A Concise Overview of English Grammar

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361-103 English Grammar

Abstract

This book provides a brief overview of grammar fundamentals. After an initial philosophical consideration of what constitutes grammar, an analytical approach is taken operating under the assumption that grammar provides a set of descriptive rules, whereby assessing the individual components of a sentence and how they are assembled together leads us to an understanding of how to build a sentence, before briefly discussing how multiple sentences are then combined to form coherent paragraphs and texts. By way of a contrast, we conclude with a brief aside on poetry as a form of written English that often violates many rules of grammar yet remains meaningful and part of written English communication.

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1. Introduction

Grammar is conventionally associated with the strict specification of rules governing the use of language, and in particular written language. I say 'conventionally', since the notion of grammar itself is a theoretically interesting and contentious subject. Nevertheless, if we assume that it is some sense is a compendium of rules, then it becomes possible to organise the analysis of those rules in a meaningful manner. Here we will be looking at the essential core of English grammar: what parts all come together in order for us to write meaningful sentences composed of the manifest variety of English words that are available to us (and there are many, upwards of half a million...!).

The book is therefore organised in the following way: i) A necessarily brief discussion of 'what' grammar is, and in particular some of the thoughts that the Austrian-British philosopher Wittgenstein had regarding grammar, or indeed grammars, in general[1]; ii) next a reductionist analysis of what constitutes a sentence grammatically by analysing all of the principle component parts, in turn; the finally, iii) we will conclude with a short discussion about how these sentences are composed into larger units of text in order to form a body of written English, since we would generally assemble multiple sentences in some logical order in order to communicate information meaningfully in written English.

This book is chiefly written from an analytical perspective, and the order of components are introduced predominantly according to their structural relationship with each other, in a stepwise manner building from the smallest unit (a word) up to a complete sentence, then finally the assembly of multiple sentences into a text. Many other approaches are possible, and a brief review of some of the hundreds of textbooks reveals that countless approaches and different ways of organising the information can and have been taken. My approach has not been written from a pedagogical perspective, so the intention of this book is not for it to be a 'how to' guide to either teaching or learning grammar. Since I have no previous direct experience of teaching (outside of the context of one-to-one 'teaching' whilst working as a Personal Trainer), I cannot formulate an appropriate pedagogical methodology since such a pedagogy needs to be reflected and reviewed upon in light of practical attempts to actually teach according to a such a provisional methodology first. So instead my approach is more orientated toward the presentation of grammatical components in terms of their logical coherence.

[1] This topic really goes straight to the heart of Philosophy of Language. It is a fascinating topic, but a more detailed discussion is outside of the scope of this book.

2. What is grammar

2.1. Grammar considered

What exactly is a language grammar, whether applied to English or indeed any other natural language? In fact, computer programming languages also have a 'grammar'. The philosopher Wittgenstein likened grammar to the rules of a game: these rules govern what constitute valid 'moves' within the game, and by playing the game, we are furnished with evidence as to what constitutes successful moves within the game. Moreover, using the example of chess, in this bidirectional process, just as the pieces have a particular prescription or proscription of valid moves (i.e. a pawn can only generally only advance one square or capture diagonally; a rook in a straight line horizontally or vertically for as many squares as are available), and through the application of these moves the pieces gain their identity, so in the application of grammar rules on words, phrases, clauses and then sentences draw their identity. The nature of rules differs according to the game played, so that some children's playground games actually have implicit rather than explicit rules; language operates in this manner, being in one sense a gigantic aggregate of a series of interrelated games (e.g. the game of 'academic writing'; the game of 'poetry'; the game of 'fiction'; or an admixture of several games all in the same body of writing), with particular overlapping rule-sets, that nevertheless forms a somewhat coherent and identifiable whole. English itself is an amalgamation and assimilation of many languages all with a complex history, and as such it has inherited a richly messy rule-set[2]. The rules of the 'English game' change all the time since language is not a static entity.

Wittgenstein suggests that a second description of grammar is that it consists of 'a description of a set of signs', with grammar therefore not so much the prescription of set rules but rather the description of the game itself; more complexly, he then goes on to claim that these two different definitions of grammar are not so much separate, as interdependent facets of the same underlying phenomenon. Language use is an emergent property that arises through the production of well-formed sentences; the production of well-formed sentences informs what constitutes 'correct' grammar. In this respect we can draw a sharp distinction between natural language and computer languages; to break a 'rule' in a computer language is to create code that is literally meaningless in the sense that it will not compile into executable code. However, breaking a rule in English grammar can be the domain of someone with expert proficiency as much as it the frequent occurrence of novice learners. Habitual, deliberate breaking of particular rules, for a specific intended effect, can eventually lead to a morphing of the grammar of the language such that eventually it becomes admitted into the 'formal' specification of the grammar for the language. English has no overall supreme authority, though perhaps some might wish that the Oxford English Dictionary would occupy that position. Human languages are a living entity that are defined as much by their actual use in practice by their formal grammatical structure. Eventually, the grammatical structure itself will change and slowly adapt. This is a bidirectional game. It is this distinction that forms the debate centred on prescriptive versus descriptive grammarians; as teachers we may emphasise the *prescriptive* approach in the classroom, but the reality is the one that *descriptive* grammar accommodates, as most language use does not actually occur within a classroom or formal context.

[2] My discussion here is indebted to Michael N. Forster's book *Wittgenstein: On The Arbitrariness Of Grammar.*

2.2. Vocabulary and grammar

Grammar may define the rules through which words can be meaningfully combined into sentences, but without vocabulary you have no material to furnish your sentences with. Vocabulary itself can be divided into receptive and productive categories. Generally speaking, someone's receptive capacity is larger than their productive capacity: we always understand more words than we typically use. Only those individuals who make extensive use of language as an integral part of their work, and who write and speak on an extremely wide range of topics, and write using a diverse range of styles are likely to regularly produce anywhere close to what they actually understand. Many words are archaic, or are extremely infrequently used either due to their difficulty, or their specificity. The word 'antidisestablishmentarianism' is often known simply due to its notoriety as one of the longest words in the English language, yet it is a word you would typically not ever use even in an entire lifetime of writing. Its meaning is so particular and context-dependent as to almost render it completely useless except for a few scholars who happen to write in the field of 19th Century history of the Anglican Church in Britain. We learn by listening as children; hence long before we use words, we have received and understand them. Whether we then go onto to actually employ them depends upon a variety of factors, but principally whether the word has utility or not.

2.3. Word tiers

Words can be categorised as either Tier 1, 2, or 3. This is convenient notation based on a frequency analysis of how commonly words appear in speech and writing. Tier 1 are the most frequent and form an essential core vocabulary. They are essential for many basic functions of language in its communicative aspect. Tier 2 consists of words that are the mark of a well educated fluent adult speaker, and that allow detailed description and communication of difficult abstract concepts. Tier 3 words are the remaining vast bulk of highly specialised or obtuse words that are of limited utility outside their highly specific context (but that enrich written language immeasurably from an artistic perspective, especially in fiction writing, poetry and song). Estimates are subjective, but somewhere in the region of 20-30,000 words would signal that your knowledge of English vocabulary is of a proficient and educated nature. Those that are linguistically gifted will exceed 30,000 or 40,000 words (Stephen Fry is a well known celebrity famous for his expansive vocabulary). For ESL learners, the good news is that around 5000 words account for somewhere in the region of 95% of the most frequently used words, meaning that in order to be able to at least function well in English the task is not quite so daunting. A similar principle operates across most if not all other languages in the world, too.

2.4. Grammar errors: global and local

We can differentiate grammatical errors into two classes: local and global. Local errors are errors specific to a particular sentence or just restricted to minor deviations (i.e. incorrect verb order,

mixing subject-verb-order, limited incorrect word choice, etc), with the result that the communication is still successful and the meaning is still understood.

“Please train ticket buy I want to Liverpool” would be a local error: any native English speaker will have no difficulty understanding that they are attempting to buy a train ticket to Liverpool. Severe pronunciation errors in spoken English, completely incorrect choice of words (such as the wrong verb entirely) are all examples of global errors that could stop a native speaker being able to comprehend the individual at all.

3. Components of a sentence

A sentence is composed of a series of units or component parts which must be produced and assembled in a certain way in order to create a meaningful 'well formed' sentence. First we will look at the different types of word, before progressing to phrases, clauses, the use of punctuation, and finally complete sentences themselves.

3.1. Types of word

3.1.1. What is a word?

A word consists of a series of letters arranged into one group (spelling). The word is the smallest meaningful conceptual unit in grammar (the letter 'p' does not meaning anything in itself; it is just written notation for a particular sound). In the case of verbs, or the plural version of words, the spelling of a word can change, which informs us not of a different conceptual unit but rather of a change in state or quality (i.e. in terms of its operation through time), or quantity (as in plurals). The article 'a' is an exception to this distinction between letters and words, since though only a single letter, it also happens to form a word in itself. We will look at it below.

3.1.2. Nouns

Nouns are principally naming words. Nouns identify something; a place, or a thing, or an idea, or indeed a given object in general. There are many types of nouns; a proper noun is one that officially names something. My name 'Aren' is a proper noun, since it names *me*. Proper nouns are capitalised in English to designate that they officially 'name' something. Bus, car, tree, house, idea, nose, toenail, Siam, laptop, and bicycle are all examples of nouns.

3.1.3. Articles

There are three articles in English – a, an, the – split into two primary types: definite and the indefinite.

3.1.3.1. Definite article: 'the'

The definite article 'the' is one of the most frequently occurring words in the English language. It refers to a subject that already has been mentioned, or to a concrete specific noun (i.e. either a definite physical object or particular concept), so that what it refers to should be obvious from the *context* of the sentences.

3.1.3.2. Indefinite article: 'a' and 'an'

Conversely, the indefinite article is used to refer to something that has not been previously mentioned (in the context of the text), or to a non-specific item (i.e. just one unspecified or unremarkable physical object among many, something that is indefinite).

'A' is used when the noun starts with a consonant (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y or z), and 'an' is used when the noun starts with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u). The exceptions to this rule are words that start with *consonant sounds*, such as 'university' (i.e. "a university") or with a vowel sounds, such as 'hour' (i.e. "an hour").

The indefinite article cannot be used with uncountable nouns (i.e. 'a milk'). Uncountable nouns are objects not generally seen as separable into individual objects (i.e. a body of water)[3].

3.1.3.3. Example exercises

3.1.3.3.1. Exercise 1 – Picture matching with article selection

Match the words with the picture and pick 'a', 'an', or 'the' as appropriate.

(A / An) owl

(A / An) boy

(The / An) rainbow

[3] Language thus reflects our philosophical assumptions about our physical relationship with the universe. What constitutes a separate 'discrete' object? Linguistically, languages developed out of an oral tradition, so it is evident that the distinction between 'countable' and 'uncountable' arose out of the day-to-day use of language to describe the physical exchange and handling of material objects (primarily through trade and barter). So the indefinite article is only applicable when the object is physically bounded or contained in some way; we cannot say 'a water', but we can say 'a bottle of water'.

(An / A) mouse

(The/ An) moon

3.1.3.3.2. Exercise 2 – Gap fill

Complete the sentences with either ‘a’ , ‘an’, or ‘the’ accordingly.

Rembrandt was ___ artist.
I have ___ large tree in my back garden.
Where is ___ Grand Palace in Bangkok?
It was___ very large pizza.
For me, it was a long day in the classroom at ___ university.
My sister lives in ___ apartment in Tokyo.

3.1.3.3.3. Exercise 3 – Use the correct verb participle and ‘a’, ‘an’, or ‘the’ as appropriate

The cat (to sit) on ___ table.
I am (to go) to ___ library to read __ book.
We (to be) cycling along the road when __ British Prime Minister’s car nearly hit us.
You should have (to look) before you put ___ fork in your mouth!

I (to fly) from Bangkok to Chiang Mai, and barely __ hour had passed before it was time to land again.

3.1.4. Adjectives

Adjectives are words that modify the meaning of the word they are used with. They add additional descriptive information when used to describe a noun. For example, 'it was a *beautiful* dress', or, it was an 'extremely *boring* film'.

3.1.5. Adjectives activity

Here is an example of a worksheet to test student's understanding that the ending of an adjective will change when in the context of comparatives and superlatives. It therefore teaches two skills simultaneously; both the standard for altering the adjective, and key comparatives/superlatives. Taken from https://busyteacher.org/25278-comparatives-and-superlatives-size.html.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
big	bigger	biggest
small		smallest
huge	huger	
	littler	littlest
tiny	tinier	
large	larger	
	shorter	shortest

3.1.6. Prepositions

3.1.6.1. Types of preposition

A preposition is a linking word that links a noun/pronoun (or noun phrase) to another part of sentence. Their use can be complex.

They can be broadly categorised into five main types:

Category	Description
Time	Used for designations of time and date.
Place	Used for designations of physical places and locations within space, or of pertaining to the physical relationships between objects; e.g. the kettle on the kitchen worktop, the dog under the table.
Direction	Used for designations regarding directions in a geographical sense.
Agent	Links an agent (i.e. an entity *doing* something) with its causal effects (i.e. the guitar was played *by* him).
Instruments	These prepositions link the use of the machine/device/tool/instrument with its effect/action.

3.1.6.2. A list of the most common English language prepositions

Here is a list of the most common English language prepositions:

	Preposition	Usage	Examples
1	**with**	To accompany; to be in relation to/for things that go together.	I went to the cinema **with** my mother. You should try some soy sauce **with** your rice.
2	**at**	Indicates a position/location. Used to indicate a specific time. Indicates an extent or degree.	The milk is **at** the back of the fridge. We were **at** work. The market closes at three o'clock. The beer is being sold **at** three pounds per bottle.
3	**from**	Indicates a starting point (either location or in	A flight left **from** London

		abstract). Made from a material. Used to indicate causality.	Heathrow five minutes ago. The house is made **from** stone. He lay in bed till midday; **from** this we can conclude he is either very lazy or extremely tired.
4	**into**	Within or moving inside something. A change of state from something to something else.	He went **into** the shop. We can turn flour, yeast, and water **into** bread. The caterpillar turns into a butterfly.
5	**during**	At some point whilst something else was occurring. Throughout the continuance or existence of.	He got up and went to the toilet **during** the middle of the film. He liked to go skiing during the long cold winter here.
6	**including**	To contain or aggregate together. To be in addition to.	The microwave meal has everything you need **including** a plastic fork. Everyone left the university: all of students, **including** the teachers too.
7	**until**	Either up to, or before a certain point in time.	He was playing well **until** he missed that easy shot. I will keep working on this assignment **until** it is finished.
8	**against**	To be in opposition or resistance to. In contact or collision with.	That country is **against** same-sex marriage. May I rest my bike **against** your wall?
9	**among**	To share with. To be in the middle of.	I am going to divide the winnings **among** us all equally.

		To have consent or form an agreement with	I couldn't find the reference I was looking for **among** all the papers. They all agreed **among** themselves as to the best way to travel to the festival.
10	**throughout**	In all parts of. From the beginning to the end.	Make sure to spread the seeds **throughout** the entire plot of land. Try to demonstrate your intelligence **throughout** the entire course.
11	**despite**	Regardless or notwithstanding; in defiance of. Usually used to indicate unfavourable circumstances, factors, or conditions.	**Despite** getting no sleep, he performed really well in the test. He got lost in the building **despite** having been there many times before.
12	**towards**	Geographical: either near or in the direction of. Indicates the having a viewpoint or feeling with regards to someone/something.	If you head **towards** the river, you will soon reach the train station. She had very strong feelings **towards** him.
13	**upon**	Combines 'up' and 'on'. To be elevated or on top of. To be supported or provide the foundation for. "Once upon a time," a special case of an idiomatic phrase indicating a moment 'elevated' in time for the start of the story.	The cat would usually sleep **upon** our kitchen table. The book is **upon** the top shelf. The house floats **upon** the river.
14	**concerning**	In relation to, or in regards of. About.	**Concerning** the assignment you mentioned yesterday... The latest government report was on literacy, especially **concerning** literacy among low income families.

15	**of**	Used to indicate a cause or reason. Indicates parts or contents. Can be used to indicate spatial relationships.	He died **of** cancer. Here is a nice mug **of** tea. The body was found three miles south **of** the nearest village.
16	**to**	For moving in the direction of. Joins an adjective with its application.	He was cycling **to** school. She was very kind **to** him.
17	**in**	Inclusion within something. Bounded by, or a part of something.	There are six eggs **in** the carton. She played violin **in** the orchestra.
18	**for**	To indicate something that is appropriate or beneficial. Intended towards.	They were studying the BA TESOL degree **for** the qualification and to become better teachers. The teaspoon is **for** stirring the milk and sugar into your tea.
19	**on**	At a specific time during. Attached, connected, or located in relation to something.	I will open the shop at 10:30am **on** Sunday for you. Please hang your poster **on** the wall.
20	**by**	Next to or by means of. Time designation for during or ongoing process.	The cafe is **by** the bookshop. Please complete the essay **by** 9pm.
21	**about**	Concerning something. The particular topic. Being close to something. Approximate location.	Q. What was the book **about**? A. It was a book about English Grammar. Keep your keys **about** your person. I'm sure I tripped over **about** here when I was out last night.
22	**like**	Of something that indicates possibility. To be inclined towards something.	It looks **like** a thunderstorm is approaching.

			I feel **like** sleeping now.
23	**through**	From one opening to another. To express a duration.	We went **through** the tunnel and emerged on the other side of the mountain. I will stay in the classroom and work **through** this list of prepositions.
24	**over**	Above or upon. To be on top of. To indicate an approximate location. To finish or conclude.	The viaduct went **over** the valley. The flowers were all **over** the hillside. It was somewhere **over** there. When I woke up, the film was **over**.
25	**before**	Previous to or earlier than. In preference to.	The Queen puts cream on her scones **before** the jam. I love my job now; whereas **before**, I hated it. I would always take tea **before** coffee as it is the superior daily drink.
26	**between**	Linking two concepts or places; sharing among; or in the physical space located in the middle of two things.	Politically, I would say I am fairly centrist, **between** the New Left and Royalist Right. The BTS system runs **between** Siam and Sala Deung stations. You'll find the planning permission certificate **between** my insurance documentation and the mortgage documentation at the back.
27	**after**	Subsequently or in succession to something.	I will see you **after** I have finished marking

		Chasing or in pursuit of something.	these assignments. Quick! Get **after** that fox before it disappears into the undergrowth.
28	**since**	Due to or because of.	**Since** we're on the topic of English Grammar, can I just say what a mess in general the English language is? I won't be able to meet you tonight **since** they're currently doing loads of repair work on the main road near me.
29	**without**	Indicates absence or omission; or to indicate exclusion.	You will have to manage **without** me today as I have work to attend to. Can I please have my coffee **without** sugar?
30	**under**	Lower than or covered by something else. Lower in value than.	You will find the vacuum cleaner **under** the stairs. I managed to get a new laptop for **under** £200.
31	**within**	Contained in. Surrounded by something else. Less than by degree.	If you place the screws **within** this plastic box, you won't keep losing them every time you build flat-pack furniture. It is not far – **within** about 5km I would estimate.
32	**along**	Parallel or beside. To follow or be in conformity with.	Let us walk **along** the coastline up to Edinburgh. I will be **along** shortly. I'll go **along** with this new theory on the Communicative language learning methodology.
33	**following**	Due to a result of. At a later time.	I feel very tired **following** a poor night's sleep.

			Following the difficulties that occurred at the last meeting, today we will be avoiding all controversial topics.
34	**across**	To move from one side to another; to bridge something. To come into contact with (usually accidentally).	If you look **across** the plaza, you can see the new sculpture over there. I came **across** this interesting book whilst browsing through a second-hand bookshop.
35	**behind**	Later than or after. Physically located at the rear of something.	We are running **behind** today, so we will just cover the topics briefly. You will find the spade **behind** my coat hanging up on the wall.
36	**beyond**	Father along in space, time or degree.	It is **beyond** the perimeter of the fence. We need to go **beyond** the textbook material if we really want to grasp this issue.
37	**plus**	In addition to, as well as.	Two **plus** two equals four. Teachers need to deliver the syllabus **plus** the soft skills in the hidden curriculum if they are to really teach people.
38	**except**	Not including; apart from.	Pick up all of the sheets **except** the last one; that is for tomorrow. I think this would be a good idea **except** that I am not sure it is practical to implement.
39	**but**	With the exception of.	We looked everywhere **but** the loft when searching for the missing keys.

			The presentation was everything **but** the main subject topic.
40	**up**	Elevated or at a father place than. To, or toward something.	The cat is hiding **up** in the tree. You'll find the shop you are looking for father **up** the street.
41	**out**	Movement: from inside to outside, or to drive away from.	If you look **out** of the window, you can see all of Bangkok's skyscrapers. We need to force these rats **out** of the house.
42	**around**	To encircle or envelop. To move or search within an area.	The mould is all **around** the room. The old mine is **around** here somewhere.
43	**down**	In a more remote or descending position.	I'm sure I dropped the paintbrush somewhere **down** there. You'll find the old town further **down** the river.
44	**off**	To be disengaged or in a passive state. Not attached or supported by. Separate or away from.	Please switch **off** the air conditioning when you leave. The handle fell **off** my kettle so I can no longer use it. Keep **off** the grass.
45	**above**	In a higher place than. A larger quantity or degree.	That cat always likes to sleep on that shelf **above** the fridge. **Above** and beyond mere definitions, a student must demonstrate their comprehension by being able to actually use the words.
46	**near**	Close by, or near to, in space or time or state.	Gateshead is **near** to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. She is **near** to a state of total mental breakdown.

3.1.6.3. *Prepositions worksheet*

The use of prepositions can be difficult when learning English. This worksheet helps develop proficiency, aimed at reasonably advanced learners:

PREPOSITONS OF TIME: AT, ON, IN

1. Write the expressions in the right column.

at	*on*	*in*
2) 8 o'clock	1) 6 June	13) the evening

1) 6 June
2) 8 o'clock
3) Wednesday
4) 12.30 a.m.
5) 1977
6) September
7) 24 September
8) Friday
9) 1984
10) half past two
11) Christmas Day
12) winter
13) the evening
14) the morning
15) Monday morning
16) Saturday night
17) night
18) Christmas
19) the weekend
20) Tuesday afternoon
21) the end of my holiday

2. Choose the right preposition.

1) Goodbye! See you (on/at) Friday.
2) Where were you (in/on) 28 February?
3) I got up (in/at) 8 o'clock this morning.
4) I like getting up early (on/in) the morning.
5) My sister got married (on / in) May.
6) Diane and I first met (in / at) 1979.
7) Did you go out (in / on) Friday evening?
8) Did you go out (in / on) Friday?
9) Do you often go out (in / on) the evening?
10) Let's meet (on / at) 7.30 tomorrow evening.
11) I'm starting my new job (at / on) 3 June.
12) We often go to the beach (in / at) summer.
13) George isn't here (in / at) the moment.
14) Julia's birthday is (on / in) January.
15) Do you work (in / on) Saturdays?

3. Insert *at, on, in* where necessary.

1) I'm leaving … Saturday.
2) I'm leaving … next Saturday.
3) I always feel tired … the evening.
4) Will you be at home .. this evening?
5) We went to Scotland … last summer.
6) What do you usually do … the weekend?
7) She phones me … every Sunday.
8) Can you play tennis … next Sunday?
9) I'm afraid I can't come to the party … Sunday.
10) We went to bed late … last night.
11) I don't like going out alone … night.
12) I won't be out very long. I'll be back … ten minutes.

4. Make sentences with *in*.

1) It's 17.25 now. The train leaves at 17.30. The train leaves ….
2) It's Monday today. I'll phone you on Thursday. I'll…… days.
3) It's 14 June today. My exam is on 28 June. My ……
4) It's 3 o'clock now. Tom will be here at 3.30. Tom……

5. Complete the sentences. Use *at, on, in* and expressions from the box.

the 1920's	1917	the 15th century	about five minutes	the same time
Saturdays	night	the age of five	21 July 1969	the moment

1) Columbus discovered America ….
2) The first man landed on the moon….
3) In Britain football matches are usually played…
4) You can see the stars….
5) In Britain children have to start school….
6) Jazz became popular in the United States….
7) It's difficult to listen when everyone is speaking….
8) The Russian Revolution took place….
9) Tom isn't here…. He'll be back….

3.1.7. Verbs

Verbs are one of the most difficult aspects of English to master (especially the highly irregular verb to be). Verbs are a critical part of a sentence and define an action, occurrence, or state of being. Without verbs it is impossible to state anything of real meaning, as sentences would be restricted to simply naming and describing properties of things: 'The red house', 'The big car'.

3.1.7.1. Verb types

Verbs can be classified into various types. Here we will look at some of these divisions below.

3.1.7.1.1. Transitive verbs

A transitive verb requires an object; a recipient of the verb's 'action'. From *agent* to *patient*. Without an object these verbs do not possess any intrinsic meaning.

For example, the verb 'admire' requires an object that the admiring subject *can* admire. I cannot simply 'admire'. Admire what? I can admire *him*, or I can admire 'tree huggers' that embody the politics of environmental conservation, but to 'admire' *by itself* does not make much sense: the state of admiring requires an object that is the focus of the subject's admiration.

3.1.7.1.2. Intransitive verbs

Intransitive verbs, by contrast, do not require an object. They can function in English grammar independent of an object, as simply something the subject does or is

For example, I *went* to the library. I am out *walking*.

3.1.7.1.3. Verbs that function both transitively and intransitively

Many verbs can function both transitively *and* intransitively, depending upon where they occur/how they are used in the sentence. Here is a table of some of the most common ones (taken from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/grammar/transitive-and-intransitive-verbs):

Verb	Transitive	Intransitive
Move	*Could you **move** your car please?*	*The trees were **moving** in the breeze.*
Start	*Taylor was found guilty of **starting** the fire.*	*The match **starts** at 3 p.m.*
Change	*Marriage hasn't **changed** her.*	*The area's **changed** greatly in the last decade.*
Close	***Close** your eyes; I've got a surprise for you.*	*Most shops here **close** at 5.30 p.m.*
Open	***Open** the window; it's too hot in here!*	*The museum **opens** at 10 a.m.*
Stop	*Greg tried to **stop** her from leaving.*	*When the rain **stopped**, we went for a walk.*
Do	*Have you **done** your coursework?*	*Joe's **doing** well in his new job.*

Set	*Kate **set** a chair next to the bed.*	*The sun was **setting** and a red glow filled the sky.*
Run	*Michelle used to **run** a restaurant.*	*The path **ran** over the hill.*
Live	*Our cat **lived** till he was 10.*	*He was **living** a life of luxury abroad.*
Wash	*Have you **washed** your hands?*	*I **washed**, dressed, and went out.*
Write	***Write** your name here.*	*Kevin couldn't read or **write**.*

3.1.7.1.4. Regular verbs

Regular verbs follow the classic rule of the verb root form, together with the following additions:

- -*s* (or –*es*) for third person singular. If the word ends in z, the ending is –*ies*.
- -ed for both past simple and past participle forms.
- -ing for the present participle and gerund.

3.1.7.1.5. Irregular verbs

Irregular verbs are defined in a negative sense as all those verbs that don't follow the form/rules listed above for transforming verbs into the correct tense. The verb *to be* is the most 'irregular' of them all, having a highly changeable structure that alters dramatically by tense/aspect. English language students have little choice but to simply memorise the structure of this verb when learning English.

From http://www.really-learn-english.com/the-verb-to-be-forms-examples-grammar-exercises.html:

When?	Who?	Form	Example
Base form		be	It can be simple.
Simple Present	I	am	I am here.
	You	are	You are here.
	He/She/It	is	She is here.
	We	are	We are here.
	They	are	They are here.
Simple Past	I	was	I was here.
	You	were	You were here.
	He/She/It	was	She was here.

	We	were	We were here.
	They	were	They were here.
Simple Future	I	will be	I will be here.
	You	will be	You will be here.
	He/She/It	will be	She will be here.
	We	will be	We will be here.
	They	will be	They will be here.
Progressive form		being	He is being unusual.
Perfect from		been	It has been fun.

3.1.7.2. Auxiliary verbs and modal verbs

Verbs can also function as auxiliaries or modals. Here we will look at these two types.

3.1.7.2.1. Auxiliary verb

An auxiliary verb is a 'helping' verb. It cannot appear alone in a sentence. Auxiliary verbs are used to add functional meaning to the other 'main' verbs in a clause. For example, the verb *will* cannot occur by itself; it requires additional verbs in order to create a well-formed sentence:

Aren *will* the house.

This is grammatically meaningless, since you cannot 'house' something. Used with an additional verb (to *go*), and the preposition *into* turns it into a well-formed sentence:

```
Aren will go into the house.
```

Another example.

```
The teacher can the tree.
```

Can *do what* with the tree?

```
The teacher can see the tree.
```

Here *see* is the main verb. It assists *see* by informing us that the teacher has the capacity to look upon the tree (with the further implication that they can do so from their current physical position,

and is likely in the process of looking at the tree right now!). Auxiliary verbs functionally combine with other verbs change the meaning of sentences by changing the tense and aspect of sentences.

3.1.7.2.2. Modal auxiliary verbs

Modal auxiliary verbs, or modals, are a special class of verbs that inform us about likelihood or capacity to do something, or our intention or obligation towards something.

There are nine 'true' modal auxiliary verbs: *will, shall, would, should, can, could, may, might*, and *must.*

3.1.7.3. Verb tense and aspect

Tenses help define where an event exactly occurs in time; the past or the future. Its aspect helps to convey *how* an event occurs through time.

Commonly in English we consider three tenses; the past, the present, and the future. These three words are used to indicate our understanding of when an event or action occurred relative to the present moment 'now' in the text according to our notion of linear time.

Strictly speaking, however, there is *no* future tense in English. The root of regular verbs have an *–s* ending to indicate the present tense, and *–ed* to indicate the past tense. There is no special ending to indicate future events. Instead, often the present tense is used to indicate future time/future events (there are also other methods of indicating this is a sentence). Nevertheless, for logical convenience we will consider there to be these three tenses (past, present, future), together with the four aspects. Tenses are applied to a sentence as a whole.

i) Simple:
Simple tenses are typically used to indicate specific, measurable, or definite statements/reports of facts or events. Usually they have already occurred (and finished), or typically occur as an ordinary daily event, or will occur but within a predetermined time frame. They are temporally bounded.

ii) Progressive:
Progressive tenses are typically used to indicate an ongoing or *continuous* action or event. *Continuous* is an interchangeable and alternative term. It is either something that is happening now (and still continuing), happened for an indeterminate duration of time in the past (and could well be continuing now), or is something that will occur during an indeterminate period of time in the future.

iii) Perfect:
Perfect differs from progressive in that it temporally bounds the events or actions, so that we can specifically state during which time period the events/actions occurred.

Aspect	Prototypical Form	Usage	Examples
		Past	
Past simple	S + V(past simple) + O.	Completed events/actions in the past. Factual statements in the past. Definite or specific periods of time in the past.	I went to Hong Kong. It was 37C yesterday. I lived in Newcastle for nearly ten years.
Past progressive	S + 'was'/'were' + V(+ing) + O	To indicate uncompleted actions from the past. To indicate habitual actions from the past.	I was cycling into the city centre when I got a puncture. I was always cycling whenever I had free time.
Past perfect	S + 'had' +V(past participle) + O	Used to indicate a completed action in the past prior to another event.	I had already studied at university before I started studying at Siam Technology College.
Past progressive perfect	S + 'had been' + V(past participle +ing) + O	Used to indicate a completed action in the past with definite time bounding.	I had been studying for a TEFL certificate in March before I started studying at Siam Technology College in April.
		Present	
Present simple	S +V(present participle) + O.	Straightforward statements of facts held to be true now. When an event happens regularly or typically. Statements of facts that are typically true in the future.	I am 173cm tall and do not have much hair. I walk to Siam Techology College every morning. The shop closes on Easter Sunday.
Present progressive	S + 'am'/'is'/'are' + V(past participle +ing) + O	To express unfinished actions now. To express temporary situations. To express definite future actions/activities.	I'm working on my assignment now. I'm driving so cannot answer my phone.
Present perfect	S + 'have'/'had' + V(past participle) + O	To indicate events without a specific time reference. To indicate actions which started in the past and continue up till now.	We have studied English grammar. She had spoken about different teaching

			methodologies. You have cycled a long way.
Present progressive perfect	S + 'have'/'has been' + V(+ing) + O	To indicate events that started at a specific point but which may or may not be completed.	I have been writing a grammar mini-book.
Future			
Future simple	S + 'will' + V + O	To predict a future event. To express a spontaneous decision, or willingness.	It will rain tomorrow. The taxi driver will take you home from the airport. I will do the cooking tonight.
Future progressive	S + 'will be' + V(+ing) + O	To indicate planned or intended events in the future.	They will be lying in bed on Saturday morning.
Future perfect	S + 'will have' + V(past participle) + O	To indicate a planned or intended future event that you intend to have completed before some other event.	They will have an exciting party ready for when you arrive.
Future progressive perfect	S + 'will have been' + V(past participle +ing) + O	To indicate an ongoing future event that has been occurring for some duration but will still not yet have been completed.	They will have been partying for several hours by the time that you arrive.

3.1.7.4. Verb tenses gap fill activities

Here is one example of the sort of basic gap fill shet you could use to test the verb tenses from (http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/grammar/verb-tenses-worksheets):

1) Andy kept _____ on the ice. (slip)

2) The boy is _____ under the tree. (sleep)

3) John passed his _____ test first time. (drive)

4) The man is _____ his car. (wash)

5) People were _____ on the pond. (skate)

6) Ben was _____ in the bushes. (hide)

7) Carol was _____ a sweater. (knit)

8) The girl is _____ an apple. (eat)

9) Roy went out without _____ the door. (shut)

10) Pam is _____ to us across the road. (wave)

For more advanced students, here is another one that covers past perfect and past perfect progressive (taken from http://www.englishforeveryone.org/Topics/Verb-Tenses.htm):

Jill knew that her friend Sasha (feel) _____ _____ _____(1) sad lately. Sasha's mother (die) _____ _____(2) two months before, and the two friends (not, have) _____ _____ _____(3) a chance to talk since it happened.

Sasha arrived at Jill's house at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon. Jill (call) _____ _____(4) her friend on Friday to invite her to over for coffee and cookies. Glancing at the mess in the kitchen, Sasha guessed that Jill (bake) _____ _____ _____(5) cookies all day.

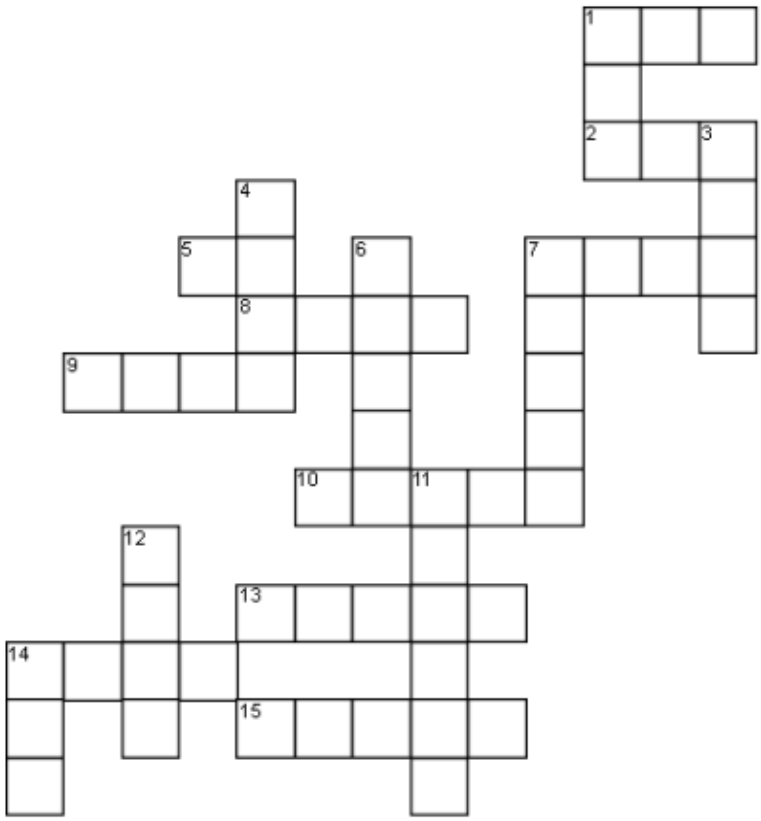
The women talked for a couple of hours. They (always, enjoy) _____ _____ _____(6) each other's company in the past, and were happy to be together again. Sasha recalled some of the things that she (find) _____ _____(7) as she (sort) _____ _____(8) through her mother's belongings.

"It seems that, for some time before Mom died, she (make) _____ _____ _____(9) three scrapbooks," said Sasha. "The last one (never, be) _____ _____ _____(10) completed."

3.1.7.5. Verb tense crossword activity

A more fun approach is this crossword (from https://busyteacher.org/25050-crossword-present-perfect-and-simple-past.html), which requires students to select the correct tense in order to complete the crossword:

Solve the crossword below by completing with the correct verb form:



ACROSS

1 Carol's____ the same old car for 10 years (have)
2 Karen____a good job defending you last year (do)
5 What did you ___ at the weekend? (do)
7 We've never _____ to Tokio (be)
8 I haven't _____ you this month yet (see)
9 I ____ my mind last night (lose)
10 I've _____ him since 2014 (know)
13 She's____in Jundiai for 30 years (live)
14 Neil Armstrong____to the moon in 1930, I think (go)
15 The Queen has just _____ a speech (give)

DOWN

1 She____ lots of good ideas at the meeting (have)
3 Oh, my! What Have you _____? (do)
4 I've_____ my keys (lose)
6 Life has just _____ (begin)
7 He____ asking the boss about his plans (begin)
11 The new restaurant_____2 days ago (open)
12 Mr. Sandman has just _____ out (go)
14 I___born in Brazil(be)

3.2. Phrases

A phrase is a small sequence of words that operate together as a conceptual unit, and is a component or part of a clause. The predominant or central word in a phrase determines what 'type' of phrase it is.

3.2.1. Five phrase types

3.2.1.1. Noun phrases, determiners and modifiers

3.2.1.1.1. Noun phrase

In a noun phrases the dominant word therefore is a *noun*. They have the following structure:

Determiner	**(Pre-modifier)**	**Noun**	**(Post-modifier)**
The	*large*	*horse*	*which runs around the field.*

The pre and post modifiers are both optional; i.e. "the horse" still constitutes a noun phrase. The word 'horse', a noun, designates that 'the large horse which runs around the field' is a noun phrase.

3.2.1.1.2. Determiners

Determiners introduce noun phrases. Articles are the most common (i.e. the, a, an) type of determiner, with pronouns, numerals, and a selection of other words that function to qualify either quantity or degree (i.e. every, many, more, some, etc.).

3.2.1.1.3. Pre-modifier

Pre-modifiers tell us more about the qualities associated with the noun. They are typically an adjective, e.g. large, which gives more information about this particular horse.

3.2.1.1.4. Post-modifier

Post-modifiers are typically prepositional phrases, (i.e 'around the field'), or are relative clauses (see section 3.3.2 below) or *to* clauses (e.g. 'a notepad to record your thoughts').

3.2.1.2. Verb phrases

Verb phrases are a critical component of English grammar and are used to signal the tenses/aspects as discussed above. They therefore help situate actions or events in time.

They have the following structure:

(Auxiliary verb)... (Auxiliary verb)...		**Main Verb**
has	*been*	*destroyed.*

The main verb is optionally preceded with one or *more* auxiliary verbs. The use of the correct auxiliary verbs, and correct form of the main verb, all come together to set the particular tense/aspect of the verb phrase as per the general rules detailed above in section 3.1.7.3.

'The house has been destroyed' = present perfect progressive. 'Destroyed', 'has' and 'been' all need to be considered in a grammatical relationship to each other. The verb phrase here indicates that the destruction of the house started at some point in the past, and has been ongoing for some time to and may well include the present moment. It has presumably happened recently.

3.2.1.3. Adjective phrases

Adjective have the following structure:

Pre-modifier	**Adjective**	**Post-modifier**
extremely	reluctant	to stay

The pre-modifier is usually used as an 'intensifier' – it adds information regarding the degree to which the feeling or emotion the adjective describes occurs. i.e. the fact the person was *extremely* reluctant to stay means that they had a very strong desire to leave. The post-modifier consists of what the quality described or suggested by the adjective pertains to; in this case, the property of remaining in the present location.

3.2.1.4. Adverb phrases

Adverb phrases have a similar structure:

Pre-modifier	**Adverb**	**Post-modifier**
particularly	silently	to stay

The pre-modifier is once again an 'intensifier'. Post-modifiers rarely occur in adverb phrases, with only *indeed* and *enough* commonly occurring. "He walked particularly silently indeed".

3.2.1.5. Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases have the following structure:

Pre-modifier	**Preposition**	**Complement**
Straight	across	the bay.

The complement is usually a noun phrase (see section 3.2.1.1.1 above). The pre-modifier is quite rare, but if it occurs it itself is a pre-positional phrase where the preposition above forms the

complement of the pre-modifying pre-position. In other words, the rule here is effectively a recursive one[4].

3.2.2. Active and passive voices

3.2.2.1. Voice

Voice refers to whether a sentence takes on an active or passive aspect. The voicing of the sentence is therefore either active or passive. Although different voicing does not alter the intrinsic meaning of a sentence, it does alter the stress and emphasis of a sentence; where you want to draw the reader's attention.

3.2.2.2. Active voice

In an active sentence, the sentence has the structure S + V + DO where "DO" is the direct object, i.e. the thing that the subject is acting upon. This syntax has the subject (i.e. the doer) performing the action denoted by the verb. i.e. "Roger is eating a packet a biscuits" has Roger performing the action of *eating* the biscuits, which is the direct object.

3.2.2.3. Passive voice

In a passive sentence, the core meaning is preserved, but the word order is changed. Here the biscuits become the subject, which is acted upon *by* the object. i.e. "The biscuits were being eaten by Roger".

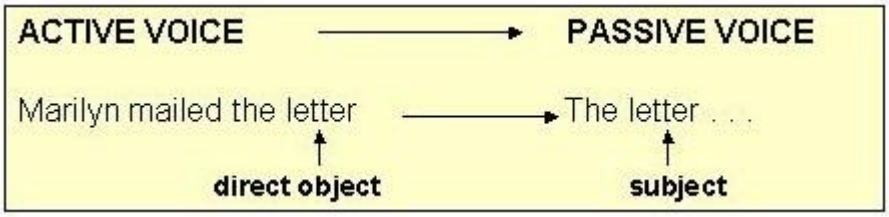
3.2.2.4. Transformation of voice

Here is an example transformation from active to passive.

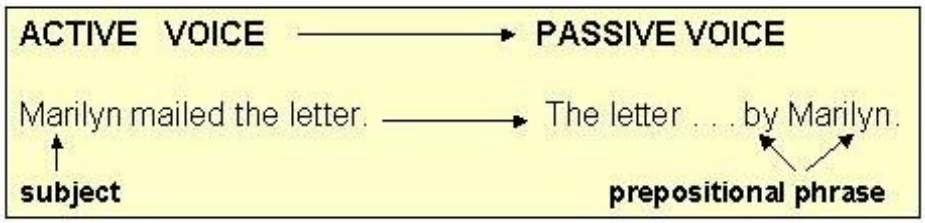
The actively voiced sentence "Marilyn mailed the letter" is transformed into "The letter was mailed by Marilyn" (from https://webapps.towson.edu/ows/activepass.htm):

[4] An interesting aside: this type of recursion is a common and indeed vital property in terms of the specification of the grammar of programming languages: a rule can contain the rule itself as a sub-part. This enables, for example, a function within a language to recursively call itself. I once programmed a maze solving algorithm in Prolog in this manner. Maze solving is an archetypal application of this type of recursive algorithm.

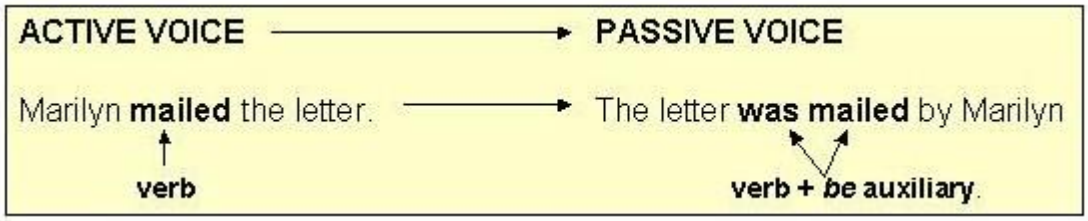
1. Move the active sentence's direct object into the sentence's subject slot



2. Place the active sentence's subject into a phrase beginning with the preposition *by*



3. Add a form of the auxiliary verb *be* to the main verb and change the main verb's form



3.2.2.5. Mixed active and passive voice worksheet

Here are some examples for testing/developing comprehension of active and passive voice in students (from https://busyteacher.org/8440-mixed-active-passive-voice-worksheet.html):

1. Underline the best option:

1. The book was published/published in 2010.
2. My parents will lend/will be lent me some money to buy a new car.
3. It is said/says that some sports involve serious risks.
4. Lots of workers have been made/have made redundant as a result of the crisis.
5. My father was bought/ bought me a CD.
6. Fewer letters are written/write nowadays.
7. The TV presenter has been made/has made lots of mistakes today.
8. Where are you being lived/are you living?
9. My children are liked/like pasta.

10. Emails are sent/send more and more.

2. Change the sentences from active to passive & viceversa.

1. I have had my hair cut.
.....
2. Politicians say that teachers don't work hard.
.....
3. Peter has been given a promotion.
.....
4. It's believed that there is life in the afterlife.
.....
5. Will you send me a postcard from New Your?
.....
6. Nothing is done to help the homeless.
.....
7. People think that unemployment is increasing.
.....
8. Popular TV series are broadcast on AXN.
.....
9. Something like that can't be done.
.....
10. My husband was cooking dinner when someone knocked at the door.
.....

3.3. Clauses

Clauses are a part of a sentence and contain a subject and predicate; the predicate gives us information about what the subject was doing. The predicate consists of a verb and its complement (see verbs, above, section 3.1.6).

3.3.1. Dependent and independent clauses

A sentence is constructed from one or more clauses. An independent clause is a clause that could stand alone in isolation and form its own sentence.

Consider the sentence "When it is dark, he is always asleep".

Here, the independent clause is "he is always asleep". This could be written in isolation and be a well-formed English sentence; "He is always asleep". "When it is dark" is dependent: we are expecting something to follow from conjunction 'when'. 'When it is dark...' – what?

When the dependent clause appears first, as above, a comma is required. If we rewrite the sentence with the independent clause first then no comma is required:

He is always asleep when it is dark.

3.3.2. Relative clauses

A relative clause is introduced through the use of a relative pronoun: *that, which, who, whose, whom, whichever, whoever, whomever*.

“The book that I am reading is fascinating.”

Which book? Any book? No, it is *the* book that I am *[currently] reading*.

I have a friend who cannot stand the heat so cannot live in Thailand.

Which friend? The friend who *cannot stand the heat*.

3.3.3. Relative clause pronoun worksheet

Comprehension of the correct choice of relative pronoun for building relative clauses can be developed/tested with a simple multiple choice worksheet (from https://busyteacher.org/19687-relative-clauses-multiple-choice-activity.html):

A- Choose the correct answer.

1) The man _____ was talking to us is a popular DJ.
    a) who
    b) which
    c) whose
2) The girl _____ works in that shop doesn’t speak English.
    a) Who
    b) which
    c) whom
3) The motorist, _____ car had broken down, asked us to help him.
    a) who
    b) which
    c) whose
4) The girl _____ dog was killed was devastated.
    a) whose
    b) which
    c) who

3.3.4. Defining and non-defining relative clauses (restrictive and non-restrictive)

Defining clauses give specific information that *identify* and help distinguish the particular subject or individual subject contained within the sentence. Non-defining clauses simply supply additional information.

"The minibus had six passengers, and the truck struck it from behind on the left; the passenger who would often daydream about wandering around the planes of Mongolia, and who also happened to be sitting in the rear left-hand seat, was badly injured when the truck hit the rear of the car."

The main subject is the (particular) passenger involved in a crash.

Defining relative clause: The information about being in the rear left-hand is defining and 'restrictive'.

Non-defining relative clause – The act of 'daydreaming' does not help us identify which passenger was injured (different matter if it was the driver, perhaps!).

3.4. Punctuation

3.4.1. Punctuation marks

Punctuation marks serve to specify the parts of the sentence, help contain clauses, help convey meaning, and adjust the flow and timing or written language. The most common are full stops (.) which indicate the termination of a sentence, the comma (,) which indicates the end of a clause, the colon (:) which indicates a strong pause followed by information specifically related to what preceded it, and the semi-colon which amalgamates the comma and the colon such that the timing is somewhere between the two and the 'flow' also somewhere between; again a semi-colon demands further clarifying information to the previous clause whenever it occurs.

Punctuation develops accordingly with language proficiency. Although seemingly basic, the mark of someone with advanced English writing capacity is through expert use of punctuation as much as vocabulary.

3.4.2. Punctuation gap fill activity

At a basic level, punctuation can easily be developed through gap-fill activities such as this one (from https://busyteacher.org/16097-writing-missing-punctuation.html):

a When is your birthday___

b Mrs. Smith___s cat is black and white.

c My sister hates football___ but I love it.

d What time does school finish___

e "Don___t shout in the classroom," said the teacher.

f I___m twelve years old in March.

g "Hooray___" the children shouted.

h The bus doesn___t arrive for an hour.

i In my school bag I have a book, a pencil___ a sharpener and a ruler.

j ___My job can be dangerous," said the fireman.

k "Look out___" shouted the man.

l I couldn___t see through the thick fog.

Speaking is an effective way to consolidate punctuation, as it emphasises how punctuation can radically alter the timing pattern – prosody – of sentences.

3.4.3. Direct and indirect speech

Direct speech uses quotation marks (“) to specify the *exact* words spoken. For example, in novels, direct speech is frequently employed to show dialogue between characters:

Mary said, “I don’t have a little lamb any more!”

Here we are stating that Mary did in fact *exactly* say: I don’t have a little lamb any more.

Indirect speech is formed by reporting, usually in a summarised manner, what was said. For example, the indirect speech of Mary's sentence would be to say: Mary commented that she no longer had a little lamb. Indirect speech is usually written in the past tense since it reports on speech that has already been spoken. Indirect speech does not use quotation marks.

3.5. Sentences

Sentences come in numerous types. Here we will look at the four main types.

3.5.1. Simple sentences

Simple sentences, as the name implies, are the most basic type of sentence. They consist of one independent clause (see section 3.3.1 above).

3.5.2. Compound sentences

A compound sentence joins two independent sentences with a conjunction such as 'and'.

```
It was raining and I felt tired.
```

Here 'it was raining' and 'I felt tired' could both operate as self-contained sentences; hence they are independent clauses.

3.5.3. Complex sentences

A complex sentence joins an independent clause with a dependent clause (again see section 3.3.1 above).

```
When the boy went to the park, he ate candy floss.
```

Here 'when the boy went to the park' is dependent; we are expecting something to complete it.

3.5.4. Compound-complex sentence

A compound-complex has at least *two* independent clauses and one dependent clause. In mature adult writing, many sentences will be of the compound-complex variety.

```
He hated watching the TV since the adverts were always irritating;
he decided to go to sleep.
```

‘Since the adverts were irritating’ is dependent; ‘he hated watching TV’ and ‘he decided to go to sleep’ are independent.

3.5.5. Types of sentences activity

Here is an activity to test comprehension of the different types of sentences. Combine the sentences into one sentence (taken from https://www.thoughtco.com/compound-complex-sentence-worksheet-1212348):

- Susan teaches the kids who live in the neighborhood. They meet in the evenings after she comes home from work.
- The doctor wants to prescribe physical therapy, and he asked me to see a specialist. He recommended Dr. Smith.
- Anthony told us about the assembly of the products. Unfortunately, he didn't tell us about where they were made.

- We managed to finish the exercise on time and passed the exam. However, it was very difficult.
- The man spoke little English. Mary understood him, but couldn't help.
- We didn't have much time, so we didn't read the final chapter. However, we still enjoyed the book.
- We will miss our father greatly. He taught us many lessons. Those lessons have helped us succeed in life.

4. Writing: Putting sentences together

Writing consists of putting together a number of sentences into a coherent block, a text. Here is a brief summary.

4.1. Paragraphs

Paragraphs consist of a number of sentences, all of which serve to relate to the same overall topic, theme, or idea. In novel writing, a paragraph often indicates a particular contained scene within the book. A new paragraph may often indicate switching scene to entirely new characters in a new situation.

4.2. Long-format text

Compiling a number of paragraphs together, into chapters or sections then gives us a text, such an an article or short report. Longer than these, are long-format texts, the most common being books or academic papers, where there is a logical organisation of structure, with the text divided into chapters, sections, or parts depending on need. How many parts are needed reflects the complexity of the topic chosen.

4.3. Poetry: the rule breaker

Poetry as a written art form often deliberately defies conventional grammar rules. Often it will play utilise our expectations pertaining to grammar rules for dramatic effect, such as in this extract of Lewis Carrol's poem "Jabberwocky":

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!

The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

Those most of the words are in fact non-English language words, Carroll uses a combination of our grammar expectations about the type of words that occur in certain parts of sentence, plus the phonology of words (how they sound) in conjunction with vocabulary expectations related to spelling. The net effect of all of this is that the apparently meaningless words do end up taking on more meaning than their initial absurdity would suggest.

More classical poems, such as this poem "No man is an island" by John Dunne from 1624 tend to stick more closely to conventional grammatical forms with relatively 'well-formed' sentences[5]:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

But poetry has licence to use language however it pleases, without necessarily observing any formal grammar rules; in one sense, this is what defines poetry. Poetry conveys meaning with precise word selection whilst often abandoning the use of formal grammar, and sometimes even correct spelling. Here is an example of a piece of modern poetry by Brian Strand, entitled "An Eclectic Enigma Part 4". Note that the particular spelling, spacing and what would ordinarily be considered typographic errors in normal text are here all deliberate, by design:

[5] Here the spelling of words has been updated into their modern form for legibility. Spelling is an aspect of grammar that slowly mutates over time.

The natural& the normal,synthetic
yet,small scale,regular and the
irregular,embossed.Illumed in the artificial light
Drawings and legible forms intrique
and beguile creating mind-games
in memory.Charactiture & cartoon
avant-garde of the geometric
in three dimensional desire.
Inspired by Jim Ede's collection of artworks

We are not here concerned with aesthetic judgements as to whether or not such poetry is good or bad. Instead, we can observe that writing in this format constitutes the form known as 'poetry', and therefore as a written form of the English language, does not require or use the conventional grammar rules we have been discussing in this book.