Spelling and Vocabulary

SIMPLIFIED AND SELF-TAUGHT

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to help you make words work for you—in your writing, your reading, your speaking, and even your thinking. You may already know how words can work against you. If your word skills are poor, you have probably felt at a disadvantage in many everyday situations. Poor command of words may even be keeping you from advancing at school or in your job: perhaps your abilities are going unrecognized because of weak writing and communication skills. You may also have found that lack of skill with language is simply limiting or hindering you, even if your problem is not as evident to others as to yourself. Whatever your motivation, this book can help you to overcome many of your difficulties with words, to use words correctly and more effectively.

If you are to benefit from this book, your motivation must be strong enough to see you through a detailed course of study and exercises. You will need self-discipline: No teacher or parent or boss can provide the necessary discipline for you. If you are conscientious about studying the material and doing the exercises, you will be rewarded with improved word skills. It is as simple or as difficult as that.

The book is designed in such a way that you will *see* your progress. As you learn, what once was difficult will become not only easier but even exciting—in the way that solving a puzzle can be exciting—as you apply a skill mastered in one section to the next section and the next kind of problem. Your self-confidence will grow as you strengthen and extend your word power. If you are willing to commit enough time and effort to work through this book systematically and carefully, permanent improvement will be the result. Then, even if your memory sometimes fails you, the word-attack tools you have learned will stay with you.

This book is based on two assumptions: that words can be broken down into parts and that words fall into families and patterns. Therefore, you can analyze word parts and compare one word with others to help unlock word meanings (and even word spellings). Word analysis becomes **word arithmetic:** parts added together form whole words with precise meanings determined by the nature of the parts. This principle makes a wide range of language skills manageable and comprehensible.

In Chapter 1, you will learn how to break a word down into its basic components. Your ability to break words down will enable you to grasp the spelling rules in Chapter 2. Knowledge of spelling rules will help to eliminate common spelling problems, which are often taken as an indication of substandard word skills (especially in business situations). By building on your ability to analyze words, Chapter 3 will increase your vocabulary. You'll learn to use **word arithmetic** to master synonyms and antonyms, and you'll have the opportunity to practice distinguishing among homonym meanings in Chapter 4. Appendix I offers 75 spelling questions of the kind you may encounter on standardized tests; Appendix II does the same for synonyms and antonyms.

Practice and repetition with variety are the methods of this book. Each

chapter begins with a Pretest—or, in the case of Chapter 1, a preliminary exercise—to help you identify your problems and guide your study as you work through the chapter. Short exercises—including word games and puzzles—reinforce and review each principle, and the chapters each conclude with a series of longer exercises and Mastery Tests. Answer Keys are provided for all exercises and tests, and answers for many of the tests refer you to the appropriate review material. After the groundwork is laid, connections are drawn between each principle covered and the ones that precede it. Therefore, your step-by-step progress will gradually lead to mastery of word arithmetic and, finally, to your goal—strong and flexible word skills.

LIMBERING-UP EXERCISE

Directions: *Look at the word below. See how many words of three or more letters you can form from the letters it contains. Any given letter can be used only once in any new word; for example, since our word contains only one* e, *no new word you find can contain more than one* e. *Proper names and foreign words are not allowed.*

c e n t r i f u g a l

(Answers on next page)

I stopped at 179 words:

ace
act
age
agile
alert
alter
angel
angle
arc

cage
can
canful
cant
care
careful
caring
cart
cat
cater
caul
cent
central
certain
clear
clean
cretin
cult

ear
earful
earn
eat
elf
enact
engraft

face
fact
fain
fair
far
farce
fare
fat
fate
faucet
fault

fear
feat
feral
fiat
fig
figure
fir
fire
fit
flag
flair
flat
flint
flirt
flu
fluent
flute
fringe
frugal
fruit
fulgent
fun
furl
futile

gain
gale
gate
gel
gift
gilt
girl
glare
glean
glen
glint
glut
gnat
graft
grain
grate
grateful
grief
grit
guile
guilt
gulf

ice
incur
inert
infect
infer
inflate
inflect
integral
inter
irate
ire

lace
lair
lean
learn
legal
lent
liar
lice
life
lift
line
lint
lug
lunar
lunge

nag
nail
near
nectar
net
nice
nil

raft
rail
rain
rang
rant
rate
real
regal
renal
rent
rift

rig
rile
ring
rite
rue
rug
ruin
rule
run
rune
rung
runt
rut

tag
tail
tale
tan
tear
tearful
tile
tin
tinge
tingle
tire
trace
tragic
trail
train
trial
true
truncate
turn

ulcer
ulna
uncial
uncle
unclear
unfit
unfurl
unit
unite
unlace
unlit
until

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1

WORD PARTS

If you think that your skills with words are weak, it is easy to become intimidated and discouraged about your ability to improve. But words fall into patterns and groups, and it is possible—and not even terribly difficult—to learn the spellings and definitions of a great many words by beginning with what you already know and building upon that knowledge by adding one new piece of information at a time. The key is to follow a system that enables you to make the most of what you know and to learn ways of applying your knowledge to new situations, that is, to unfamiliar words.

At one time or another, you have probably tried to learn vocabulary words or improve your spelling by memorizing long lists of words. You probably gained short-term mastery of a number of them—and then promptly forgot them, perhaps when the test or spelling bee you studied for was over. Memorization is one way of approaching the problem of learning unfamiliar words. It is *one* tool—and also a necessary tool. But it is unrealistic to expect your memory to do the whole job for you. You would not expect to be able to make all your car repairs with just a wrench, nor to build a house with only a hammer, however basic and necessary these tools may be. Improving your language skills is a complex job that requires more than one mental tool. Once you realize this, you can stop blaming yourself for not having remembered every word on that list of words, and you can shed the sense of inferiority and frustration that comes with feeling that you've failed to learn as well as you "ought to" or failed to keep up with others. Then you are free to use your memory constructively—by using it together with your other mental abilities, particularly your ability to compare things, to notice sameness and differences. You can learn to apply the skills you use every day in all the normal activities of your life to this situation too, instead of expecting yourself to perform superhuman feats and setting yourself a standard that is impossible to live up to. The trick is to make use of what you know already.

TAKING STOCK

Since you use English every day, you have an almost intuitive sense of its structure or the way it is put together. Overhearing a stray word in conversation, you can almost always recognize the word as referring to a person or thing, as being a descriptive word, or as conveying action, for example. It's not necessary to know even the grammatical terms *noun, adjective,* or *verb* to be able to tell that *invention* is a thing, that *inventive* describes something or someone, and that *invent* is an action. These three words have the same kernel or base part, *invent,* but whether *invent* stands alone or whether it ends with *ion, ive,* or *ing* tells you

almost immediately what kind of word it is. You can even tell something about how it should be used. If someone says, "an inventive," you expect a word to follow *inventive* for it to refer to, and "to invention a better mousetrap" would not seem like good English to you, even if you thought you understood what the speaker meant to say. Of course, your instinctive knowledge of English is much more sophisticated than this: You can tell very quickly whether *real* is describing something, or whether the word you've heard is *reel,* in which case you swiftly distinguish a *reel* on a fishing rod from a *reel* of film or a dance *reel*—and all these things from actions, to *reel* in a fishing line, for example, or to *reel* from a blow. You can also distinguish a *general* statement from an Army *general* with hardly any effort at all.

Exercise 1

***Directions:** By filling in each blank in the paragraph below with the form of the word* time *that seems right to you, you will prove that you have a grasp of the parts of speech and basic English grammar. You'll also learn something about* homonyms, *a topic we'll return to later. Answers are on page 20.*

[1]Your letter was a _____ reminder that it's already _____ to start planning for the Thanksgiving holiday. [2]It's turkey with sage and *thyme* dressing every year, but somehow the same old menu doesn't seem to lose its _____ appeal. [3]I can _____ the roasting of the turkey by what football game is on television, and at half-_____, I even get some help in the kitchen. [4]_____ have changed, but some things remain the same.

Evidently, putting an ending of a letter or more on the kernel or backbone part of the word allows the word to *function* differently. Also, certain letters or letter combinations coming before the backbone part change the meaning of the word. *Time* is a very general idea, at once very abstract and very familiar, a "thing" that we "measure" in everday minutes and hours. *Times* as used in sentence four narrows down the general idea to a particular segment of time with a beginning and an end. *Halftime* refers to a very specific segment of time indeed. Notice that these three forms of the basic unit-word *time* cannot be simply dropped from the paragraph: The sentences don't make sense if you don't fill in the blanks with these words. This is also true of the first blank in sentence three: Your intuitive sense of English tells you that you must supply a word conveying some kind of action here. On the other hand, "a reminder" can stand by itself in sentence one, and so can "its appeal" in sentence two. Adding a form of *time* to these phrases simply conveys a more specific and exact sense of what the writer means. The letter-combinations *ly* and *less* allow the writer to *adapt* the basic word *time* to describe another word more exactly, or to *modify* it. Clearly, these two letter-combinations allow *time* to *function* differently than the *s* you added in *Times* or the *half* that comes before *time* in *halftime.*

It's important to realize that words are not completely separate units with meanings and spellings that have to be memorized separately, one at a time. Instead, words fall into families and groups, and words that seem very complicated can almost always be broken down until they fit families and groups you are familiar with. You've already seen how one very easy word, *time,* can become

many different words by adding letters at its beginning and end. Look at the following word lists:

time	fair	easy	love
timely	fairly	easily	lovely
untimely	unfairly	uneasily	unlovely

The same letter-combinations tacked onto the base words *time, fair, easy,* and *love* make all four follow a pattern, by changing the meaning of each word in exactly the same way. These letter-combinations, then, can be used with many different words (and this also means many different word groups), and they will always change the words in exactly the same ways. What works with *untimely* also works with

unemotionally
unrelentingly
unscrupulously
unwaveringly

These letter-combinations, therefore, help unlock the meanings of *many* words.

Letters and letter-combinations placed before a word to change its meaning are called **prefixes.** Each prefix has a meaning of its own that modifies the meaning of the word you attach it to: *re,* for example, means "again," so *regain* means "to gain back" or "to gain again"; *remake* means "to make again" or "to make over"; *reinterpret* means "to interpret again." Some typical prefixes are:

ab	de	ir	re
ac	dis	mal	sur
ad	en	mis	trans
bi	il	over	under
com	im	per	
con	in	pro	

You can usually add a prefix to a base word without changing the spelling of either the prefix or the base word:

Prefix	*Base Word*	*New Word*
a	typical	atypical
ab	normal	abnormal
ac	company	accompany
ad	join	adjoin
bi	lateral	bilateral
com	mission	commission
con	duct	conduct
de	centralize	decentralize
dis	organize	disorganize
en	tangle	entangle
il	legible	illegible
im	possible	impossible
in	sincere	insincere
ir	rational	irrational
mis	spell	misspell
mal	practice	malpractice

Prefix	*Base Word*	*New Word*
over	do	overdo
per	form	perform
pre	text	pretext
pro	noun	pronoun
re	flex	reflex
under	go	undergo

Your dictionary will give you the meaning of each prefix and explain where that meaning comes from. The chapter on vocabulary will treat prefixes in greater depth; for now, you should concentrate on recognizing prefixes as one element of a word's *structure*.

Letters or letter-combinations placed after or at the end of a base word are called **suffixes.**

Some common suffixes:

able	less
ed	ly
er	ment
ful	ness
ing	ous

You can add these suffixes to some base words without changing the spelling of either the base word or the suffix.

Base Word	*Suffix*	*New Word*
expend	able	expendable
roar	ed	roared
read	er	reader
use	ful	useful
sink	ing	sinking
ego	ist	egoist
count	less	countless
love	ly	lovely
arrange	ment	arrangement
glad	ness	gladness
peril	ous	perilous

Suffixes change how a word functions, but they don't usually change a word's meaning the way prefixes do. Compare:

prefix *a* + *typical* ⟶ *atypical*

prefix *a* + *moral* ⟶ *amoral*

prefix *im* + *moral* ⟶ *immoral*

prefix *mis* + *spell* ⟶ *misspell*

Each of the prefixes above, when added to the base word, forms a new word that means the opposite of the base word. To spell and to misspell are actions—exactly opposite actions.

spell + suffix *ing* ⟶ *spelling*, a thing (a noun)

spell + suffix *er* ⟶ *speller*, a person or a thing (a noun)

spell + suffix *ed* ⟶ *spelled*, an action done in the past (a verb)

Adding the suffixes above allows *spell*, a verb, to function as a noun or to show the time of an action in the past.

Once you know that *pre* means "before" (*preview, preamble, precede, precaution*), you won't have any trouble telling *pre*fixes from suffixes.

Exercise 2

***Directions:** In the following sentences, add a prefix or suffix to the base word given to complete the sentence. In the blank following the sentence, write* **P** *if you've added a prefix and* **S** *if you've added a suffix. Answers are on page 20.*

elect 1. The candidate did not receive as many votes in the _____ as the polls had predicted. ____

conduct 2. The official was charged with _____ in office, but there was not enough evidence to convict him. ____

judged 3. The game did not go into overtime because the rookie guard _____ the shot. ____

possess 4. The crowd cheered wildly whenever the home team got _____ of the ball. ____

kindle 5. To get the fire going properly, you will need some twigs to use for _____. ____

pitch 6. How your tent is _____ has a lot to do with how comfortable you are when you are camping out. ____

match 7. After I lost the chess game, I asked for a _____ to see if I could win with a different strategy. ____

care 8. In the second match, I made my moves more _____. ____

consider 9. It was very _____ of her to ask if everyone had a ride home from the reception. _____

consider 10. I began to _____ my decision once I learned that he squeezed tubes of toothpaste in the middle. _____

PARTS OF SPEECH

To most people, the word "grammar" means nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions, and other terms of this kind. These are the **parts of speech,** and even if you've never been able to sort them out, you will find that once you put your **language sense** to work, you can learn to identify them and understand how they function—at least, some of them. A thorough study of grammar is beyond the scope of this book, but time spent learning the parts of speech will pay off handsomely in increased word power.

How do you go about changing a problem into a useful tool? We've already touched on how words can be changed by adding suffixes to them. If you can apply what you know about suffixes to the intuitive grasp of English that we've called your *language sense,* you will have a double-strength weapon with which to attack the parts of speech.

First, why learn technical grammatical terms like "noun" and "verb" at all? These words seem old-fashioned, but they've survived and even become more popular again lately because they actually provide a very useful and convenient way of talking about words and sorting them into groups. Look at any page in the dictionary and see how many words, familiar and unfamiliar, are followed by *n.* These words are all nouns, and all of them can be used in the same kinds of ways. For example, *education* is on the same page of my dictionary as *ectoplasm, edict,* and *edifice,* all nouns. Any noun can be the "subject" of a sentence, the "person, place, or thing" about which a statement is made:

Education is important for success in the business world.
Gel-like *ectoplasm* figures in plant movement.
The *edict* was enforced rigorously by the Armed Forces.
The *edifice* is striking architecturally, but it seems abstract and cold.

Once you are sure that a word is a noun, you'll know a lot about how it should be used and how it shouldn't be used. On the other hand, if you see an unfamiliar word used in a way you know nouns are used, you will have some idea of how to go about discovering the word's meaning. For example, the words *a, an,* and *the* can be considered **noun markers.** They indicate that a noun will be either the next word or will follow very shortly. You may not already know the meaning of *edifice,* but once you notice the noun marker and see that *edifice* is the word that the rest of the sentence makes a statement about, you can deduce that it is a noun and then learn about its meaning from the other words in the sentence. *Architecturally* includes the suffix *ly,* which you know (if you remember and think about how you use *timely* and *fairly*) answers the question *how.* The

edifice is striking. How? As architecture. You can conclude that an edifice is a building of some kind, probably a building of some size or importance, or the word *architecturally* would not be applied to it.

One way of classifying words, then, is by function: by parts of speech. Once you can identify a word as a noun or verb, adjective or adverb, you are well on your way to mastering that word.

The following brief descriptions will help you to recognize the parts of speech in your everyday reading and in your own writing. Remember that the more you can learn about how to classify words in groups and patterns, the more your everday thinking skills (like comparing and contrasting) will help improve your spelling and vocabulary—and the less you'll have to rely on memorization alone. Think of the process of classifying by part of speech as detective work with words.

Nouns and Adjectives

This classic definition of a noun works well enough so long as you remember that a noun need not be a person, place, or thing that you can touch. Concepts and ideas are also nouns, like *time* and *mathematics*. You cannot touch a thought, but *thought* is a "thing," a noun. Another way of recognizing nouns is to use the noun-marker test: Put *a, an,* or *the* in front of an unfamiliar word and see how your intuitive language sense responds.

As we've already discussed, your language sense is basically a recognition of word endings, that is, suffixes. As we'll see later, suffixes are not an absolute guide, but, in general, your language sense will provide a good rule of thumb. You know, for example, that English words that end in *able, ous,* and *ful* are not usually nouns. These endings frequently show up on words that describe nouns. Such words are called **adjectives.** Here are some adjectives you know well:

comfort*able*	a comfortable couch
gener*ous*	a generous allowance
plenti*ful*	the plentiful harvest

The same pattern holds true for words you may not know at all:

a diaphan*ous* gown
an ineluct*able* truth
the scurril*ous* diatribe
an imperme*able* membrane

Adjectives answer questions like *whose?, which?,* and *what?*. It is fairly easy to tell the adjectives from the nouns even when the words are unfamiliar. True,

there is the occasional word like *stable* which can be a noun meaning "a home for horses or other domestic animals" or an adjective meaning "well-balanced" or "steady" (a stable individual). For these words you can rely on your dictionary, but first examine the sentence in which the word appears and see if you can push your language sense to determine which function the word serves.

Here is a sentence that demonstrates several things about nouns and adjectives:

> One of Hercules' labors was to clean out the Augean stables, which housed 3,000 oxen and hadn't been cleaned in thirty years.

You will already have spotted a noun-marker, *the,* in the first part of the sentence. You know, therefore, that a noun is about to appear, and in this sentence, it is a good bet that the noun will appear before the comma. The two possibilities, then, are *Augean* and *stables.* Now, one universally accepted truth about English grammar is that in grammatically correct writing, two nouns will appear side by side, with no words or punctuation between them, only if one of them is *not* functioning as a noun in the sentence. You may see a book of "word games," but *word* then tells you what kind of *games* are in question—and *functions* as an adjective. *Augean* and *stables* cannot both be nouns *in this sentence.* It's also probable that both are not adjectives here, since *the* has signalled a noun. Both, however, contain letter-combinations that you have often seen as adjective suffixes: *an* and *able.* As we have said, *stable* can be a noun or an adjective, depending on the sentence. But *stables* can *only* be a noun because *a noun is the only part of speech that can be made plural.* You can have *comfortable chairs,* but you cannot have *comfortables chair* or *comfortables chairs.* In French, Spanish, and in some other languages, adjectives are made plural when they are used to describe plural nouns, but in English, *only* nouns can be made plural. *Americans* can only be a noun.

Of course, this does not mean that every word that ends in *s* is a plural noun. Verbs, for example, often have an *s* at the end: He *walks;* She *runs;* It *does* not work out too well. But when a verb ends in *s,* it is a "singular" verb, not a plural.

> He (one person) walks. We (more than one) walk.

Another characteristic of a noun is that it can be made possessive by adding *'s* or, if the word ends in *s,* an apostrophe (') only : the *woman's* dress, the *boy's* sneakers, the *dogs'* leashes. However, when a noun is made possessive by adding *'s,* it no longer *functions* as a noun—it becomes an adjective. In the phrase *the woman's dress,* a noun marker, *the,* signals a noun to follow shortly, but the noun is *dress. Woman's* describes what dress. In our example sentence about *Hercules' labors,* the proper noun *Hercules* has been made possessive and functions as an adjective answering the question *whose* labors. (A *proper* noun is the name of a *particular* person, place, or thing, and it is always capitalized. Other nouns are called *common* nouns. *New York* is a proper noun; *city* is a common noun.)

Exercise 3

Directions: *Using the noun characteristics described above, find and circle the nouns in the following sentences. Answers are on pages 20 and 21.*

1. The gray kittens were the only ones with white markings.
2. If you pass the entrance, you can turn around at the next exit.
3. The rock concert was sold out well in advance.
4. An argument was the result of our conversation.
5. A quick check showed that none of the three items was missing.
6. I will have to buy some tools to do the job properly.
7. The baby crawls but can't talk yet.
8. One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other.
9. Apparently, it was not a marriage made in heaven.
10. She has a soprano voice, but not a soprano temperament.

Once you have learned to figure out whether an unknown word is a noun or an adjective (or a verb or adverb, which we will discuss shortly), the task of discovering its meaning will be very much easier, whether you have access to a dictionary or have to derive the word's meaning from other words in the sentence.

Certain suffixes indicate nouns:

ance, ence	performance, permanence
ics	economics
ion, tion	union, introduction
ism	socialism
ity	community
ment	department
ness	happiness
tor, ator	actor, aviator

Other suffixes indicate adjectives:

able, ible	personable, edible
al, ial	seasonal, special
ar, iar	similar, familiar
ed	seasoned
ful	peaceful
ic	specific
ish	skittish
less	penniless
ous	jealous
er, est	taller, tallest

Note: When two adjectives are compared, the base adjective usually takes *er*. When two or more adjectives are compared, the base adjective takes *est*.

One film is *longer* than the other.

His first film is the *longest* of the four.