

AN

A-Z

OF

**ENGLISH
GRAMMAR
& USAGE**

**GEOFFREY
LEECH**

An A–Z of English Grammar and Usage

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Introduction

1. Who is this book for?

This book is a basic guide to the grammar and usage of English for anyone learning or teaching the language. If you are a learner, it is a reference book in which to look up problems you encounter in using the language, as well as a book to find out more about the way English works. If you are a teacher, it is a basic reference book to turn to when faced with something you are not sure of, as well as a source book to help you present grammar in class.

2. How is this book organised?

To make grammar as accessible as possible, *An A–Z of English Grammar and Usage* is arranged alphabetically, like a dictionary. There are plenty of cross references so that, to look things up, it is not necessary to know any grammatical terms. For example, to find information on “the articles”, you could look up *a*, *the*, *zero article* or *articles*, or, for information on conditionals, you could look up *conditionals*, *if* or *unless*. You could even look up the ending *-ed* to find information on the past tense and the past participle. Because of this alphabetical arrangement, there is no need for an index.

3. What is in this book?

There are three kinds of entry in this book.

- (i) There are ordinary words of the language, such as *if*, *when*, *should*, and parts of words, such as the verb ending *-ing*.
- (ii) There are grammatical terms such as *conditional*, *present perfect*, *sentence*, *clause*.
- (iii) There are entries which cover a variety of things not usually found in a book on grammar. Some, such as *invitations*, *thanking people*, *apologies*, *agreeing and disagreeing* give examples of how grammar is used to perform these functions. Others, such as *intonation*, *stress*, *spelling*, *paragraphs*, show how the language is written and spoken. And others, such as *letter-writing*, *formal and informal English*, *geographical names*, give information on a variety of topics.

At the end of the book, there is a list of irregular verbs.

4. What kind of grammar is in this book?

The grammar “rules” in this book are the rules of standard English. Incorrect English is shown by crossing out, e.g.: Adam is very ~~muçfi~~ old. This is a descriptive grammar book and, where a form is considered right by some native speakers and wrong by others, we point this out without being prescriptive. Where American usage is different from British English, the difference is briefly described.

5. How to use this book.

An A–Z of English Grammar and Usage is a reference book. The complete list of entries will show at a glance which words appear in the book. But the book can also be read to find out about the forms and structures of grammar. In that case, we suggest you begin by reading the entries for *sentence* and *clause*, and the entries for word classes (parts of speech): *noun*, *verb*, *adjective*, *preposition*, *conjunction*, *pronoun*, *determiner*. From these, cross-references will lead you to other aspects of grammatical structure, such as *subject*, *object*, *phrase* and *adverbial clause*.

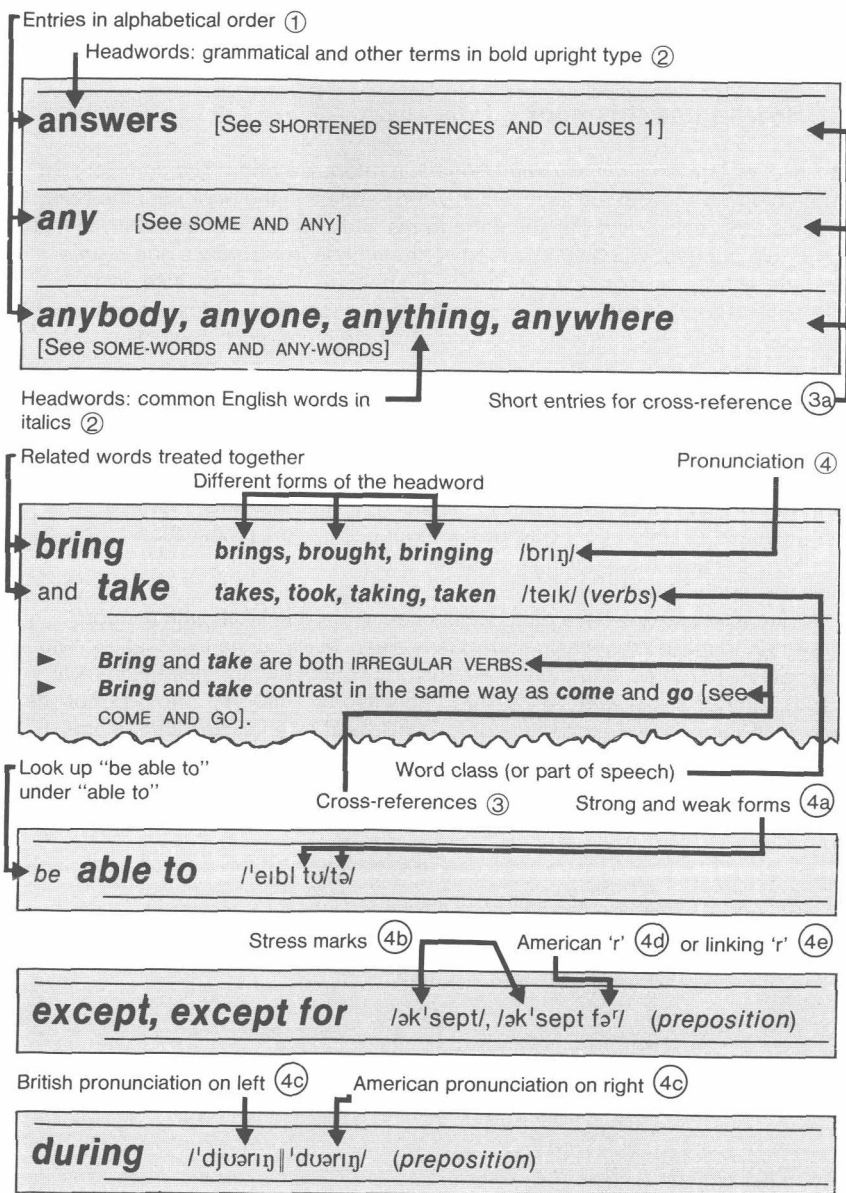
6. How does this book describe grammar?

The explanations in this book avoid difficult grammatical terms. However, it is not possible to write about grammar without using some grammatical terms. If you do not know the meanings of these, you can look them up in their alphabetical position.

All the explanations have carefully chosen examples, often with cartoon drawings to make the meaning absolutely clear. Many of the explanations use diagrams and tables, and there are structural patterns where helpful. In most cases, entries begin with “key points” indicated by a flag: ►. The descriptions usually begin with an explanation of form followed by an explanation of use.

How to use this book

On these pages, pieces from different entries are shown to help you make full use of the features of the book. The numbers ①, ② etc. on the left hand pages refer to the explanations on each facing right hand page.



Detailed explanations

The numbers below, (1), (2), etc., refer to numbers on the opposite page and give further help in explaining the features of this book.

1 Alphabetical arrangement

Entries are arranged alphabetically to help you find what you need easily. You can look up common English words like *the*, *can*, endings like *-ing*, grammatical terms like *noun*, *article*, or terms like *agreeing and disagreeing* which describe what you do with the language.

2 Headwords

Common English words or word-parts which are important in grammar are in bold italic type, e.g. ***the, of, -er, -est***. Grammatical and other (non-grammatical) terms are in bold upright type, e.g. **noun, modal auxiliary, invitations**.

3 Cross-references

When you look something up, it will often help you to look up other related entries too. Most entries have cross-references to other entries. These cross-references are in small capital letters, e.g. SOME AND ANY. Sometimes the words are part of a sentence (e.g. "Bring and take are both IRREGULAR VERBS."), sometimes they are in square brackets, e.g. "[see WORD ORDER]", "[see QUANTITY WORD 2]". The number (or number and letter) tells you what section of the entry to read.

3a Short entries

Some entries act as cross-references to other entries, e.g. the entry ***any*** tells you to look up ***some and any*** for a full explanation.

4 Pronunciation

At the top of most entries for common words we give the pronunciation between slant lines / /, using phonetic symbols. [See CONSONANTS AND VOWELS for a list of symbols.]

4a Weak forms

Sometimes there are three slant lines, e.g. /¹eɪbəl tʊ/tə/ for *able to*. Here the symbols between the last two slant lines show the weak pronunciation of the last word or syllable, usually used in the middle of a phrase or sentence. [For more information on weak forms, see STRESS 4.]

4b Stress

The main stress in a word is shown by a mark in front of the stressed syllable, like this: ¹ [For more information on stress, see STRESS 2.]

4c American pronunciation

For important differences between British English <G.B.> and American English <U.S.> we use a double line (||) with the British pronunciation (/dʒʊəɪnɪŋ/) on the left and the American pronunciation (/dʊəɪnɪŋ/) on the right.

4d American r

Most <U.S.> speakers pronounce an /r/ after some vowels and diphthongs, where <G.B.> speakers usually do not. For example, *car* <G.B.> = /kɑː/, <U.S.> = /kɑːr/; *world* <G.B.> = /wɜːld/, <U.S.> = /wɜːrld/. We use a small raised ʳ to show this difference, e.g. /kɑː^ʳ/.

4e Linking r

A raised ʳ at the end of a word also shows a "linking" /r/ in <G.B.>, that is, an /r/ pronounced at the end of a word, when the next word begins with a vowel, e.g.

/ək^ʳsəpt fə^ʳæn/ = *except for Ann*.

How to use this book — continued

Sections and sub-sections

Flags for key points ⑤

Repeat of headword or associated word in bold type

a bit, a bit of /ə'bit/, /ə'bitəv/

A bit and **a bit of** behave like QUANTITY WORDS and **a bit** also behaves like an adverb of DEGREE.

The meaning of **a bit** and **a bit of** is 'a small amount or piece (of)'.

A bit and **a bit of** are generally used in the same way as **a little** [see LITTLE / A LITTLE], but are <more informal>.

1 **A bit (of X)** is used only when X is uncountable.

E.g. **a bit of wood**, **a bit of cheese**

But where X is a drink we use another word such as **drop**.

E.g. **a drop of water**

1a You can say just **a bit** (= 'a little') when the hearer knows what you are talking about.

E.g. 'Why don't you try **this cake?**' 'I've already had **a bit**, thank you.'
Do you have **any string?** I just need **a bit**.

Examples in italic type

Pointed brackets for "style" or "variety of English" ⑧

Three dots for missing words ⑨

Structural patterns in capital letters

2 To use fractions in phrases and sentences, put:
FRACTION + OF + . . . NOUN

The noun following the fraction can be:

- (i) countable (singular). E.g. **a quarter of the cake**
- (ii) countable (plural). E.g. **two thirds of the children**
- (iii) uncountable. E.g. **three quarters of the money**

[See COUNTABLE AND UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS.]

NOTE: But before **half** we can omit **a***, and after **half** we can omit **of**. So we can say:

a half of the
Or: **half of the** } egg / eggs / water
Or: **half the**

*Except when **half** follows a whole number: **two and a half**, not ~~two-and-half~~

Smaller type for notes ⑥ and asterisked notes ⑦

Crossing out for "incorrect" English ⑩

Detailed explanations

5 Flags

We signal important key points at the beginning of entries by flags: ► Make sure you always read these key points.

6 Notes

We put less important points in smaller type in Notes (marked NOTE, NOTE (i), NOTE (ii), etc.)

7 Asterisked notes

Other less important points refer to particular parts of an explanation. These are also in smaller type and are marked by asterisks (*, **, etc.)

8 Pointed brackets

A word in pointed brackets, e.g. <formal>, tells you what “style” a grammatical form or structure belongs to. E.g.: “*whom* <formal>” means that we use *whom* in formal kinds of English.

The labels we chiefly use are:

<formal> and <informal> English [look up FORMAL AND INFORMAL ENGLISH]

<written> and <spoken> English (or <writing> and <speech>)

<polite> and <not polite> English [look up POLITE AND NOT POLITE]

<G.B.> and <U.S.> English (i.e. British and American).

9 Three dots

We use three dots . . . to show that extra words can or should be added at this point.

10 Crossing out

When something is “incorrect” or “not English”, we show this by crossing it out, using a diagonal line through one word or a horizontal line through a number of words.

How to use this book — continued

Forms of the verb with endings (11)

- 1a With the PRESENT PROGRESSIVE form (**be + always + Verb-ing**) **always** means 'continually'. We often use it to describe a habit we don't like.

E.g. *She's **always smoking and coughing**. Ugh!*
*I'm **always losing** my glasses.*

- 4 We can link more than two items by coordination. (Note the use of INTONATION.)

E.g. *Which of these fruit juices do you want? The apple, the grapefruit, or the orange?*

Intonation marks (12)

Table which can be read horizontally and diagonally (13)

<i>She It My son</i>	loves	<i>ice-cream.</i>
<i>I We Italians</i>	love	<i>ice-cream.</i>
<i>The bus They</i>	arrived	<i>late.</i>

Table which can only be read horizontally (13)

subject	verb phrase	complement	...
<i>Fresh bread</i>	is becoming	expensive	<i>(in this town).</i>
<i>This chair</i>	looks	comfortable,	
<i>Our friends</i>	seem	ready to help.	
<i>The weather</i>	will stay	fine	<i>(tomorrow).</i>

Brackets show words that can be omitted

Detailed explanations

11 Forms of the verb

In structural patterns we use Verb with a capital V as follows:

Verb	indicates the basic form of the verb, e.g. <i>want</i>
Verb-s	indicates the -s form of the verb, e.g. <i>wants</i>
Verb-ed	indicates the -ed form of the verb, e.g. <i>wanted</i>
Verb-ing	indicates the -ing form of the verb, e.g. <i>wanting</i>

12 Intonation

We mark intonation (˘ ˊ) when it is important to show how the height or pitch of a voice changes during a sentence. For details of these symbols, look up INTONATION.

13 Tables

Most of the tables in this book can be read without any explanatory notes. But there are two kinds, illustrated opposite, which need some explanation.

The first table has vertical as well as horizontal lines. The vertical lines between different parts of a phrase or sentence show that you can read horizontally or diagonally. In the example opposite, you can make the correct sentences: *She loves ice-cream. It loves ice-cream. My son loves ice-cream.* However, you cannot cross a horizontal line. *My son love ice-cream* would be incorrect.

The second table has no vertical lines so the sentences can only be read horizontally, e.g. *Fresh bread is becoming expensive.* You cannot read diagonally; for example *Fresh bread looks ready to help* is obviously incorrect!

Contents

Introduction	viii
How to use this book	x
The grammar	1
List of irregular verbs	564
Complete list of entries	570

a or **an** **a** /eɪ/ (weak form /ə/ is usual)* **an** /æɪ/ (weak form /ən/ is usual) (*determiner*)

► **A / an** is called the 'indefinite article'.

*The letter 'a' is always pronounced /eɪ/ (as in **a**, **b**, **c**, ...)

1 When to use a; when to use an

Use **a** before a consonant sound.

E.g. He's **a** /ə/ doctor. What **a** /ə/ nice picture!

Use **an** before a vowel sound.

E.g. He's **an** /ən/ actor. What **an** /ən/ ugly picture!

Also: **an** hour, **an** honest person, etc. [See AN: Note (ii).]

[For more examples, see AN.]

2 A or an comes before a singular countable noun:

a } + singular countable noun
an }

E.g. **a** man, **a** union /ju:niən/, **an** idea

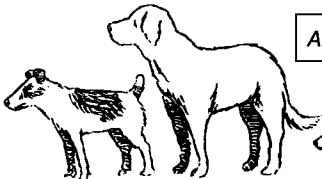
a } + modifier(s) + singular countable noun
an }

E.g. **a** happy woman, **a** very famous author, **an** interesting new book

2a A / an has no plural form. In the plural, instead of a, we use either no word at all [see ZERO ARTICLE] or **some**.



E.g. This is **a** cat. This is **a** rabbit. And that is **a** camel.



All these are **animals**.



a dog + **a** dog + **a** dog . . . = **some** /səm/ dogs

[To find out how to choose between zero article and **some**, see ZERO ARTICLE 2.]

2 a or an

3 The meaning and use of a / an

A / an means any one of a kind or group. It contrasts with **THE** (the definite article) and with the zero article. [See **THE 3** and **ZERO ARTICLE** to see how these are used.]

3a **A / an** is used especially after the verb **BE**, for example in naming a person's job.

E.g. 'What does your father do (for a living)?' 'He's **a** teacher.' 'Oh, really? Mine's **a** pilot.'

3b **A / an** is used when something is mentioned for the first time. But when the same thing is mentioned again, use **the**.

E.g. *My friends live in **a** very beautiful house. But **the** house has only a small kitchen.
Once we had **a** dog and **a** cat. But **the** dog was always eating **the** cat's dinner. In the end, we gave **the** cat to **a** friend.*

3c **A / an** means the same as **one** when it contrasts with **two**, **three**, etc.

E.g. *I'd like **two** cups of tea and **a** glass of milk, please.*

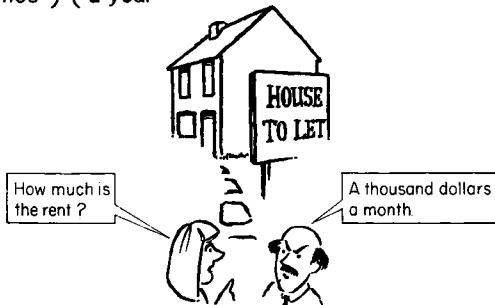
We stayed in Austria for $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a week.} \\ \text{three weeks.} \\ \text{a month and a half. (= '1½ months')} \end{array} \right.$

3d In **NUMBERS**, we generally use **a** instead of **one** in front of:

FRACTIONS	<informal> numbers	large numbers
a half (½)	a couple (= 2)	a hundred (100)
a third (⅓)	a dozen (= 12)	a million (1,000,000)

3e **A / an** also means 'per' or 'every' in phrases of **MEASURING** or **FREQUENCY**.

E.g. $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{once} \\ \text{twice} \\ \text{six times} \\ \dots \text{ times} \end{array} \right\} \begin{array}{l} \text{a day} \\ \text{a week} \\ \text{a month} \\ \text{a year} \end{array}$



Some more examples:

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. (a saying)

My son goes to the dentist twice a year.

'How fast are we travelling?' 'Sixty miles an hour.' **'That's the same as a hundred kilometres an hour, isn't it?'**

3f A / an also has a general use, which describes 'all examples of the same kind', or 'any example of the same kind'.

E.g. **'What is a dictionary?' 'A dictionary is a book which tells you about the meanings of words.'**

If a man and a woman are in love, they will have a happy marriage.

There are many ways of learning a language.

A teacher earns less than a lawyer.

NOTE (i): **A / an** is not used for describing substances, masses or abstractions in general. [See ZERO ARTICLE 1-3 to find out about these.]

NOTE (ii): A special use of **a** is found before QUANTITY WORDS and ADVERBS OF DEGREE. For example:

a bit * (of) < informal >	a (great) deal (of)
a few * (of)	a (good) many *
a little * (of)	a (large) number (of)
	a lot * (of) < informal >

* [These words have separate entries in this book. Look them up for further details.]

E.g. **A few** } parents attended the meeting.
A lot of }

In this example, **parents** is a plural noun, but **a** can still come before it because **a few** and **a lot of** are plural in meaning.

NOTE (iii): Often **a** also comes before 'part nouns' like **piece**, 'unit nouns' like **cup**, **box**, and 'NOUNS OF KIND' like **kind**, **type**.

E.g. **a piece of cake**, **a cup of tea**, **a type of cup** *

* After **a kind of**, **a sort of**, **a type of**, we usually omit the second **a** which would come before a countable noun.

E.g. **He lived in a kind of tent.**

A Jaguar is a type of car.

NOTE (iv): When the determiners **what**, **such** and **many** are used with a singular countable noun, **a** follows the determiner.

E.g. **What a noise!** [See WHAT 4.]

She was such a kind person. [See SUCH.]

Many a man died in that battle. < formal and archaic > [See MANY.]

Also, **a** often follows the adverbs **quite** and **rather** [see QUITE AND RATHER].

E.g. We had **{ rather / quite } a busy day.** (Also . . . **a rather busy day.**)

a- words

- 1 Some common English words begin with **a-** (pronounced /ə/) and have stress on the second syllable:

PREPOSITIONS		ADVERBS		ADJECTIVES
<i>against</i>	<i>aboard</i> ↔	<i>aboard</i>	<i>abroad</i>	<i>afraid</i> *** (of)
<i>amid</i> **	<i>about</i> * ↔	<i>about</i> *	<i>again</i>	<i>alike</i>
<i>among</i> **	<i>above</i> * ↔	<i>above</i> *	<i>ago</i>	<i>alive</i>
	<i>across</i> * ↔	<i>across</i> *	<i>alone</i>	<i>alone</i>
	<i>along</i> * ↔	<i>along</i> *	<i>ahead</i>	<i>ashamed</i> *** (of)
	<i>around</i> * ↔	<i>around</i> *	<i>aloud</i>	<i>asleep</i>
			<i>apart</i>	<i>awake</i>
			<i>aside</i>	<i>aware</i> *** (of)

* [These words have separate entries in this book. Look them up for further details.]

** **Among** and **amid** have <rarer> forms **amongst** and **amidst**.

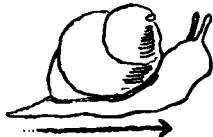
*** **Afraid**, **ashamed** and **aware** can be followed both by an *of*-phrase and by a *that*-clause [see THAT 1, ADJECTIVE PATTERNS 1, 2].

E.g. *I'm afraid of mice.*

I'm afraid that I'll lose my job.

- 2 As the arrows (↔) above show, some words can be both prepositions and adverbs [see PREPOSITIONAL ADVERB].

E.g. *The snail crept slowly **along**.*
(**Along** is an adverb)



*The snail crept slowly **along** the fence.*
(**Along** is a preposition)



- 3 The **a- words** which are adjectives usually follow the verb **BE** or another **LINKING VERB**.

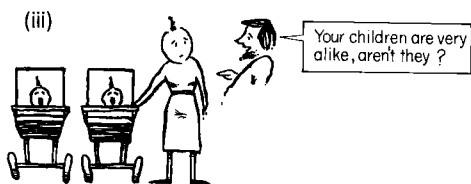
E.g. (i) '**Are the children asleep?**' 'No, they're still **awake**.'

(ii)

Are you afraid?

No, nothing frightens me!





These adjectives usually cannot come before a noun [see ADJECTIVE 1a]. Instead, we have to use another adjective with the same meaning.

E.g. two $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{afraid} \\ \text{asleep} \\ \text{alike} \end{array} \right\}$ children two $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{frightened} \\ \text{sleeping} \\ \text{similar} \end{array} \right\}$ children

a bit, a bit of /ə'bit/, /ə'bitəv/

- ▶ **A bit** and **a bit of** behave like QUANTITY WORDS and **a bit** also behaves like an adverb of DEGREE.
- ▶ The meaning of **a bit** and **a bit of** is 'a small amount or piece (of)'.
- ▶ **A bit** and **a bit of** are generally used in the same way as **a little** [see LITTLE / A LITTLE], but are < more informal >.

1 **A bit (of X)** is used only when X is uncountable.

E.g. **a bit of wood**, **a bit of cheese**

But where X is a drink we use another word such as **drop**.

E.g. **a drop of water**

1a You can say just **a bit** (= 'a little') when the hearer knows what you are talking about.

E.g. 'Why don't you try **this cake?**' 'I've already had **a bit**, thank you.'
Do you have **any string?** I just need **a bit**.

1b You can also use **a bit (of)** with abstract nouns.

E.g. **a bit of** $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{peace and quiet} \\ \text{news} \end{array} \right.$ **a bit of** $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{advice} \\ \text{fun} \end{array} \right.$

NOTE: Sometimes in <informal> English we put **little** in front of **bit** in order to be <polite>.

E.g. Could I borrow **a little bit of chalk?**

Have the rest of the meat. It's only **a little bit**.

2 **A bit (or a little bit)** as an adverb of degree (= 'a little') often goes with words which have a negative or unpleasant meaning.

E.g. Janet felt **a bit annoyed** when Pete borrowed her bicycle.
'How is your arm after the accident?' 'It still **hurts a bit**.'