

ENGLISH

the basics

A Practical Handbook

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Preface

In *communicative methodology*, little attention is given to grammar terminology and structure. Students in communicative situations will hopefully learn grammar indirectly and inductively. However, there will be times when there is a desire to know explicitly common grammatical terminology such as 'phrase', 'clause', 'auxiliary verb' and 'agreement' or to check specific grammatical items. This is especially so as these terms are used frequently in English language textbooks and in daily classroom teacher-talk. This handbook fulfils such a need. It serves as a guide as well as a quick reference for students. Grammar is explained in a simple yet comprehensive manner in order to enable the student to secure a strong foundation, to sustain interest and to enable self-learning. It is therefore not the intentions of the authors to highlight minor exceptions to a general grammatical rule.

This handbook aims to be practical in nature. Thus, exercises abound and these are meant as reinforcement for the concepts that are explained in each unit. We are in full sympathy with the tendency of communicative methodology which is to avoid as far as possible the type of exercises which involves filling in of blank spaces within the framework of a given structure. The inclusion in this book of so many of such exercises of this kind can be justified by a major purpose of the book — which is the correction of specific mistakes and the removal of particular difficulties. To provide instant self-monitored feedback, answers to the exercises are provided.

This handbook is divided into five parts. Part I with its ten units provides the components necessary for the construction of acceptable sentences. Part II deals with the tricky business of punctuation, and teaches capitalization. Part III introduces the components that are useful for the construction of longer and more complex sentences. Part IV shows the two ways in which statements can be recorded, and how emphasis can be shifted from agent to receiver. Part V looks at the mechanics of writing.

It is our conviction that **English the basics** will provide the reader with a good grasp of English and greater facility in its use.

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PART ONE

**The Sentence:
Components**

PART ONE

The Sentence: Components

1

The Sentence — Communication or Confusion

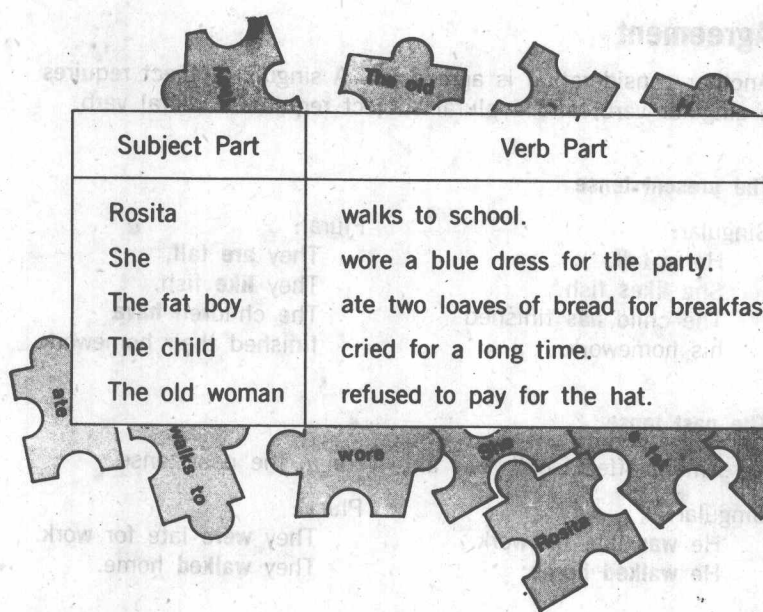
Introduction

One way of mastering a language is through using it. It is necessary for you to try to use English as much as possible in both speech and writing.

For a start, it will be helpful to take a look at the **sentence**.

The sentence

A sentence can be divided into two parts: the **subject** part and the **verb** part.



Subject Part	Verb Part
Rosita	walks to school.
She	wore a blue dress for the party.
The fat boy	ate two loaves of bread for breakfast.
The child	cried for a long time.
The old woman	refused to pay for the hat.



Word order

As the sentence consists of a number of words put together, word order is important. It is essential to know where to place the subject, the verb, the object, the noun, the preposition — in fact all the different components of a sentence — for various situations.

Word order is different in statements, questions, commands, exclamations, direct speech, and indirect speech.

As a matter of interest, just focus on the work 'read' in the examples below, and note the various positions it is placed to serve different purposes.

statement: I **read** a book.

question: Have you **read** the book?

You are going to **read** the book, aren't you?

command: **Read** the book!

exclamation: What, **read** the book!

direct speech: 'I have **read** the book,' he said.

indirect speech: He said that he had **read** the book.

Agreement

Another consideration is agreement. A singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb.

The present tense

Singular:

He **is** tall.

She **likes** fish.

The child **has** finished his homework.

Plural:

They **are** tall.

They **like** fish.

The children **have** finished their homework.

The past tense

Agreement affects only **was** and **were** in the past tense.

Singular:

He **was** late for work.

He **walked** home.

Plural:

They **were** late for work.

They **walked** home.

Ambiguity

The sentence has to be clear in meaning. Care must be taken in the positioning of words or phrases to avoid ambiguity.

A word

- (1) I drink **only** water.
- (2) **Only** I drink water.
- (3) I **only** drink water.

The three sentences show **only** in three different positions with three different meanings.

Sentence (1) indicates that the person drinks nothing except water. Sentence (2) indicates that he alone drinks water. Sentence (3) indicates that he drinks water and does nothing else.

Only is a useful word in English. It gives emphasis to the meaning of the word immediately after it. It should therefore not be placed at the end of a sentence except in notices or reminders.

Staff **only**
Non-smokers **only**

Phrases

- (1) **The fierce dog** bit the man.
- (2) **The man** bit **the fierce dog**.

The two above sentences which shows the phrases in different positions carry obviously different meanings.

The first describes something that happens fairly frequently; the second something which rarely, if ever, happens.

The longer sentence

Short, simple sentences are easily understood but they can become quite monotonous.

Every morning I get up at six. I wash my face. I brush my teeth. I comb my hair. I eat my breakfast. After that I walk to school.

Lengthening a sentence

It is not too difficult to lengthen a sentence. The part in the sentence which contains the main idea can be called the **central unit**; and any additional part, the **support unit**. A sentence is expanded by adding support units to the central unit. The central units in the following examples are those in bold.

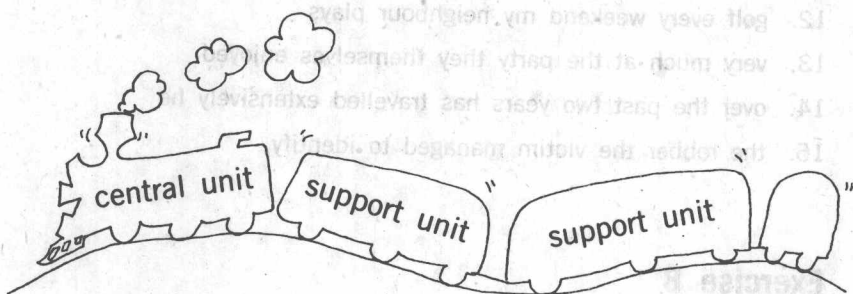
1. I like playing football **with my neighbours**
in the field near my home .
2. **Although I was not well** , I finished my work.
3. **If I had attended the meeting** , I would have met Rohani.
4. **The burglar stole** not only his alarm clock
but also his antique vase
5. **Neither I nor** my brother is attending the play
this evening
6. **Every morning** I walk to school
with my good friends , Rahmah and Devi .

There is no fixed place for the support unit. It can be at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence.

There must not be too many support units in a sentence. If there are, the sentence can be unwieldy and its meaning unclear. A very long sentence is best broken down into two or three shorter

sentences. Special care in punctuation (the use of the commas, semi-colon, colon, dash, etc.) has to be taken when writing longer sentences.

Read this chapter again. Then work out the exercises that follow. You are now quite ready to take the first step towards understanding English grammar!



Exercise A

Arrange the words to form sentences.

Example 1: the cake the child eats
The child eats the cake.

Example 2: the ball kicks the boy
The boy kicks the ball.

1. the little shop damaged vandals at the corner of the street
2. cleans the carpet every day the maid
3. once a week his motorcycle is washed
4. well football plays he
5. owns several shops he in the city
6. a lot at night cries the baby

7. at the road junction the motorist stopped his car
8. her driving test she passed at the third attempt
9. fortnight every writes home she
10. coffee likes his grandfather to drink
11. the athlete every afternoon trains
12. golf every weekend my neighbour plays
13. very much at the party they themselves enjoyed
14. over the past two years has travelled extensively he
15. the robber the victim managed to identify

Exercise B

Combine the central units which are indicated in bold with the support units.

Example: by bus **my neighbour goes to the office**

My neighbour goes to the office by bus.

1. for a walk every afternoon **he likes to take his nephew** to the park
2. which are crowded and noisy **I hate to eat** in places
3. when she saw the fire destroying her home **the old lady wept**
4. **the driver saved the lives of his passengers** swerving quickly
5. this afternoon at the stadium **I hope he wins the race**
6. every morning when her mother goes to the market **Susan looks after her younger brother and sister**
7. at 4.00 p.m. **the orchestra will perform** on August 3 at the Conference Hall
8. coming down the stairs **the little boy tripped**
9. at the earliest **I do not expect to hear from her** until after Christmas
10. after repeated attempts **he succeeded**

11. **this book is very informative and useful** which is written by my colleague
12. **Hassan could not finish the exercise** no matter how hard he tried in an hour
13. for one so young to be so brave **it is unusual**
14. without the aid of a map and torch **it requires more than courage to carry out the mission** on a moonless night
15. suddenly disaster struck onto the rocks **a huge wave tossed the boat**
16. **he decided to wait** getting no reply for fifteen minutes before ringing again
17. because of poor skill and lack of stamina **he lost the match**
18. before it rains **we had better hurry**
19. to your left on the shelf **you will find the new books** I bought
20. at this bend for five kilometres **we have to go on foot**

2

Concord — The Need for Agreement

In English the subject must agree with the verb. If the subject is singular, a singular verb is required. A plural subject takes a plural verb. This is particularly important in the present tense where any mistake in agreement is very noticeable. In the past tense, only the verbs **was** and **were** need to be considered.

Rules for Agreement

- A singular subject takes a singular verb.

In the present tense a singular verb takes an **s**.

He **writes** books.

She **walks** to school.

Her brother **drives** a car.

Sharifah **owns** a bicycle.

- A plural subject requires a plural verb.

In the present tense the plural verb is without the **s**.

- They **write** books.

We **walk** to school.

Her brothers **drive** cars.

Sharifah and her sister **own** bicycles.

- Amount, distances, and number can be taken as single units if used as subjects.

Two **is** enough.

Fifteen ringgit **is** what I have to pay.

Sixteen kilometres **is** a long way to walk.

But,

Two watches **have** been stolen from her locker. (2 units)

There **are** 16 kilometres more to cover. (16 units of distance)

There **are** 365 days in a year. (365 units)

- Titles and names of countries are singular.

The Netherlands **is** the home of windmills and tulips.

Genting Highlands **is** a holiday resort.

The United States **buys** large quantities of oil to service its industries.

'The Brothers Karamazov' **is** an exciting novel to read.

- **Words ending in 's' can be either singular or plural.**

Corps, ethics, economics, mathematics, athletics, politics, news are singular.

The National Cadet Corps **conducts** drilling courses. (The 'p' and the 's' are silent in the pronunciation of the word *corps*.)

Professional ethics **has** to be observed at all times.

Economics **is** an interesting subject.

Mathematics **is** difficult for Ponniah.

Athletics unlike swimming **has** a low rating in this school.

Politics **is** best left to politicians.

The news of his success **is** revealed to only a few close friends.

- **Collective nouns can be either singular or plural, depending on whether the emphasis is on the group as a single unit, or on the units composing the group.**

Army, board, jury, team, audience, class, public can be both singular or plural.

Singular:

The **army** conducts live-firing exercises weekly.

The **board of directors** **has** met twice to discuss wage adjustments.

The **jury** **has** not arrived at a verdict.

Our **team** **has** won the game.

Plural:

The **audience** **have** been reminded to leave *their* drinks in the canteen below the auditorium.

The **class** **have** to decide among *themselves* the best way to solve the problem.

The **public** **are** encouraged to submit *their* suggestions.

Note:

As can be seen by the above examples, the pronoun must match the subject.