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Geraldine Woods

English teacher

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Adjective

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***Grammar
Essentials***
FOR
DUMMIES®

by **Geraldine Woods**
with **Joan Friedman**



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Geraldine Woods began her education when teachers still supplied inkwells to their students. She credits her 35-year career as an English teacher to a set of ultrastrict nuns armed with thick grammar books. She lives in New York City, where with great difficulty she refrains from correcting signs containing messages such as “Bagel’s for sale.” She is the author of more than 40 books, including *English Grammar For Dummies*, *English Grammar Workbook For Dummies*, *Research Papers For Dummies*, *College Admission Essays For Dummies*, and *The SAT For Dummies*.

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Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Grasping Grammar Nitty-Gritty	5
Chapter 2: Making Peace between Subjects and Verbs.....	13
Chapter 3: Perfecting Your Pronoun Usage	33
Chapter 4: Constructing a Complete Sentence.....	45
Chapter 5: Drawing Parallels (Without the Lines)	65
Chapter 6: Adjectives, Adverbs, and Comparisons	75
Chapter 7: Polishing Your Punctuation	93
Chapter 8: Capitalizing Correctly	117
Chapter 9: Choosing the Right Words	127
Chapter 10: Tackling Other Troublemakers	139
Chapter 11: Improving Your Writing.....	149
Chapter 12: Ten Ways to Improve Your Grammar Every Day	165
Index.....	169

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

About This Book	2
Conventions Used in This Book	2
Foolish Assumptions	2
Icons Used in This Book.....	3
Where to Go from Here	3

Chapter 1: Grasping Grammar Nitty-Gritty..... 5

Grammar: What It Is!.....	6
The Big Ideas of Grammar	7
Making the right word choices	7
Arranging words for optimal understanding	9
Pinpointing punctuation	10
Putting Grammar to Work in the Real World	11

Chapter 2: Making Peace between Subjects and Verbs 13

Getting Reacquainted with Verbs	14
Linking verbs: The giant equal sign.....	14
Action verbs: The go-getters	16
Helping verbs: The do-gooders.....	16
Doubling your money: Compound verbs.....	17
Infinitives: Verb imposters	18
Identifying Subjects	18
Getting two for the price of one:	
Compound subjects.....	19
Figuring out you-understood.....	19
Finding subjects when words are missing.....	20
Grappling with unusual word order	21
Searching for the subject in questions	22
Tossing fake subjects aside.....	22
Give Peace a Chance: Making Subjects and Verbs Agree	23
No mixing allowed: Singles and plurals	23
Verbs that change and verbs that don't	24
Dealing with negative statements.....	26
Cutting through distractions.....	27

Coming to an Agreement with Difficult Subjects	28
Spotting five little pronouns that break the rules	28
Finding problems here and there	29
Meeting the ones, the things, and the bodies	30
Figuring out either and neither	31
Chapter 3: Perfecting Your Pronoun Usage	33
Playing Matchmaker with Pronouns and Nouns	33
Selecting Singular or Plural Pronouns	35
Letting your ear be your guide	36
Treating companies as singular nouns	36
Steering clear of “person” problems	37
Getting Possessive with Your Pronouns	37
Keeping Your Pronouns and Antecedents Close	38
Pairing Pronouns with Pronoun Antecedents	41
Wrestling with everybody, somebody, and no one... ..	41
Following each and every rule	42
Examining either and neither	43
Avoiding Sexist Pronouns	43
Chapter 4: Constructing a Complete Sentence	45
Creating Complete Sentences from Complete Thoughts....	45
Locating subject-verb pairs	46
Not relying on context	47
Fishing for complements	48
Banning Fragments from Formal Writing	51
Enough Is Enough: Avoiding Run-ons	52
Getting your endmarks in place	53
Fixing comma splices	54
Attaching Sentences Legally	54
Employing coordinate conjunctions	55
Relying on semicolons	56
Connecting Unequal Ideas	56
Giving subordinate clauses a job	57
Finding homes for your subordinate clauses	58
Making connections with	
subordinate conjunctions	59
Combining Sentences with Pronouns	61
Don’t Keep Your Audience Hanging:	
Removing Dangers	62
Dangling participles	62
Dangling infinitives	64

Chapter 5: Drawing Parallels (Without the Lines) . . . 65

Seeking Balance.....	65
Striving for Consistency	68
Matching verb tenses	68
Staying active (or passive)	69
Being true to your person.....	70
Using Conjunction Pairs Correctly	72
Constructing Proper Comparisons.....	73

Chapter 6: Adjectives, Adverbs, and Comparisons . . . 75

Spotting Adjectives	75
Describing nouns and pronouns.....	76
Working hand in hand with linking verbs.....	76
Recognizing articles as adjectives.....	77
Locating adjectives.....	78
Hunting for Adverbs	79
Sprucing up verbs.....	79
Modifying adjectives and other adverbs	80
Locating adverbs	80
Sorting through Some Sticky Choices	81
Choosing between “good” and “well”	81
Do you feel “bad” or “badly”?.....	82
Coping with adjectives and adverbs that look the same	83
Getting Picky about Word Placement	83
Placing “even”	83
Placing “almost” and “nearly”	85
Placing “only” and “just”	85
Creating Comparisons.....	86
Getting the hang of regular comparisons	86
Good, better, best: Working with irregular comparisons	88
Error alert: Using words that you can’t compare.....	90
Confusing your reader with incomplete comparisons	91

Chapter 7: Polishing Your Punctuation 93

More Rules Than the IRS: Using Apostrophes	93
Showing possession	94
Cutting it short: Contractions	97
Quoting Correctly	98
Punctuating your quotations	99
Identifying speaker changes.....	102
Using quotation marks in titles.....	102

Making Comma Sense.....	103
Placing commas in a series	103
Adding information to your sentence	104
Directly addressing someone.....	108
Presenting addresses and dates.....	109
Setting off introductory words.....	110
Punctuating with conjunctions	111
Mastering Dashes.....	111
Long dashes.....	112
Short dashes.....	113
Wielding Hyphens with Ease	113
Creating compound words	113
Hyphenating numbers.....	114
Connecting two-word descriptions	114
Creating a Stopping Point: Colons	115
Sprucing up a business letter.....	115
Inserting long lists	115
Introducing long quotations.....	115

Chapter 8: Capitalizing Correctly 117

Covering the Basic Rules	117
Capitalizing (Or Not) References to People.....	118
Treating a person's titles with care.....	119
Handling family relationships	120
Tackling race and ethnicity.....	121
Getting a Geography Lesson: Places, Directions, and More	122
Locations and languages	122
Directions and areas	123
Looking at Seasons and Times of Day	123
Getting Schooled in Education Terms.....	124
Wrestling with Capitals in Titles	124
Writing about Events and Eras.....	125
Capitalizing Abbreviations.....	126

Chapter 9: Choosing the Right Words 127

One Word or Two?	127
Always opting for two	128
Picking your meaning.....	128
Separating Possessive Pronouns from Contractions	129
Its/it's.....	129
Your/you're	130
There/their/they're.....	130
Whose/who's.....	130

Using Words That Seem Interchangeable but Aren't	131
Affect versus effect	131
Between versus among	132
Continual versus continuous	132
Due to versus because of	133
Farther versus further	133
Lie versus lay	134
Rise versus raise	134
Since versus because	135
Sit versus set	135
Suppose versus supposed	135
Whether versus if	136
Who versus whom	136
A Word and a Phrase to Avoid	137
Irregardless	137
Different than	138

Chapter 10: Tackling Other Troublemakers 139

Creating Noun Plurals	139
The -ies and -ys have it	140
Gooses? Childs? Forming irregular plurals	141
Making plurals with hyphenated nouns	142
Perfecting Prepositions	142
Expressing relationships	142
Eyeing the objects of prepositional phrases	144
Identifying the objects of prepositions	144
Paying attention to prepositions	145
Are you talking to I? Matching prepositions and pronouns	145
A good part of speech to end a sentence with?	147
Deleting Double Negatives	147

Chapter 11: Improving Your Writing 149

Identifying Your Audience	149
Keeping it formal	150
Knowing when conversational English will work	150
Cutting Ties with Your Computer Grammar Checker	151
Giving Your Writing Punch with Great Verbs	152
Staying active	152
Knowing when "there is" a problem	154
Recognizing that your writing "has" issues	154
Letting your subjects do more than "say" and "walk"	155
Deleting All That's Extra	156

Spicing Up Boring Sentences.....	157
The clause that refreshes	158
Verbally speaking	159
Writing for Electronic Media	160
Scoping your audience.....	160
Being clear and concise	161
Structuring an e-mail message	163
Proofreading before you send.....	164

**Chapter 12: Ten Ways to Improve
Your Grammar Every Day..... 165**

Pick Up a Good Book	165
Read the Newspaper.....	166
Sample Some Magazines	166
Delve into Strunk and White.....	166
Surf the Web	167
Review Style Manuals	167
Watch High-Quality TV Shows	167
Peruse the News.....	168
Download Podcasts	168
Listen to Authorities.....	168

***Index*..... 169**

Introduction

When you're a grammarian, people react to you in interesting — and sometimes downright strange — ways. An elderly man once asked me about something that had puzzled him for eight decades: Why did his church, St. Paul's, include an apostrophe in its name? My nephew recently called to inquire whether his company's sign in Times Square should include a semicolon. (I said no, though the notion of a two-story-tall neon semicolon *was* tempting.) Lots of people become tongue-tied, sure that I'll judge their choice of *who* or *whom*. (They worry needlessly, because I consider myself off-duty when I'm not teaching or writing.)

Though you may aspire to be something other than a grammarian, knowing how to use proper grammar is always an advantage — especially in the workplace. Most jobs that provide you with a desk (and many jobs that don't!) demand that you know how to communicate in both speech and writing.

If you haven't yet reached the workplace, now's the best time to master good grammar. No matter what subject you're studying, teachers favor proper English. Also, the SAT includes a writing section that's heavy on grammar and, ironically, light on writing.

In this book, I show you the tricks of the grammar trade, the strategies that help you make the right decision when you're facing such grammatical dilemmas as the choice between *I* and *me* or *was* and *were*. I explain what you need to do in such situations, and I also tell you why a particular word is correct or incorrect. You don't have to memorize a list of meaningless rules (with the exception of some points from the punctuation chapter) because when you understand the reason for a particular choice, you'll pick the correct word automatically.

About This Book

I concentrate on what English teachers call the common errors. You don't have to read this book in order, and you don't have to read the whole thing. Just browse through the table of contents and look for things that you often get wrong. Or start with Chapter 1, which outlines the usage issues voted "most likely to succeed" — in giving you a headache. When you recognize something that nags you every time you write, jump to the chapter where I explain how to handle it like a pro.

Conventions Used in This Book

When I introduce a term or concept that may be unfamiliar to you, I *italicize* it so you know I'm aware that jargon is at hand. I quickly follow it up with an explanation or definition so you can continue on with the topic.

Foolish Assumptions

I assume that you already speak English to some extent and that you want to speak it — and write it — better. I also assume that you're a busy person with better things to do than worry about pronouns. This book is for you if you want

- ✓ Better grades
- ✓ Skill in communicating exactly what you mean
- ✓ A higher-paying or higher-status job
- ✓ Speech and writing that presents you as an educated, intelligent person
- ✓ A good score on the SAT I Writing or the ACT exam
- ✓ Polished skills in English as a second language

Icons Used in This Book

In the left margins of this book, you find the following four icons, each of which highlights a particular type of material:



This icon points out a nugget of information you'll want to recall later, so make room for it in your mental filing cabinet.



Are you hoping to spend some time behind ivy-covered walls? To put it another way: Are you aiming for college? If so, you should pay special attention to the information next to this icon, because college-admissions testers *love* this material.



Wherever you see this icon, you'll find helpful strategies for understanding sentence structure or choosing the correct word.



Not every grammar trick has a built-in trap, but some do. This icon tells you how to avoid common mistakes.

Where to Go from Here

Need some pointers on how to improve your writing — fast? Jump to Chapter 11. Want to refresh your memory regarding punctuation regulations? Head straight for Chapter 7. Not sure where to begin? Chapter 1 can help.

I truly don't mind where you start. Just allow me one last word before you do. Actually, two last words: *Trust yourself*. You already know a lot. If you're a native speaker, you've communicated in English all your life, including the years before you set foot in school and saw your first textbook. If English is an acquired language for you, you've probably already absorbed a fair amount of vocabulary and grammar, even if you don't know the technical terms.

I'm just here to help you refine what you know and get past any grammar gremlins that haunt you. So if the word *grammar* usually makes you sweat, wipe your brow and remember that nothing in this book is too difficult for you to master.

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Hey, Al! Do we hyphenate 'doo hickey'?"

Chapter 1

Grasping Grammar Nitty-Gritty

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining what *grammar* means
 - ▶ Identifying the problems grammar can solve
 - ▶ Bringing grammar into the real world
-

I'm well aware that you've been studying grammar in one form or another for a lot of years. You may have been in first or second grade when a teacher introduced the notion that different words in a sentence do different things: Some words name people, animals, and objects, for example, and other words indicate what those people, animals, and objects are doing.

If you were blessed with brilliant, enlightened teachers, your experience with grammar has led you to understand not only how to use it but also why it's essential. However, because you're holding this book in your hands, I suspect that may not have been the case. More likely, you were blessed with caring, dedicated teachers who followed a pattern of instruction handed down to them from teachers past. That pattern likely focused on memorizing parts of speech and diagramming sentences. And here you are, years later, trying to recall what indirect objects are and why you should care.

In this chapter, I explain how I approach the study of grammar in this book. A clue: I honestly don't care whether you can identify an indirect object (a part of speech I describe in Chapter 4). I do, however, care a great deal about your ability to construct a complete sentence that communicates information clearly and meets the needs of your audience.