
Learn Basic English Grammar: Beginners - Part 1

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Introduction

How do you think about English Grammar?

Do you think about complicated rules, confusing ideas, difficult concepts?

If so, you may be thinking about grammar in the wrong way, and so your learning is going to be stressful and ineffective.

Actually, grammar can be fun, if you change how you think about it. Let me make basic English grammar easy for you.

Easy English Grammar

I think language is like music.

Imagine words are like musical notes and the grammar describes which notes go together, like in English it describes which words go together. As simple as that.

Grammar describes the language, but it is not the language.

It's a way of talking about it.

You may find that you started to get bored with grammar when your teacher introduced lots of complicated names and labels, like the 'present perfect conditional' or 'possessive determiners'. As well as lots of rules followed by lots of exceptions.

And slowly, the word grammar meant 'headache'!

You see, I think you need to start with listening to and loving the music, as well as just repeating it, not by learning the rules about the order of notes.

Likewise with language. When learning English, start by listening to and loving the language, as well as repeating it. Don't start with the grammar. As a teenager, I learnt to play the piano by myself. I didn't buy a music book, I just listened to music and tried to imitate it.

After some months, I played something to my friend, who had had music classes.

He said, that's great, you know the major scales, arpeggios and minor blues scales. I had no idea what all that meant, but I could play them.

I was passionate about it and loved it.

In fact, I then became curious about all these names or labels and what they meant. So I learnt them and it helped me.

In conclusion, I found the best way to learn was to combine learning by listening and repeating, with the discovery of some labels and rules.

I have successfully learnt Chinese and Spanish the same way. First by listening, loving and repeating, and then by learning some names, labels and rules.

This is how to make English grammar easy.

I believe the grammar should always come second, as a clarification, rather than a basis for learning.

With this in mind, I offer you this lesson as a reference.

As a way to clarify some basic English grammar you may know, and a way to review and deepen your understanding.

In this lesson, I will look at the following 8 most important parts of speech you should know as a part of basic English grammar for beginners.

Here in Part 1, we will look at the following:

- 1) Verbs
- 2) Adverbs
- 3) Nouns
- 4) Articles

In Part 2, we will look at the following:

- 5) Pronouns
- 6) Conjunctions
- 7) Prepositions
- 8) Conjunctions

Verbs in English

INFINITIVES
PAST
PRESENT
VERBS as NOUNS

INFINITIVES

Verbs are doing words. They describe actions and states. For example,

drive
cook
read

We sometimes put 'to' before a verb, and this is called the 'infinitive'. It's just a label to help you recognise it is a verb.

To drive
To cook
To read

Verbs can exist in different tenses. In the past, the present and the future.

PRESENT

Let's look at examples in the present simple tense:
Describing a present habit (present simple)

I usually **cook** on Saturdays
I drive to **work** everyday

Notice in the present simple tense we must add an S or ES to the verb after **he, she and it**

He, she and it are sometimes called 'the third person'.

Think of it like I am first, you are second and she is third!

He cookS /kʊks/
She driveS /draɪvz/

PAST

In the past tenses verbs can be regular or irregular.
Regular verbs are put into the simple past tense by adding ED

I cookED yesterday /kʊkt/
I washED my face /wɒʃd/
I wantED to go /wɒntɪd/

There are about 200 irregular verbs in English, but here are 35 of the most important ones for beginners.

Verb (Infinitive)	Past participle
Do	Did
Make	Made
Go	Went
Come	Came
Get	Got
Take	Took
Find	Found
Give	Gave
Put	Put
Bring	Brought
Say	Said
Tell	Told
Speak	Spoke
Mean	Meant
Know	Knew
Hear	Heard
Think	Thought
Feel	Felt
Understand	Understood

Buy	Bought
Spend	Spent
Choose	Chose
Wear	Wore
Eat	Ate
Drink	Drank
Drive	Drove
Sit	Sat
Stand	Stood
See	Saw
Read	Read
Write	Wrote
Draw	Drew
Cut	Cut

VERBS as NOUNS

Finally, it is useful to know that verbs can become nouns. When we add 'ing' to a verb, often known as 'the gerund' it can become a noun.

For example,

Driving is fun

Cooking is relaxing

Adverbs in English

HOW
WHEN

Adverbs are used with verbs to say how, when and where you do something.

HOW

I drive quickly

'**Quickly**' (adverb) tells you how I **drive** (verb)

We make an adverb by adding 'ly' to an adjective

Safe + ly = **Safely**
ADJECTIVE + LY = ADVERB

Adverbs come after the verb. For example,

I drive **quickly**
SUBJECT + VERB + ADVERB

If the verb has an object, then the adverb comes after the object

I read books **slowly**
SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT + ADVERB

There are some irregular adverbs, but not many. For these adverbs we do not add 'ly' to the adjective.

The common ones for basic English grammar are the following

Adjective	Adverb
Good	Well
Fast	Fast
Hard	Hard
Wrong	Wrong
Early	Early

WHEN

Adverbs can also describe **when** and **how often** you do something. For example,

I always drive to work

We call these adverbs frequency adverbs and the most common ones you need to basic English grammar are probably,

Always
Usually
Normally
Often
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

The position of these adverbs can change in spoken English, but normally they go between the subject and the verb.

I *always* drive to work
SUBJECT + ADV + VERB

In addition to individual words, we also have phrases which act as adverbs, these are commonly called adverbials.

Some adverbials of frequency you may see or hear as a beginner are the following

Now and again
From time to time
Once in a blue moon

Adverbials can go at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

Once in a blue moon I drive my wife's car
I drive my wife's car **once in a blue moon**

Nouns in English

**SINGULAR / PLURAL
COUNTABLE / UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS
NOUN PHRASES**

Nouns can represent things, people or places.

Here are some examples,

Things

Pen, car, day

People

friend, teacher, colleague

Places

classroom, city, kitchen

When we actually use the name of something, these are known as **proper nouns and are spelt with a capital letter.**

Common Noun	Proper Noun
A friend	Jack
A city	Manchester
A month	July

SINGULAR / PLURAL

Nouns can be either singular (just one) or plural (more than one). To make a noun into a plural we add S or ES

For example

Singular	Plural	Pronunciation
Book	Books	/bʊks/
Car	Cars	/kɑːz/
Box	Boxes	/bɒksɪz/

COUNTABLE / UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

It is possible to count most things, and if we can, then we can use those nouns in the plural. For example, cars, books and boxes.

However, there are certain nouns that we cannot count, and so we can never use the plural.

Some are obvious like liquids (water, coffee, oil), these are difficult to count, and so are rarely put in the plural and don't take an article (a / an).

If we do count them, then the meaning changes a little.

So, for example, when we say 'I want two coffees', we are referring to cups of coffee, not coffee the liquid.

Others are less obvious like powder (rain, pepper, salt), and grammatically we can not put these in the plural.

Likewise there are other abstract words that are 'grammatically' uncountable and so we don't use the plural or an article (a / an).

However, we can usually make them countable by adding a unit of measure. Here are some common examples below of uncountable nouns made countable.

Uncountable Nouns	Countable Nouns
water	A glass of water
coffee	A cup of coffee
sugar	A teaspoon of sugar
rice	A grain of rice / A bowl of rice
furniture	A piece of furniture
information	A piece of information
news	A piece of news
advice	A piece of advice

NOUN PHRASES

Nouns are not only individual words. They can also be a group of words. In this case, it is known as a noun phrase. For example,

The pen in my hand is black
NOUN PHRASE + VERB + ADJECTIVE

The woman with blond hair and glasses is from London
NOUN PHRASE + VERB + ADJECTIVE

It is useful to be aware of these, especially when reading quickly or listening to a long passage, as it can help you identify the different building blocks a sentence. If you only listen to, or look at, individual words, this will really slow you down.

Articles in English

**A / AN
THE
THIS / THAT**

Nouns can have an article before them, and this help you make it clear if you are talking about a general noun or a specific one.

1) A / AN

We use the indefinite article A or AN when we are talking about something generally. So, if you don't know which one I mean, I will use A or AN

*I saw **a** cat in your garden.*

(You don't know which cat I mean)

*I'd like **an** apple, please*

(I am not asking for a specific one, any apple will do)

As you can see, when a noun begins with a vowel, we us AN.

Notice that with plurals, we don't use A / AN

I love dogs

In addition, with uncountable nouns, we don't use A / AN

I'm tired, I need coffee

2) THE

We use the definite article THE when we are talking about something specific. So if you know which one I mean - I will use THE

*Can you pass me **the** blue pen?*

(You know which pen I mean)

*I am going to **the** bank*

(You know which bank I mean)

3) THIS / THAT

In addition, to indicate if something is near or far, either in distance or time, we can use THIS / THAT.

This book is better than **that** one.

THIS gives the feeling that something is near, and THAT gives the feeling it is far away. Here is an example with distance in time.

This story I am going to tell you is interesting

That story you told me yesterday was interesting

We can also use the plurals as below

Singular	Plural
This	These
That	Those