

An A.B.C. of  
ENGLISH USAGE

BY  
H. A. TREBLE  
AND  
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OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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## PREFACE

IN this book an attempt has been made to present in dictionary form the main elements in the accidence and syntax of the English language, both spoken and written. Spelling, punctuation, pronunciation, and idiom have their place in the scheme of what is intended to be a dictionary of grammar and usage—an alphabetical companion to English composition. The definitions and rules have been presented in their simplest and most concise terms. This presentation assumes a knowledge of what may be called the axioms of grammar, and involves a frequency of cross reference that will, it is hoped, be as interesting and profitable in the limited spaces of this book as in the wider fields of Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, that prince of reference books for the connoisseur in language. To *M.E.U.* our debt is deep and gladly acknowledged, not only for an idea that we have tried to translate into the terms of the class-room or the office, but for its guidance on all points of which we have been doubtful or ignorant. We are much indebted, also, to various other commentaries on language and grammar, especially Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith's *Words and Idioms* and Prof. Sonnenschein's *New English Grammar*; and to innumerable pupils of our own who have often helped us to a great right by doing a little wrong. Our special thanks are due to Mrs. Jessie Coulson, lately of the staff of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, who read the manuscript from end to end and made a large number of invaluable suggestions. We also owe much to the criticisms and suggestions of our publishers. Besides *M.E.U.* and *The King's English*, our chief courts of appeal have been the various Oxford Dictionaries, the *Report on Grammatical Terminology* (which seems to survive only in such prefaces as this), *Authors' and Printers' Dictionary* (F. H. Collins), and *Rules for Compositors and Readers* (Horace Hart).

Croydon,  
February 1936

H. A. T.  
G. H. V.

## CHIEF CONTRACTIONS USED

>	becomes.
<	is derived from.
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary.</i>
SOED	<i>Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.</i>
COD	<i>Concise Oxford Dictionary.</i>
KE	<i>King's English.</i>
MEU	<i>Modern English Usage.</i>
RCR	<i>Rules for Compositors and Readers (Hart).</i>
RGT	<i>Report on Grammatical Terminology.</i>
Mod.E.	<i>Modern English.</i>
ME.	<i>Middle English.</i>
OE.	<i>Old English.</i>
AV	<i>Authorised Version, 1611.</i>

Small capitals refer the reader to the article so indicated, for further information.

## A.B.C. OF ENGLISH USAGE

a. (i) The indefinite article. See AN.

(ii) In 'I go a fishing', 'A hunting we will go' the *a* is a weak form of OE. *on*.

**ablaut.** See GRADATION.

**-able, -ible.** Our blurred pronunciation makes it difficult to decide between the two suffixes; and in spelling all but the commonest words there is often an uneasy doubt in the mind of the speller. The OED helps a little—but only a little: 'In English there is a prevalent feeling for retaining *-ible* wherever there was or might be a Latin *-ibilis*, while *-able* is used for words of distinctly French or English origin.' Examples, however, will be worth all attempts at generalization. They are taken, with a few omissions, from the lists in RCR:

### -ABLE

actionable	forgivable	palatable
adorable	immovable	peaceable
advisable	immutable	personable
agreeable	impassable (i.e. that cannot be passed; cf. impassible, i.e. incapable of feeling)	preferable
amenable	impenetrable	probable
amiable	impressional	provable
analysable	improvable	rat(e)able
arguable	inalienable	reasonable
believable	incalculable	regrettable
blam(e)able	inconceivable	removable
changeable	incurable	sal(e)able
chargeable	indispensable	serviceable
comfortable	inestimable	tam(e)able
conceivable	inflatable	teachable
conversable	inviolable	tenable
debatable	irreconcilable	tolerable
definable	lik(e)able	translatable
delineable	lovable	treasonable
demonstrable	malleable	tun(e)able
detestable	manageable	uncontrollable
dissolvable	movable	undeniable
drinkable	nam(e)able	unendurable
dutiable	notable	ungovernable
eatable	noticeable	unmistakable
endorsable		unpronounceable
excisable		unquenchable
forgettable		unshakable

### -IBLE

accessible	credible	fencible
adducible	deducible	flexible
admissible	dirigible	forcible
audible	discernible	gullible
avertible	divisible	impressible
collapsible	edible	incomprehensible
comprehensible	eligible	incorruptible
compressible	expressible	incredible
contemptible	fallible	indefeasible
controvertible	feasible	indefensible



## -IBLE (contd.)

indelible	negligible	reversible
indestructible	ostensible	submersible
indigestible	perceptible	suggestible
inexhaustible	permissible	suppressible
inflexible	persuasive	susceptible
intangible	plausible	tangible
intelligible	reducible	transmissible
irascible	reprehensible	vendible
irresistible	repressible	visible
legible	responsible	

**abridgement, abridgment.** The first is preferable. See under MUTE E.  
**absolute.** For nominative absolute see NOMINATIVE CASE.

**abstract.** *Abstract* is an epithet sometimes applied in grammar to nouns which are the names of intangible things—*love, thought, opinion*, and the rest.

**accent.** In English *accent* is a matter of stress, i.e. it depends on force of utterance; and the contrast between accented and unaccented syllables is very marked, whereas in French it is slight. Hence English verse depends primarily on alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, rather than on quantity, as in Latin, or strict numbering of syllables, as in French.

In English words the accent falls as a rule on the first syllable or on the root syllable; and the comparative weakness of the end syllables is the main reason for the confusion or loss of inflexions, which is marked if we compare King Alfred's English with Chaucer's, or Chaucer's with Shakespeare's.

Some words that have the same spelling but different accentuation according to their grammatical function are included in the following list. In such pairs the noun usually has the accent on the first syllable, the verb on the second:

ábsent (adj.)	absént (v.)	éxploit (n.)	explóit (v.)
ábstract (n. or adj.)	abstráct (v.)	éxport (n.)	expórt (v.)
áccent (n.)	accént (v.)	éxtract (n.)	extráct (v.)
Aúgust (n.)	augúst (adj.)	férment (n.)	fermént (v.)
colleét (n.)	colleét (v.)	fréquent (adj.)	fréquent (v.)
cómpound (n.)	compóund (v.)	ímport (n.)	impórt (v.)
cómpress (n.)	compréss (v.)	ímpress (n.)	impréss (v.)
cóncert (n.)	concért (v.)	ímprint (n.)	imprínt (v.)
cónduct (n.)	condúct (v.)	íncense (n.)	incénse (v.)
cónflict (n.)	conflicé (v.)	íncrease (n.)	incréase (v.)
cónsort (n.)	consórt (v.)	ínstinct (n.)	instínct (adj.)
consúmmate (adj.)	consummate (v.)	ínstult (n.)	insúlt (v.)
cóntract (n.)	contráct (v.)	ínterdict (n.)	interdíct (v.)
cóntest (n.)	contést (v.)	ínvalid (n. or adj.)	inválid (adj.)
cónvért (n.)	convér† (v.)	[Invaléed]	[inválid]
cómvíct (n.)	convíct (v.)	mínute (n.)	minúte (adj.)
cónvoy (n.)	convóy (v.)	[mínit]	
déscant (n.)	descánt (v.)	misconduct (n.)	miscondúct (v.)
désert (n.)	desért (v.)	Natál (n.)	nátal (adj.)
détail (n.)	detaíl (v.)	óbject (n.)	objéct (v.)
díctate (n.)	dictáte (v.)	pérfect (adj.)	perféct (v.)
díggest (n.)	digéat (v.)	rébel (n.)	rebél (v.)
díscount (n.)	discoúnt (v.)	súspect (n.)	suspéct (v.)
éscort (n.)	escórt (v.)	tránsport (n.)	transpórt (v.)
éssay (n.)	essáy (v.)	tránsfer (n.)	transfér (v.)
éxpert (n.)	expért (adj.)		

**access, accession.** The general distinction between the two words is well illustrated by examples given in MEU. *Accession* means actual coming to, *access* the possibility of coming to; so *accession to the throne* = coming to the throne, i.e. becoming sovereign; and *access to the throne* = the opportunity of coming to the throne, i.e. approaching the sovereign (with a petition). *Accession* is generally restricted in use to the idea of rising to a state, a rank.

**accusative case.** The case of (1) the direct object of a verb, (2) the object of a preposition.

The accusative case occurs in the following special and idiomatic constructions:

(a) *Accusative and infinitive*: the accusative of a noun or pronoun used with the verb infinitive, making a noun phrase as object of a verb of *knowing, thinking, believing*:

'I know *that virtue to be* in you, Brutus.'

'Behind the man was a girl in a silvery grey robe, *whom* Graham perceived *to be* beautiful.'

(b) *Adverbial accusative*: (i) the idiomatic accusative of extent of place and duration of time, making an adverbial phrase of place, time:

We walked *ten miles*.

He had lived *three years* in London.

(ii) the adverbial accusative of cost: The book cost *six shillings*.

(iii) adverbial accusative of respect: *heart broken*; *tongue tied*; *foot sore*; *conscience stricken*.

(c) *Cognate accusative*: a noun of the same significance as the verb to which it becomes an 'emphasizing' object. Thus in the sentence 'I have fought the good fight', the verb is intransitive, the noun *fight* being a cognate (Lat. *cognatus*, 'born with') object, not suffering but emphasizing the action:

'Such a *sleep* they sleep,  
The men I loved.'

'Let us run with patience the *race* that is set before us.'

'ere the bat bath flown  
His cloister'd *flight*.'

(d) *Retained accusative*: the direct object that is kept or 'retained' in the sentence when a verb with a direct and an indirect object is made passive. Thus:

Active sentence	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Active verb</i>	<i>Indirect obj.</i>	<i>Direct object</i>
	He	gave	me	a book
Passive sentence .	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Passive verb</i>	<i>Retained obj.</i>	<i>Instrument or agent</i>
	I	was given	a book (accusative)	by him

See also DATIVE CASE.

(e) *Accusative with factitive verbs*: verbs of 'making' (*factitive* < Latin *facio*, 'I make') sometimes have two direct objects, one in apposition to the other:

'Then the King made *Daniel* a great man.'

**acknowledgement, acknowledgment.** The first is preferable. See under MUTE E.

**active voice.** See PASSIVE VOICE.

**addicted.** *Addicted* cannot be followed by the infinitive. The idiom is *addicted to* + noun, or noun equivalent. A gerund, therefore, may legitimately follow the preposition: 'He is addicted to betting on horse-races' (not 'to bet').

**adjective.** The adjective (Lat. *ad* + *jactum*, 'put near', 'added to') qualifies a noun or pronoun. Syntactically adjectives may be either:

- (a) *attributive*—the adjective that stands with (usually before) its noun as in 'the *blue* sky', 'the *angry* sea', 'He was a friar of orders *grey*', and
- (b) *predicative*—the adjective that stands in the predicate as complement to the verb: 'The sky is *blue*', 'He seems *angry*'

For possessive adjective see POSSESSIVE.

**adjective clause.** The adjective clause is always introduced by a relative pronoun, or by a word that plays the part of a relative pronoun, whose antecedent the clause qualifies: 'At one period Swift was acting as secretary and adviser to a distinguished lady *who often required him to read to her aloud*.' The adjective clause (italicized) qualifies the antecedent of the relative pronoun, *lady*.

The relative pronoun introducing an adjective clause may be

- (a) governed by a preposition: 'Far away, down a long declivity, was the opening of the tunnel *up which we had fled*.'
- (b) adjectival: 'And you, good yeomen, *whose limbs were made in England*.'
- (c) replaced by the relative conjunctions *when, where, whither, whence, why*. For examples see under the words concerned.
- (d) represented by *as*, especially after *same, such*; see AS.
- (e) represented by *but* (= who, which [do not]) after a negative or interrogative; see BUT.

In modern idiom the relative pronoun may be omitted ('understood') when it is not the subject of its own clause: 'Almost every sentence  $\Delta$  we speak has a natural rhythm or form of its own'; 'That is the room  $\Delta$  I slept in.'

The following two sentences illustrate the difference between *defining* (or *restrictive*) and *non-defining* (or *non-restrictive*) adjective clauses:

The man *who broke the bank at Monte Carlo* was a lucky fellow. (defining clause).

The Prime Minister, *who had just returned from Switzerland*, was met at Victoria by an enthusiastic crowd. (non-defining clause).

In the first sentence the subject is *defined* by the clause; if the clause were removed we should not know *who* was the lucky fellow. In the second sentence the clause is almost parenthetical (and as such is enclosed within commas), and merely adds a fact to the sentence, the subject of which is sufficiently defined without it.

For a further note on this see under COMMA.

**adjective phrase.** The adjective phrase qualifies a noun or pronoun in the sentence and has the following forms:

(a) containing an adjective, or adjectives, separated by a comma from the noun (or pronoun) qualified:

*'Unstable as water, thou shalt not survive.'*

*Tall, strong and intellectual*, he seemed to be the darling of the gods.

(b) preposition and noun. The chief prepositions in this construction are *of* (introducing the genitive phrase), *with*, and *for*: 'the top *of the table*'; 'the man *with the white hat*'; 'the Society *for the Propagation of the Gospel*'.

(c) phrase containing an infinitive. See INFINITIVE (d).

(d) phrase containing a participle. See PARTICIPLE.

Since there is the minimum of inflexion in English, the position of the adjective phrase in the sentence is all important. It must be so placed as to qualify without ambiguity the noun it is intended to qualify. The familiar advertisement quoted long ago in *Punch* will point the moral: 'Wanted easy chair by gentleman *with sliding back and oak legs*.' Other examples of misplacement of the adjective phrase are given under PARTICIPLE.

**admit.** (a) When it has a personal subject *admit* is not followed by *of*: 'I admit being in the wrong' (not 'admit of'). But with a non-personal subject (e.g. *it* or an abstract noun) *admit of*, meaning 'present an opening for' or 'leave room for', is the verb: 'His conduct admits of no other interpretation.'

(b) The noun from *admit* in all senses, concrete and abstract, is *admission*: 'His admission of guilt caused great surprise'; 'admission sixpence'. The noun *admittance* survives idiomatically only in 'No admittance except on business' and similar phrases—e.g. 'They knocked, but could not gain admittance'—when *admission* is rather less likely to be used.

**adverb.** (a) *Form.* The OE. normal inflexion for the adverb was *-e* added to the adjective form. That inflexion has disappeared; but the few adverbs, like *fast* and *hard*, which have the same form as the adjective in Mod.E., are a reminder of the inflexion. *Fast* was originally *fæste* and *hard* was *hearde*. Our modern characteristic ending *-ly* arises out of the adjectival form *-lic*, which was common in OE. (e.g. *manlic*, Mod.E. *manly*; *godlic*, Mod.E. *godly*), and which had the normal OE. adverb termination in *-e*: *munlic* (adj.), *manlice* (adv.). These terminations (*-lic* and *-lice*) have both become *-ly* in Mod.E., which therefore contains both adjectives and adverbs ending in *-ly*. It is important to remember that the adjectives ending in *-ly* cannot always act as adverbs. The adverb corresponding with *godly* is *godlily* (though the Prayer Book has 'that under him we may be *godly* and quietly governed'), with *manly* is *manlily* and with *lonely* is *lonelily*. But *early*, *likely* (in the phrase 'very likely'), *daily*, and *hourly*, with some others, may be both adjectives and adverbs.

(b) *Classification.* The conventional classification of adverbs into adverbs of *time*, *place*, *manner*, *degree*, &c., is a matter of logic rather than of grammar. It is worth noting, however, that adverbs of degree (e.g. *too*, *very*) do not modify verbs (except their adjectival forms, i.e. participles), but adjectives and adverbs. See also **VERY**.

(c) *Function.* The adverb modifies:

(i) a verb:

'And Agag came unto him *delicately*.'

'*There* lay Duncan.'

'*Now* sleeps the crimson petal.'

(ii) an adjective:

'*Too* deep for tears.'

'You are *very* kind.'

'I am *sincerely* glad.'

(iii) an adverb:

'Yours *very* faithfully.'

'Her sceptre *so* fantastically borne.'

'He behaved *extraordinarily* badly towards me.'

In such sentences as 'The train ran *right* through the station', 'I shall help you *only* when you deserve it' the adverbs modify the adverb phrase and the adverb clause respectively rather than the preposition ('through') and the conjunction ('when'). Often (especially in sentences containing verbs of incomplete predication) the adverb modifies the whole predicate: '*Now* the time is ripe for action.' In compound prepositions and conjunctions an adverb is the modifying element: '*up* to', '*out* of', '*even* if', '*as well* as'.

For the idiomatic use of *there* see THERE, and for comparison of adverbs see DEGREES OF COMPARISON.

**adverb clause.** The following classification of adverb clauses is based on that given in RGT, from which one or two of the examples are quoted.

Type	Conjunctions	Examples and Notes
(i) Time	when, before, after, while, since, till, until, as, as soon as	' <i>When most I wink</i> , then do my eyes best see.' ' <i>As they pass by</i> , pluck Casca by the sleeve.'
(ii) Place	where	' <i>Where Claribel low lieth</i> The breezes pause and die.'
(iii) Cause	because, for, since, as	'I do but sing <i>because I must</i> .' ' <i>Since there's no help</i> , come let us kiss and part.'
(iv) Purpose	that, so that, in order that, lest (negative)	'And wretches hang <i>that jury men may dine</i> ' (RGT).
(v) Result	so . . . that	He runs so quickly <i>that I cannot keep up with him</i> . (Note that here the adverb clause strictly modifies not the verb but the notion implied in the adverb <i>quickly</i> ; the adverb clause of result is therefore often a kind of clause of degree; e.g. it answers here the question 'how quickly?').)

Type	Conjunctions	Examples and Notes
(vi) Condition	if, unless (negative) whether . . . or, BUT (idiomatic) in case, PROVIDED, so long as	Pigs might fly <i>if they had wings</i> . Take an umbrella, <i>in case it rains</i> . (Note the conditional construction with the 'inverted subjunctive': <i>Should you be passing</i> , call in to see me. <i>Had I been there</i> , it would not have happened.)
(vii) Concession	though, although, even if	' <i>Though I give my body to be burned . . . it profiteth me nothing.</i> ' (Note the construction of concession with <i>whatever</i> , <i>whichever</i> , &c. <i>Whatever you do</i> , you will not be right; and with <i>let</i> : <i>Let him be the best man possible</i> , he is still too old for the appointment. See <b>WHATEVER</b> and <b>LET</b> .)
(viii) Comparison: (a) Manner (b) Degree	as, as if, as though  as, than	'Heaven does with us <i>as we with torches do</i> ' (RGT). 'She is as wise <i>as she is beautiful</i> .' He is taller <i>than his brother was at his age</i> .

**adverbial accusative.** See **ACCUSATIVE CASE**.

**adverb phrase.** The adverb phrase has the following main forms:

- Two or more adverbs joined together: '*Slowly and sadly* we laid him down.'
- Preposition + noun: the most familiar form of adverb phrase. It most frequently indicates time and place—as in 'after tea', 'before noon', 'until the evening', 'in the sky', 'along the road', 'over the hills'. Many adverb phrases with prepositions (e.g. 'at last', 'for luck', 'in time') are idiomatic (see **IDIOM**). The preposition + gerund may make an adverb phrase:

*After waiting two hours*, we decided to go home.

- Infinitive of purpose: 'I come *to bury Caesar*, not *to praise him*.' See **INFINITIVE MOOD**.
- Adverbial accusative (duration, extent, cost): 'And Jacob served *seven years* for Rachel'; He walked *ten miles* a day during his holiday; The book costs *six shillings*. See **ACCUSATIVE CASE**.
- Nominative absolute: 'And (she), *her attendants absent*, swallowed fire.' See **NOMINATIVE CASE**.

**adverse, averse.** *Adverse* is always followed by *to*; *averse* is followed by *from* or *to*. MEU quotes examples to show that 'averse to' is the common usage.

The following, from *The Observer*, may be of interest:

'Sir,—I have an aversion for "writing to the papers" lest some one holding an opinion adverse to my own and not averse from writing should reply. But I should

like to ask why we so frequently meet with a misuse of the word *averse*? In a letter in your latest issue . . . we read "I have been averse to receiving personal letters typed" . . . Surely well educated people ought to recognize the distinction between the two words *averse* and *adverse*."

OED says, in one of its extremely rare discourses on syntax, s.v. AVERSE: "The use of the prep. *to*, rather than *from*, after *averse* and its derivations, although condemned by Johnson as etymologically improper, is justified by the consideration that these words express a mental relation analogous to that indicated by *hostile*, *contrary*, *repugnant* . . . and naturally take the same construction. *Aversion* in the sense of an action, which would properly be followed by *from*, is now obsolete."

**advice, advise.** See PRACTICE.

**advocate.** *Advocate* (verb) is followed by a noun or verbal noun as object, not by a noun (*that* . . .) clause: 'advocate his being', not 'advocate that he should be'.

**aerate.** Pronounce as three syllables 'ay-er-ate'. The diaeresis is not usually placed on the *e* (aërate) in writing or printing: 'The Aerated Bread Company'; 'aerated waters'. To call the bread made by the A.B.C. *aerated*, as the uneducated so frequently do, is to slander the Company (Latin *āēr*, *āēris* = air; *āēs*, *āēris* = copper).

**aeroplane.** *Aeroplane*, with the Greek prefix *aero-*, is the normal English word. Attempts to popularize the anglicized form *airplane* have not been successful; but they have unfortunately encouraged the extraordinary spelling *airoplane*. The contraction, which is better avoided in view of the many functions of the word *plane*, should be spelt with an apostrophe—'plane.

**affect, effect.** (a) There are two distinct verbs *to affect*: one means 'to assume', 'to make a pretence of' ('affect the pessimist', 'affect enthusiasm'), and from it are derived the (participial) adjective *affected* and the noun *affectation*: the other means 'to influence', 'to have an effect on'. Its related noun is *affection*. The noun *affect* is used only in psychology, and means the emotional antecedents or accompaniments of an act.

(b) *Effect*, as a verb, means 'to make, bring about, produce, result in' in such phrases as 'effect an entry, an escape'. As a noun it means

(i) result, consequence—'The effect of his speech was to gain twenty converts'.

(ii) power, efficacy—'of no effect'.

(iii) 'combination of colour or form in picture, &c.' (COD).

The plural *effects* is used in the concrete sense of personal property—'furniture and effects'.

The four adjectives from the Latin *efficio*, *effectum*, are troublesome; the principal facts about them are set out in the table below:

Word	Meaning	Example
<b>efficacious</b>	'sure to have the desired effect'—used of things, principally medicines.	The doctor prescribed an efficacious tonic.
<b>efficient</b>	'capable of producing the desired effect'—used of persons and things.	She was an efficient teacher. The engine was efficient for the work it had to do.

Word	Meaning	Example
effectual	applies to action apart from the agent, and means 'not falling short of the complete effect aimed at' (MEU).	effectual measures.
effective	'having a high degree of effect' (MEU).	effective acting, actor; an effective picture.

**affinity.** Affinity *between* two things, persons; affinity *with* a thing, person. MEU condemns both *to* and *for*.

**affixes.** The particles or words affixed to a root word are of two kinds—*prefixes*, 'fixed before', and *suffixes*, 'fixed after'. Prefixes are adverbial in effect; that is, they modify the idea suggested in the root, e.g. for *time* (*pre-*, *post-*), for *place* (*in-*, *ad-*, *ab-*), for *negation* (*un-*, *dis-*). Suffixes are either grammatical inflexions, e.g. the 's of the genitive and the *-ed* of the weak past tenses and participles, or endings indicative of various parts of speech, e.g. *-ness*, as the suffix of abstract nouns, *-ible* and *-able* of adjectives, *-ly* of adverbs.

**afflict, inflict.** The idioms are: '*afflict* a person *with* a thing', '*inflict* a thing (*up*) *on* a person'. In the passive (where the confusion of the two words is more common than in the active), a person is afflicted *with* a thing, and a thing is inflicted *on* a person. Cf. INCULCATE.

**aged.** As an attributive adjective and as a collective noun (e.g. in 'the poor and the aged') *aged* has two syllables (cf. *learned*). In other uses (e.g. 'aged twenty') it is a monosyllable.

**aggravate.** *Aggravate* is a verb meaning to *increase*, to *make heavier*. Thus you *aggravate* an offence, a grievance, a sorrow. The use of *aggravate* with a personal object (= tease or irritate) is purely colloquial: 'I *aggravate* him purposely'; 'She is an *aggravating* person'. It should never appear in written English.

**ago.** *Ago* should not be followed by the conjunction *since*, but by the conjunction *that* or *when*: 'It was a hundred years ago *that* (*when*) Coleridge died' (not 'a hundred years ago *since* . . .'). *Ago since* is tautological, the two words being parallel in meaning. Thus, adverbially, *since* = *ago* in such a phrase as 'ten years *since*'.

**agreement.** I. *Subject and Verb.* The verb agrees with its subject in number and person. The subject when *double* (i.e. consisting of two nouns or noun equivalents) or *multiple* (i.e. consisting of more than two nouns or noun equivalents) is always plural. When a multiple subject consists of a third, second, and first person pronoun, the verb is in the *first* person. Note that in such sentences as 'The bread and butter is on the table', where the two nouns of the subject are so closely related in thought as to make a unit, the subject is singular, not double. In 'The tumult and the shouting dies' the apparently double subject may be considered as an example of HENDIADYS (the tumult and the shouting = the tumultuous shouting), and therefore legitimately singular.



Difficulties arise only when the number and person of the subject are for some reason disguised, as:

- (a) when the subject is a collective noun. See COLLECTIVE NOUNS.
- (b) when the verb is so placed in the sentence as to be 'attracted' into the number and person of a noun or pronoun which is not the subject (see ATTRACTION). Thus 'Each of us were willing to pay our own fares.' The subject is the distributive *each* [3rd person singular]; the verb is attracted into the plural and the possessive adjective [relating to *each*] into the 1st person by the pronoun *us* in the partitive genitive phrase. Since the verb has a tendency to be 'attracted' to the noun nearest to it, this error is likely to occur when a noun differing in number and person from the subject stands between the subject and the verb, or when the noun (in a multiple subject) that stands nearest the verb is singular, and so attracts the verb into the singular: 'Ten boys, a handkerchief, and a piece of stout rope is needed for a tug of war.'
- (c) when the subject is alternative. The two parts of a subject linked by *or*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor* agree separately with the verb. If both parts are of the same number and person the verb may be common to both; if not, the verb cannot be common, and, in correct writing, the sentence must be expanded so that each part of the alternative subject has its appropriate form of verb. Thus:

Neither the driver (3rd singular)	} was hurt. (3rd singular)
nor the dog (3rd singular)	
Either the time-tables (3rd plural)	} are wrong. (3rd plural)
or the clocks (3rd plural)	

But in the sentence 'Neither the men nor the dog was hurt' the verb cannot possibly be common to *men* and *dog*; and in 'Neither you nor I am eligible' the verb (1st singular) cannot agree with both *you* (2nd singular) and *I* (1st singular). The only remedy is to recast the sentences. Colloquial English, however, allows considerable latitude to the verb with an alternative subject. It is noteworthy that since there is no inflexion for person in the plural of verb tenses in English, a plural verb will agree with any two pronouns without any question of person.

- (d) when the subject follows the introductory *there*. Shakespeare's 'There is pansies, that's for thoughts' is an example, if faulty grammar may be attributed to Shakespeare. But the construction is so common in colloquial English as to become almost an idiom. For all that, it should not be admitted in writing.
- (e) in such sentences as 'The Prime Minister, with (= accompanied by) the Chancellor of the Exchequer, are to attend the funeral' the verb has become plural through confusion with the construction 'The Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are . . .'. *With* is a preposition, not a conjunction, and introduces an adjectival phrase qualifying *Prime Minister*. The verb should therefore be singular agreeing with the true subject.

2. *Adjective and Noun*. Since there is no inflexion in English adjectives