

ENGLISH THAT WORKS



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To my husband, Rod, for his love, patience, and computer support.

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Preface

Two problems have challenged me during the twelve years I have taught business English at the post-secondary level. The first is how to motivate students, and the second is how to find a text that is appropriate for the students I teach. Through trial and experience, I have realized that most students are either fearful of the material because they have failed to succeed in the past or bored because they cannot see how English is relevant to their lives. Once they believe that correct, forceful writing is a critical job skill, the motivation to learn is there, but they still need to be convinced that they can master the material.

My approach in the classroom is to keep instructions simple and clear, to reinforce students with success in applying punctuation and grammar rules in their writing, and to stress at every turn how this improved writing ability will be a real asset in the business world. Most students respond well to this practical, functional approach with lots of hands-on practice, but they are intimidated or confused by the level of language and the sheer volume of material in most business English textbooks.

English That Works is designed to speak directly to the student in a conversational tone, to provide clear instruction without complicated terms, to present only material that will be essential on the job, and to build student confidence with a variety of exercises containing easy-to-understand sentences. Accordingly, examples follow each newly introduced skill, so that students can immediately apply what they have learned. End-of-chapter exercises, which ask the students to proofread business letters and memos, are cumulative, so that the student can gain practice in each new skill as it is presented. The goal is to make the mechanics so familiar through repetition that the student applies them automatically, just as an experienced driver no longer concentrates on the details of operating the car.

In many courses, punctuation and mechanics are covered at the end of the semester, which does not give the student enough time to practice and drill. Thus the organization of this textbook is somewhat nontraditional: following Part One, Sentence Fundamentals, it presents punctuation

(Part Two) and spelling and style points (Part Three), which will allow students to gain sufficient cumulative practice before proceeding to Part Four, Grammar. Instructors who prefer the more traditional approach can move directly from Part One to Part Four. Part Five, Effective Business Writing, includes letter and memo formats and a brief discussion of the “five C’s” of good writing, so that instructors can begin incorporating a business writing component if they have the time and so wish. At the back of the book instructors will find review tests for each major part of the book, to provide further drill for students. Answers for all exercises, worksheets, and test items are provided in the Instructor’s Annotated Edition.

Students who feel they have control over the mechanics of English will not automatically become good writers, but my experience has shown that they will feel more confident about their ability to learn to write well. The material in this book is geared to bolster students’ self-confidence and convince them that the ability to write clearly and correctly will lead to success on the job.

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A.H.R.

To the Student

Do you remember when you first decided that you were ready to drive a car? Remember the steps that you had to take? First, someone had to show you the parts of the car that you needed to know to operate the vehicle safely: the ignition, the brake and accelerator, the clutch, the windshield wipers and defroster, and so forth. Then you had to master the theory of driving by reading the driver's manual provided by your state or country and learning the conventions and rules that all drivers must agree on. Finally, when you "knew" enough, you had to put the theory into practice by taking the car onto the road.

Can you remember how you felt as you buckled your seat belt, adjusted the mirror, turned on the ignition, and pulled out into the traffic for the first time? All the details of driving seemed overwhelming at first: there was so much to keep in mind as you negotiated turns and struggled to shift smoothly.

Now think back to the most recent time you drove, perhaps on the way to school today. Did you consciously remind yourself to shift into reverse in the driveway or to signal before switching lanes on the highway? Chances are you don't even remember doing these mechanical operations because they have become second nature to you by now. Through mastery and practice, the routine aspects of operating a car have become automatic. Now you are free to concentrate on where you are going and how you will get there safely.

Learning to write well is a lot like learning to drive a car. First, you need to learn the fundamentals of building effective sentences: parts of speech, subjects and predicates, phrases and clauses. Then you must study the "rules of the road," the conventions that readers and writers must agree on in order to communicate, that is, punctuation. Finally, when you master the theory, you must put it all together and practice, practice, practice until these mechanical aspects of writing become automatic. Then you will be free to concentrate on saying what you want and saying it well.

The first step in learning to drive was to make the decision that it was worth the effort. Knowing it would involve time and hard work, you

nevertheless made a commitment. The motivation, of course, was that you would gain some freedom and control in your life once you could drive yourself wherever you chose to go. You could clearly see the difference in your future once you had attained the skill necessary to get your driver's license.

Are you ready to make a similar commitment to mastering the concepts of business English? Do you really believe that the goal of expressing yourself correctly and effectively is worth the effort? If so, then you are ready to begin reading the first chapter at once. If you are hesitating, however, you do not need to take the word of an English teacher, who might naturally seem to be prejudiced. Instead, ask any successful business executive for his or her opinion of the importance of good communication skills to career advancement. Most would agree with Robert Benjamin, Vice President and Head of European Risk Management for Chemical Bank, who insists: "In every profession, those who can communicate effectively have an enormous career advantage. Good writing skills are frequently a requirement to advancement, but perhaps more importantly, they provide the means to outshine one's colleagues at every level. This is especially true today when emphasis on quantitative skills has put good writers in short supply."

Once you have made the commitment, you might still have doubts about whether you can master the material. Memories of confusing punctuation rules, intimidating grammatical terms, and complicated explanations may prompt you to exclaim, "I never could do English!" Perhaps, discouraged and frustrated, you even used to say "I hate English!" The reason so many high school students share this view is usually that they do not see the purpose behind the lessons. Without this sense of purpose, students become bored with what appears to be meaningless material.

This text attempts to address this problem by not only simplifying terms and explanations but also stressing only those concepts that will make a critical difference on the job. Whenever possible, practice and review will be in the form of business letters, not just individual sentences, and only relevant information will be included. However interesting it might be to understand how all the parts of an engine work, this knowledge will not necessarily make you a better driver, and it is not essential for the average driver to know what is happening under the hood in order to drive a car. Therefore, you can be assured that the information in these chapters has been selected and included because you need to know it in order to write well on the job.

What can you expect when you finish this book if you make the commitment to work hard and you do indeed master the material? You will have confidence in your ability to compose clear, effective sentences and to punctuate them correctly. You will then be free to concentrate on what you are trying to communicate, since how you communicate it will be as automatic as the mechanics of driving a car. Good writers, like good drivers, can then have control over the direction in which they want to go!

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Part ONE

Sentence Fundamentals

You are probably not surprised to notice that the first section in this book is about the parts of speech and sentence structure; in fact, you were probably expecting that. Since these units are the building blocks of English grammar, learning their definitions is a logical place to begin. Yet, that is precisely the danger! Since you have heard the terms “noun” and “clause” so many times in the course of your schooling, you are likely to be bored by them and to think, “Here we go again!” Simply because the words are so familiar to you, you may be tempted to skip quickly over this part, assuming you already know the material.

The truth is that most students have only a fuzzy notion of sentence fundamentals, and later on, this vagueness can be a real problem. If you take the time to master these few concepts now, however, you will be surprised at how helpful this knowledge will be. Try this simple test: If you truly understand any material, you should be able to explain it clearly to another person. If you cannot, you don’t really “know” it. Could you explain a clause simply? How about an adverb? Believe it or not, by the end of this part of the book, you should be able to do exactly that. The concepts are not difficult to learn, but you will have to concentrate to learn them once and for all. You will be glad you did!

Chapter 1

Parts of Speech

Do you recall how many parts of speech there are? The correct answer is eight, but to be truthful, you will really use only seven most of the time. The interjection simply shows strong emotion; it is usually followed by an exclamation point, and although it is quite effective in writing dialogue, it is rarely used in business writing. Just imagine receiving a letter from your bank exclaiming, "Good Grief! Your loan payment is overdue!" or "Oh, no! Your checking account is overdrawn again!" Only two types of letters in business actually use the interjection: a letter of congratulations ("Wonderful, Ed! You are the perfect choice for president of the Chamber of Commerce!") and a sales letter ("Wow! You may have already won \$1,000,000, Ms. Adams!").

Most English texts begin this section by introducing the noun, but some nouns can be difficult to recognize. Another part of speech—namely, the preposition—can be very effective in helping you to pick out these troublesome nouns, so let's begin with the two parts of speech that function as LINKERS.

PREPOSITIONS

Most prepositions are short—only a few letters—yet they are essential to the meaning of any sentence. Prepositions are important because they show the relationship between words. For example, imagine a piece of paper and a book. Where is the paper in relation to the book? A number of prepositions could tell you.

in	inside
within	above
on top of	over
below	beneath
underneath	beside
next to	alongside

In the sentence, "Jim ran _____ Tom," think of all the possibilities. Jim might have run *with* Tom in a marathon, *to* Tom to ask for help, *against* Tom in the election, *from* Tom in fright, or *before* or *after* or *beside* Tom in a race. In each sentence, the preposition would show us the relationship between Jim and Tom.

The only way to master using prepositions is to be able to recognize them on sight; therefore, you need to memorize them. You are probably already familiar with the common prepositions, such as *to*, *in*, *of*, or *with*, but there are many more words that may surprise you. Try to write down as many prepositions as you can remember. Then cross these words off the following list. Now concentrate on the rest of the prepositions until you can identify any of them when you come across them in a sentence. One suggestion is to write each word on an index card and just glance at the cards whenever you have a few minutes—on the bus, in the checkout line, over a cup of coffee. Soon they will be familiar friends, and friends they will turn out to be!

Common Prepositions

about	below	in	toward
above	beneath	into	under
across	beside	like	underneath
after	between	of	until
against	beyond	off	up
among	by	on	upon
around	down	over	with
as	during	past	within
at	except	through	without
before	for	throughout	
behind	from	to	

Prepositional Phrase

Why are prepositions so helpful? You will notice that almost all prepositions are followed by a noun or a pronoun; the combination of a preposition and a noun is called a "prepositional phrase." Every prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and ends with a noun or a pronoun, which is called the "object of the preposition." When you spot a preposition, just ask "Preposition what?" to find the object.

The baby is *in* her crib. In what? The object is the "crib."

I will meet you *after* the seminar. After what? The seminar.

He asked *about* the retirement plan. About what? The plan.

Of course, if the preposition is followed by a person, ask "Preposition whom?"

I reported the theft *to* the manager. To whom? The manager.

Sarah went *with* the supervisor all day. With whom? The supervisor.

I walked *behind* Mary. Behind whom? Mary.

Since the objects of prepositions are always nouns (or pronouns), you can identify many nouns that would otherwise be a problem to identify just by noticing that they follow a preposition.

I disagreed with his hypothesis. With what? "Hypothesis" must be a noun.

Hannah is at the apex of her career. At what? Of what? "Apex" and "career" must be nouns.

Another way in which these little words can be a big help will be seen when we get to more complicated topics, such as determining subjects and direct objects in a sentence, because these can never be in a prepositional phrase. All you need to do is eliminate the prepositional phrases, and the subject is much easier to spot. For the moment, though, it is enough to memorize these important words.

Practice Exercise

Circle the prepositional phrases in the following sentences. A sentence may have more than one.

1. Milly went to the grocery store.
2. In the morning, I walk several miles.
3. The business meeting will be held after the dinner.
4. Someone broke into the office during the night.
5. At night my grandmother keeps her teeth in a glass on her bedside table.
6. Jane moved to Boston from San Francisco.
7. Before the storm, we closed several windows in the house.
8. Sal looked under the desk, behind the bookshelf, and even in the wastebasket for the missing check.
9. Dan skis on the cross-country trails in Maine.
10. On the way to school, Joey always walks through the puddles.

(CONJUNCTIONS)

The other part of speech that links words is the conjunction, which simply means "joins with," the way two roads join at a "junction." Conjunctions are easy to master because there are so few of them. The Big Four are and, or, nor, and but. (Some writers include for, yet, and so when they join sentences.) They can join words, phrases, or clauses; but whatever they join must be grammatical equals. You will never see a noun and a prepositional phrase joined by a conjunction, nor can a conjunction join a verb and an adverb.

Sheila or Martin can take you to your room. Nouns

Ms. Harris types *neatly* and *accurately*. Adverbs

Put the box *on the shelf* or *under the counter*. Prepositional phrases

I will *wash* and *wax* and *polish* the car. Verbs

I *wanted to study*, but I *fell asleep*. Sentences

Think of a conjunction as a scale with equal weights on both sides, or imagine it as a seesaw that needs equal weights in order to balance. A seesaw won't work with an adult on one end and a toddler on the other!

Paired Conjunctions

Sometimes the conjunctions *and*, *or*, *nor*, and *but* bring along a friend and work in pairs. These sets of paired conjunctions can add a nice balance and style to your sentences, but they must be used correctly. The pairs are always the same:

Both . . . and

Either . . . or

Neither . . . nor

Not only . . . but (also)

To be used correctly, whatever grammatical construction appears between the two conjunctions must be repeated after the *and*, *or*, *nor*, or *but*. (In other words, imagine the main conjunction as the center of the scale or seesaw so that whatever is between the pair will balance with what follows the main conjunction.)

Both *Mrs. Smith* and *Ms. Jones* can attend the seminar. Nouns

The lawyer left her briefcase either *in the courtroom* or *in the judge's chamber*. Prepositional phrases

The applicant could neither *type* nor *take* shorthand. Verbs

Not only *was the lecture long*, but *it was also boring*. Sentences

Whenever you use conjunctions in pairs, be sure to check for balance.

Wrong: Mr. Perez will call you either *in the morning* or *he will call in the afternoon*.

Right: Mr. Perez will call you either *in the morning* or *in the afternoon*.

Wrong: The new secretary can not only *type 65 wpm* but also *she can proofread accurately*.

Right: Not only *can the new secretary type 65 wpm*, but *she can also proofread accurately*.

Practice Exercise

Circle the conjunctions in the following sentences. Then underline the two equal units that are being joined.

1. Frank and Fran own a home on Block Island.
2. My father and mother are away for a week.