

Macmillan Modern Office

Series Editor: Christine Simons

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

英语语言技能 [英]

Vera Hughes

319.4

314

M

MACMILLAN

World Publishing Corp

Macmillan Modern Office

Series Editor: Christine Simons

H319.4 / 14894

141

1996

125-26-

27

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Vera Hughes

M

MACMILLAN

World Publishing Corp

© DEVA WP 1990

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 33-4 Alfred Place, London WC1E 7DP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1990

Published by
MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by TecSet Ltd, Wallington, Surrey.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Hughes, Vera

English language skills. — (Macmillan modern office)

1. English language. Business English. Writing
skills

I. Title

808'.066651021

ISBN 0-333-48534-3

ISBN 0-333-48535-1 pbk

ISBN 7 - 5062 - 1089 - 4

Reprint authorized by Macmillan Publishers Ltd
Reprinted by World Publishing Corporation, Beijing, 1992
for sale in The People's Republic of China (excluding
Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Province of China)



Themes

	Letters	Memos & Messages	Notices & Adverts	Reports	Dialogues	Speech	Minutes	Instructions
Chapter 1								
Applying for a job	•							
Sales Manager visiting a region		••						
Use of Music Rooms				•				
Shopping				••				
Chapter 2								
Camping sites/holiday	•							
Flight delays		•						
House purchase	•							
Chapter 3								
Fire drills				•				
Visitors to airport								•
Keep off the grass			•					
Chapter 4								
Malcolm is not a thief	•							
Opening a new factory							•	
Operating the photocopier								•
Sound effects		•						
Little Cherub Photographers			•					
Photocopying procedures								•/•
Chapter 5								
Report on the Personnel Department				•				
Staff attitude survey				••••				

- — correction/comprehension task
- — creative writing
- — comprehension
- — summary

	Letters	Memos & Messages	Notices & Adverts	Reports	Dialogues	Speech	Minutes	Instructions
Chapter 6								
Nursery school			•					
Hotel reception messages		•						
Chapter 7								
Tennis match report				•				
Promotional letter for luggage	•							
Promotional letter	••							
Chapter 8								
Installation of Computer Network		•						
Memos and Report		•		•••				
Chapter 9								
Supermarket delicatessen counter					•			
Company's shrinkage				•				
Litter in the park (speech)						•		
House extension	•							
Newspaper article on siting of leisure complex				•				
Chapter 10								
WP commands								•
Building Society letter	•/••							
Chapter 11								
Offices			•					
Information Technology		•						•
Desk Top Publishing				••••				

- – correction/comprehension task
- – creative writing
- – comprehension
- – summary

	Letters	Memos & Messages	Notices & Adverts	Reports	Dialogues	Speech	Minutes	Instructions
Chapter 12								
DIY Checkout Procedure Manual								•
Writing instructions on one of:								
– wiring a plug								••
– finding one's way								••
– applying eye makeup								••
– setting a video recorder								••
Chapter 13								
Letter of complaint about non-delivery of mail order goods	••							
Letter of thanks for present on changing jobs	••							
Letter of condolence on death of Supervisor's husband/wife	••							
Advert for Social or Sports Club Disco			••					
Newspaper article on local event				••				
Script for radio commercial for Sunspots holidays					••			

- – correction/comprehension task
- – creative writing
- – comprehension
- – summary



Acknowledgements

My thanks to the RSA for their help and advice on their English Language examinations and the errors most frequently made in them.

My thanks, too, to my daughter, Christina, for her permission to use the spelling list and confusibles from our joint publication — *Teach Yourself Secretary's Handbook* by Vera and Christina Hughes, published by Hodder and Stoughton.

Finally my thanks, once again, to my partner David Weller for keying in accurately every word, full stop, comma, quotation mark etc, and for the good ideas he has allowed me to use.

Contents

<i>Themes</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Introduction	1
Is this book for you?	1
Which exams are you working for?	1
What will you learn from this book?	1
How does it work?	2
What this book is not	3
About the language	3
1 Sentences and paragraphs	4
The right length for a sentence	4
Punctuating the beginnings and ends of sentences	7
When to start a new paragraph	7
Presentation skills	9
Piece/peace	10
Practice/practise	11
Points to remember	14
2 Full stops and commas	15
Full stops, question marks and exclamation marks	15
The only definite rules about commas	19
You and I/you and me	24
Accept/except	25
Points to remember	28
3 Complete sentences	29
Writing a complete sentence	29
A subject	29
A verb	30
Of/off	32
Of/have	34
Points to remember	36

4	Three basic spelling rules	37
	i before e	38
	Plurals of nouns ending in 'y'	39
	Doubled consonants	40
	Two/to/too	43
	Affect/effect	45
	Points to remember	48
5	Singulars and plurals	49
	Making the verb agree with the subject	49
	The verb 'to be'	54
	Collective nouns	55
	Personnel/personal	57
	Lend/borrow	57
	Points to remember	60
6	Apostrophes which show possession	61
	Which word takes the apostrophe?	61
	Where does the apostrophe go?	63
	Singular nouns which end in 's'	65
	Separate	66
	Where/were	66
	Points to remember	68
7	Apostrophes which show omitted letters	69
	How and when to use the omission apostrophe	69
	When to use omission apostrophes in business	71
	When to use 'more' or '---er'	72
	Whether/weather	73
	Points to remember	75
8	Its and their	76
	Its and it's	76
	There, their and they're	77
	Apostrophes in plurals	79
	Did/done	80
	Points to remember	83
9	Quotation marks	84
	Using double quotation marks	84
	Using single quotation marks	87
	Common phrases — separate or together?	90
	Sight/site	91
	Points to remember	94

10 Semi-colons and colons	95
When and how to use a semi-colon	95
When and how to use a colon	97
To lie and to lay	100
Different from/to/than	102
Points to remember	104
11 Hyphens, dashes and brackets	105
When and how to use hyphens	105
When and how to use dashes	109
When and how to use brackets	111
Brackets and full stops	112
None	113
Stationary/stationery	114
Points to remember	116
12 Abbreviations	117
The common abbreviations eg, etc, ie, NB, pp, PS	117
Time, weight and measurement abbreviations	120
Whose/who's/who/whom	122
Teach/learn	124
Them/those	124
Points to remember	126
13 Writing for special occasions	127
Letter of complaint	127
Thank-you letter	128
Letter of condolence	129
Poster or leaflet	130
Newspaper article	131
Radio script	132
Points to remember	133
<i>Appendix 1: Commonly mis-spelled words</i>	134
<i>Appendix 2: Confusibles</i>	136
<i>Index</i>	139

Introduction

Is this book for you?

Did you know that in many exams and assessed schemes you lose marks if your spelling, grammar and punctuation are wrong?

Did you know that, if you are applying for a job and you make mistakes in your letter or Application Form, sometimes an employer will not bother to interview you?

Did you know that, when you have got a job, people get fed up with you if your English Language Skills are no good?

Did you know that it is not too late to do something about it?

If you want to improve your English Language Skills, this book is for you.

Which exams are you working for?

If you are working for any English, Office Studies, Business Studies, or Information Technology exams in GCSE, BTEC, Pitmans, LCCT or RSA, you will need good English Language Skills. Even if you are working for Certificates or Diplomas in retailing, you still need to be able to spell properly, punctuate accurately and write correct English sentences.

What will you learn from this book?

The book will remind you of the basic rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation – those things which you half learnt years ago, or have forgotten; perhaps even some things which you have never learnt at all, but now need to know.

You will be able to use it as a reference book to look up odd points which you cannot quite remember, or always get wrong.

It will *not* try to teach you complicated rules about how to write English in a fancy, literary style. It will *not* use difficult words, like subjunctive or past participle; it *will* use terms like nouns, verbs and adjectives. It will *not* try to teach you the more difficult rules of English grammar; if you follow the simple notes in this book, your grammar will be acceptable.

The business and office world requires clear, accurate English: that is what this book will help you to learn, or re-learn.



How does it work?

It works in three ways. You can work through it from beginning to end if you want to improve your English Language Skills all round. You will find this a useful thing to do if your skills are generally rather poor.

You can use it to work on specific points – apostrophes, for example – by looking up what you want in the Contents or Index and going straight to that part of the book.

You can also use the Practice sections in each chapter as exam questions. They can be typed, word processed or handwritten, and will give you practice in writing different documents in a variety of styles.

The book starts with some very basic points about writing English – the length of a sentence, when to use a new paragraph, etc. The exercises in the first few chapters are fairly easy, too.

As you work through the book, you will find that the learning goals get a little more difficult to achieve; this is partly because the English language rules themselves get more complicated, and partly because the exercises are longer and more complex. However, if you work through the chapters in order, this should not be a problem. Rules and ideas you have studied in earlier chapters are repeated in later ones, with reminders of certain basics every now and again.

None of the chapters deals with advanced or very difficult English language skills, but the exercises towards the end of the book will test your knowledge and skills quite considerably.

At the end of the book there are Appendices. Appendix 1 is a list of words which people often cannot remember how to spell.

Appendix 2 is a list of words which people get confused about — their and there, for example; they are called confusibles. You will come across most of the words in Appendix 2 as you work through the book, so will be able to practise using them, as well as being able to look them up quickly.

What this book is not

This is not a book which will teach you how to lay out letters, how to do summaries or answer comprehension questions. All these things are included as exercises, but there are plenty of other books to help you learn how to tackle them. This book is about grammar, spelling and punctuation: once you have decided what to write, it will help you to write it correctly.

About the language

English is a living language, and is changing all the time; what was accepted years ago sounds funny or wrong now. This book tries to use English which is generally acceptable to most people in English speaking countries. In doing this, there may be expressions or words which some people cannot bear to hear or read — 'different to' instead of 'different from', for example. When these expressions occur, the book will use what is still considered grammatically correct ('different from'), but may point out what is becoming generally accepted ('different to'). The author regrets any inconvenience caused while work is in progress!

1 Sentences and Paragraphs

- Learning goals:**
- The right length for a sentence
 - Punctuating the beginnings and ends of sentences
 - When to start a new paragraph
 - Presentation skills
 - Piece/peace
 - Practice/practise

The right length for a sentence

'How long should a sentence be?' is rather like asking 'How long is a piece of string?' The answer is — it depends.

It depends on the idea you want to get across in a sentence, because that is the aim:

one idea = one sentence.

If you switch ideas in mid-sentence by just putting a comma and carrying on, the reader gets muddled. Read this sentence:

The meeting is scheduled to last one hour from 1100 hours, please reserve the Conference Room.

The first part of the sentence is about the time of the meeting. The second part asks the reader to book the room. The two ideas are linked, of course, but they are not the same idea. The following version is easier to read, and is therefore clearer:

The meeting is scheduled to last one hour from 1100 hours. Please reserve the Conference Room.

One good test of whether a sentence is the right length is to read it aloud. If, as you read, you find it difficult to make sense of it, that is probably because it changes ideas in the middle or because it is too long, or both. Please read the two previous examples aloud to yourself, and see which is easier to read. Business sentences are usually better if they are short and to the point.

When you are writing a sentence, ask yourself:

- Am I sticking to one idea?
- Does the sentence feel too long as I read it aloud?

You should be able to answer 'Yes' to the first question and 'No' to the second.



Exercises on sentence length

You are going to write a letter in answer to a job advertisement.

Exercise 1

- 1 Write the first paragraph by doing the following:

Read this sentence aloud to yourself. Try not to take a breath in the middle.

In reply to your advertisement, which I saw in the paper yesterday, I am writing to ask you to send me an Application Form because I think I would enjoy working for your company.

Is the writer sticking to one idea?

Does it feel too long as you read it aloud?

You probably answered 'No' followed by 'Yes', so the sentence needs breaking into two. Where would you break it? The best place to break it is after 'Application Form'; the writer is changing ideas at that point.

- 2 Write the sentences out as you think they should be written.

Exercise 2

- 1 Now add two sentences about the course itself:

Do the same as you did in Exercise 1:

Read the following aloud to yourself

Ask yourself whether the writer changes ideas in mid-sentence and whether the sentence feels too long

I am attending a full-time Office Studies course at our local college, where I am studying for the examinations mentioned in the advertisement, the results should be out by the end of August.

You probably feel that the sentence is too long, but where should you break it? Decide where to make the break and then start a new paragraph and write the two sentences about the course.

- 2 Start another new paragraph and add two sentences of your own, expressing the following ideas:

- (1) You will complete and return the Application Form as soon as you can, but you are on holiday for the next two weeks
- (2) You can go for an interview at any time once you are back home again.

- 3 Proofread your work by reading the whole thing aloud to yourself and by checking it against this version:

In reply to your advertisement, which I saw in the paper yesterday, I am writing to ask you to send me an Application Form. I think I would enjoy working for your company.

I am attending a full-time Office Studies course at our local college, where I am studying for the examinations mentioned in the advertisement. The results should be out by the end of August.

I will complete and return the Application Form to you as soon as possible, but I shall be away on holiday for the next two weeks. As soon as I am back, I shall be able to attend for an interview at any time.

In those six sentences you have expressed six different ideas:

- you are replying to the advertisement
- you think you would enjoy working for the company
- you are attending a course and studying for the right examinations
- the results should be out by the end of August
- you will be away for the next two weeks, so returning the form might be delayed
- after that you are available for an interview.

As you work through the rest of this book, make sure:

**YOUR SENTENCES EXPRESS ONE IDEA and
DO NOT SOUND TOO LONG WHEN READ ALOUD**

Punctuating the beginnings and ends of sentences

This will be a very short section, because the rules are very simple:

ALWAYS START A SENTENCE WITH A CAPITAL LETTER

ALWAYS END A SENTENCE WITH A FULL STOP OR ITS EQUIVALENT (QUESTION MARK OR EXCLAMATION MARK)

People sometimes forget to start with a capital letter, particularly if the first word is I. If you are one of those people, be strict with yourself and check that *all* your sentences start with a capital letter.

If you word process or type your work, you normally leave two spaces after a full stop — it makes the typescript easier to read. You will notice from the layout of this book that printers follow a different rule about spacing between sentences!

If you are inconsistent about your spacing, you may lose marks in examinations.

When to start a new paragraph

Many people find it very difficult to decide when to start a new paragraph. There is no golden rule to follow, but there are some tips which will help you.

When you start a new sentence, unless it happens to be the very first one, ask yourself these questions:

'What have I just been writing about?'

'Is the next sentence about the same subject or topic?'

If the answer to the second question is 'Yes' — keep on with the same paragraph. If the answer is 'No' — start a new one.

The next question is 'What do you mean by a subject or topic?'

Suppose you were writing to someone about your holiday in Corfu. What sorts of things would you write about? Probably:

- The weather
- The food
- The night life
- The other people.