

# The Liberal Arts and Sciences: Grammar

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Do we need to know grammar to learn a language? The answer is no. We learned our language before we were exposed to grammar in school. That being the case what is the point of grammar? Grammar is the whole system and structure of a language. Once we know the system and structure we are able to grasp the content of a language and understand and use language as it changes over time.

Our language started during the barbarism of the dark ages. The English language gradually varies as we trace it back, and becomes at length identified with the Anglo-Saxons, that is, with the dialect spoken by the Saxons after their settlement in England. Of this period Charles Bucke, enumerates one hundred and eleven words found in our language. Samuel Johnson, who says there are but ninety-five words remaining in our language, argues based on this number that the Saxons mingled little or at all with the Anglos. Prior to this our language is traced to the Celtics modified by the Romans.

The formation of our language cannot with propriety be dated earlier than the thirteenth century. As in all Languages the formation of a language can be traced in its literature. Notables such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Wickliffe, Luther all who wrote for the Church of the Day added to the system of grammar which became part of our grammar system of today. The English of the thirteenth century is scarcely intelligible to the modern reader. Dr. Johnson calls it "a kind of intermediate diction, neither Saxon nor English;" and says, that Sir John Gower, who wrote in the latter part of the fourteenth century, was "the first of our authors who can be properly said to have written English." Contemporary with Gower, the father of English poetry, was the still greater poet, his disciple Chaucer. .

It is in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries where our language experiences the progress of great and obvious improvement. The first of these changes was effected by the early grammarians of Europe giving considerable aid to the reformation, though it had no immediate connexion with that event. . Among the earliest of the English grammarians, was Ben Jonson, the poet; who died in the year 1637, at the age of sixty-three. His book of grammar, is a small treatise written in prose, and designed chiefly for the aid of foreigners in learning the English Language. It was not until the eighteenth century the best works were produced in the English Language. Swift, Pope, Johnson, Hume, Horne, and many other celebrated authors flourished in that century.

Grammar is a system of rules which govern our language. It is a set of symbols (words, numbers, letters, sentences etc.) that we use in a more or less uniform pattern which allows us to communicate with each other.

The science of grammar involves three aspects. Language form, language meaning, and language in context. Language form is the way we communicate by speaking or writing. Language meaning is what we communicate. Language context has two perspectives verbal and social. Verbal context is the text or speech surrounding what is written or what is being said. Social context refers to the social class, gender, age or race and social identity. In each

of these three forms is embedded sound (voice), symbols (letters and numbers), and meaning (what the letters or voice mean).

The art of Grammar is applying language form, language meaning, context, sound and symbols in writing and speaking correctly. Writing and speaking correctly involves employing words according to their proper meaning in a way where each word supports the meaning of the sentence. In writing always utilizing correct spelling and in speaking using proper pronunciation and accents.

However, for those of us who are not interested in the science or art of grammar we simply need to know there are twenty seven subjects of grammar(nouns, verbs, semicolons and so on) and the rules on how best to apply them. For many of us we learned these rules in grammar school (elementary school). The term "grammar school" historically refers to the schools teaching Latin grammar to future Roman citizens, orators, and, later, Roman Catholic Priests.

Most of us could not at present repeat the rules of grammar and possibly we were never able to. Fortunately our language has evolved and now grammar encompasses collective usage as being acceptable. The contemporary grammarian gives us some examples of this evolution of grammar:

1 We were taught never to end a sentence with a preposition. Prepositions relate one word or phrase to another and are followed by an object. Ignore it as it was designed for writing in Latin.

2 We were taught never to use a double negative. Multiple negatives add emphasis. Though the rule still stands no native English speaker is likely to misunderstand.

3 We were taught between applies two things and among should always be used for more than two. Between is appropriate when there is a reciprocal relationship i.e agreements between groups, no matter how many are involved. Among belongs to collective relationships such as voting in a Lodge.

4 We were taught it should be bored by or bored with, but not bored of. This rule is ignored by most as there is no justification for it.

5 We were taught never to start a sentence with a conjunction (and, but, because). This is a custom, distinguishing a particular class or group of people. It is a shibboleth (long-standing regarded as outmoded or no longer important)

6 We were taught that none always takes a singular verb. This is a myth. Plural is acceptable and sounds more natural.

Our ability to communicate is based on how we understand and use the complex systems of language one of which is grammar. As language evolves so does grammar. How we understand and utilize our specialized language symbols and how they are interconnected along with our general knowledge and our experience determines our success in communicating our thoughts and meaning.

## Sources

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