

The  
Least  
You Should Know about  
English

FORM A  
Writing Skills

NINTH EDITION



PAIGE WILSON • TERESA FERSTER GLAZIER

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*Paige Wilson/Teresa Ferster Glazier, Late*

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## TO THE INSTRUCTOR

This book is for students who need to review basic English skills and who may profit from a simplified “least you should know” approach. Parts 1 to 3 cover the essentials of word choice and spelling, sentence structure, punctuation and capitalization. Part 4 on writing teaches students the basic structures of the paragraph and the essay, along with the writing skills necessary to produce them.

The “least you should know” approach attempts to avoid the use of linguistic terminology whenever possible. Students work with words they know instead of learning a vocabulary they may never use again.

Abundant exercises include practice writing sentences and proofreading paragraphs. Diligent students learn to use the rules automatically and thus *carry their new skills over into their writing*. Most exercises consist of sets of ten thematically related, informative sentences on both timely and timeless subjects—anything from dog and cat translating machines and the antibiotic effects of salsa to tips for financing a college education. Such exercises reinforce the need for coherence and details in student writing. With answers provided at the back of the book, students can correct their own work and progress at their own pace.

The ninth edition includes a new section in Part 1 devoted to Adjectives and Adverbs. In Part 2, the format of exercises to correct Clichés, Awkward Phrasing, and Wordiness has changed from sentences to paragraphs. In addition, comma exercises in Part 3 now allow students to practice using individual comma rules before combining them. Finally, in Part 4, the Writing section, students will find a contemporary poem to read and respond to, along with several other new student and professional sample paragraphs and essays. As always, the Writing section outlines the writing process and stresses the development of the student’s written “voice.” Writing assignments follow each discussion. Students improve their reading by learning to find main ideas and their writing by learning to write meaningful reactions and concise summaries.

*The Least You Should Know about English* functions equally well in the classroom and at home as a self-tutoring text. The simple explanations, ample exercises, and answers at the back of the book provide students with everything they need to progress on their own. Students who have previously been overwhelmed by the complexities of English should, through mastering simple rules and through writing and rewriting simple papers, gain enough competence to succeed in further composition courses.

A **Test Booklet** with additional exercises and ready-to-photocopy tests accompanies this text and is available to instructors.

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As always, we are especially indebted to our family and friends for their support and encouragement.

*Paige Wilson*  
*Teresa Ferster Glazier (1907–2004)*

This edition is dedicated to the memory of Teresa Ferster Glazier. In creating *The Least You Should Know about English*, she discovered a way to teach grammar and writing that students have actually enjoyed for nearly thirty years. Her explanations and approaches have been constant sources of inspiration for this and the past two coauthored editions, as they will be for all future editions of her text.

*To the Instructor*     *xi*

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# What Is the Least You Should Know?

Most English textbooks try to teach you more than you need to know. This book will teach you the least you should know—and still help you learn to write clearly and acceptably. You won't have to deal with grammatical terms like *gerund*, *modal auxiliary verb*, or *demonstrative pronoun*. You can get along without knowing such technical labels if you learn a few key concepts. You *should* know about the parts of speech and how to use and spell common words; you *should* be able to recognize subjects and verbs; you *should* know the basics of sentence structure and punctuation—but rules, as such, will be kept to a minimum.

The English you'll learn in this book is sometimes called Standard Written English, and it may differ slightly or greatly from the spoken English you use. Standard Written English is the form of writing accepted in business and the professions. So no matter how you speak, you will communicate better in writing when you use Standard Written English. You might *say* something like “That’s a whole nother problem,” and everyone will understand, but you would probably want to *write*, “That’s a completely different problem.” Knowing the difference between spoken English and Standard Written English is essential in college, in business, and in life.

Until you learn the least you should know, you'll probably have difficulty communicating in writing. Take this sentence for example:

I hope that the film school will except my application for admission.

We assume that the writer used the *sound*, not the meaning, of the word *except* to choose it and in so doing used the wrong word. If the sentence had read

I hope that the film school will *accept* my application for admission.

then the writer would have communicated clearly. Or take this sentence:

The film school accepted Beth and Hector and I will try again next year.

This sentence includes two statements and therefore needs punctuation, a comma in this case:

The film school accepted Beth and Hector, and I will try again next year.

But perhaps the writer meant

The film school accepted Beth, and Hector and I will try again next year.

Punctuation makes all the difference, especially for Hector. With the help of this text, we hope you'll learn to make your writing so clear that no one will misunderstand it.

As you make your way through the book, it's important to remember information after you learn it because many concepts and structures build upon others. For example, once you can identify subjects and verbs, you'll be better able to recognize fragments, understand subject-verb agreement, and use correct punctuation. Explanations and examples are brief and clear, and it shouldn't be difficult to learn from them—*if you want to*. But you have to want to!

#### HOW TO LEARN THE LEAST YOU SHOULD KNOW

1. Read each explanatory section carefully (aloud, if possible).
2. Do the first exercise. Compare your answers with those at the back of the book. If they don't match, study the explanation again to find out why.
3. Do the second exercise and correct it. If you miss a single answer, go back once more to the explanation. You must have missed something. Be tough on yourself. Don't just think, "Maybe I'll get it right next time." Reread the examples, and *then* try the next exercise. It's important to correct each group of ten sentences before moving on so that you'll discover your mistakes early.
4. You may be tempted to quit after you do one or two exercises perfectly. Instead, make yourself finish another exercise. It's not enough to *understand* a concept or structure. You have to *practice* using it.
5. If you're positive, however, after doing several exercises, that you've learned a concept or structure, take the next exercise as a test. If you miss even one answer, you should do all the rest of the questions. Then move on to the proofreading and sentence composing exercises so that your understanding carries over into your writing.

Learning the basics of word choice and spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation does take time. Generally, college students must study a couple of hours outside of class for each hour in class. You may need to study more. Undoubtedly, the more time you spend, the more your writing will improve.

# P A R T 1

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## Word Choice and Spelling

Anyone can learn to use words more effectively and become a better speller. You can eliminate most of your word choice and spelling errors if you want to. It's just a matter of deciding you're going to do it. If you really intend to improve your word choice and spelling, study each of the following nine sections until you make no mistakes in the exercises.

Your Own List of Misspelled Words

Words Often Confused (Sets 1 and 2)

The Eight Parts of Speech

Adjectives and Adverbs

Contractions

Possessives

Words That Can Be Broken into Parts

Rule for Doubling a Final Letter

Using a Dictionary

### Your Own List of Misspelled Words

On the inside cover of your English notebook or in some other obvious place, write correctly all the misspelled words from your previously graded papers. Review the correct spellings until you're sure of them, and edit your papers to find and correct repeated errors.

## Words Often Confused (Set 1)

Learning the differences between these often-confused words will help you overcome many of your spelling problems. Study the words carefully, with their examples, before trying the exercises.

### **a, an**

Use *an* before a word that begins with a vowel *sound* (*a*, *e*, *i*, and *o*, plus *u* when it sounds like *uh*) or silent *b*. Note that it's not the letter but the *sound* of the letter that matters.

*an* apple, *an* essay, *an* inch, *an* onion

*an* umpire, *an* ugly design (The *u*'s sound like *uh*.)

*an* hour, *an* honest person (The *b*'s are silent.)

Use *a* before a word that begins with a consonant sound (all the sounds except the vowels, plus *u* or *eu* when they sound like *you*).

*a* chart, *a* pie, *a* history book (The *b* is not silent in *history*.)

*a* union, *a* uniform, *a* unit (The *u*'s sound like *you*.)

*a* European vacation, *a* euphemism (*Eu* sounds like *you*.)

### **accept, except**

*Accept* means "to receive willingly."

I *accept* your apology.

*Except* means "excluding" or "but."

Everyone arrived on time *except* him.

### **advise, advice**

*Advise* is a verb. (Pronounce the *s* like a *z*.)

I *advise* you to take your time finding the right job.

*Advice* is a noun. (It rhymes with *rice*.)

My counselor gave me good *advice*.

### **affect, effect**

*Affect* is a verb and means "to alter or influence."

All quizzes will *affect* the final grade.

The happy ending *affected* the mood of the audience.

*Effect* is most commonly used as a noun and means "a result." If *a*, *an*, or *the* is in front of the word, then you'll know it isn't a verb and will use *effect*.

**all ready,  
already**

The strong coffee had a powerful *effect* on me.

We studied the *effects* of sleep deprivation in my psychology class.

If you can leave out the *all* and the sentence still makes sense, then *all ready* is the form to use.

We're *all ready* for our trip. (*We're ready for our trip* makes sense.)

The banquet is *all ready*. (*The banquet is ready* makes sense.)

But if you can't leave out the *all* and still have a sentence that makes sense, then use *already* (the form in which the *al* has to stay in the word).

They've *already* eaten. (*They've ready eaten* doesn't make sense.)

We have seen that movie *already*.

**are, our**

*Are* is a verb.

We *are* going to Colorado Springs.

*Our* shows we possess something.

We painted *our* fence to match the house.

**brake, break**

*Brake* used as a verb means "to slow or stop motion." It's also the name of the device that slows or stops motion.

I had to *brake* quickly to avoid an accident.

Luckily I just had my *brakes* fixed.

*Break* used as a verb means "to shatter" or "to split." It's also the name of an interruption, as in "a coffee break."

She never thought she would *break* a world record.

Enjoy your spring *break*.

**choose, chose**

The difference here is one of time. Use *choose* for present and future; use *chose* for past.

I will *choose* a new major this semester.

We *chose* the wrong time of year to get married.

**clothes, cloths**

*Clothes* are something you wear; *cloths* are pieces of material you might clean or polish something with.



I love the *clothes* that characters wear in movies.

The car wash workers use special *cloths* to dry the cars.

**coarse, course** *Coarse* describes a rough texture.

I used *coarse* sandpaper to smooth the surface of the board.

*Course* is used for all other meanings.

Of *course* we saw the golf *course* when we went to Pebble Beach.

**complement, compliment** The one spelled with an *e* means to complete something or bring it to perfection.

Use a color wheel to find a *complement* for purple.

Juliet's personality *complements* Romeo's: she is practical, and he is a dreamer.

The one spelled with an *i* has to do with praise. Remember "*I* like compliments," and you'll remember to use the *i* spelling when you mean praise.

My evaluation included a really nice *compliment* from my coworkers.

We *complimented* them on their new home.

**conscious, conscience** *Conscious* means "aware."

They weren't *conscious* of any problems before the accident.

*Conscience* means that inner voice of right and wrong. The extra *n* in *conscience* should remind you of *No*, which is what your conscience often says to you.

My *conscience* told me to turn in the expensive watch I found.

**dessert, desert** *Dessert* is the sweet one, the one people like two helpings of. So give it two helpings of *s*.

We had a whole chocolate cheesecake for *dessert*.

The other one, *desert*, is used for all other meanings and has two pronunciations.

I promise that I won't *desert* you at the party.

The snake slithered slowly across the *desert*.