.”

“There are also examples of nouns, but that part is further up from here.”

These words would be much simpler to demonstrate to you in real life, as I would simply point to things in my proximity to show the meaning of this, whereas things out of my proximity would be that. I can imagine where you are right now, probably sitting somewhere. Touch your left leg and think “this leg is my left leg.” Now, look at someone else’s leg, maybe near you or out the window, and think “that leg belongs to someone else.” I hope you kept all that inside your head, else you might have to abandon your location, but you see my point. This and that essentially point out things in the physical world, though as we can see from my first two examples they also point to things in the textual world that are near or far from the position you’re reading.

These and those are very simply the plural forms of this and that respectively, for example, if you now touch both your legs and think “These legs are my legs,” you should get my point, and also attract more strange looks. These articles are easy to overlook as we don’t often practise them when we’re alone in self study, making them important to work on in person with your learners.

# Verbs

## To be or not to be

I like to think that the more deeply a verb relates to our understanding and interaction of the world around us, the more volatile and difficult to define it becomes. For example, the verb to microwave has a limited number of meanings, as it describes a very specific thing whose meaning is quite inflexible.

However, consider the verb take. Imagine how profound its meaning is for human existence; without the ability to take, we would be powerless to manipulate the world around us. This may help explain why such verbs are so volatile. With the simple addition of another basic word like off or over, we change the meaning completely. We cannot say microwave off for example. We will explore this more fully in the Phrasal Verbs section below.

Now, which would you say is the most irregular verb in English? It is of course the verb be, as what could be more profoundly connected to the human experience than that. To be, to exist, is at the core of humanity. It is so unpredictable therefore that it should be considered in a grammatical realm of its own, free from the rules of other verbs. Here are some examples:

“I’m a little tired today, I’m often not hungry when I’m feeling that way.”

If you check my sections on Progressive Aspects, Simple Aspects and Frequency Adverbs, you’ll see what I mean. The first part is a situation which can certainly be described as in progress and temporal in nature, yet it doesn’t take (+ing). The second is Simple, yet needs no auxiliary verb to make the negative; be functions as both auxiliary and verb at the same time. Often, a frequency adverb normally entering before the verb, is after be in the sentence. The third part, a standard Progressive state, uses be as its auxiliary, though it occupies the exact same position in the sentence as our other two examples.

These are only a few of the many... many examples of be’s exceptional nature. It is the narrator, floating above the story and mocking the silly grammatical characters below. It is the silent arbiter of strict and inflexible rules, reminding us that nothing is simple in language, keeping us on our toes. Still, let us look at some of its basic tendencies, to be sure we are not tricked by this crafty yet elegant verb.

## Basic tendencies

Present	Positive (Negative)	I	am (am not)	+ adjectives + past participles + (ing) forms  Found in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present Tense</li> <li>• Simple Aspect</li> <li>• Progressive Aspect</li> <li>• Future sense (with 'going to' or (ing) forms)</li> <li>• Passive forms</li> </ul>
		You, We, They	are (aren't)	
		He, She, It	is (isn't)	
	Question	Am	I	
		Are	you, we, they	
		Is	he, she, it	
Past	Positive (Negative)	I, he, she, it	was (wasn't)	+ adjectives + past participles + (ing) forms  Found in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Past Tense</li> <li>• Simple Aspect</li> <li>• Progressive Aspect</li> <li>• Future-in-the-past sense (with 'going to')</li> <li>• Passive forms</li> </ul>
		You, We, They	were (weren't)	
	Question	Was	I, he, she, it	
		Were	you, we, they	
Future (e.g. with will)	Positive (Negative)	I, you, he, she, it, we, they will (won't)	be	+ adjectives + past participles + (ing) forms

Question	Will I, you, he, she, it, we, they	be	Found in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Future sense</li><li>• Progressive Aspect</li><li>• Passive forms</li></ul>
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### In the present:

Can be used for:

- describing physical states
- stating qualities
- expressing emotional states
- as an auxiliary to form the progressive aspect
- as an auxiliary to make a passive sentence

### In the past:

Can be used for:

- describing finished physical states
- stating qualities
- describing finished emotional states
- as an auxiliary to form the progressive aspect
- as an auxiliary to make a passive sentence

## Irregular verbs

Luckily, verbs other than be are less challenging to study, and English only has maximum 3 forms of each verb. Consider the following irregular verb:

“I see many weird and wonderful people every day.”

“I saw a group of them this morning.”

“I’ve seen more than one weird person this week.”

So the simple present form is as normal, but the simple past form is considerably different, as is the past participle which is used after the auxiliary ‘have’ and ‘be’ when forming the perfect aspect or passive construction respectively. The past participle deserves a word on its own as its name often gives us the false impression that it indicates ‘pastness’, which it does not. We can use the past participle in sentences about the past, but that is incidental, it can also be used in the present and even the future. It is simply an extra form of the verb which we wouldn’t realise exists with irregular verbs as the normal past form and past participle form are identical, e.g. “I talked to my boss yesterday, I’ve talked to her a lot this week.”

I recommend learning irregular verbs by heart as you encounter them in the real world, as I cannot give you any satisfactory tendencies that would help you form them. For a full list of everyday irregular verbs, see Appendix 1.

## Phrasal verbs

Above we discussed the volatility of small, simple verbs that we use every day in describing our interaction with the world around us. In English, the addition of another word, often a preposition, forms a new ‘chunk’ verb (see Chunking), or phrasal verb. The meaning of these new chunks may have some relation to the original meaning of the verb alone, but very often changes the meaning completely. To be safe, we should consider each new verb chunk as a new verb entirely. Consider these examples:

take

“I always wanted to take up dancing, but was too embarrassed. But when you take away the fear, it’s really not so bad. Now I take my wife out dancing every Wednesday.”

put

“I have a habit of putting off practising; put it down to laziness, but when I put on my tap shoes and the hi-fi puts out that funky rhythm, I just can’t help myself!”

Often learners first reaction is to try to separate the chunk for isolated word translation, which we know from my section on Chunking is a mistake. The logic behind the choice of verb or preposition is often too abstract to be considered worth learning. For example:

“I pick my pen up when I want to write.”

This makes sense as we know the action pick, and up is undoubtedly related to its directional meaning.

“I have to put up with a lot of confusion from students due to this problem,”

This shows how difficult these verbs can be to decipher. Put we know, up we just spoke about, with is simple enough, but the sum of their meanings does not literally equal tolerate or endure.

Perhaps through investigating the etymology of put up with, we might shed some light on its reason for existing in such a form, but is that really worth the effort? Why not just consider that when two words are put together, one or both of their meanings will undoubtedly change at least a little, so we should approach such combinations with an open mind, and make a habit of checking in the dictionary before making assumptions or deductions.

## Special cases

### Just... because!

It is very important to remember that English is a highly varied language and that, given its multiple origins, it has particular expressions and verbs that must be considered in unique ways; separate from the standard tendencies or ‘rules’. Consider these examples of what are called ‘sentence heads’:

“Let’s	get together	and feel alright.” - Bob Marley
Sentence head, contraction of “Let us”	verb	etc.

We could now talk about why we use ‘let’ in this case, the origin of the meaning of this kind of construction etc., but we must ask ourselves an important question: will it help us use it? The answer is probably no. It is undoubtedly for many people interesting to learn the history and etymology of words and expressions, but that is all it is; interesting. If you’re interested in this field, please buy a book on linguistics or the history of language. Here are a few good recommendations:

- “The History of English,” David Crystal (2005) Penguin
- “The Mother Tongue: English, and how it got that way,” Bill Bryson (2001) William Morrow Paperbacks
- “What is English? And Why Should We Care?” Tim William Machan (2013) Oxford University Press

So, in conclusion, let’s take some examples of other interesting sentence heads and consider them as unique; without delving into their reason for existing:

## Sentence heads

Following the description above, below are some examples of sentence heads to get a feel for how useful these ready-made constructions really are:

Sentence head	Possible ending	Use
How about...	we don't talk about food for once?	Making suggestions
	talking about the weather?	
What about...	take a look outside and see for ourselves.	
	Why don't we...	
I'm looking forward to...	the long weekend that's coming.	Excitement / Pleasure concerning future plans
	staying in bed all day.	

## Question tags

These special bits of sentence are attached to the end of a positive or negative statement. Their formation is simple: find and copy the subject and auxiliary verb and negate it; not forgetting that two negatives make a positive!

This	-	is	a great example,	isn't it?
I	couldn't	do	the same thing again,	could I?

You	-	love	my examples,	don't you?
Subject	auxiliary	verb	etc.	question tag

Remember earlier when I spoke about how important the auxiliary verb is in English? Notice in the examples above, when we take a simple present sentence “You love my examples,” even though we see no auxiliary verb, we still have to keep ‘do’ in mind when forming the question tag. We cannot simply say “You love my examples, love you?” as ‘love’ is not the auxiliary. Also, notice that the verb ‘be’ still functions in a magical world of its own, not needing an auxiliary but repeating itself all the same in the question tag.

## Modals

We have one last group of verbs to pay special attention to: the modal auxiliary verbs. These are not so much verbs in the action / state sense, more like human perspectives on those verbs, so they must be used in conjunction with another verb. It is difficult to define exactly what this group represents, so let's just consider them one by one:

### can

I	can	speak	a little German, but I have no self confidence.
It	is possible for me	to speak	a little German...
I	have the ability	to speak	a little German...
Can	I	share	more uncomfortably personal examples with you?
Is it possible	for me	to share	more examples with you?

Clearly, by its definition above, ‘can’ is a present verb concerning present possibility or ability. As a result it can be used for simple polite requests; instead of demanding a service directly, we can ask if it is possible to have the service first. This indirectness is where English derives its politeness, as do many languages (though English does so with particular flair). We will see more examples of politeness in this section.

## could

I	could	speak	Spanish at school, but now I'm rubbish.
It	was possible for me	to speak	Spanish at school
I	had the ability	to speak	Spanish at school

Notice the similarity. 'Could' might be called the past form of 'can', as it can describe both ability and possibility in the past. Again, as before, it can be used in polite requests. In this case, as it is distant from the present reality and therefore more indirect, it forms an even more polite request than simply using 'can'.

## should

This is one of the more difficult modals to define. We could say it indicates what is expected or believed to be a good or sensible idea, often in the sense of advice. It can also be used to express strong probability. We need to dive straight into some examples to understand what that means in practice:

We	should	study	as many examples as possible.
It	is a good idea for us	to study	as many examples as possible.
I	shouldn't	overload	my readers
It	isn't a good idea for me	to overload	my readers
I	should	be able to	make it concise and clear.
It	is probable	that I will be able to	make it concise and clear.
We	shouldn't	need	any more explanation than this.

It	is improbable	that we will need	any more explanation.
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Notice how when used in an advisory way, or what I believe to be right, it is simple present and factual in nature. On the other hand, when used to describe something as probable, it takes a distinctly future feeling. This makes sense, as probability is by nature a future concept; if it had happened in the past, we wouldn't need to guess!

## would

This modal is not easy to define in theory, and even more difficult to understand in practice. 'Would' contains the most abstract of concepts; the unreal, in other words, the imaginary or the hypothetical. Some languages do not use a separate word for this concept, they simply conjugate the verb directly. Consider the following examples and their explanation:

"I would write a simple example, if only this verb were simple."

i.e. Imagine an parallel universe where this verb is simple. In this universe, I am able to write a simple example. But since this universe is not real, I am in fact not able to write a simple example. But what an interesting thought, n'est pas?

Yes, I am trying to make a joke, try to contain your laughter. Though this concept is so abstract I would challenge anyone to do better. It is one of those words which we find near impossible to define without using the word itself; the ultimate mind-bending paradox. Try defining the word 'important', you'll see what I mean.

Anyway, I digress. Notice how the example I gave was followed by an 'if' clause (see clauses). This often leads 'would' to being called the 'conditional'. It is true that 'would' is often joined by a conditional clause, but this does not define would, it is simply a necessary prerequisite to its use. If we are to imagine an alternate reality, we must give it definition for our interlocutor to follow our example. This is done through the conditional clause. Consider that...

"What would you do?"

"I would buy a mansion."

... seems terribly out of place without context, as most examples do. We can add a conditional clause to give more form to the dream:

"What would you do if you were a millionaire?"

"I would buy a mansion (if I were a millionaire.)"

But there are often other ways to form the same sentence without the conditional:

“What would you do with a million dollars?”

“I would buy a mansion (with a million dollars).”

Yes, we could argue that the “if I had a million dollars” is implicit, but that is all it is. I wish simply to show that would is not defined by the conditional clause, it is simply often seen in its vicinity, but does not require it necessarily.

Politeness

Having already seen that could is more polite than can simply by being more detached from the present and therefore indirect, it follows that would is the most detached and therefore most indirect of all. Consider these examples:

“Would you open that window for me?”

Try to imagine literally what is meant by this, though it may cause mental breakdown:

“Imagine you are in a parallel universe with me. In this universe, is it possible for you to open that window for me? If yes, I am politely encouraging you to do the same in our universe. If no, I withdraw my request, but at least it was only hypothetical and so no guilt will be felt on your part.”

I’m really trying to put you off now, is it working? Perhaps you should skip this section and move on to simpler things, or even better learn a language like Chinese where these considerations are much simpler.

Still here? Well, let me pose another example of the ultimate British politeness. This is a common British expression used in polite requests, and also a sentence head (See Sentence Heads):

“Would you be so kind as to open that window for me?”

I won’t even try to paraphrase that one, but you get the idea. Would is used in many fixed polite expressions, so be prepared to see it often. If I’ve taught you one thing it should be this: when you see it, for goodness sake, don’t ask questions.

## must

We discussed with should the idea of believing something to be right. Must could be considered as a stronger form of this idea; in other words, the belief that something is morally / ethically right or wrong. As with should, it can be used to express even higher probability. Take the following example:

I	must	study	more German vocabulary.
I	believe it is right for me	to study	more German vocabulary.
You	mustn't	sit	reading this book all day.
I	believe it is wrong for you	to sit	reading this book all day.

## Adjectives

Adjectives, like nouns in English, are simple in form as they don't change to suit the gender or plurality of the noun. Celebrations all round again, right? There are a few 'exceptions', but they are simple ones, like how we describe a woman as beautiful but a man as handsome. These aren't really exceptions, as they are not necessarily determined by the gender of the noun, just that one is generally more appropriate for women and the other for men.

However, possessive adjectives pose an interesting point of confusion for most speakers of Romance languages. In French, for example, I could say "ma soeur" for my sister and "mon frere" for my brother, where the adjective changes from feminine to masculine according to the gender of the noun, though you can clearly see from the English translations this is not the case.

No problem I suppose, until we come to 3rd person adjectives. If I say "son frere" or "sa soeur" in French without any context or example, you have no idea if the person in question whose brother or sister it is is male or female. You could say, for example, "Brad Pitt a un frere et une soeur. Son frere s'appelle Doug, et sa soeur s'appelle Julie," which in English would be, "Brad Pitt has a brother and a sister. His brother is called Doug, and his sister is called Julie." Thus the possessive adjective in English is determined via the person being spoken of, not their possessions. If you describe the possessions of a man, it will always be his possessions, and her possessions for a woman.

## Comparison

Another short etymology lesson is needed here. As said earlier in the book, English has three distinct origins for most of its words, including adjectives. This unfortunately means that it uses two distinct ways of forming comparatives and superlatives. One of them,

for phonetically short adjectives, comes from Germanic origins, and Latin and Greek before that, where adjectives had a particle added to the end. The other, for phonetically longer adjectives, comes from French, where a word is added before the adjective. Consider the following examples:

“English is sometimes considered easier than German. Though it’s difficult to say which language is easiest.”

“French certainly has more complicated grammar than English, though English may have the most complicated spelling.”

Notice how, although the adjective easy has two syllables, it falls into the (+er) category as it finishes with a y, which is changed to an i when forming a comparative or superlative, (+ier) / (+iest). Also notice that we use the in the superlative the most complicated, but not in the comparative. Being the highest expression of the adjective means the superlative is specific, therefore often necessitating the definite article (see Articles).

The next examples show how comparison can also be concerned with equal, or unequal, or lesser expression of an adjective, while learning some fun idioms at the same time:

“You, my dear reader, are as cool as a cucumber.”

“You are definitely not as interested as I am in culinary grammar examples.”

“Fusilli is not as fatty as gnocchi, but it is less tasty.”

“The least healthy pasta might be ravioli with cheese filling, mmm...”

So equal expression is formed with as + adjective + as, and for unequal expression we simply add not at the beginning. Lesser expression, in the last two examples, is made using less and the least, essentially in the same position and grammatical form as more and the most.

Finally, we can intensify or mitigate, that is to say strengthen or dilute, a comparative by using certain adverbs, for example:

“It was much hotter in Tuscany last summer than in Paris.”

“The weather in Paris is still a little better than in my home town, Belfast.”

## Possession

Now we move on to something I mentioned in the introduction to this section, the possessive adjectives. These are placed before objects to identify their owner or a relationship. I recommend we simply study a table of the different possibilities, then look at some examples to put them into context:

Pronoun	I	You	He	She	It	We	They
Possessive adjective	My	Your	His	Her	Its	Our	Their
Possessive pronoun	Mine	Yours	His	Hers	Its	Ours	Theirs

How exciting, reminds me of Latin practice in school! Anyway, consider these examples:

“My readers are a bunch of grammar geeks.”

“Their needs are mixed, so then, so are mine. Yours are of course unique, and our mission is to satisfy those needs.”

So the possessive adjective is used to identify the owner or relationship of the noun, and the possessive pronoun is used, as pronouns always are, to substitute for something that has already been identified to avoid repetition.

## Adverbs

When stating or describing an action, we often wish to add extra information to make our description more clear and detailed. You could imagine me saying, “I jog.” This is a strangely vague statement, even though the action is clear and well-known, you can even picture it in your head. Still, your next question might be “How often?” or “How fast?”, these would require adverbs to answer, i.e. “I jog every Sunday,” which would be an adverbial phrase, or “I jog quite quickly but I’m afraid of hurting my knee,” which would be a classic adverb formed from an adjective, as well as an adverb that describes the degree, quite.

Adverbs can also be used to add depth to adjectives, for example: “Versailles is a very relaxing place to go jogging.” Clearly, these are words that cannot be used alone, and must be linked to either a verb or adjective. Unless, like I’ve just done, you start a sentence with an adverb, clearly, essentially adding depth to the sentence before it even begins. In summary, adverbs are descriptive words used with verbs, adjectives and even whole sentences which add more depth.

### Degree (very, quite, etc.)

These adverbs often translate quite neatly into foreign languages, as most languages have a system to intensify or mitigate their descriptive words. For example:

“Regular pasta is quite good, but gnocchi is really delicious.”

I don't want to criticise regular pasta, but I want it's degree of 'goodness' to be far away from gnocchi. Quite allows me to use a positive adjective with a diluted strength, as does its synonyms pretty or rather, i.e. pretty / rather good, and really allows me to strengthen or intensify the already quite positive adjective delicious.

We can form other adverbs of degree that add a little more flavour to the mix. Imagine I tell you about a painting in The Louvre Museum that is strikingly beautiful, I not only intensify the beauty in your imagination, but you imagine yourself being struck by it. What if I said that you, dear reader, are dangerously beautiful, what do you imagine I mean? There's no right answer, but you can see how adverbs such as these can add a real poetry to your language. Don't be afraid to try some new ones out if you feel like expressing yourself more deeply. Vive l'expérimentation!

## Sentence

Clearly, there are many different uses for adverbs. Interestingly, they can be used to add definition to a whole sentence as opposed to just one word. Fortunately, this allows me to demonstrate their use within the text through which I'm describing them. Evidently, I'm running your patience thin, but you can see how these adverbs add no additional content to the sentence, just the speaker or writer's personal perspective or opinion on it.

## How often... ?

The final adverbs in our adventure are often called 'adverbs of frequency', as they are used with verbs to define how often the action is performed. They are relatively simple, but merit separate consideration given their unusual position in the sentence. Look at the following examples:

“I often listen to funky acoustic artists while I type, but I never watch TV at the same time - it's too distracting.”

“I'm always on time when I have a meeting, though occasionally public transport makes me late, it drives me crazy!”

“Sometimes I write examples that look like exceptions, but they often aren't.”

I have to apologise, after years of teaching through course books and grammar books I'm so used to thinking that adverbs of frequency follow these lovely neat little rules that I can present you. In fact, looking at the above examples, we can see that poetic license often allows us to break these rules in favour of sentential beauty (yes, I did just say that). I guess you'd like some rules anyway, I owe you that much...

## Basic tendencies

Structure	Sentence	Possible Adverbs	Adverb types	Sentence	Possible Adverbs	Adverb types
Position 0		Clearly,	Sentence		Obviously,	Sentence
Subject	I			This table		
Position 1			n/a			n/a
First auxiliary	-			has		
Position 2			n/a		always	Frequency
Second auxiliary	-			been		
Position 3		really	Standard		lovingly	Standard
Main verb	am			constructed		
Position 4		always	Frequency		meticulously	Standard
etc.	excited by tables.			by a true geek.		

So, usually, we can say:

- sentence adverbs come before the subject
- frequency adverbs come before the main verb, except if the main verb is to be
- adverbs of degree come before the main verb
- standard adverbs can come either side of the main verb

# Tenses

This is perhaps the happiest moment of English teaching: to explain the tense system. English tenses are surprisingly simple. We have one verb form modification to indicate past time, and the present time is indicated by the basic form of the verb (except the 3rd person singular). For the future, as you will see in that section, the verb does not change. How much simpler could it be! In French, for example, there are 6 possible verb forms for each tense.

Now, a caution must be given. This is where the section above about “The Importance of Auxiliary verbs” pays dividends. When I say, “... the present time is indicated by the basic form of the verb,” I do not necessarily mean the main verb of the sentence. Remember that to change tense, it is the first verb of the sentence which changes form. That may be the main verb, but in the case of negative and question sentences it is the auxiliary verb. Bare this in mind and you and tenses will get on just fine.

## Present

As above, the present tense has only one exception: the 3rd person singular (he, she, it). All other persons (I, you, we, they) are followed by the basic form of the verb. Consider the following examples:

I	give	excellent examples	
Subject (1st person singular)	verb	etc.	
David Crystal	gives	better examples.	
Subject (3rd person singular)	verb (+s)	etc.	
Classic grammar books	don't	give	real examples
Subject (3rd person plural)	auxiliary verb	verb	etc.
This book	doesn't	use	examples out of context.

Subject (3rd person singular)	auxiliary verb (+s)	verb	etc.
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Notice in the examples that as soon as an auxiliary verb appears in the sentence, it takes the place of the main verb in changing its form with the 3rd person (+s). Further proof of the importance of auxiliary verbs in defining subject-verb agreement.

Now, we have forgotten one verb important verb, our best friend: to be. Of course, he (if you're French, le verb) or it (if you're German, das Verb) is an exception. But, luckily, we only have to learn three forms in the present:

I	am	excited	about this verb.
Subject (1st person singular)	auxiliary verb	verb (past participle adjective)	etc.
It	isn't	very difficult.	
Subject (3rd person singular)	verb	etc.	
We	are	enjoying	it together.
Subject (1st person plural)	auxiliary verb	verb (progressive aspect)	etc.

Notice how to be doesn't follow the typical rules laid out above concerning auxiliary verbs. Where any other verb needs the addition of do to make negatives and questions, be does not. It functions as both verb and auxiliary at the same time. Notice as well how no matter what happens after be (progressive forms or past participles), it retains its presentness to indicate the tense of the sentence.

## Basic tendencies

All verbs:

Positive	I / You / We / They	infinitive verb		etc.
	He / She / It	infinitive verb (+s)		
Negative	I / You / We / They	do not	infinitive verb	
	He / She / It	does not		
Question	Do	I / you / we / they		
	Does	he / she / it		

to be:

Positive / Negative	I	am / am not	etc.
	You / We / They	are / are not	
	He / She / It	is / is not	
Question	Am	I	
	Are	you / we / they	
	Is	he / she / it	

## Past

The past tense in English follows essentially the same rules as the present. Like in other European languages, we modify the verb to indicate 'pastness'. But unlike many European language, our main past form does not necessarily require an auxiliary verb in the positive form. This leads to confusion, for example with the French passé composé or the Spanish pretérito perfecto, as these take an auxiliary verb as part of their basic grammatical formation. Consider the following examples to see the contrast, and notice the similarities with the Present Tense:

You	had	a little fear about the Past.	
Subject (2nd person singular)	verb (past form)	etc.	
You	didn't	have	a good impression from school learning.
Subject (2nd person singular)	auxiliary verb	verb (infinitive)	etc.
Did	I	remove	some of that fear with my excellent examples?
Auxiliary verb	subject	verb (infinitive)	etc.

Compare with my first Present Tense table. Notice how it is still always the first verb in the sentence that changes. In the context of the Present, our concern was where to add the (+s) in 3rd person singular. Here, our concern is which verb to morph into the past form. In the negative and question example, it is the auxiliary verb that represents to us the pastness of the sentence. In the positive example, no auxiliary is used to form the past, so it must be the main verb itself that is morphed. This should further prove to you the importance of auxiliary verbs in English tense and subject-verb agreement.

Consider the following examples of changes in aspects in the past to drive this point home:

I	was	thinking	about this section all day.
Subject	auxiliary verb (past form)	verb (progressive)	etc.
You	hadn't	started	reading my book when I wrote this.
Subject	auxiliary verb (past form)	verb (passive past participle)	etc.
Rome	wasn't	built	in a day.
Subject	auxiliary verb (past form)	verb (passive past participle)	etc.

Normally, all verbs have just one past form. For regular verbs, this is made by adding (+ed). Irregular verbs are rightly named, see Appendix 1 for a full list of every-day examples.

I'm not counting the participle forms, such as in the passive examples above, as these are examples of grammatical construction as opposed to tense; consider that in the present, "Cities aren't built in a day," the verb remains in past participle form, it is once again the auxiliary that changes the tense and subject verb agreement (singular was to plural are).

Of course, to be is as always an exception. See the 'Basic Tendencies' section.

## Basic Tendencies

Regular verbs:

Positive	I / You / He / She / It / We / They	regular verb (+ed) / irregular past form		etc.
Negative		didn't	infinitive verb	
Question	Did	I / you / he / she / it / we / they		

to be:

Positive / Negative	I / He / She / It	was / was not	etc.
	You / We / They	were / were not	
Question	Was	I / he / she / it	
	Were	you / we / they	

## Future (or is it?)

Following our definition of a tense, most languages have at least one future tense. French, for example, has le futur simple, where the verb itself is changed to represent its 'futureness', e.g. Je vais (I go) becomes J'irai (I will go). French also has another way of representing futureness, using an auxiliary verb: Je vais (I go) becomes Je vais aller (I am going to go). This is not a tense, as the verb is in the infinitive form; it has not physically changed to show futureness.

English, in fact, does not have any way of representing futureness with physical changes to the verb, therefore English does not have a future tense. It does, however, like French and many other languages, use auxiliary verbs to represent futureness. Consider these examples:

### going to

"I'm going to write some examples in this section."

i.e. I have a pre-existing intention to write examples in the future.

"Are you going to practise this grammar point with your trainer?"

i.e. Do you have an intention to practise in the future with your trainer?

"We're not going to understand this fully before we look at the verb 'will'."

i.e. I know from past experience that we won't understand this in the future until we look at 'will'.

Notice that in all examples, my reference to the future is made thanks to something in the past. This is the nature of going to; a future event that is based on pre-existing information.

## will

“I’ll take some time to make these examples perfect.”

i.e. I’ve just decided to make these examples perfect.

“You won’t make any progress unless you practise.”

i.e. I predict no future progress unless you practise.

“Will you keep reading, or take a break?”

i.e. What is your decision: keep reading, or take a break?

Notice that in all examples, there is no reference to the past. They involve making present decisions or present predictions about the future. It could be described as spontaneous thoughts about the future. This is the nature of will.

## Basic tendencies

Positive / Negative	I	am going to / am not going to		infinitive verb	etc.
	You / We / They	are going to / are not going to			
	He / She / It	is going to / is not going to			
Question	Am	I	going to	infinitive verb	etc.
	Are	you / we / they			
	Is	he / she / it			

Positive / Negative	I / You / He / She / It / We / They	will	infinitive verb	etc.
Question	Will	I / You / He / She / It / We / They		

going to can be:

- used for planned future events
- used for future predictions based on past information
- used for future plans based on past decisions

will can be:

- used for spontaneous decisions
- used for unfounded future predictions
- used for 'certainties' about the future, often in conditionals

## Aspects

In all likelihood, you've never made this distinction before. In school, we constantly talk about tense as if it applies to any and every grammatical form to do with time. As explained in the 'Tense' section, English has only the past and present tense, that is to say, these are the only times when the main verb is changed to reflect the time it is in. Of course, there are other possible verb changes, and many of these fall under the heading of 'Aspects', in other words, how the auxiliary and verb work together to show the relationship between action/state and time, as opposed to when it occurred.

This is much more complex an idea than Tenses alone. Aspects change, sometimes considerably, from language to language, and learning a new one can be a daunting mental challenge. Learning is one thing, having enough practice to access them automatically in communication is another, and this can only be achieved through real-world practice.

In the following sections you will find explanations of the English Aspects, and how the effect the verb in Past and Present Tense, as well as when combined with future verbs (will, going to, etc.).

## Factual (Simple)

How lovely that we English speakers decided to name a tense Simple, what other language in world does that? Well, I can't answer that, but Anglophones have a habit of resorting to blissful ignorance when it comes to foreign languages, so thank goodness for that.

Anyway, as its name suggests, this is the easy aspect. When recounting facts, stories or predictions, it is often preferable to leave out such considerations as temporal relationships and hidden meanings (the kind you'll find later in the Progressive and Perfect sections). This allows us to simply state a fact. A fact can be generally true, such as "Water boils at 100 degrees," ephemeral, such as "I now pronounce you man and wife," stative, such as "I live and work in France," mental or psychological, such as "I love pizza, I'm eating some now and I feel great."

You should see from these examples that temporal considerations, such as duration or relationships with other points in time, are not necessary in this aspect. So what makes it so useful? Well, making a distinction between aspects removes the need to explicitly state temporal relationships. If I tell you something using the Simple Aspect, you know immediately that there's nothing more to it than that; unless I explicitly state it. If, however, I use a Perfect or Progressive Aspect, you'll know without any explicitly stated words that I want you to understand something more complex about my expressions relationship with time. This distinction facilitates comprehension, and lack of appreciation of it can potentially lead to miscomprehension.

## Basic tendencies

With the Present Simple, you can:

- Describe states, e.g. "I am a 28 year old man."
- Describe general truths or facts, e.g. "The sky is blue, unless you live on Mars."
- Describe actions which are frequent in your current life, e.g. "I go jogging once a week."
- Describe beliefs or opinions, e.g. "I think these examples are great, I believe they will help."
- Describe emotions or feelings, e.g. "I feel a little tired, but I'm happy at the moment."
- Describe necessity or obligation, e.g. "You need to read these examples twice, you have to really try hard to understand."

You cannot, however:

- Add any kind of temporal relationship or connection, e.g. "~~I teach since 2009.~~" (see Perfect Aspect)

- Describe temporary states or actions in progress, e.g. ~~“I work only 3 days this week,”~~ ~~“I type an example.”~~ (see Progressive Aspect)

Positive	I / You / We / They	verb (infinitive)		etc.
	He / She / It	verb (+s)		
Negative	I / You / We / They	don't	verb (infinitive)	
	He / She / It	doesn't		
Question	Do	I / you / we / they		
	Does	he / she / it		

With the Past Simple, you can:

- Describe finished states in the past, e.g. “I was a great swimmer when I was a child,” “I worked as a Finance Assistant for 4 years.”
- Describe past actions, both singular or formerly frequent, e.g. “I finished work 2 hours ago,” “I swam every week when I was young.”

You should not, however:

- Put too many sentences in Past Simple together to avoid monotony, e.g. “I got home, I made dinner, my wife arrived, I watched TV.”

Positive	I / You / We / They / He / She / It	verb (past form)		etc.
Negative	I / You / We / They / He / She / It	didn't	verb (infinitive)	
Question	Did	I / you / we / they / he / she / it		

With the Simple Aspect and future verbs, you can:

- Describe singular future actions or states, e.g. “I’ll eat breakfast before I start work tomorrow,” “I’ll stay home on Thursday as it’s a public holiday,” “I’ll be 29 next year.”

For structural table, see the Future (or is it?) section.

## Connected (Perfect)

Kryptonite weakens the otherwise invincible Superman, and this is the effect the Perfect Aspect has on learners of English. So why do other European languages often have constructions that resemble the Perfect in English? We know that it existed in Ancient Greek in a similar way to English. Latin however, and thus many European languages, merged the Perfect with the Simple in some cases, hence the “passé composé” in French or the “Perfekt” in German. So many Europeans recognise the use of the have auxiliary and past participles, but are confused by their application in English.

The Perfect Aspect is used when an event is just one in a chain of events. Whichever Tense (see Tenses) is used indicates where the chain of events occurs (in the past, present or future). This is in contrast to the Simple Aspect, which focussed on just one event without its corresponding chain. I will use the chain analogy in the coming examples, so keep it in mind.

Look at the following chains of events. Note that in the Present Tense, the next event is often not explicitly stated:

First event (Perfect)	Next event (Simple)	Next event (Simple)
I haven't eaten dinner yet	I'll eat dinner later (implicit)	

I've taken the train to go home	I'm on the train now (implicit)	I'll get off the train soon and be home (implicit)
I hadn't eaten breakfast	when I arrived this morning (explicit)	Maybe I ate it after I arrived (implicit, supposition)

When such a chain of events has finished, or we wish to talk about an isolated link of that chain, the Simple tense is more appropriate, for example:

"I've already eaten dinner (so now I'm not hungry). I ate gnocchi with a cream sauce, it was delicious!"

"Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France in 1804 after he had performed a coup d'état in 1799."

One of the most important observations from the above example is that one event can be described in both the Perfect and Simple Aspect, for example, "I've eaten dinner. I ate gnocchi." The choice simply comes down to what you want to describe: a simple link in a chain, that is, the event in isolation "I ate"; or the chain itself "I've eaten."

More importantly, certain circumstances necessitate the use of the Perfect Aspect, especially in the Present Tense. What if you want to describe the place you live, and the duration which you have lived there. This is a chain in the sense that you started living there in the past and still live there in the present, so we are obliged to say:

"I've lived in Versailles for 4 years."

There is no other way grammatically to express this same idea. Saying "I lived in Versailles for 4 years," the Simple Aspect, would communicate that these 4 years in Versailles are an isolated past event, therefore I do not live there today. Consider also if your chain of events is in fact the lack of an action in the past, but accepting that it is possible in the future:

"I've never travelled to China (but I might one day, who knows)."

We cannot express this lack of past action in any other way. It is through such examples that we see the importance of the Perfect Aspect, and through the first examples I gave that we see the usefulness of such an aspect. We can learn such grammar as a gut reflex through repeated exposure to and familiarisation with its use in contrast with other aspects.

This gut reflex can be difficult and long to develop, and often has confusing bumps in the road. For example:

Meeting my colleagues on Monday after a 4-day weekend, we each exchanged our stories of how we spent it. I paraphrase:

Colleague: "How did you spend the long weekend then Richard?"

Me: "I lay on a beach in Tenerife all weekend, it was lovely!"

But my going to Tenerife is an action in the past with a very strong and important link to Now, so why can't I say "I've laid on a beach in Tenerife, it was lovely!"? Although no time reference is included in the second example, there is an innate feeling of 'weekendness' about it which psychologically forces it into the past. Once again, this gut feeling is something not explicitly learned, it comes through practice and exposure to many examples.

A further examination of this psychology of time periods shows that depending on the nature of the event, its distance in time from the present lowers the chance of employing the Perfect aspect. Consider this example:

1. The news today is that many world leaders have gathered for the D-day anniversary ceremony (this happened this morning).
2. Recently, Russia has been criticised over its handling of the Ukrainian revolution (this criticism came a few days ago, and again before that).
3. Ukraine had a political revolution recently (this happened a few months ago).

All of these things are news, which usually have a strong link to the present by their very nature as news. So why, in example 3, do I not say "Ukraine has had a political revolution recently"? The revolution was one in a chain of events leading to the present, but the psychological period in which it happened was one of revolution, so the events that followed, being more reformist in nature, generate a new period of news, a new section of the chain, weakening the present link with the revolution and making the isolated Simple aspect more appropriate. I sound like a broken record, but this is another example of the need for exposure and familiarisation with a considerable number of examples of Perfect aspects before this Perfect feeling can be developed.

With that in mind, read the following basic tendencies and try to complete the self-study examples below to start you on the road to acquisition.

## Basic tendencies:

Positive	I / You / We / They	have / had	verb (past participle)	etc.
	He / She / It	has / had		
Negative	I / You / We / They	haven't / hadn't		
	He / She / It	hasn't / hadn't		

Question	Have / Had	you / I / we / they	
	Has / Had	she / he / it	

Can be:

#### Present

- used for finished actions with a strong link to the present (You've bought my book)
- used for the duration present states (I've worked in language teaching for 5 years)
- used for repeated past actions with strong links to the present (I've travelled to America 4 times)
- used for any time period linked to the present (Have you eaten today? vs. Have you ever eaten lobster?)

#### Past

- used for finished actions before other finished actions (I had already eaten my breakfast when I wrote this)

#### Future

- used for actions projected to be finished before other future actions (I will have finished this section before I print the book)

CANNOT be:

- in reference to a finished time period (I have finished work ~~yesterday~~)
- used without an implicit or realistic present reference (~~Napoleon has invaded Poland~~)

## In progress (Progressive / Continuous)

What most of you learned in school about this aspect was probably a gross oversimplification. We all probably remember the simple explanation of "It's an action happening now," but this doesn't fully appreciate its nuances. It also shoots us in the foot for examples of this aspect in the Past or Future Tense.

The Progressive Aspect gives a verb a temporal feeling, different from that of the Simple and Perfect aspects. Simple verbs are factual with respect to time, Perfect verbs are a link in a chain of events, while Progressive verbs are intimately connected to their time period, as if they were spread over a period in our understanding. This often leads us to talk about Progressive verbs being “in progress” with reference to another moment, in that they are happening at that moment, or around that moment. Look at the following examples:

“While I’m typing this, I’m sitting in a train.” Two actions in progress with reference to the moment Now

“I was brushing my teeth this morning while I thought about this section.” One action in progress, brush, around another, think.

“I’ll be working on an essay when my wife gets home tonight.” One action in progress, work, around another, get home.

One important point often noted in grammar explanations of this aspect comes up in the future example. When speaking about actions in progress in the future, they often have the sense of being interrupted by the other action. So, in my example, I will most likely stop writing when my wife arrives home to eat the tortillas we still have in the fridge which I cooked in advance last night. This future sense, except for the tortillas, is often effectively communicated simply through the use of the Progressive Aspect.

Returning to the Present Tense, we find an example of usage that is worth special consideration: Present Progressive sentences with reference to the future. While this is normally considered a frustrating exception, I beg to differ; I believe it fully supports my explanation above. Consider the example:

“I told you I’m having tortillas for dinner tonight.”

An action in progress around the moment Now, but how? I’ll physically eat the tortillas tonight, in the future. But ask yourself, what other information have I given you? You know that I cooked them last night, and they’re currently in the fridge, patiently waiting for tonight’s feast. This is a convenient example, but it shows how one verb phrase, have tortillas, involves much more than the simple act of eating.

## Basic tendencies

Positive / Negative	I	am / am not	verb (+ing)	etc.
	You / We / They	are / are not		
	He / She / It	is / is not		
Question	Am / Was	I		
	Are / Were	you / we / they		
	Is / Was	he / she / it		

### In the present

Can be:

- used for actions in progress now or around now
- used for temporary or situations that are changing (Salaries are rising with inflation)
- used for actions in the future for which events are presently set in motion (I'm seeing a friend this weekend, i.e. I have organised a meeting time and place with my friend already)

### In the past

Can be:

- used to set the scene for a story (I was walking along when suddenly the rain came pouring down)
- used to indicate an interrupted action in the past (I was watching TV when the power went out)

### In the future

Can be:

- used to indicate simultaneous actions (I'll be studying when you get home)

# Perfect Progressive

So, we've seen the Perfect Aspect, actions in a chain of events with a strong link to the moment in question, and we've seen the Progressive Aspect, actions in progress at a particular moment. What if an action was in progress, had a strong link to another moment, and was not finished at that moment? We'd have to combine the concepts of Perfect and Progressive aspects. Here's what we get:

"I've been writing this book for a few months now."

"I had been teaching in a summer camp for several weeks before I bumped into the woman who is now my wife."

Notice I avoid making an example with any future forms or modal verbs. Although possible, they are extremely rare in communication and are limited to only the most specific of contexts, so are not worth studying. With the basic forms above we can create more complex forms if we wish through the same logic. Let's look at their basic tendencies:

## Basic tendencies

Positive / Negative	I / You / We / They	have / haven't had / hadn't	been	verb (+ing)	etc.
	He / She / It	has / hasn't had / hadn't			
Question	Have / Had	I / you / we / they			
	Has / Had	he / she / it			

Can be used for:

- actions that began before a certain moment and continue at that moment (e.g. I've been sitting in this chair for 20 minutes)
- actions that finished just before a certain moment (e.g. I've just been speaking to my colleague)
- states and their duration, when the state is similar to an action (e.g. I've been living in Versailles for 4 years.)

Cannot be used for:

- some stative verbs where its use would be redundant (e.g. I've ~~been believing~~ believed in ghosts since I was a child)

# Prepositions

Prepositions describe a relationship between an object and space or time. For this reason, they cannot exist alone; they must be linked to an object. The sense of a preposition is implicit and quite difficult to define without a little imagination or pictorial representation, but with a few examples and depictions we should form a better understanding of these tiny yet feared pieces of language.

One very important point to emphasise is the fact that prepositions are dependent on other words. This means that one way to simplify their analysis or memorisation is to always take them in little bricks, or as Michael Lewis (1986) would call them 'chunks', as this is how you will always find them in the real world. I've broken them into a few common categories: Spacial; Directional; and Temporal. In each category I've given some key prepositions to get you started, but you'll undoubtedly encounter more as you experience more natural English. Look at the examples below and pay special attention to how I've 'chunked' the prepositional parts.

## Spacial

"I put my laptop on my knees when I type."

on + resting position

"I often work in the train."

"I live in Versailles."

in + interior location / city / country

"My laptop bag is at my feet."

at + physical point of reference

“I never put my bag **above my head** in the storage bin.”

above + object below

“Most people don’t put bags **under their seats** for fear of pickpockets.”

under / below + object above

## Directional

“I left **from La Défense train station** 20 minutes ago.”

from + point of origin

“I’ll get **out of the train** soon and **into a bus.**”

out of + object exited

into + object entered

“Before I arrive **at my apartment**, I’ll take a detour to go **to the supermarket.**”

at + point of reference

to + destination

## Temporal

“I often get home **before 8pm,** but today I finished early, **at 4:30pm,** so I got home **at around 5:45.**”

before + latest limit

at + time of reference

around + approximate time of reference

“When I finish I’ll be off work **on Wednesday** **for 4 days** **during the Easter break.**”

on + day / date

for + quantity of time

during + named period of time

“I’ll be going to Berlin . **in June** The last time I went there was **in 2013.**”

in + month / year

## Verbs and Objects

Many verbs have what’s called ‘dependent prepositions’, or prepositions that the verb needs to include its object. I’ve put together a list of some of the most common examples of verbs with more specific prepositional needs to give you an idea of what I mean:

“This book is **about English grammar.**”

verb (talk, think, to be, etc.) + (about + subject / topic / idea)

“I don’t agree **with many other teachers** **on how grammar should be learned.**”

verb (agree, see eye to eye, etc.) + (with + person) + (on + disputed subject)

“It’s been a long time since I’ve applied **for a new job.**”

verb (apply, send off, ask, etc.) + (for + thing requested)

“I don’t believe **in strict teaching methods.**”

verb (believe, have faith, trust, etc.) + (in + religion / idea / person)

# Conjunction

Also known as linking, this is the process of connecting objects, sentences, ideas, even whole paragraphs, both written and spoken.

The idea of conjunction in our native language is so implicit to the communication process we find it difficult to isolate and explain them ourselves. That being said, many linking devices are vital to effective communication. Scientific documents avoid miscomprehension through the use of proper conjunction, with words we rarely see outside of that context like consequently or moreover. The reason for their rarity is that we often do not need such precision in our every-day communication. We tend to repeat what we say, making modifications and reformulations on the fly, as opposed to trying to construct perfect sentences first time.

Let me first introduce you to the idea of the 'clause', or what we call a sentence within a sentence. Later, I will give examples of simple linking words, that is to say the words we use in everyday life and simple writing. Finally, I'll introduce some technical linking words, the words reserved for contexts where preciseness is key and which would seem out of place in everyday communication.

## Clauses

This is a key concept in the analysis of certain linking devices. Clauses are sentences that are combined to form more complex, hybrid sentences, normally connected by linking words. Consider the following examples:

Linking word	Clause 1	Linking word	Clause 2
	I'm writing complex examples	and	I don't care who knows it.
If	I continue with these examples		will you still want to read my book?
	You'll cite the Geneva Convention	when	this section is done torturing you.
In case	you don't survive,		can I have your TV?

I recommend you don't delve too deep into the reasons why such clauses are linked in such ways, just consider them as two potentially independent sentences, brought together in harmony by one linking device, isn't that romantic?

In any case, notice how we have already identified two possible positions for linking words: before or after the first clause. This is generally the case, but not necessarily a rule. Be prepared to see writers using artistic licence to, for example, do what I've just done and stick the poor word somewhere in the chaos of a very long sentence and, regardless of the confusion it causes, feel smug and intelligent in having created such a beautiful construction, n'est pas?

## Simple linking words

Starting with the basics, let's consider words such as and, but and or. These can link many things, from nouns to whole clauses, though the items they link must be grammatically equal, that is to say, a noun links with a noun and a sentence links with a sentence. Consider these examples:

"This book is (both) interesting and informative."

adjective + adjective

"On Sundays I (either) go out for baguettes in the morning, or I use frozen ones."

sentence + sentence

"I could give you more examples, but I won't (give you more examples)."

sentence + sentence (truncated)

Notice how with and and or, we can employ both or either respectively. This is not obligatory, but can often be useful when using longer constructions to be sure the reader / listener knows where the link occurs. Now let's consider some linking words for time phrases:

"While I brush my teeth, I often dance around a little bit."

Simultaneous actions

"I'm sitting on my sofa typing. At the same time, my wife is watching TV."

Action + Preceding Action

"Before I brush my teeth, I usually have a shower."

“After I brush my teeth, I can’t drink anything like orange juice or Coke.”

Action + Following action

Now we move on to linking words for more psychological connections:

“I haven’t talked about food in a while, so let’s do some culinary examples.”

“If you don’t stir a risotto regularly, you’ll burn the pot.”

Cause + Effect

“I put a lot of salt in pasta water because that’s how an Italian once showed me.”

Fact + Reason

“Even though risotto recipes often use celery, I tend to avoid it.”

“I also don’t like almonds, though for some reason I love frangipane.”

Fact + inconsistency / contradiction

Those last ones, even though or though, are perhaps the trickiest. We use them when something happens or exists even though the evidence would normally indicate the contrary. For example, imagine it’s raining; people don’t normally go outside. If you went outside anyway, this would be contrary to expectation, and so you could say “I went outside even though it was raining.”

## Formal linking words

As stated above, these linking words are purely for technical contexts such as scientific or legal writing, professional reports, etc. We use them to reduce the chance of miscomprehension, to be understood the first time with no negotiation, and so they represent a high level of formality. We do not use them with friends or in every-day interactions with others. I’ll write a short text as an example, imagining I’m submitting a text to a teaching journal:

“Modern language teaching has evolved a great deal from the period of direct grammar translation still prevalent less than a century ago, particularly in the area of content delivery. Communicative teaching has taken over as the norm. Indeed, some language schools today refuse any means of translation in favour of teaching purely in the target language, for instance Berlitz. Moreover, the nature of the content is almost exclusively natural and often personalised to increase chances of retention. Although students often obtain positive results from such an

experience, the process can be gruelling and, consequently, many language institutions strive to find a balance between pure second language teaching and elements of the original direct grammar translation technique.

To discuss the meaning and usage of each of them would be time-consuming, and it's been my experience that learning as you go is much more effective, as without context they are exceptionally boring. Try reading papers published in scientific or trade journals in your professional sector or area of interest. See Appendix 2 for a list of some of the most common formal linking words in categories of use.

## Idioms and Metaphor

An idiom is defined as an expression whose meaning is difficult to determine from the sum of the definitions of its individual words. That sounds complicated, but I'm excited to share my own fascination with you for this wonderful area of language.

I believe that idioms in a language are intimately connected to the culture of the people of that language. The connection can be difficult to determine, as often idioms simply appear in popular speech from populist literature with only some, or perhaps little or no explanation. Consider the following examples and try, for fun, to find an expression with the equivalent meaning in your language:

Idiom	Meaning	Possible origin
When pigs fly!	It's impossible	John Withals's list of proverbs in the English-Latin dictionary: A Shorte Dictionarie for Yonge Begynners, 1616, contains "Pigs fly in the ayre with their tayles forward."
To let the cat out of the bag	To reveal a secret before the appropriate time	Two theories: 1) 16th century, substituting a piglet for a cat in a bag at an animal market to trick a customer; 2) taking the 'cat of nine tails', a vicious whip used to punish sailors, out of the bag
A baptism of fire	A task to perform with no training or preparation	King James Christian Bible, baptised by the 'fire' of the Holy Ghost. Also perhaps a reference to actual martyrdoms by fire.
You're pulling my leg.	You're deceiving me for a joke.	In 1883, Ohio newspaper The Newark Daily Advocate wrote: It is now the correct thing to say that a man who has been telling you preposterous lies has been "pulling your leg."

If you found some examples in your language, I can almost guarantee they are not the same. These expressions most often cannot be translated word for word, we must perform a 'sense translation' which involves considering why the expression is used, then finding an appropriate expression in the second language for the same reason.

When thinking about idioms, we often encounter the concept of metaphor. This is normally a way of conceptualising and understanding complex or abstract things in our world. Consider the following examples, and again think if there is a similar way of explaining them in your language:

Metaphor	Example	Meaning
Time is money (they can be often used interchangeably)	You waste time when you sit on Facebook all day.	You use your time unnecessarily / impractically sitting on Facebook all day.
	You waste money when you bet all the time	You use your money unnecessarily / impractically betting all the time.
green is the colour of envy	I turn green when I see people driving sports cars	I'm always jealous when I see people driving sports cars
up is positive, down is negative	Apple's profits have gone way up / risen / soared this year.	Apple's profits have increased significantly this year.
	When you're feeling down in the dumps / depressed / low, you need a friend.	When you're feeling very negative emotions, you need a friend.

As you can see, at this point we enter a very difficult area of language. It would be impractical and irresponsible to suggest learning metaphors and idioms in some way as rules, as they are so complex, or even non-existent, that you'd be driven mad. Think about it another way - as you adventure through your English experience, you may encounter some of these wonderful and amusing expressions and ideas and be able to learn about your interlocutors culture by enquiring as to their meaning. Imagine them as the cherry on the cake of your overall English development.

# Conclusion

We've had a brief and simplified look at English grammar here, and I hope it's at least gone some way to at least improve your perception of grammar and language in general. Grammar can be as simple or as complex as we wish to make it, but for the purposes of language learning and training the explanations given here are sufficient. We certainly should never foster the idea that learning more detailed grammar explanations and complex arbitrary rules can do anything to improve one's language skills. The study of grammar can be a fascinating pursuit, but only for those who wish to study it explicitly. For those wishing to simply benefit from such study to quickly and efficiently increase their language ability, the types of descriptions in this book will more than suffice.

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## Appendix 1: Irregular verb list

be	was / were	been	freeze	froze	frozen			
Base form	Past form	Participle	Base form	Past form	Participle	Base form	Past form	Participle
beat	beat	beaten	have	had	had	set	set	set
become	became	become	hear	heard	heard	shine	shone	shone
begin	began	begun	hide	hid	hidden	shoot	shot	shot
break	broke	broken	hit	hit	hit	show	showed	shown
bring	brought	brought	hold	held	held	shrink	shrank	shrunk
build	built	built	hurt	hurt	hurt	shut	shut	shut
buy	bought	bought	keep	kept	kept	sing	sang	sung
catch	caught	caught	know	knew	known	sink	sank	sunk
choose	chose	chosen	lead	led	led	sit	sat	sat
come	came	come	learn	learnt	learnt	sleep	slept	slept
cost	cost	cost	leave	left	left	slide	slid	slid
cut	cut	cut	lend	lent	lent	speak	spoke	spoken
deal	dealt	dealt	let	let	let	spend	spent	spent
do	did	done	lie	lay	lain	split	split	split
draw	drew	drawn	light	lit	lit	spread	spread	spread
drink	drank	drunk	lose	lost	lost	stand	stood	stood
drive	drove	driven	make	made	made	steal	stole	stolen
eat	ate	eaten	mean	meant	meant	stick	stuck	stuck
fall	fell	fallen	meet	met	met	swim	swam	swum
feed	fed	fed	pay	paid	paid	take	took	taken
feel	felt	felt	put	put	put	teach	taught	taught
fight	fought	fought	read	read /red/	read /red/	tear	tore	torn
find	found	found	ride	rode	ridden	tell	told	told
fly	flew	flown	ring	rang	rung	think	though	thought
forget	forgot	forgotten	rise	rose	risen	throw	threw	thrown
forgive	forgave	forgiven	run	ran	run	understand	understood	understood
get	got	got	say	said	said	wake	woke	woken
give	gave	given	see	saw	seen	wear	wore	worn
go	went	gone	sell	sold	sold	win	won	won
grow	grew	grown	send	sent	sent	write	wrote	written

## Appendix 2: Linking words

<u>Emphasis</u>	<u>Addition</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Contrast</u>	<u>Comparison</u>	<u>Standard</u>
Undoubtedly	And	First / firstly,	So	For example	For	However	Similarly	and
Indeed	In addition / additionally / an additional	second / secondly,	As a result	For instance	Because	Nevertheless	Likewise	or
Obviously		third / thirdly etc.	As a consequence (of)		Since	Nonetheless	Also	but
Generally	Furthermore	Next, last, finally	Therefore	That is (ie)	As	Still	Like	so
Admittedly	Also		Thus	Such as	Because of	Although / even though	Just as	after
In fact	Too	In addition, moreover	Consequently	Including		Though	Just like	before
Particularly / in particular	As well as	Further / furthermore	Hence	Namely		But	Similar to	unless
Especially		Another	Due to			Yet	Same as	though
Clearly		Also				Despite / in spite of	Compare	if
Importantly		In conclusion				In contrast (to) / in comparison	compare(d) to / with	until
		To summarise				While	Not only...but also	as
						Whereas		since
						On the other hand		when
						On the contrary		because
								than
								while