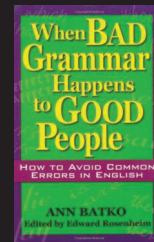


When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People

How to Avoid Common Errors in English



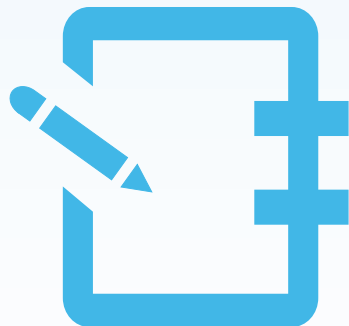
Book by Ann Batko and Edward Rosenheim

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Synopsis

Are your language skills letting you down? Been mixing up your pronouns? Or perhaps you simply can't tell the difference between *lay* or *lie*, *who* or *whom*, *affect* and *effect*... Whatever the problem, help is at hand with an easy-to-read program offering grammatical guidelines for any English speaker.

When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People (Career Press, © 2004) explores in an easygoing and non-judgmental manner how students of all ages, writers, speakers, business professionals, or anyone seeking grammatical advice can improve their communication skills. Co-authors Batko and Rosenheim pinpoint common errors in written and spoken English and provide useful tips and tests to help you improve your grasp of this often complex and daunting language.



The key concepts of *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People* can be distilled into the following steps:

Identify Problem Areas

Don't know where to start? This book includes a pre-test to help you narrow down any specific language hurdles you may be struggling with. You can then focus on these problem areas in particular, or work through the book from beginning to end.

Test Your Knowledge

The chapters in the book follow an orderly and logical format, making it easy for you to cover your bases. At the end of each chapter, there's also a short test you can take to compare your answers against the solution provided.

Reaffirm

Practice makes perfect! Reinforce what you learn by practicing the grammar basics and applying the rules and principles of the English language as and when you can, not just for the purposes of this book.

Take the Review Tests

At the end of the book, you'll find more grammar review tests you can use to test your knowledge and check your progress towards becoming a language aficionado.

“Habit,” as the philosopher Michel de Montaigne once said, “is second nature.” If you're committed to forming new habits, we believe that clear and precise language can become second nature to you, allowing you to speak with ease and confidence.”

Based on *When Bad Grammar Happens To Good People: How to Avoid Common Errors in English* by Ann Batko and Edward Rosenheim, we examine common grammar mistakes in both written and spoken English and how you can unlearn and replace them with new, better habits. We share our interpretations of the authors' methodology in the following pages.

Basic Grammar Principles

Whether your memory of the subject is fuzzy or you never managed to fully grasp the basic principles of grammar in the first place, it's never too late to learn. In this book, two basic areas of grammar are discussed in particular: the eight parts of speech and the four basic components of a sentence. When speaking and writing, it's essential to have a solid understanding of the parts of speech and parts of a sentence in order to get your meaning across in the way you intend.

The Eight Parts of Speech

The eight parts of speech are: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Each "part of speech" refers to the function of words in a sentence. However, an individual word can sometimes be used in more than one part of speech. For example, a word such as "blur" can act as a noun or a verb, depending how it's used in different circumstances.

The Parts of a Sentence

A sentence is a group of words that collectively expresses an idea or thought. There can be four basic parts in any sentence—the subject, predicate, clause, and complement. The foundation of a sentence is the subject—who or what that sentence is about. The predicate is the part of the sentence that contains the verb. So, can anything that contains a verb and a subject be considered a sentence? Not necessarily. For something to be considered a sentence, it must identify and offer an explanation about what or to whom you are referring. If, for example, you have a group of words that express an incomplete thought—*John and Carla's dog, Max*—this would be considered a fragment as it cannot stand alone the way a complete sentence can.

In addition, there are other essential elements known as complements, which are contained in the predicate to add meaning to the verb. There are three types of complements—direct objects, indirect objects, and linking verbs. A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and predicate, and can be found within a sentence. Clauses can be independent or subordinate—standalone or deriving their meaning from the rest of a sentence.

Error Types

The English language can be quite tricky and confusing, even for native speakers. Many people make common grammatical errors and aren't even aware of it! Consequently, the authors highlight common errors—those that people make most frequently. For the purposes of the book, these errors have been divided into three broad categories: grammar, usage, and pronunciation.

Grammar

Grammar refers to the structure and system of a language, and the construction of words into sentences. To understand grammar, you need to know how to avoid mixing up the correct forms of pronouns, comprehend how to use transitive and intransitive verbs to eliminate unnecessary prepositions, and much more!

The Correct Forms of Pronouns

Do you often experience problems with pesky pronouns? Are you unsure when to use relative pronouns such as *who* or *whom*? It may help to remember that *who* is the subject of the verb while *whom* is the object of the verb. For example, don't say: *To who did you turn?* Say instead: *To whom did you turn?*

Another easy-to-use rule to decide between *who* or *whom* is to apply the "m" test. Simply substitute the pronoun *he/him* or *they/them* with *whom*—both *him* and *them* end in "m." If it's *he* or *she*, then use *who*. You can test your knowledge and understanding of these principles using the questions and answers provided in the book.

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Verbs can be very confusing, because they come with their own set of rules and principles. Some of the most common errors in the use of verbs are to do with transitive and intransitive verbs.

Transitive verbs are easiest to understand—these are verbs that have a direct object to complete their action or meaning. For example, *The dog licked the spoon.* The verb *licked* is transitive, because the direct object *spoon* is receiving the action conveyed by the subject *dog*.

Unlike transitive verbs, intransitive verbs don't have a direct object receiving the action. For example, *The boy laughed.* Here the verb *laughed* is intransitive because it has no direct object—you cannot laugh *something*.

Two common transitive and intransitive verbs known to cause confusion are *lie* and *lay*. While both these words may have similar meanings, they are completely different verbs. *Lay* is a transitive verb, which means to put or place. This verb requires an object to complete its meaning. For example, *John lays the book on the table.* *Lie* is an intransitive verb that means to rest, recline, or stay. This verb cannot take an object because the subject performs the action. In other words, you can't rest a book.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Many people become really flustered by subject-verb agreement, particularly when indefinite pronouns are added to the mix. Basically, the subject-verb agreement means that the subject and verb must agree in amount—they both need to either be singular or plural. The rule is quite straightforward! These indefinite pronouns are always singular: one, anyone, no one, someone, everyone, anybody, somebody, each, nobody, everybody, either, neither. For example, *Everyone is going to the circus.* In this example the meaning of *Everyone* is *each one*—and *one* is singular—therefore we apply the singular verb *is* and not the plural verb *are*.

Modifiers

Modifiers are descriptive words, such as adjectives or adverbs. These are typically used correctly, but there are instances when modifiers in sentences sound awkward or don't make any sense at all. The adjective and adverb forms of a modifier can create difficulty when the adjective is applied incorrectly as an adverb. For example, don't say: *I'm good*; rather say *I'm well*. *Well* in this case is used as an adjective to describe good health and wellbeing and the meaning is more appropriate.

Prepositions

Prepositions can be tricky when you need to choose the right one in a sentence. Common errors include prepositions that express fine shades of meaning such as "*agree to*" vs "*agree with*," "*differ with*" vs "*differ from*," and "*differ from*" vs "*differ than*." Sometimes people use prepositions where they aren't necessary. For example, don't say: *Is the meeting over with*? Rather say, *Is the meeting over*? If you mean a task is completed, it's not necessary to add *with*.

Connectors or Conjunctions

Connectors or conjunctions are words that link two elements in a sentence. Connectors such as *and* and *or* create a simple link and act as a time-saver. Other connectors such as *because* and *therefore* create a logical link to express two thoughts or explanations. Two types of connectors can be particularly baffling—bookend expressions and imprecise connectors. Bookend expressions are pairs of words or phrases used to link two ideas such as "*either...or*," "*neither...nor*," and "*on the one hand...on the other hand*." Using imprecise connectors is not only grammatically incorrect, it can also make your speech sound less eloquent. For example, don't say: *On the one hand, he hasn't done laundry in months, but he's been very ill*. Rather say: *On the one hand, he hasn't done laundry in months, but on the other hand he's been very ill*.

Plurals

Perhaps you, like so many people, get your singular and plural forms of nouns confused. Plural errors to be aware of include *criteria and criterion*, *phenomenons and phenomena*, and *memorandums and memoranda*.

Word Usage

Are you guilty of using the wrong words? One mistake many people make is to mix up words that sound or look alike. Another common usage error is using so-called clutter expressions that don't add any meaning. Let's explore a few examples.

Mixing Up Words that Sound Alike

With the English language being so vast, it's understandable that certain words get confused with others—especially words that sound the same or are thought to be interchangeable. But understanding what words mean can help you discern when to use them and how to identify them to ensure you use them accurately. Commonly confused word pairs include *affect vs effect*, *accept vs except*, *elude vs allude*, *imminent vs eminent*, and *tack vs tact*.

Mixing Up Words that Look Alike

Have you noticed how some words actually look the same? While many words may look the same, they typically have different meanings that change the idea of the sentence. Word pairs that are frequently mixed up in this way include *adapt* vs *adopt*, *continual* vs *continuous*, *incredible* vs *incredulous*, *elegy* vs *eulogy*, and *sensuous* vs *sensual*. When you have to use one of these words in a sentence, find out what each means so they don't wreak havoc with your grammar.

Mixing Up Words with Similar Meanings

Words are sometimes mistaken for one another *because* they have similar meanings. But words with similar meanings cannot be substituted for one another if their implication has a subtle difference. Two words that have such nuanced shades of meaning are the word pair *imply* vs *infer*. These are often mistaken to mean the same thing, but *imply* means to suggest something indirectly whereas *infer* means to deduce or figure out.

Making Up Words

Some people have a habit of making up words that aren't necessarily acceptable or valid. Even if you think it makes you sound more intelligent, it may not always be in your best interest to use these words. The opposite could happen; you may seem unpolished or not be taken seriously. A classic example is *irregardless*. There is no such word—use *regardless* instead.

Word Clutter

Many of us are guilty of using word clutter; we use too many words when writing or speaking. Perhaps you're careless or think it makes you seem smarter or more important. Whatever the reason, by simply removing a few extra words such as *a*, *on*, *as*, or *two* you can improve your overall speech and writing. For example, don't say *Mary ate a half a cherry pie before dinner*; rather say *Mary ate half a cherry pie before dinner*.

Mispronouncing Words

Do you feel embarrassed when you mispronounce a word? While it's quite common to encounter pronunciation problems, *not* learning how to pronounce a word correctly could reflect badly on you in the long run. Common mispronounced words include *air* vs *err*, *libary* vs *library*, *athaletics* vs *athletics*, or *expresso* vs *espresso*. The key here is to pay attention, practice saying the word properly, listen to how it sounds, and repeat until you eventually get it right.

Insights—Overcome Common Grammar Errors Like a Pro

Take the Pre-Test

Make a point of taking the pre-test before working through the book. This carefully constructed test will highlight your bad language habits and then it's up to you to unlearn them.

Review Basic Grammar Principles

Use the principles in this book as a refresher course to familiarize yourself with the complexities of the English language. After a brief review of some of the basic principles of grammar, you should be well on your way to gaining a better understanding of nouns, verbs, prepositions, and sentence structure.

Focus on Grammar Error Types

Learn the underlying grammatical concepts and rules to perfect your speaking and writing skills in your personal and work life. By working through the numerous tests offered, you can test your knowledge and polish up on your communication skills.

Improve Word Usage

Brush up on correct word usage if you find it's one of your problem areas. Avoid using any words you don't understand the meaning of—remember to keep your language simple. Doing so helps ensure you speak clearly and eloquently!

Avoid Poor Pronunciation

Mispronouncing a word can make or break you in certain situations. It's a good idea to practice the correct pronunciation beforehand, particularly if you have to speak in front of others. Choose words you're confident you can pronounce correctly. That way you won't be left with egg on your face!

Conclusion

Bad grammar is all around us. Thankfully, bad grammar habits can be unlearned and replaced with new and correct habits. *When Bad Grammar Happens To Good People* is an informative and comprehensive program that addresses how to avoid common language pitfalls and improve overall communication skills. The book offers easy-to-understand language rules and grammar principles, numerous review tests at the end of each section, and handy tips to identify and work through common errors.

“Everyone has bad language habits. We hear language errors on TV, at work, and even from family—so many times that the errors might seem correct. But they’re still errors, and they make us sound less sophisticated, or even less intelligent, than we really are. Fortunately, you can form new, good habits the same way you got stuck with the bad ones.”

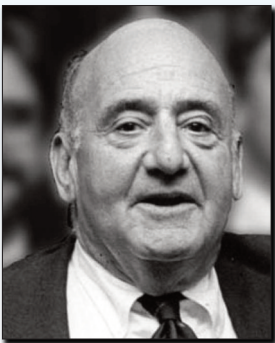
If you’ve enjoyed our insights on Ann Batko and Edward Rosenheim’s *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People: How to Avoid Common Errors in English*, we encourage you to access the other *When Bad Grammar Happens to Good People* assets in the Skillsoft library, or purchase the hardcopy.

About the Authors



ANN BATKO is a business communications expert and a former Executive Editor of Rand McNally & Company. During her 20 year career, she has trained advertising, marketing, and publishing executives in effective writing and presentation skills.

This is her first book.



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Also by Edward Rosenheim

- 1 *Swift and the Satirist's Art*, University of Chicago Press, © 1967 ISBN 978-0226727943.
- 2 *What Happens in Literature: A Student's Guide to Poetry, Drama, and Fiction*, University of Chicago, © 1962, ISBN 978-0226727936.