

A Practical
English
Grammar
for Foreign
Students

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**A PRACTICAL
ENGLISH GRAMMAR
FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS**

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PREFACE

THIS book deals with the construction of English from elementary to advanced level and is intended for intermediate and advanced students of English as a foreign language. Though written chiefly for adults it is suitable also for senior forms in schools. It is hoped also that teachers of English as a foreign language may find it useful as a reference book.

Special features of the book are:

1. A very comprehensive index, which should make this Grammar easy to use as a book of reference.
2. A very careful and detailed treatment of those points which students of English find particularly difficult, e.g. auxiliary verbs, the use of the present perfect and simple past tenses, the difference between certain similar words such as 'during' and 'for', &c.
3. A new treatment of the future.
4. Indication where necessary of the difference between ordinary conversational usage and strict grammatical form.
5. A list of over 300 of the more important of the verb + preposition/adverb combinations (e.g. give up, take off, &c.).
6. A chapter on spelling rules.
7. The use of the simplest possible English for all explanations so as to present the minimum difficulty to students who have not yet learned to read English easily.
8. Copious examples in good modern English.

Those using this Grammar as a textbook are warned that it is not a graded course, and that the chapters are not presented in order of difficulty. Difficult sections may therefore be met with in any part of the book, and intermediate students may prefer to omit these on the first reading. It is not, of course, necessary to study the chapters in the order given.

Sets of exercises specially written for use with this Grammar are available, which will, it is hoped, be of assistance to the student. These exercises are graded and a key is provided.

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I

Articles

The Indefinite Article

1. Form

The indefinite article is **a** or **an**. The form **a** is used before a word beginning with a consonant, or a vowel sounded like a consonant:

e.g. a man, a table, a university, a useful thing.

The form **an** is used before words beginning with a vowel (**a, e, i, o, u**) or words beginning with a mute **h**:

e.g. an hour, an honourable man, an egg, an elephant, an apple.

It is the same for all genders:

e.g. a man, a woman, an actor, an actress.

2. The indefinite article, **a** or **an**, is used:

a. Before a singular noun which is countable (i.e. of which there is more than one) when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing:

e.g. A dog is an animal. I see a man.

A house has a roof. A cat can catch a mouse.

b. Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things:

e.g. A cow has horns (i.e. All cows have horns).

An elephant never forgets.

A palm tree is usually very tall.

c. With a noun complement. This includes names of professions:

e.g. He is a doctor.

She is a teacher.

He became a great man. She is a good girl.

d. Before certain numerical expressions: a dozen, half a dozen, a score (20), a gross (144), a hundred, a thousand, a million, and before: a lot of, a great many of, a great deal.

e. In expressions of price, speed, ratio, &c.:

e.g. sixpence a pound, a shilling a dozen, sixty miles an hour, four times a day, ten shillings a yard.

f. Idiomatically with **few** and **little**. There is a great difference between **few** and **a few** (used for countables), and between **little** and **a little** (used for uncountables). **A few** and **a little** mean 'a small number', 'a small amount'. **Few** or **little**, on the contrary, denote scarcity or lack:

e.g. I have a house and a few acres of land and I grow vegetables for sale (i.e. I have a minimum of three or four acres and possibly more).

I have few friends and I am often lonely ('few' meaning 'not many').

I have very little money. I can't afford to go to the cinema.

g. In exclamations before singular, countable nouns:

e.g. What a hot day! What a pretty girl! Such a pity!

but What pretty girls! What big dogs! (plural nouns, so no article. See 3).

h. **a** can be placed before 'Mr/Mrs/Miss' + surname:

e.g. a Mr Smith, a Mrs Smith, a Miss Smith.

'A Mr Smith' means 'a man called Smith' and implies that he is a stranger to the speaker.

'Mr Smith', without **a**, implies that the speaker knows Mr Smith or knows of his existence.

(For the difference between **a/an** and **one** see 25.)

3. The indefinite article is **not** used:

a. Before plural nouns.

The indefinite article has no plural form. Therefore the plural of 'a dog' is 'dogs' without article.

Other examples:

Singular: An owl is a bird. Plural: Owls are birds.
 „ A cow gives milk. „ Cows give milk.

(For some before plural nouns see 26.)

b. Before certain nouns which are considered uncountable in English: e.g. advice, information, news, baggage, luggage:

e.g. He gave me good advice.

These nouns are often preceded by expressions such as: some, a little, a piece of, a lot of, &c.:

e.g. He has a lot of luggage.

c. Before uncountable nouns such as: glass, wood, iron, stone, paper, cloth (i.e. names of materials), and milk, tea, money, grass, corn, &c.:

e.g. I write on paper. Tables are made of wood.

These, similarly, are often preceded by the expressions: some, a little, &c.:

e.g. some milk, a piece of butter, a lot of money.

Some of these nouns, of course, can be used as countable nouns and are then preceded by the article:

e.g. a glass of water, a daily paper (newspaper),
 a wood (a small forest), an electric iron.

d. Before abstract nouns such as: truth, beauty, happiness, fear, joy:

e.g. Beauty is truth (Keats).

The Definite Article

The definite article is **the**. It is the same for singular and plural and for all genders:

e.g. the boy, the boys, the girl, the girls, the tree, the trees.

4. The definite article is used:

a. Before nouns of which there is only one:

e.g. the earth, the sky, the sea, the weather, the North Pole.

b. Before a noun which has become definite by being mentioned a second time:

e.g. There is *a* tree in the garden. *The* tree is an oak.

c. Before a noun made definite by the addition of a phrase or clause:

e.g. The place where I met him. The boy who won the race.

The girl in the white hat. The books that I bought.
The man on the donkey.

d. Before a noun which, by reason of locality, can represent only one particular thing:

e.g. Mary is in the garden (i.e. the garden of this house).
He was ill and sent for the doctor (i.e. his own doctor).
Please pass the sugar (i.e. the sugar on the table).

e. Before superlative adjectives:

e.g. Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in Europe.
She chose the most expensive bag in the shop.

f. Before singular nouns used to represent a class of objects:

e.g. The cuckoo is a lazy bird (i.e. All cuckoos are lazy birds).
The ant is industrious.

g. Before an adjective used to represent a class of persons:

e.g. We should help the poor (see also 18).
He has put down the mighty from their seat. (*Magnificat.*)
Cowards die many times before their death;
The valiant never taste of death but once. (Shakespeare.)

h. Before names of seas, rivers, chains of mountains, groups of islands, plural names of countries:

e.g. the Atlantic Ocean, the Thames, the Alps, the Orkneys,
the Netherlands, the U.S.A.

5. The definite article is not used:

a. Before countries, towns, streets, proper names:

e.g. Mr Smith went to England and bought a house in London.

b. Before abstract nouns used in a general sense:

e.g. Men fear death.

But when abstract nouns are used in a particular sense they are preceded by the article:

e.g. The death of the Prime Minister led to the fall of his Party.

c. Before places of assembly such as: church, school, market, &c., when these places are visited for their primary purpose:

e.g. We go (come, &c.) to school	(to study)
to market	(to sell or buy)
to church	(to pray)
to prison	(as a punishment)
Note also: to bed	(to sleep)

Similarly, we can be: at school, at market, at church, at sea, and: in prison, in bed.

But when these places are visited for any other purpose the article is used:

e.g. You will get a bus at the church.

I went to the school to see the headmaster (see also 80 *a*).

d. Before **home** when it means the home of the speaker, or the person spoken to:

e.g. Go home. Stay at home (see also 80 *b*).

e. After a noun in the possessive case, i.e. before the person or thing possessed:

e.g. the boy's uncle.

f. Before a noun preceded by a possessive adjective:

e.g. the book, the blue book

but my book, my blue book.

II

Nouns

6. Kinds

There are four kinds of nouns in English:

1. Common nouns e.g. dog, table, man.
2. Proper nouns e.g. Tom, France, Madrid, Mrs Smith.
3. Abstract nouns e.g. charity, beauty, fear, courage, joy.
4. Collective nouns e.g. swarm, team, crowd, flock, group.

7. Gender

English genders are extremely simple, because all inanimate things are neuter:

1. Masculine gender: men, boys, and male animals.
2. Feminine gender: women, girls, and female animals.
3. Common gender: a few nouns which can be either male or female, such as: teacher, friend, parent, child.
4. Neuter gender: all inanimate things, such as: chair, tree, table, book, garden.

The moon is usually considered feminine, so are ships and sometimes cars and trains, while the sun is masculine.

Some nouns have a different form for masculine and feminine:

e.g. man—woman, lord—lady, boy—girl, bull—cow

Others form the feminine from the masculine by adding **ess**;

e.g. actor, actress manager, manageress waiter, waitress

Notice that many words ending in **er** or **or** drop the **e** or the **o**.

Many words have the same form for masculine and feminine:

e.g. author, poet, dentist, driver, cook, rider, artist

It is sometimes possible to place the prefixes **man** or **woman** before the above words when it is necessary to emphasize the sex. This is only usual, however, in general statements:

e.g. Some people think that men drivers are even worse than women drivers.

Genders only affect nouns and pronouns, as adjectives in English do not agree with nouns.

8. Plurals

The plural of a noun is usually made by adding **s** to the singular:

e.g. dog, dogs day, days house, houses

Exceptions:

a. Nouns ending in **o** or **ss**, **sh**, **ch**, or **x** form their plural by adding **es**:

e.g. tomato, tomatoes kiss, kisses brush, brushes
watch, watches box, boxes

But foreign or abbreviated words ending in **o** add **s** only:

e.g. piano, pianos dynamo, dynamos photo, photos

b. Nouns ending in **y** following a consonant form their plural by dropping the **y** and adding **ies**:

e.g. baby, babies lady, ladies country, countries fly, flies

Nouns ending in **y** following a vowel form their plural by adding **s** only:

e.g. donkey, donkeys boy, boys day, days

c. Twelve nouns ending in **f** or **fe** drop the **f** or **fe** and add **ves**. These nouns are: wife, life, knife, wolf, self, calf, shelf, leaf, loaf, thief, sheaf, half:

e.g. wife, wives wolf, wolves loaf, loaves, &c.

The nouns scarf, wharf, and hoof take either **s** or **ves** in the plural, i.e. their plurals are: scarfs *or* scarves, wharfs *or* wharves, hoofs *or* hooves respectively.

Other words ending in *f* or *fe* add *s* in the plural in the ordinary way:

e.g. cliff, cliffs handkerchief, handkerchiefs fife, fifes

d. A few nouns form their plural by a vowel change:

e.g. man, men woman, women foot, feet mouse, mice
louse, lice goose, geese

The plural of 'child' is 'children'.

The plural of 'penny' is either 'pennies' or 'pence'. 'Pennies' is used when referring to individual coins, and 'pence' when the amount only is being considered:

e.g. You need four pennies to make a telephone call from a public box (i.e. four coins).

but This costs fourpence.

e. A few names of fish and animals do not change in the plural: sheep, deer, salmon, trout, fish, grouse, &c.:

e.g. one sheep, two sheep one fish, six fish, &c.

Some measurements and numerals do not change either (see 301, 305).

f. Words which retain their original Greek or Latin forms make their plurals according to the rules of Greek or Latin:

e.g. <i>agendum</i> , <i>agenda</i>	<i>memorandum</i> , <i>memoranda</i>
<i>erratum</i> , <i>errata</i>	<i>phenomenon</i> , <i>phenomena</i>
<i>radius</i> , <i>radii</i>	<i>terminus</i> , <i>termini</i>
<i>crisis</i> , <i>crises</i>	<i>appendix</i> , <i>appendices</i>
<i>basis</i> , <i>bases</i>	<i>oasis</i> , <i>oases</i>
<i>axis</i> , <i>axes</i>	

Sometimes there are two plural forms with different meanings:

e.g. *index*, *indexes* (lists of contents of books)
indices (a mathematical term)

genius, *geniuses* (extraordinarily intelligent persons)
genii (supernatural beings)

But there is a tendency, particularly with fairly common Latin

or Greek words, to make the plural according to the rules of English:

e.g. dogma, dogmas formula, formulas

g. Compound nouns

Normally the last word is made plural:

e.g. armchair, armchairs bookcase, bookcases

Where **man** or **woman** is prefixed, both parts are made plural:

e.g. manservant, menservants

Compound nouns formed with prepositions or adverbs make only the first word plural:

e.g. sister-in-law, sisters-in-law looker-on, lookers-on

Where the compound noun has an adjective as the last word, the first word is usually made plural:

e.g. court martial; courts martial

Words in **ful** usually make their plural in the ordinary way:

e.g. handful, handfuls armful, armfuls

9. Cases of nouns

a. English nouns have no case endings except in the possessive case. We say, however, that they are in the nominative, accusative, or dative case according to the work that they do in the sentence.

A noun is in the nominative case when it is:

(*a*) the subject of a sentence:

e.g. *Tom* drove the car.

(*b*) the complement of the verb **to be**, **to seem**, &c.:

e.g. He is my *father*.

b. A noun is in the accusative case when it:

(*a*) is the direct object of a verb:

e.g. We ate the *octopus*.

or (*b*) follows a preposition:

e.g. We went to the *river*.