

Course 1(1)

English – a quick refresher



CHELTENHAM

TUTORIAL COLLEGE



Course 1(1)
English – a quick refresher
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Course 1(1)

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English – a quick refresher

Introduction

It is important to be able to use English correctly and effectively. The existence of a common language with generally-observed rules is absolutely vital.

If you, reading this, didn't use English in *at least* a very similar way to that in which I use it, I might as well be writing in eleventh century Korean. If I can't understand you, and you can't understand me, we can have no communication between us; if English is to be common to both of us it must have rules that we both know and use.

Many people speak and write English without realising that their use of the language is vastly different from some of the people around them; they use slang or are ambiguous or ungrammatical in their use of English. These are barriers to communication and you must learn to overcome them.

What to expect from this course

This coursebook will take you through the basics of the English language in the same way that a series of classroom-based lectures would.

It is difficult to say exactly how long the course will take you to study as you are not constrained to follow a timetable with other students. It is, however, very unlikely to take you less than two hours and you may find that it takes perhaps six hours to complete it.

The course adopts an **active** learning approach: we get away from the traditional sort of education that you might be familiar with, where you sit and watch or listen to a lecture.

In this course, we set goals so that you're always sure of what you're aiming towards. We introduce the material you need to know bit by bit, so that it's easier to understand.

The lesson is divided into sections and sub-sections with clear headings to help you absorb material, to make your notes and find those parts that you want to go over again and revise as you progress.

There are activities for you to do. They come with feedback so that you can check how you're doing.

And at the end there is an assignment for you to do.

The assignment

You should do the activities as you come to them. Mostly they play an important role in developing your understanding of the subject, so you will miss out if you do not attempt them.

They have feedback in the feedback section at the end of the course. Do not look at the feedback until you have attempted the activity.

The feedback is not there to give you a perfect answer, but should give you a good idea as to whether you have understood the text or whether you will need to read more widely to gain greater understanding.

You also have an assignment. This rounds off your study of the course.

There is separate feedback to the assignment – the **guide answers** – however, if you wish you can submit your assignment to us for marking.

Please contact the Registrar at the College if you wish to do this.

Lesson 1

English – a quick refresher

LEARNING TARGETS



Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the different types of words that can be used in a sentence and demonstrate the function of the following:
 - verbs,
 - adverbs,
 - nouns,
 - pronouns,
 - adjectives,
 - conjunctions,
 - articles,
 - prepositions,
 - interjections,
 - phrases and,
 - clauses.
- identify the following types of sentences:
 - complex sentences,

- simple sentences and,
- compound sentences
- understand and demonstrate the function of paragraphs and punctuation.
- identify the different punctuation marks that can be used, and demonstrate the functions of the following:
 - full stops,
 - question marks,
 - exclamation marks,
 - commas,
 - semi-colons,
 - apostrophes,
 - hyphens,
 - brackets,
 - dashes and,
 - speech marks.
- discuss the importance of accurate spelling in written english.
- discuss the special cases and common trouble spots in the english language.

This lesson should take you between two and six hours to complete.

The work words do

For us, communicating through a shared language means putting words together so that they express ideas. We'll be looking at this in the next section. Before then, we need to look at the sorts of jobs words do, what sort of information words are giving us. This is useful since, if we know what role each word plays in a piece of English, it

makes it easier to understand the meaning of the whole. It follows, also, that we can tell if it is put together properly.

If we look at them carefully, it turns out that there is only a limited number of jobs that words can do:

- they can give *names* to things,
- they can indicate that something is happening - an *action*,
- they can *join* ideas together,
- they can *point* to the focus of interest,
- they can give more information – *details*,
- they can *locate* things relative to each other,
- they can indicate *emotions*.

We will be looking at each of these functions.

Verbs

Verbs are *action* words, they indicate that something is taking place. Without verbs, you cannot construct messages. Without messages there is no communication. Verbs relate the ideas expressed in a sentence. For instance:

The woman ... the man.

What's happening? What's their relationship? Has it happened or will it happen soon? You don't know until you see the verb:

The woman *kissed* the man.

A verb often consists of only one word, but sometimes consists of two or three:

I *will look* at the books.

I *did not fiddle* my expenses.

Generally, if the verb is negative, it consists of more words rather than less. This is usually because it needs the addition of “not” to make it

negative. This is often merged into one of the other verb words by being shortened to *n't* and pressed against its end:

I wouldn't do that.

I won't be there.

It hasn't finished yet.

As well as indicating what is happening, verbs indicate *when* a thing is happening. This is done through the use of different **tenses**, different forms of the verb according to whether the action happened in the *past*, is happening in the *present*, will happen in the *future* or is *conditional* upon something else happening:

I drank	(past)
I'm drinking	(present)
I will be drinking	(future)
I would be drunk	(conditional)

Past and future tenses of verbs are imprecise about exactly when things have happened or will happen, and need additional information added to them – “ten days ago”, “in a year's time”, for instance – if you want them to be specific. Future and conditional tenses of verbs can be expressed in many different ways. All in all, tenses are complicated things and only practice makes perfect when you are learning to use them.

Verbs can also be used in two distinct ways, either *actively* or *passively*. When they are used actively, they express the actions that the doer – the “force” behind the verb – has taken:

The student *passed* the exam.

If the verb were to be used passively, the emphasis would be placed on the deed done, and not the doer:

The exam *was passed* by the student.

This can be taken one step further, where we ignore completely the doer and see only the deed:

The exam *was passed*.

Using a verb this way separates the doer from the deed, and is a way of avoiding placing blame (or credit) for an action, as in:

I don't need you any more.

and

You aren't needed any more.

One further thing that verbs can do, something that is used primarily for effect, is indicate the relationship between the author of the sentence and the doer connected with the verb. If the sentence is written in **first person**, the author of the sentence and the doer are *the same person*:

I saw it.

We saw it.

If the sentence is in **second person**, the author is *talking to* the doer:

You saw it, didn't you?

Dick, Christine – *you* saw that.

If the sentence is in **third person**, the author is *talking about* the doer:

She said she saw it.

Perhaps *they* saw it too.

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that tells you *how* something happens:

She listened *attentively*.

or *when* it happens:

See you *soon*.

or *where* it happens:

Do you live *nearby*?

An adverb is used with a verb and adds to the information that the verb gives us. It can be made up of two (or more) separate words. In this case the first word intensifies the meaning of the word that follows it (which can always be used as an adverb on its own):

The horse behaved *very well*.

Please don't speak *so quickly*.

This sweater is *too small* for Simon.

There are also adverbs that are used for emphasis and to focus attention:

I had *just* got home when the phone rang.

Kevin spoke *only* to Anne.

Always be careful when using adverbs in this way – it is so easy to place the emphasis on the wrong word and end up saying something quite different from that which you had intended:

Kevin *only* spoke to Anne,

means that Kevin never did anything else with Anne, only speak to her. In the previous sentence Anne was the only person he spoke to. It doesn't mean that that was the only thing he did. It is important to be careful. Is someone being very relaxed and pensive:

He stood *still*.

or has he just not fallen over yet?

He *still* stood.

Nouns

Nouns are *naming* words. In English they give names to objects, ideas, people, places – anything which exists. Nouns can be divided into three types:

- **common** – these are everyday objects or concepts like “kitchen”, “table” or “efficiency”.
- **proper** – these are the names we give to people, places and particular things like paintings or railway engines.

They are all spelt with an initial capital letter, “Maurice”, “Canada”, the “Flying Scotsman” and the “Mona Lisa”, for example.

- **collective** – these are names given to groups of things, each of which will have its own “name”, for example a *pride* of lions, a *class* of students, a *nest* of tables.

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that can replace nouns or help explain what the noun is doing. Among the things that pronouns can replace are:

- **people** – I, you, him, her, mine, ours.
- **things** – it, that.

When pronouns are explaining things, they can be:

- **asking questions** – who? what?
- **completing meanings** – “I cut *myself*.”
- **adding information** – “The horse *that* came first won the cup for *its* owner.”

Adjectives

Adjectives are words that add to the meaning of nouns and pronouns; they *describe* people and animals and things, telling us something about the “which” in a sentence. *Colours* are adjectives, and so too are words like “old” and “first”, “Aztec” and “Hebridean”, and the more abstract ideas such as “obvious” and “mutual”.

Adjectives then, can be used in four ways:

- to **extend a description** – “The *big* tree by the *red* gate, there we saw *their* car.”
- to **identify** a particular object – “*This* mess, which comes from *that* firm.”
- to **introduce questions** – “*What* time do you call this? *Where* have you been?”

- to **denote possession** – “It’s *your* turn with *my* computer.”

Generally, an adjective will come *before* the noun or pronoun that it is adding to; but sometimes an adjective can refer to the state of the noun, in which case it has a rather different place in the sentence:

By this time next year your working practices will be *efficient*.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are *linking* words; they are used to join ideas together. They are used in several different senses according to the relationship of the ideas they join. For example, words like “and”, “but”, “next”, “then” and “yet” link ideas that can stand independently of each other:

The elephant is big *and* strong.

could just as easily be written as:

The elephant is big. The elephant is strong.

Other conjunctions are used for linking ideas where one clearly depends on the other. These include such words as “when”, “why”, “what”, “as”, “since”, “although”, “if” and many others. To add variety – and reduce boredom – the dependent idea can come before or after the main idea:

We turned the heating off *as* it was so hot.

As it was so hot, we turned the heating off.

Some conjunctions, mainly those of this type, are made up of several words, for example “even though”, “with the result that” and “as soon as”. Finally, there are some conjunctions which are used in pairs. These include “either ... or”, “neither ... nor” and “both ... and”:

It was *both* hot *and* wet in the Amazon jungle.

We had a choice: *either* we made for the city *or* we stayed in the wilderness.

But really that was *neither* here *nor* there.

Articles

Articles are words that let you point to a noun. *Definite* articles point to one noun in particular:

The lion.

Indefinite articles point to any noun that will fit the description:

The lion, *a* big cat.

Prepositions

Prepositions are *locating* words, and are used immediately in front of the noun (or pronoun) that they are defining a point relative to. For example:

under the table

across the office

outside the door

Sometimes, they are used to make verbs; “jump *up*” and “stand *out*” for example.

Interjections

Interjections are words that don't really have a meaning, but convey a sense of feeling or emotion. They are often exclamations like “Ouch!” but can be voluntary expressions like “Hmm?”

Next step

Now that we know what job each sort of word does, we can go about putting them together to make messages, confident in the knowledge that we can use each word we want to properly.



ACTIVITIES

Do these and then compare your answers with those at the end of the course.

1.1 Write this short passage in the past tense:

I'm going to work. Robert is going to come with me.
We'll meet Keith there.

1.2 Pick out the verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives:

The faithful dog walked obediently beside its ageing
master.

Grouping words together

Any word constitutes a message, but for the most part a message that we can't use. "Help!" is something that we can understand, as are "Look" and "Go", but if someone were to come up to you in the street and say "Penguin", "Green" or "Extremely" no useful information would have been communicated to you.

For virtually any useful message we need to group words together, and the more complicated the message, the more words it needs. Very soon, as the message grows, all sense of the relationship between the words is lost and the message crashes in confusion.

Grammar is the tool we use to preserve the relationship between the words and keep the *group* meaning clear.

The first step in grouping together words is to form **phrases**. A phrase is a group of words which are related in sense. They are often introduced by a preposition or conjunction:

in the blue corner

on my way to the theatre tonight

just then

as soon as possible

after the gold rush

By and large, phrases do not include verbs in them. The next step up from a phrase is a **clause**. This is a group of words that possesses a verb and a **subject**. The subject is the “force” behind the verb, the doer of the deed. Clauses can be quite detailed, but often don’t amount to a sentence on their own:

she caught the ball

we stopped

I hummed a tune

Sentences are like clauses in their content – a subject and a verb – but are different in that they convey meanings that are complete in themselves. They can be extremely complicated as well, being made up of not just one but *several* separate clauses.

Another feature of sentences is that they will often have an **object**. If a subject is the doer, and a verb is a deed, then the object is the done-to in the sentence. We identify three types of sentence, based on the clauses they contain:

- **simple sentences** contain one clause only.
- **complex sentences** contain two (sometimes more) clauses, one of which is the main clause – it could make a simple sentence on its own – and the others are dependent on it. Dependent clauses cannot make sentences on their own. The two clauses are linked by a conjunction. If you are in any doubt as to which is the main clause and which is the dependent clause in a sentence, split the sentence up:

He studied hard and he didn’t finish until 9pm.

can be split into,

He studied hard.

He didn’t finish until 9pm.

The dependent clause is the second one, it leaves questions unanswered – didn’t finish what? The first clause can stand on its own as a sentence.

- **compound sentences** contain two or more main clauses, each of which can have their own dependent

clauses. For the sake of simplicity, though, compound sentences are usually limited to just the two main clauses.

This leaves us now with the problem of joining sentences together. Where sentences are related by a common theme and develop a set of ideas from one to the next, they can be grouped into **paragraphs**. We therefore need some way of keeping the sentences separate from each other so as not to run all the clauses together, and lose the sense and clarity we've built up by structuring our sentences properly.

In speech, this is easy. You just leave gaps between sentences and longer ones between paragraphs – it's natural, after all you need to take breaths. When writing, however, there is a set of conventions that we use called **punctuation**.

Most of the time, all punctuation does is transfer the pauses we'd use whilst talking on to the page. It has other uses too, and we'll be looking at punctuation in depth in the next section. For the time being, all we need to know is that you mark the beginning of a sentence by turning the first letter of the first word into a capital, and its end by placing a full stop “.” at the end of the last word:

This is a sentence. It has both a beginning and an end.
Together, these sentences make up a paragraph. They represent a single, complete idea.

Making sense of sentences

Punctuation exists to give shape to the written word, so that its meaning is conveyed accurately, with the fullest indication of how different groups of words are related to each other. It replaces the inflexions and pauses we would use in speech, and used properly it is more informative than they are. Punctuation gives order to our ideas and direction to our arguments, and so enhances and improves communication.

You should be aware of all the different punctuation marks that can be used, and the different functions that they have:

- **ending sentences** – full stops, question marks, exclamation marks,
- **pauses** – commas, semi-colons, colons,

- **indicating possession** – apostrophes,
- **joining things** – hyphens,
- **separating things** – brackets, dashes,
- **indicating speech** – speech marks.

Sentence enders

The end of a sentence is marked by a **full stop** (.). Its beginning is indicated by making the first letter of the first word of a sentence a capital letter:

September is cold this year.

Full stops are used to stop sentences running into each other. There are also two special sorts of full stop that can give us additional information about the sentence that precedes them. One of these is the **question mark** (?), which indicates that the sentence it ends is a direct question:

Are you feeling better now?

Question marks are *not* used, however, when a question is being reported:

He asked him if he was feeling better.

They wanted to know how he was.

A question is any sentence that requests information. The other sort of full stop is the **exclamation mark** (!). That may be used instead of a full stop to show that strong feelings accompany the sentence, be they of surprise, approval or shock:

Oh no, they didn't!

Yes, that's right!

You can't be serious!

Be careful not to over-use the exclamation mark as some people do. Use it only if you really want to shout at your reader.

If we can return briefly to full stops, there is one more function they fulfil, and that is to indicate where a word has been *abbreviated*, that

is, written down in a much shorter form. There are literally hundreds of instances where this happens in everyday English, e.g.

Mr.

Rev.

Dr.

St.

etc.

but often we are so familiar with the abbreviations that they have replaced our use of the full word, and we no longer use full stops with them. *All* of the above examples are commonly used without full stops.

Pauses

One of the things that we do when speaking is section up our sentences with pauses. As well as providing an opportunity to take a breath, sectioning up sentences with small, middling and longer pauses allows you to structure them and convey more information.

The **comma** (,) is the most difficult of all the pause marks. When you read, you should see how commas are used; and when you write, you should use your common sense. You will then, gradually, develop good “comma sense”. Remember that a comma should always be used for a purpose. So if you read through what you have written and cannot explain why you have put a comma in a certain place, it is very likely that you shouldn’t have used it at all.

A comma can be used in a variety of ways. First of all, to separate the items in a list:

She invited William, Emma Jane, and Luke.

She invited William, Emma, Jane and Luke.

In the first example, there are three people in the list. In the second, there are four. The second example also shows how you can omit the final comma – the one before “and” – in a list. Commas are also used to show *contrast* in a sentence, as when you change the subject:

She opened the door, and *Peter* was standing on the doorstep.

Commas are used before clauses that begin with conjunctions such as “as”, “since” and “for”:

Jasbir left early, *as* he had a headache.

You might as well have it back, *since* it’s yours anyway.

The days were long, *for* it was now mid-summer.

When dependent clauses come first in a sentence, their end is marked off with a comma:

When we were in Athens, we visited the Acropolis.

If there is a list of adjectives that could be joined together with “ands”, or written in reverse order, the words should be separated by commas:

We had a lazy, fun-packed holiday in Greece.

Another use of the comma is to break a piece of the sentence off from the rest:

He managed to get to his feet, however, he fell right down again.

This can be done to the extent of putting in a little aside:

The answer, which had been quite unexpected, took them by surprise.

ACTIVITY



Try answering this and then compare your answers with those at the end of the course.

1.3 Put capitals, commas and full stops in these sentences:

the fisherman caught a cod a crab and a mackerel

the ingredients of the cake are flour sugar butter eggs
currants and milk

Semi-colons (;) are not in such wide use as they used to be. This isn't because they have no real use, they do, but more because of a drive for simplicity that has also seen the comma being dropped for many of its routine functions. The semi-colon is a *strong* pause and most frequently is used to separate clauses where the second clause develops or further explains ideas expressed in the first:

The sales campaign has been brilliantly conceived; it caught our competitors completely unprepared.

The clauses separated by semi-colons should be capable of standing on their own as sentences. **Colons** (:) are stronger pauses yet than semi-colons. They perform much the same function in that they separate clauses. Where a colon is different, is that it separates clauses that are *distinct* from each other. In the above example, the second clause furthers the first in that it is a consequence of it. Colons separate clauses that do not have this sort of direct dependence:

The sales campaign has been brilliantly conceived: we can look forward to a big profit this year.

It takes practice to learn where in a sentence you can place a semi-colon or a colon.

Colons also have another function, that of introducing things such as examples (as we have been using them in this lesson), quotations or lists:

So then we have Polonius' famous line: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be".

Colours you can choose from include: aquamarine, crimson, ochre, canary and emerald.

One note of warning about colons; although you may sometimes see them used with dashes (:-), do not follow this practice yourself.

Possession

One of the things that you will have to indicate when you write something down is whether there is anything in your sentence that belongs to something else. It might belong to a person, an animal, a physical object like a door or the sky and even to a concept like time or liberty, but you should always indicate possession.

We indicate possession with an **apostrophe** ('). When we are talking about a *single* thing (*singular* case) we use 's and add it to the end of the thing that does the owning:

Have you seen Philip's pen anywhere?

We'll be there in a year's time.

If the "owner" ends in an "s", matters are complicated slightly. You can either keep the extra "s":

Ann Jones's victory at Wimbledon was in 1969.

Or you can drop it:

I live near St. James' Church.

When we want to indicate that a *collection* of things (*plural* case) does the owning we use s':

The girls' parents were worried when they heard that the school bus had crashed.

However, where the owning thing is *already* a collective noun, it is treated as being singular:

The children's parents were worried when they heard that the school bus had crashed.

Again, it takes practice. There is one word that is exempt from all this, however. Whenever you want to signify that something belongs to "it", use *its* – no apostrophe.

Apostrophes have one further use, and that is to show that something has been missed out of a word. This often happens when two words are **contracted** or merged into each other:

I'm	I am
doesn't	does not
she'll	she will

but not always:

'phone	telephone
--------	-----------

'round	around
can't	cannot

Joining together

Words are joined together through use of the **hyphen** (-). There isn't much call for it, but the hyphen is still an important punctuation mark. It joins words together in instances where they have become so closely connected in meaning that they are almost one word:

up-to-date
leap-frog
master-at-arms

In English, this is usually the preliminary stage before the words are all run together to make just one word. Racecourse, for instance, used to be race-course. Hyphens also indicate where parts of the same word need to be spoken separately:

co-operative
pre-emptive
co-existence

Hyphens can also indicate that we are dealing with something that is a combination of two otherwise distinct things. For instance, red-brown is a colour someway between red and brown. Mark Templeton-Keynes is descended from both the Templeton and the Keynes families.

One other use you will see the hyphen put to is to indicate that a word which is at the end of a line is continued on the next:

which is at the end of a line is con-
tinued on the next.

Hyphens can be extended into short dashes (–) and used to indicate things that aren't so much joined together as side-by-side or in opposition. The France–Italy border doesn't mean a border that is made by joining France and Italy together, but a border between France and Italy. The French–Italian race is not a race held in

France-Italy, or a race in which France-Italy takes part, but a race between France and Italy.

Separating out

Sometimes we need to insert additional information into a sentence that is quite secondary to it, but maybe acts as a sort of commentary on it. In any case, we need some way of sectioning out this material without actually removing it from the sentence. In the case where the additional material is more by way of a commentary, **parentheses** or **brackets** () are appropriate:

You know (although at the time he didn't) the source of the problem.

He tried (his chances were not good) to jump the fence.

The material contained in the brackets need not fit in with the grammar of the sentence:

The formula (see equation 6) is easy to use.

but generally, the material contained in the brackets should be written so as to keep the sentence grammatical – if long-winded – should the brackets be taken out:

The dog (which by chance was passing) barked.

The dog which by chance was passing barked.

The **dash** (–) is used in a similar way, but more often when additional information is being given:

The lights – twelve in all – blinked.

They can also indicate when the tone or the topic of the sentences changes:

Then the pound slid – you know how it's been.

Speech

Speech marks, quote marks or inverted commas may be single (‘ ’) or double (“ ”) and are used to indicate where something written down represents words that have actually been spoken:

“Can you help me?” he asked.

If the speaker is quoting the actual words spoken by another person, the internal quotation is shown in the other style:

“Well, she thanked me for the present and then she said, ‘I’m ever so pleased with it, you know.’ And I think she really meant it,” he said, “because there were tears in her eyes.”

Speech should always be properly punctuated, and the text around it should ignore the punctuation. That is why there are two full stops either side of the second internal speech mark in the above quote. One finishes her sentence which he is repeating; the other finishes his.

Speech marks can also be used around a word or phrase to indicate that you know the words you’re using aren’t the right ones, but they’re the best you can think of:

The dolphin is a “fish”.

This “door” here.

This can be done for sarcastic effect:

Call yourself a “soldier”?

This pretty much completes our look at punctuation. Punctuation is an essential guide to understanding and interpreting the written word correctly; it lets our ideas and messages come across the way we want them to. If we didn’t use punctuation to indicate how all the words we’ve written relate to each other, we would not be able to communicate in writing.

ACTIVITY



Try answering this and then compare your answer with that at the end of the course.

- 1.4 The following passage contains twenty errors in punctuation. Try to find them all and then rewrite the passage so that the mistakes have all been corrected.

At the Annual General Meeting of Bell Limited held on 16 April 1999 the Chairman said it is with pleasure that I am able to announce the results for the past financial year. Profits have risen by 20 per cent after tax and, happily, your Boards concern with the rising cost of raw materials which I expressed last year, has not been entirely justified it is true that costs have risen when do they not do so. Our increased sales particularly on the export side have however enabled us to show increased profits in addition the continued streamlining of the process, rationalisation of staff, together with re-organization of departments, improved advertising methods and the success of the new name, Mega, have contributed to progress. I anticipate that in two years time our change-over to the new machines will be complete and that we shall then see even greater returns than are apparent now the dividend of 10 per cent that we are able to declare is largely the result of intensive work by the staff and they deserve our thanks. Good staff are hard to come by and we appreciate their many qualities, integrity, intelligence, adaptability, patience and, above all, the will to work hard.

Spell write

English is a language that has developed by absorbing words and ideas from other cultures. It started out as Anglo-Saxon but soon took in Celtic words, and then, through the centuries, Norman, French and Latin ones. There have also been influences from Scandinavian languages, e.g. in everyday words like *Wednesday* and *Thursday*; from Greek, especially in technical terms like *theatre* and *television*;

from Arabic (usually coming through Spanish), e.g. *admiral* and *alcohol*; and from the languages of India and the far East, e.g. *bungalow* and *jungle*. We have even begun to pick up words from further afield, the Eskimo *igloo* and the Japanese *karaoke*, for instance.

New ideas need new words, and so a language grows. You will see that modern English has a very rich background – and that is our problem. It has a system of spelling that causes a lot of difficulties for a lot of people. One of the worst problems is that we do not spell *phonetically* – that means we don't always spell a word the way we say it. Nonetheless, there are steps we can take; and these are to learn what rules we *do* have – and what rules we don't.

- **rules that always work**

“q” is always followed by “u”.

No English word ends in “j”.

No English non-slang word ends in “v”.

- **plurals**

Most English plurals are formed by adding “s” to the singular:

trees

fences

houses

However, there are exceptions:

tomatoes

thrushes

buzzes

Ones where you have to watch out for something odd include those that end in “y”. For the plural these mostly replace the “y” with “ies”:

ladies

maladies

divinities

If, however, a vowel comes *immediately* before the “y”, you just add an “s” as per usual. You can add “es” to some words to form the plural. These include words ending in: “s”, “x”, “z”, “sh”, “ch” and “ss”:

branches

fixes

guesses

Some words just possess irregular plurals:

child/children

woman/women

these, and those of foreign words, need to be learnt by heart:

bureau/bureaux

stadium/stadia

basis/bases

formula/formulae

- **prefixes**

Adding a prefix to a word does *not* change its spelling, although sometimes you need to add a hyphen:

ignoble

disappear

co-operate

- **suffixes**

Adding a suffix is a more complicated process. You can change a word into an adverb quite simply, by adding “ly” to its end. This works even for those words that already end in “l”:

lively

freely

principally

The “ing” ending can also be added straight onto a word, except in cases where the word ends in “e”, in which case the “e” is dropped:

bringing

doing

moving

serving

Another useful guide is that where a word ends in a vowel-non-vowel pair – “ut”, “an”, “er”, for example – the non-vowel is doubled. This also works for other endings that you can add to a word; “er”, “ed” and “est”:

betting

hotter

deterred

biggest

Where a verb ends in a “t”, it can be changed to a noun by replacing it with “sion”:

subvert/subversion

revert/reversion

Adding “ness” to the end of a word is also quite straightforward, except where the word ends with a “y”. In this case the “y” is changed to an “i”:

sadness

brightness

dizziness

Which leaves us with the endings “able” and “ible”. Unfortunately, there aren’t any rules for these. You have to learn how to use each by heart.

- **bits and pieces**

The following rules have no common thread running through them, but will help you spell correctly.

Where there is a soft “g” in a word, it is usually followed by a “e”, “y” or “i”:

revenge

stingy

giant

The letter “i” comes before “e”, except after “c”:

piecemeal

perceive

tiedye

If a word ends in a vowel followed by a solitary “l”, the “l” is doubled before any other suffix is added:

vital/vitaly

devil/devilled

You can eliminate any confusion over whether a word begins with an “f” or a “ph” by remembering that “ph” is used in words that are derived from the Greek. This means, in practice, words beginning with:

phys

phen

photo

phil

and so on. A quite general rule is that short vowels are followed by double consonants, whereas long vowels are followed by single consonants:

simmer

dazzle

gutter

frame

fulfil

home

Lastly, unless the “sh” sound is close to the beginning of the word, it is likely to be written as “ti”, “ci” or “si”.

decision

verification

luscious

We can't stress the importance of accurate spelling in written English enough: if we are to use a common set of words we need to spell them the same way so that we all know that we are talking about the same thing. Learning to spell is a hard slog, however, and takes a lot of work. Luckily, you'll already have done most of it, and by this stage you should not need to do much more than brush up any problem areas.

ACTIVITY

Try answering this and then compare your answer with that at the end of the course.

- 1.5 The following passage contains twenty errors in spelling. Try to find them all and then rewrite the passage so that the mistakes have all been corrected.

The old-fashioned practise of writing out correctly one's erors in spelling may still definately benifit those students who occassionally find difficultys in this area. An effecient storekeeper must be able to spell accuratley; even the most capible should keep a dictionery nearby. Some of the following words are commonly misspelled:

advertisment
academic
conscientious
explanation
intrepret
installments
dissappear

managment
phsychological
recomendations
statistical
exhibet
signiture
objectionible

Crazy phrasing

As we've seen, English is a complicated language that has grown by adding parts of other languages into itself. This has made it uneven and full of oddities and special cases that often trip up the most able user of the language. Before we finish this lesson, we will have a quick look at the more common trouble spots.

It's and its

The apostrophe in *it's* tells us that part of a word has been omitted, typically either the second "i" from "it is" or the "ha" from "it has":

It's cold outside. (It is cold outside.)

It's been snowing. (It has been snowing.)

Its is a possessive adjective. Like "his", "her", "my", "your" and "their" it indicates an owner. There is no apostrophe since no part of any word has been omitted. Sometimes *its* is used as a possessive pronoun, like *hers*, *yours*, *ours*. It doesn't need an apostrophe in this case either.

A quick way of deciding whether or not to use *its* is to say a sentence to yourself, using both "it is" and "it has". If neither form fits, use *its*, if one form does, use *it's*.

Affect and effect

Affect is only ever a verb, and can be used in two different ways. In its more common usage it means "to have an influence on":

The train strike has affected me.

It can also indicate a pretence to have or feel something:

When he saw that there was money in it, he soon affected sympathy.

Effect is used differently. It can be used as a noun, in which case it means "result":

What will be the effect of a rise in the sea-level?

Used as a verb, it means to bring about a result:

This drug may effect a cure!

Their, there and they're

Their is a possessive adjective. It means “of them”.

That's their ball.

There is the opposite of “here”:

“Have you got a phone around here?”

“No, but the manager has one over *there*.”

They're is the short form of “they are”:

“Are those figures up-to-date?”

“Yes, *they're* the latest ones we've got.”

Before you write, always think carefully about what you mean. If you do, you won't confuse these simple words.

Homophones

“Their”, “there”, and “they're” are examples of **homophones** – words that sound the same. English is full of words like these and all you can do, if you find them confusing, is to recognise the situations in which one or the other is used. Other homophones include:

air/heir

what/watt

threw/through

bite/bight

course/coarse

Lie and lay

Lie has two different meanings. One is when something is untrue:

“That’s a *lie*! I didn’t do it.”

When a *lie* is in the past tense, it becomes “*lied*”. In the present tense it becomes “*lying*”:

“You *lied* about it then, and you’re *lying* about it now.”

Lie can also mean to be flat upon a surface:

“Go and *lie* down if you are feeling ill.”

“I’m *lying* down now, I’d *lain* down sometime ago but the dog then came and *lay* down beside me and I became uncomfortable.”

The basic meaning of *lay* is “to put in a certain position”:

“I’m going to *lay* the stair carpet. I’m *laying* the hall carpet now, and I’ve already *laid* the one in the sitting room.”

You can see how you might become confused over the word “*lay*”, and sometimes use “*lie*” instead because in some cases their meanings are very similar. All you can do with this one is practice.

Due to and owing to

“*Due to*” and “*owing to*” are often confused. “*Due to*” means “caused by” as in the following examples:

The flood was *due to* heavy rain.

What was the cause of the flooding? Heavy rain.

An official inquiry has found that the plane crash was *due to* metal fatigue.

What was the cause of the plane crash? Metal fatigue. You’ll notice that “*due to*” is used with a noun, in these cases “the flooding” and “metal fatigue”. “*Due to*” should not be used as the first words in a sentence, because the cause should not precede the event.

“Owing to” means “because of” as in the following examples:

Owing to exceptionally heavy rain, the road was flooded.

Why was the road flooded? Because of the heavy rain.

The church tower was repaired owing to the generosity of Bill Marwood.

How was the church tower repaired? Because of Bill Marwood’s generosity. You can see that whereas “due to” was used with a noun, “owing to” is used with a verb, in these cases “was flooded” and “was repaired”. “Owing to” is often used at the start of a sentence but, as we’ve seen, can be used later on in it as well.

When you write, you should try to avoid using the ugly phrases “due to the fact that” and “owing to the fact that”. You can usually use a clause introduced by “because”, “since” or “as” and be clearer and more direct in your meaning. Always think about what you mean before you write.

Who and whom

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether “who” or “whom” is the correct word to use in a given sentence. Take the following example:

The umbrella belongs to the customer who I served.

Is it correct? A simple rule of thumb will help you decide which to use. Where the sentence is about a “he”, “she” or “they”, use “who”:

“Who did that?”

“They did.”

Where the sentence is about a “him”, “her” or “them”, use “whom”:

“Whom did you give it to?”

“I gave it to her.”

So if we look again at the first example, we can see that we should have used “whom” as, clearly, “I served he” or “I served they” is wrong:

The umbrella belongs to the customer *whom* I served.

Shall and will, should and would

These words are often misused. In the first person, “shall” and “should” indicate something that is going to happen in the future. “Will” and “would” indicate something with a bit more determination:

I *shall* write.

This is in the future.

I *will* write.

This is going to happen, and soon. However, and this is one of those instances where English doesn’t make much sense, this is all reversed when you write in the second or third person.

He *will* write.

This is in the future.

He *shall* write.

This is definitely going to happen. When you want to use two words, use only “shall” and “should” or “will” and “would”. *Never* any other combination.

Principle and principal

These words sound the same, and are spelt in almost the same way, but mean very different things. A “principle” is a theory or belief that you can hold:

I’m a woman of principle.

Let us consider the principle of gravity.

The principle that it is up to the customer to be careful is dangerous.

In principle, I agree.

The “principal” is the first, biggest or most important part of a group:

She’s going to play the principal girl.

The principal reason for the theft was greed.

It is easy to confuse the two, so do be careful.

The basis of all effective use of English, and so of good communication, is accuracy in grammar and spelling. As we’ve said so many times before, we communicate only because we share a system for putting our ideas and messages into words. No common system; no communication.



ACTIVITIES

Try answering these and then compare your answers with those at the end of the course.

- 1.6 The following passage contains twelve errors in phrasing or choice of words. Try to find them all and then rewrite the passage so that the mistakes have all been corrected.

Due to an astounding discovery that overturned all the principals of thermodynamics that Max knew, he was about to receive the ultimate accolade: membership of the Royal Society. He couldn’t believe the effect it was having on his career. “Its bean wonderful,” he reflected. “I’ve affected a sea-change in thinking, and their’ll all be there. All of them shall be there. I would be proud. I wonder from who I’ll receive the award?”

Max yawned and stretched. Fell asleep over his experiment again. Time to go and lay down and have a knap.

- 1.7 The following letter contains twelve commonly made grammatical mistakes. Try to spot them all. How would you rewrite the letter?

Dear Sir,

Owing to the bad weather last week, we were unable to complete the laying of your lawn. I would be very

pleased if you could let me know when it will be convenient for us to return to finish the work.

Referring to your query about the price of shrubs. You shall have our estimate for this by the end of the week.

Mr Brown, our consultant, who you met some time ago, will be able to meet you and I next week at a time to suit yourself to consider what herbaceous plants will suit your soil.

We apologise for him not contacting you earlier, but he has unfortunately been ill. He would be glad if you can give him some idea of your preference as to colours in this border. Do you wish them to be different to each other or of similar hues? If you want two colours only, would you like less of one plant or an equal number of each type?

Everyone of the plants we sell have, of course, our usual guarantee.

Yours faithfully

PROGRESS CHECK



In this lesson we've been looking at how our language – English – works. Virtually all our communication is based upon our having a system of naming things – objects, actions, and so on – that is common to all of us and that we use in exactly the same way. For us, that system is English; it could just as easily be French, Hindi, sign language, Morse code – a system of names and rules for using them that we can use in communicating with each other. By starting from basic principles and moving up through the rules up to the hints and tips, your study of this lesson should now have you using English effectively and well.



ASSIGNMENT A

Here is an assignment for you to try. It should take you about two hours and you should attempt it in exam conditions. The guide answers will give you some feedback on the questions, but if you would like one of our tutors to look at your work, please contact our Registrar.

1. (a) Pick out the adverbs from this passage:

He entered the room slowly. He searched carefully and soon found what he was looking for.

- (b) Complete these sentences using *who*, *which* or *that* in the correct place:

The dog savaged a young child was put down.

The first person gets the answer wins.

..... can tell me of the boxes is heavier?

- (c) Punctuate each of these examples in two different ways, to give two different meanings:

stop at the gate at the end of the garden you'll see a wheelbarrow

jill and i met you last week you had a cold

- (d) Put apostrophes in the correct places:

My horses coat was scratched and its ears torn.

Dont touch peters record; its not yours.

- (e) If you add a prefix and a suffix to the word "self" you can make another word, for example "unselfish". Make new words out of the following by adding a prefix and a suffix and then write a sentence using each:

agree

appear

certain

- (f) Re-write each pair of sentences so that they each contain a homophone for a word appearing in the other:

The train was stopped.
I need some writing materials.

The letters and parcels went by air.
The job was advertised for someone with experience.

We took the shortest way to York.
A mouse nibbled the underground part of the plant.

He stood in the rain with his head uncovered.
A grizzly is a large fierce animal in North America.

- (g) What are the adjectives made from these nouns?

health

Holland

silence

curiosity

2. Read the following five passages describing the town of Cambridge:

ONE

The history of Cambridge began many hundreds of years before the first college, Peterhouse, was founded in 1284 by Hugh de Balshom, Bishop of Ely. In the century preceding the Roman Conquest a Celtic settlement had arisen on what is known as Castle Hill, lying between Castle Street and Chesterton Road to the north of the town. At the foot of the hill was a ford across the River Cam, and successive Roman developments probably included the building of a bridge at

this point. This bridge became the only one to have given its name to an English county. Its location was of great importance as marking the place where the Roman roads, in particular the via Devana from Colchester to Chester, converged with the system of rivers and canals. As the northernmost point before reaching the fens such a site was of great strategic and commercial importance.

With the departure of the Romans the town continued to spread to its present position on the East Anglian side of the river. The Normans, however, rebuilt the castle and moved over to the opposite bank of the Cam. Nothing remains of the castle today but the mound. The thirteenth century saw the founding of the first Cambridge college and the consequent increase in the importance of the city as a seat of learning and a centre of communal life.

TWO

Then, Cambridge. I know Cambridge well enough, having spent three years there, and many an odd day or two since. A lovely old place, far lovelier now than Oxford. But either you are completely and happily at home there or are always faintly uncomfortable, longing to escape from Kings Parade and the Trumpington Road. I was always faintly uncomfortable, being compelled to feel – and quite rightly too – a bit of a lout and a bit of a mountebank. I'm not pleased with myself about this discomfort of mine at Cambridge. Probably it is because they know, whereas I am always only guessing. But wistfully, as a self-condemned lout and mountebank, I wish Cambridge did not tend to take every advantage of the fact that it knows more than anybody else about seventeenth-century prose or electrons or the foreign policy of Choiseul or Vitamin E. I wish it were not so primly pleased with itself, as if it was a hard-working charitable spinster and the Absolute its delighted vicar. I wish that somebody, one day, would rise in the Senate and begin: "Look here, we're a conceited parochial gang ..." It would not be true, but I cannot help feeling that the resulting shock would be of some benefit.

THREE

Cambridge, the county town, a city of 95,400 inhabitants; situated on the river Cam (known also as the Granta above Silver Street Bridge), in a flat but not unpleasing district; is the

seat of one of the two great and ancient English universities, and, thanks to its freedom from industry, has some claim to be considered the only true university town in the country. Its college architecture is delightful, and King's College Chapel is unique, while in the Backs it possesses a charm peculiar to itself.

FOUR

A small city, beautiful, well preserved and without industry. The university controls the city and owns most of it, carrying on like a feudal landowner – still holding grand banquets and paying subsistence wages to its loyal servants who live in tied cottages.

In term-time there are a lot of stimulating things going on as the town is dominated by students – but in the summer it changes into a tourist centre.

Two good alternative bookshops – Cockagne and Last Exit – can put you in touch particularly with political activities. Arjuna, the wholefood shop, has notices and would know of anything in the self-development direction. A meeting place is Ramsay Town cafe. Most colleges have a notice-board just inside the entrance which will tell you what's happening.

FIVE

One of Britain's twin academic highspots, Cambridge is a must for the admirer of educational achievement. The elegant courts of the famed river colleges, many of them hundreds of years old, overlook the Cam, where today's students (or undergraduates) punt their friends over the still, tree-fringed waters. Rich in tradition, Cambridge offers the unparalleled splendour of King's College Chapel, a fifteenth century Gothic masterpiece, the magnificent gateway of Christ's, where Puritan poet John Milton prepared himself for the labours of his immortal Paradise Lost, and Trinity, attended by poets William Wordsworth, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and the present Prince of Wales. A visit to Cambridge takes you deep into the heart of England's heritage, a panoramic view of civilisation ranging from Trumpington, where Chaucer's students seduced the local miller's wife and daughter, to the Cavendish laboratories, where Rutherford first split the atom.

- (a) Discussing each of the five passages in turn, what information do you think the writer is trying to communicate and what impression do you get of the writer?
 - (b) Write an account describing Cambridge, based on all of the above five passages. Use between 140 and 160 words only.
-

English – a quick refresher

Feedback to activities

Lesson 1

1.1 I went to work. Robert came with me. There we met Keith.

1.2 Verbs:

The faithful dog *walked* obediently beside its ageing master.

Adverbs:

The faithful dog walked *obediently beside its ageing master*.

Nouns:

The faithful *dog* walked slowly beside its ageing *master*.

Adjectives:

The *faithful* dog walked obediently beside its *ageing* master.

1.3 The fisherman caught a cod, a crab and a mackerel.

The ingredients of the cake are flour, sugar, butter, eggs, currants and milk.

1.4 The places where a mistake in punctuation has occurred and been put right are italicised. Make sure you understand all the corrections:

- 1,2 At the Annual General Meeting of Bell Limited held on 16 April 1999, the Chairman said,
- 3 “It is with pleasure that I am able to announce the results for
4,5 the past financial year. Profits have risen by 20 per cent after
6 tax *and happily*, your Board’s concern with the rising cost
7,8 of *raw materials*, which I expressed last year, has not been
9 entirely *justified*. It is true that costs have *risen*. When do
they not do so?
- 10,11,12 “Our increased *sales*, particularly on the export side, have,
13,14 however, enabled us to show increased *profits*. In addition
the continued streamlining of the process, rationalisation of
staff, together with reorganization of departments, improved
advertising methods and the success of the new name,
15 ‘Mega’, have contributed to progress. I anticipate that in
16 two years’ time our change-over to the new machines will be
complete and that we shall then see even greater returns
17 than are apparent *now*.
- 18 “The dividend of 10 per cent that we are able to declare is
largely the result of intensive work by the staff and they
deserve our thanks. Good staff are hard to come by and we
19 appreciate their many *qualities*: *integrity*, intelligence,
20 adaptability, patience and, above all, the will to work *hard*. ”

1.5 The places where a mistake in spelling has occurred and been put right are italicised. Make sure you learn the spellings of all words that you aren’t familiar with:

- 1 The old-fashioned *practice* of writing out correctly one’s
2,3,4 errors in spelling may still *definitely benefit* those students
5,6,7 who *occasionally* find *difficulties* in this area. An *efficient*
8 storekeeper must be able to spell *accurately*; even the most
9,10 *capable* should keep a *dictionary* nearby. Some of the
following words are commonly misspelled:

11,12	<i>advertisement</i>	<i>management</i>
13	<i>academic</i>	<i>psychological</i>
14	<i>conscientious</i>	<i>recommendations</i>
	<i>explanation</i>	<i>statistical</i>
15,16	<i>interpret</i>	<i>exhibit</i>
17,18	<i>instalments</i>	<i>signature</i>
19,20	<i>disappear</i>	<i>objectionable</i>

1.6 The places where a mistake has occurred and been put right are italicised. Make sure that you understand the reasons why these changes are corrections from the original:

1 *Owing to* an outstanding discovery that overturned all the
 2 *principles* of thermodynamics that Max knew, he was about
 3 to receive the ultimate accolade: membership of the Royal
 4,5,6 Society. He couldn't believe the *affect* it was having on his
 7 career. "*It's been wonderful,*" he reflected. "I've *effected* a
 8,9,10 sea-change in thinking, and *they'll* all be there. All of them
 will be there, I *should* be proud. I wonder from *whom* I'll
 receive the award?"

11,12 Max yawned and stretched. Fell asleep over his experiment
 again. Time to go and *lie* down and have a *nap*.

1.7

Dear Sir

1 Owing to the bad weather last week, we were unable to
 complete the laying of your lawn. I *should* be very pleased if
 you could let me know when it will be convenient for us to
 return to finish the work.

2,3 *With reference* to your query about the price of *shrubs*, you
 will have our estimate for this by the end of the week.

4 Mr Brown, our consultant, *whom* you met some time ago,
 5 will be able to meet you and *me* next week at a time to suit
 6 *you* to consider what herbaceous plants will suit your soil.

7 We apologise for *his* not contacting you earlier, but he has
 8 unfortunately been ill. He would be glad if you *could* give
 him some idea of your preference as to colours in this
 9 border. Do you wish them to be different *from one another*
 or of similar hues? If you want two colours only, would you
 10 like *fewer* of one plant or an equal number of each type?

11 *All* of the plants we sell have, of course, our usual guarantee.

12 *Yours faithfully,*

feedback

