

Academic Writing Course

COLLINS STUDY SKILLS
IN ENGLISH

R. R. Jordan

Collins Study Skills in English

ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

R. R. Jordan

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INTRODUCTION—GUIDE TO THE BOOK

The Aim of the Course

- 1 To enable the non-native speaker of English who wishes to follow a course in the medium of English at tertiary level to express himself coherently in writing
- 2 To provide samples of academic writing and appropriate practice material for such students and also for those students who need to write essays or reports in English at an intermediate to advanced level
- 3 To act as a revision course for students who have previously learned English as a foreign language at school and who probably learned English with the sentence as the grammatical unit. These students may now need to write in English for academic purposes

The Organisation of the Course

The book is divided into three parts: *Part 1*—Fundamentals, *Part 2*—Functions, *Part 3*—Appendices

Part 1 looks at difficulties that students often experience in writing. It examines the types of error that are frequently made and gives practice in correcting errors. It looks at the organisation and style of writing that is needed for academic purposes. There is a *Key* to the exercises at the end of the book.

Part 2 is the main part of the book. The grammatical features of English have been organised into language functions that are used to express a particular notion or idea. Written practice is given at different levels within each Unit. A *Key* to the exercises is included at the end of the book.

Part 3 acts as a bank of reference material which contains information and examples generally useful to the student when he is writing. This is referred to both in Parts 1 and 2.

The book is concerned with aspects of writing at all the different levels: the details of spelling and punctuation, the use of grammatical constructions and the appropriate style for academic writing.

Using the Book

Parts 1 and 2 should be worked through in sequence. *Part 3* should be referred to when necessary.

Part 2 is arranged as follows:

Each of the first 8 Units has three stages which are graded in the amount of help and guidance they give. The final 2 Units are divided into two stages and give opportunities for revising the previous eight Units. Most of the Units have a *Structure and Vocabulary Aid* at the end of the Unit to provide assistance with the words and grammatical constructions needed in the Unit. The *Key* at the end of the book provides additional comments on the exercises and answers to most of the exercises. Normally, the answers to each exercise should be checked before proceeding to the next exercise.

To the Teacher: Suggestions

- 1 After the students have completed the section on Spelling in *Chapter 1* (p 12), it would be useful to select a number of words from the list of 40 and give a dictation. This will help to establish the sound/spelling relationship. It would also be useful to dictate some short sentences containing some of the difficult words.
- 2 In a number of the Units in *Part 2* there are *blank-filling exercises* to be done after reading a text. These can be used with some flexibility: students who have difficulty could look at the text again or at the same time as they are writing. Other students could do the exercises without referring back to the text. Advanced students could try to do the exercises *before* looking at the text. In other words, they would be trying to anticipate or predict the language needed from the context of the sentence.
- 3 Very early in *Part 2* of the book (Unit 1, Stage 3, Section 3, page 34) there is an opportunity for students to write reasonably freely, although based on a model. This is deliberately arranged so that the students and you may see the areas of difficulty that they still have.
- 4 Some groups of students may be studying the same academic subject, e.g. one of the sciences, economics and so on. If this is the case, then it would be helpful if you could devise some questions related to their specific subject at the end of Stage 3 for each Unit.
- 5 Some students may need practice in writing quickly, especially if they are preparing for an examination in which a limited time is given to answer questions or write an essay. Such students could be given a certain time limit in which to write some of the exercises, particularly those in Stage 3 in the later Units.

References

- Common Errors in Written English*—J. Y. K. Kerr—Longman.
An Intermediate English Practice Book—S. Pit Corder—Longman.
(Sections 12–14: Spelling, Word Building and Words)
A Practical English Grammar—A. J. Thomson and A. V. Martinet—O.U.P.
(Chapter 33: Spelling Rules)
Handwriting - A Workbook and Teacher's Book—J. Bright and R. Piggott—C.U.P.
A Communicative Grammar of English—G. Leech and Jan Svartvik—Longman.
A Grammar of Contemporary English—Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik—Longman.

Part 1

FUNDAMENTALS

The notes on the exercises and the answers are in the Key at the end of the book (page 97)

CHAPTER 1

ACCURACY: AWARENESS AND CORRECTION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the common types of error that are often made by students when writing formal or academic English. The first step is to be aware that an error has been made, the second step is to recognise or identify it; the third step is to correct it. Of course, it is far better not to make the error in the first place! If you look carefully at what follows in this chapter it should help you *not* to make some of the mistakes in your writing.

1 Some common causes of error

- (1) Probably the biggest cause of error is *literal translation* from your own language into English. If you try to translate word for word you will make mistakes.

For example: in one Asian language the sentence "John said nothing" would be rendered as (translated) "John nothing spoke". It is easy to see that when translating into English the *word order* and the *sentence structure* could cause difficulties, and also the *vocabulary*.

ADVICE Try to remember English sentence patterns when you read them and try to use them in your writing.

- (2) If you write in *long complex sentences* it is easier to make mistakes: the sentence becomes complicated and the subject and verb tenses may become confused.

ADVICE Try to write in fairly short sentences (perhaps at most about three lines) until you are confident that there are no mistakes.

- (3) If you try to write English in the same way as you speak it, you will probably write in the *wrong style*. Spoken language is often *informal*. Academic writing is normally rather *formal*.

ADVICE Try to recognise a formal style of writing and use it. Do not mix it with an informal style.

2 Some common types of error

- (1) Subject and verb agreement (i.e. concord), particularly singular and plural subject with the correct verb form.
- (2) The use of 's' at the end of the third person singular, present simple tense (i.e. stem + s).
- (3) (a) 'This' + singular noun, 'these' + plural noun,
(b) 'Other' and 'another' differences.
- (4) Uncountable nouns are often wrongly used (as if they were countable nouns).
- (5) When the impersonal 'It' or 'There' subject should be used, it is often wrongly omitted.
- (6) Verb tense use confused, particularly the present continuous (used too

- frequently) and present simple.
- (7) The formation of some verb tenses is not known, particularly the present passive. The formation of the past tenses of irregular verbs also causes difficulty.
 - (8) 'No' and 'not': differences in using the negatives.
 - (9) The formation and use of some of the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs.
 - (10) The correct use of:
 - (a) some prepositions (e.g. *in, on, at, for*)
 - (b) the articles: *a/an/the*
 - (c) relative pronouns: *who, which*
 - (d) possessive adjectives: *his, her, their*.
 - (11) Confusion over the choice of vocabulary, e.g. 'make' and 'do'. The choice of synonyms will often depend on *usage* (or *context*) as much as on *meaning*.
 - (12) Spelling mistakes.

3 Practice in areas of language difficulty

The following sections in this chapter will give you practice in some of the areas of language that commonly cause difficulty; these were noted above. The main areas are:

Spelling and Punctuation
Grammar and Vocabulary
Style and Appropriateness

The practice given in this chapter can only be brief. If you find that you still make a number of errors or have difficulty after completing the exercises, look at the references given at the end of this chapter. The books referred to there give more practice in the areas of difficulty.

- (1) Each time you do an exercise and practise the language you should be as *accurate* as possible: copy carefully.
- (2) If you make a mistake, learn from it. Try *not* to repeat an error.
- (3) Do not forget the seemingly simple or obvious elements in writing, e.g. write as *legibly* or *clearly* as possible. Remember, if someone cannot *read* your writing it does not matter how accurate it is!
- (4) Check your *punctuation*: if you have used a full-stop (.) it indicates the end of a sentence and immediately after it the next sentence will begin with a capital letter.
- (5) Do *not* mix capital letters and small letters within a word: it gives the impression that you are uneducated!
- (6) Remember to divide your writing into *paragraphs*: it makes it easier to read and creates a better impression.

NOTE: If you have any difficulty with any of the language items practised in this or the next chapter, or with your handwriting, look carefully at the *Appendices*: they contain a lot of useful information and examples.

SPELLING

Exercise 1 Recognition

Each word on p. 12 in CAPITAL LETTERS to the left of the line is spelled correctly. The same word is repeated correctly *once* in small letters in the list of four words to the right of the line. Draw a circle around each word to the right of the line that is the *same*

as the word to the left: e.g.

41 BELIEVE beleave belief believe beleve

or write the correct letter next to each number: e.g. C41.

- (1) If you have difficulty with English spelling or writing, do the exercise by looking carefully at the word in capital letters and try to match it with one of the words in small letters.
- (2) If you think you do not have much difficulty with English spelling or writing, look first at the word in capital letters *and then cover it up* before you look at the words in small letters.

| | A | B | C | D |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 ACCOMMODATION | acommodation | acomodation | accommodation | acomodation |
| 2 ACHIEVE | acheve | achieve | acheive | achive |
| 3 APPLICABLE | applicible | aplicable | applicable | applicabel |
| 4 BEGINNING | biginning | beginning | begining | begginig |
| 5 CHOICE | choise | chose | choose | choice |
| 6 CRITICISM | criticism | criticism | critisism | critism |
| 7 DEVELOPMENT | development | divelopment | development | divelopment |
| 8 DISAPPEARED | disapeared | dissapeared | dissapeared | disappeared |
| 9 DIVIDED | diveded | divedid | devided | divided |
| 10 EMPHASIS | emphasis | emphases | emphasise | emphisis |
| 11 EXPERIMENTAL | expiremental | experemental | experimental | expirimental |
| 12 FOREIGNER | foreigner | foriegner | forienger | foreinger |
| 13 FREQUENTLY | friquently | frequently | frecuently | frequently |
| 14 GOVERNMENT | goverment | government | governement | goverment |
| 15 HEIGHT | heigt | height | heigth | hieght |
| 16 HYPOTHESIS | hypophysis | hypotheses | hypothesis | hypophesis |
| 17 INCREASINGLY | increasingly | increingly | increasingly | increasingely |
| 18 INSUFFICIENT | insufficent | insuficient | insufficient | insuffecient |
| 19 INTERESTING | intresting | intiresting | interisting | interesting |
| 20 INTERVIEWED | interviewed | interviewed | interviewied | interviewed |
| 21 KNOWLEDGE | knowlege | knowledge | knoledge | knowledge |
| 22 LABOURERS | labours | laborers | labourers | laboures |
| 23 MAINTAINING | maintaning | mantaining | maintianing | maintaining |
| 24 MEDICINE | medisine | medecine | medesine | medicine |
| 25 NECESSARY | necessary | necessary | necessary | necessarry |
| 26 OCCUPATION | occupatation | occupation | ocupation | occupatation |
| 27 OCCURRED | occured | ocurred | ocured | occurred |
| 28 PREDOMINANTLY | predominantly | predominately | predominatly | predominently |
| 29 RAISED | riased | rised | raised | araised |
| 30 REFERRING | referring | refering | reffering | refereeing |
| 31 RESEARCH | reserch | research | reaserch | risearch |
| 32 RESOURCES | resources | resources | risources | resorses |
| 33 SCHOOLS | shools | scools | school | schools |
| 34 STUDYING | stuyding | studing | studying | istudying |
| 35 SUCCESSFUL | successfull | successful | sucessfull | successfull |
| 36 TECHNIQUES | techniques | technics | technicues | teckniques |
| 37 THOROUGH | thorought | thorough | through | trough |
| 38 WHETHER | wether | weather | wheather | whether |
| 39 WHICH | whitch | wich | witch | which |
| 40 WRITING | writeing | writing | writing | wraiting |

Now check your answers with those given on page 98

Exercise 2 Correction

The following 10 words are all spelled *wrongly*. You have already seen them spelled *correctly* in Exercise 1. *Without* looking back at Exercise 1 write out the 10 words correctly.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1 acheve | 6 mantaning |
| 2 freqantly | 7 medecine |
| 3 incresingely | 8 reaserch |
| 4 insufficient | 9 reffering |
| 5 interverwed | 10 sucessfull |

Now check your answers on page 98

Exercise 3 Correction

The following 10 words are all spelled *wrongly*. Many of the mistakes are similar to the mistakes shown in Exercise 1. Try to write the words *correctly*. If you have great difficulty use a dictionary, but only after you have *attempted* the correction by yourself.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1 seperatly | 6 conscioseness |
| 2 prefered | 7 embarassed |
| 3 recieve | 8 preceed |
| 4 recomendasion | 9 discucion |
| 5 enviroment | 10 characteristics |

Now check your answers on page 98

For extra information on sounds and spelling see *Appendix 2 Sounds and Spelling* (page 76)

PUNCTUATION

The most commonly used punctuation marks and their names are as follows

comma , full-stop colon : semi-colon ; hyphen -
apostrophe (John's) question mark ? dash —
quotation marks (or inverted commas) “ ” or ‘ ’ exclamation mark !
brackets (or parentheses) ()

See *Appendix 3* for guidance on the use of punctuation marks and capital letters (page 79)

Exercise 1

In the following passage put the correct punctuation marks *in the spaces underlined*. Also add CAPITAL LETTERS where necessary.

the first of the great civic universities established in england _ manchester is today the largest unitary university in the united kingdom and an internationally famous centre of learning and research _ it is well _ endowed with resources and facilities _ the university library _ for instance _ is one of the four big academic libraries in the country _ and the university has its own modern theatre _ television studios _ and

gallery _ museum _ shopping centre and _ of course _ extensive sports facilities _

Now turn to page 99 and check your answers

Exercise 2

Now copy out the passage below putting in the correct punctuation marks. Remember to use CAPITAL LETTERS where appropriate.

mr brown had been teaching english abroad for a number of years, he had forgotten how cold it could be in england in the winter it was often dull and grey in november but it could be really cold in december january and february even in the spring it could snow mr brown looked out of the window as the train crossed the river avon he remembered the weather forecast that he had heard on the bbc at 9 oclock that tuesday morning it said that it would be wet and windy in the north west manchester where he was now travelling to was unfortunately in the north west

Now turn to page 99 for the answers

GRAMMAR

Some areas of language consistently cause difficulty. Some of the main ones have been selected for practice.

I In the sentences below there are a number of errors they have been underlined. On the lines beneath each sentence *write the whole sentence correctly*

- 1 Table 3 is showing that most of this accidents occurs to young children.

- 2 Each worker pay a small money which is taken from their salary.

- 3 Specialist doctors in hospitals can divide into surgeons which operate _____ the body and another specialsts which act as consultants

- 4 The number of schools growed gradually till 1965 and then _____ number rised suddenly

- 5 When a country apply for foreign aids _____ is because it has no enough resources of its own.

Turn to pages 99/100 and check your answers.

II In the sentences on the next page there are a number of errors: many of them are similar to the errors made in Section I. First underline the error and then *write the whole sentence correctly* on the lines provided

- 1 If somebody become ill, then can go to local doctor

- 2 To my opinion, there is many parent which did not take care their children

- 3 In the other hand, if we look the table of accidents, we will see this facts

- 4 In my country we have other kind of system, it is bigger and more better

- 5 The problem was solve by the introduction of machineries

Now turn to page 101 and check your answers

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary is a very large subject. It really requires a book to itself, in other words, a dictionary. In fact, a good mono-lingual English dictionary is the best book that you as a student of English, can buy. Recommended ones, especially compiled for the student of English are:

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English—A. S. Hornby—O. U. P.
Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English—P. Procter—Longman
Collins English Learner's Dictionary—D. J. Carver, M. J. Wallace, J. Cameron—Collins.

Often a wrong word is used because a wrong choice has been made between similar words or synonyms. The choice of *synonyms* will often depend on *usage*, or *context*, as much as on *meaning*. A good English dictionary will give examples of usage or context that will help you to choose the correct word.

Some attention is given below to a few words that frequently cause difficulty to students. *Read the information and examples carefully.*

I Verbs

1 MAKE and DO

The basic meanings are: *make*: construct, produce, form, shape, create
do: perform, carry out, act.

However, there are large lists of idiomatic expressions containing these two verbs; they can be found in the dictionaries referred to above.

LOOK AT THESE EXAMPLES

Considerable progress has been *made* with the ~~experiment~~ *research*.

He found that he could not *do* the research.

He *made* a number of attempts to finish the ~~work~~.

She had some difficulty in *doing* her homework.

Many discoveries have been *made* this century.

2 SAY and TELL

The basic meanings are *say* speak or produce words
tell give information, make known, order or direct

NOTICE THE CONSTRUCTIONS

say something (to somebody) or *say* (to somebody) something.
tell someone something.

EXAMPLES

The lecturer *said* that he would finish early

He *said* to her that it did not matter

She *told* him not to worry

My tutor *told* me to come back later

3 LEND and BORROW

The basic meanings are *lend* give somebody the use of something for a period of time
borrow use someone's property (that is to be returned)

NOTE *lend* something to somebody or *lend* somebody something
borrow something (from somebody)

EXAMPLES

Mr Smith *lent* his dictionary to the student

Dr Green said he would *lend* Alan his book on fertilizers.

Sandra tried to *borrow* some money from the bank

4 RISE, ARISE, RAISE, INCREASE

rise (intransitive, i.e. without a direct object) go up, get up, go higher

e.g. Prices continue to *rise*

The cost of living index *rose* by 10% last year

The sun usually *rises* at 5 a.m. in the summer

NOTE. *rise* is also a noun, meaning an increase.

e.g. There was a *rise* in prices caused by a *rise* in wages.

arise (intransitive) come into existence, appear

e.g. A new problem has *arisen* in the college

An unexpected difficulty *arose* when he was analysing the results

NOTE *arise*, meaning 'to get up' (e.g. He *arose* very early) is seldom used now

raise (transitive, i.e. takes a direct object) lift up, make higher, cause to rise

e.g. Bus fares were *raised* three times last year.

The landlord said he is going to *raise* the rent

Also to bring up for discussion or attention

e.g. He *raised* a new point in the seminar

And to manage to get, obtain

e.g. He *raised* a loan. He tried to *raise* money for a new project

increase (transitive and intransitive) make or become greater in size, number, degree, etc

e.g. The Chancellor of the Exchequer *increased* the tax on petrol in his last Budget.

The population has *increased* by 200 000 to a total of 50 million.

NOTE: *increase* can sometimes be **used** instead of *raise* or *rise*.

e.g. in the above two sentences *raised* could be used in the first and *has risen* in the second.

NOTE: *increase* is also a noun, meaning **rise**.

e.g. There was a steady *increase* in population.

II Pairs of words often confused

| <i>NOUN</i> | <i>VERB</i> | <i>NOUN</i> | <i>ADJECTIVE</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| practice | practise | politics | political |
| advice | advise | mathematics | mathematical |
| effect | affect | statistics | statistical |
| choice | choose | logic | logical |

| <i>ADJECTIVE</i> | <i>VERB</i> |
|------------------|-------------|
| loose | lose |

NOTE: the adjective *economical* relates to **saving** money, not to the *economy*.

NOTE ALSO: (1) two adjectives are often confused, partly because of spelling mistakes: *later* (late, later, latest) and *latter* (the second of two things already mentioned, contrasted with *former*, meaning the first of two).

(2) two adverbs are often confused: *very* (to give emphasis, e.g. very good) and *too* (excessively, e.g. too expensive)

III Exercise

In the spaces in the following sentences write the correct form of the word chosen from the list that is given.

- 1 He _____ a big effort to finish in time. (do/make)
- 2 The painting was _____ by a famous artist (do/make)
- 3 His supervisor _____ him to prepare a talk (tell/say)
- 4 It is possible to _____ four books at a time from the library (read/borrow)
- 5 The oil crisis _____ the price of petrol (rise/arise/raise)
- 6 Last year the price of food _____ by 15%. (rise/arise/raise)
- 7 Tutors often give good _____ (advice/advise) but students sometimes _____ (choice/choose) not to follow it
- 8 Of _____ (mathematics/mathematical) and _____ (politics/political), the former is, perhaps, more _____ (logic/logical) than the _____ (later/latter)

Now check your answers with those given on pages 101/102. If you have made any mistakes look again carefully at sections I and II above; if necessary, look at the *List of Irregular Verbs* (Appendix 5), page 84.