
**English grammar for beginners .
authorized for use in the Province
of Quebec**

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ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR BEGINNERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOPE AND DIVISIONS OF GRAMMAR.

1. Importance of the Study of English Grammar.—When boys and girls begin to learn English Grammar, they are apt to start with a prejudice that the study is likely to prove useless and certain to prove dull :—useless, because Grammar is supposed to “teach a person how to speak and write correctly,” and they can speak and write correctly enough already; dull, because grammarians, like the men of whom Jack Cade complained, “usually talk of a noun and a verb,” and in talk of this sort there is not much charm. Now, the dullness of a subject is a matter of personal taste, and about tastes it is idle to dispute. If anybody finds Grammar dull, he has a right to his opinion and a right to express it. But the usefulness of a subject is a question not of taste but of fact, and a word or two may be said with advantage at the outset, in answer to the inquiry,—What is the good of learning Grammar?

In the first place, as one part of the business of Grammar is to deal with correct forms of expression, and to point out, not merely that some forms are wrong, but also why they are wrong, it is clear that a person who has studied Grammar is more likely to avoid common errors in speech and writing than one who has not. The habit of mixing with educated people, and of reading well-written books, will doubtless do vastly more, than can be done by

studying Grammar, to keep a man from making grammatical blunders; but the study of Grammar will help.

We can give much better reasons than this, however, for occupying ourselves with English Grammar. It is by means of the English language that we carry on trains of thought in our own minds, and convey our meaning to the minds of other people. Time and trouble will therefore be well spent in learning something of the nature of an instrument, which performs services of such great importance. An artisan, who is occupied year after year in using a complicated piece of machinery, must be a dull drudge, if his curiosity is never aroused about the way in which the machine performs its work. An artisan, whose mind is active and alert, does not content himself with merely turning taps and lifting handles. He acquires a knowledge of each part of the machine, and of the service which each part contributes towards the work of the machine as a whole. This knowledge makes him a more competent mechanic, enabling him, if the machine at any time goes wrong, to put his finger on the faulty spot. It also adds to his stock of ideas, and thereby makes him a more intelligent man.

Now the English language is a complicated instrument, which is used by us all every day of our lives, and we ought to aim, not merely at using it correctly, but at using it, as an intelligent workman uses his machine, with some understanding of its nature. Consider, too, the range over which the English language extends. It is the language spoken to-day by millions in North America, in Australia, in South Africa. It is the language in which, during many centuries, great writers have given their thoughts to the world,—the language of Chaucer, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Wordsworth, of Tennyson. Its history and its character certainly have claims on our attention, and something of its history and character the study of English Grammar will teach.

2. Grammar is the science which deals with language and its correct use. By a science we mean

a collection of facts and principles arranged in an orderly fashion. Accordingly, English Grammar brings together facts concerning the English language, and states the principles which are observed when it is correctly used.

A language consists of words, which may be spoken or written. Spoken words are sounds which convey a meaning,—not mere noises like the cries of the farm-yard. Written words are composed of letters, and suggest to us these sounds. The thousands of words, of which a language consists, may be arranged in a small number of groups, according to the purpose for which we employ them. The words in some of these groups undergo slight changes which produce variations in their meanings. Words do their work, not when they stand alone, but when they are arranged in such a manner as to form sentences, or, as we sometimes say, “to make sense.”

3. Different Parts of Grammar.—Hence we may expect a book on English Grammar to give us information on such points as the following :—

1. Of how many simple or elementary sounds are English words composed? How may such sounds be classified? This branch of Grammar is commonly called **Orthoepy**; a better name is **Phonology**.

2. How many letters are required for a perfect English Alphabet? What are the imperfections of our existing Alphabet? This branch is called **Orthography**.

3. Into what classes do words fall when we group them according to their function,—that is, with reference to the sort of work which they do? What changes of form, or inflexions, do they undergo to indicate variations of their meaning? How are words built up? This branch is called **Etymology**.

4. When words are so placed as to form sentences, what principles must be observed, in order that the sentences may be grammatically correct? This branch is called **Syntax**.

CHAPTER II.

ELEMENTARY SOUNDS IN ENGLISH.

4. Classification of Simple Sounds.—Words are significant sounds,—sounds which convey a meaning. Of such sounds we may assume that the English language contains about a hundred-and-fifty thousand. But these hundred-and-fifty thousand different sounds are formed by joining together simple or elementary sounds, of which in English there are about forty. Take, for example, the words *bat* and *but*. Both words contain three simple or elementary sounds in combination, but two of these sounds, *b* and *t*, are the same in each. Our first business will be to enumerate all these simple sounds and to arrange them in classes.

5. Vowels and Consonants.—The two principal classes consist of Vowels and Consonants. Let us ascertain how they differ in character.

Pronounce the vowel-sound of *a* in *path*, or of *e* in *feed*, or of *o* in *note*. You can utter it at the top of your voice, as the saying is. Next pronounce the *b* in *bat*, not calling it *bee*,—for ‘bee’ is merely its name as a letter of the alphabet,—but sounding it as you would do, if you were going to say *bat*, and then changed your mind and stopped, as soon as the first letter had passed your lips. Do this also with the words *dog* and *ten*, checking yourself at the end of the *d* and *t*. In this way you will produce the sounds which belong properly to *b*, *d*, and *t*. They are sounds of which you can hear hardly anything at all. Now add a vowel after the *b*, *d*, and *t*; say *be*, *day*, *tee*, and you can make yourself heard a hundred yards away.

Shall we describe a Vowel, then, as a sound which can be audibly pronounced when it stands alone, and a Consonant as a sound which is audible only when a vowel accompanies it?

Further experiments will show that this mode of distinguishing vowels from consonants breaks down. Make the sound of *zzz...* in *buzz*; or the sound of *sss...*, as if you were hissing some one; or the sound of *sh...*! as if you were telling people to be quiet; or the sound of *mmm...*? as if you were expressing your doubt respecting a statement. These sounds can be heard very well without the addition of a vowel. Yet nobody calls them vowel-sounds. In what respect, then, do they differ from vowels?

They differ in this respect. Add a vowel to a sound, such as *b*, *d*, or *t*, which is almost inaudible when pronounced alone, and the inaudible sound becomes audible. But add the sound of *z*, *s*, *sh*, or *m*, to *b*, *d*, or *t*,—say *bz*, or *dm*, or *ts*,—and your *b*, *d*, or *t* can be heard no better than before. Put this statement to the test. By performing half-a-dozen experiments yourself, you will learn much more about these matters than by merely reading many pages of print. Try to say *bm*, *dz*, *tsh*. You can hear the *m*, and the *z*, and the *sh*, but the *b*, and the *d*, and the *t* have become no more audible than they were when you tried to pronounce them alone. Let us therefore express the distinction thus:—

Consonants are sounds which will not enable us to produce other sounds.

Vowels are sounds by the aid of which any consonant can be audibly produced.

6. **Pure Vowel-sounds.**—Of pure vowel-sounds we have in English fifteen, though there are only five letters, or signs, with which to express them. The words in the following list illustrate these vowel sounds.

<i>A sounds</i>		<i>I sound</i>
fat		pin
fate		<i>O sounds</i>
father		not
fall		note
fare		<i>U sounds</i>
want		but
<i>E sounds</i>		pull
fed		fur
feed		rude

6 ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR BEGINNERS.

7. **Semi-vowels.**—The sounds of *w* and *y* are commonly called Semi-vowels.

When *w* and *y* are immediately followed by a vowel in the same syllable, they represent sounds which are something like consonants. Say *wit*, and let your voice linger on the *w*. The sound given to the *w* closely resembles the sound of *oo* in *cool*, or of *u* in *rude*. Pronounce slowly *oo-it*: then increase the speed as you repeat the word, and you will find that you are saying *wit*. In like manner pronounce slowly the word *yes*, and you will recognise in the sound of its *y* the long *e* sound of *feed*. Listen to a person who answers a question with a hesitating 'yes,' and you will hear that he says 'ee-es.' But when the word is uttered at ordinary speed, the long vowel-sound at the beginning glides into a closely allied consonantal sound.

8. **Diphthongs.**—Two vowel-sounds which run together in pronunciation are called Diphthongs.

Bear in mind that in this chapter we are talking of sounds, not of letters. If you were asked to name a true diphthong in English, you would probably give as an example the *æ* in *Cæsar*; but your example would be wrong. The *æ* in *Cæsar*, as we pronounce the word, is no diphthong in sound: it is a pure vowel,—the long *e* which we have in *feed*. Whether we spell this sound with *æ* as in *Cæsar*, or with *ea* as in *meat*, or with *ie* as in *siege*, or with *ei* as in *seize*, or with one *e* as in *be*, or with two as in *feed*, the sound is in each case the same, and it is a simple sound, not a blend,—a pure vowel, not a diphthong. The true diphthongs in English are these:—

i in *fine* = *a* (in *father*) + *i* (in *pin*),
oi in *noise* = *a* (in *fall*) + *e* (in *feed*),
ou in *house* = *a* (in *father*) + *u* (in *put*),
u in *mute* = *i* (in *pin*) + *u* (in *rude*).

To these four there is sometimes added as a fifth the broader form of *i* in *fine*, which we hear in the word *aye*, when we say, 'The Ayes have it.'

Notice carefully that, although the *i* in *fine* is a single letter, the sound is diphthongal. The same remark is true of the *u* in *mute*. When enumerating the simple vowel-sounds, be on your guard against inserting these blends, or diphthongs, in your list.

9. **Consonants.**—At his present stage the reader shall be excused the tedious task of classifying the Consonants, and we will content ourselves with making out an unsorted list. Take away the five vowels and two semi-vowels from our alphabet of twenty-six letters, and nineteen consonants are left. But from this remainder, for reasons which

will be given in the next chapter, four consonants, *c, q, j, x*, must be rejected. The number is thus reduced to fifteen, which stand in the alphabet in the following order :—

b, d, f, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, z.

This list is however incomplete. It requires the addition of five more simple consonantal sounds, and the addition of these five will bring the total number of English consonants up to twenty.

The five simple consonantal sounds for which we have no single letters are these:—the sound of *zh* in *azure*, of *sh* in *shine*, of *dh* in *thine*, of *th* in *thin*, and of *ng* in *king*. You may raise the objection that in the word *azure* the sound is already represented by a single letter,—the letter *z*. Observe, however, that the usual and proper sound of *z* is not its sound in *azure*, but its sound in *zeal* or *prize*. To mark this difference we have written the *z* of *azure* as *zh*, but the sound is not a compound of *z* and *h*: it is really a simple sound. Again, in the other sounds, represented by *sh, dh, th*, as a matter of fact there is no combination of the sound of *h* with *s, d, or t*. The sounds are in each case simple, but we write them with an *h*, because they have no separate letters of their own. In the same way, the sound of *ng* in *king* is thus indicated for want of a single sign by which to represent it; but the sound is not a blend of *n* and *g*; it is a simple sound.

QUESTIONS.

1. Explain the terms *vowel* and *semi-vowel*. Point out the vowels and semi-vowels in *wayward* and *yearly*.

2. Which of the following words contain true diphthongal sounds?—*pain, noise, new, people, yeoman, build, now, found, eye, clean, rough*.

3. Write two words in which *i* occurs as a pure vowel and two in which it occurs as a diphthong. Show in the same way that *u* may stand for a pure vowel or for a diphthong.

4. From the list contained in § 6 select the word illustrating the vowel-sound which is represented by the italicised letter or letters in each of the following words:—*flaw, clerk, sew, stern, flood, plaid, bury, pretty, what, fruit, wolf, love, chief, leopard, women, door, shoe, could, broad, day, guard, guarantee, marine, busy, carriage, soul, manœuvre, learn, does, aunt, haunt, journal, tow, prove, fête*.

5. If we had single letters to represent the simple sounds sometimes denoted by *sh, th, and ng*, in which of the following words should we use them?—*shoot, disheartened, dishevelled, dishonoured, grasshopper, thick, hothouse, Worthing, Eltham, ringing, engage, anger, danger*.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENGLISH ALPHABET.

10. Requirements of a Perfect Alphabet.—We will now turn our attention to the signs, or letters, by which sounds are indicated in writing. The collection of these signs, or letters, is called the Alphabet.

A perfect alphabet would fulfil these two conditions:—

1. Every simple or elementary sound would have a separate letter.
2. No simple or elementary sound would have more than one letter.

11. The English Alphabet tested.—Is the English alphabet a perfect one? Does it fulfil these two conditions?

It certainly does not fulfil the first. There are fifteen simple vowel-sounds in the language, whilst there are only five letters to express them. Then, again, under the head of consonants, letters are lacking to represent the sounds of *zh*, *sh*, *dh*, *th*, *ng*, all of which are simple. Thus the alphabet is short of letters to the extent of ten vowel-signs and five consonant-signs,—fifteen letters in all,—and to supply the place of these we have recourse to various shifts.

Try the alphabet by the second test. Does it contain any letters which are not needed? Is it extravagant in having too much, at the same time that it is badly off in not having nearly enough?

The alphabet must plead guilty on this charge also

though its faults in the way of excess are far less serious than its faults in the way of deficiency. It contains four letters, which would be absent from a perfect alphabet, viz., *c, q, j, x*.

Why is *c* a superfluous letter?

Because it represents no sound not already represented by *k, s*, or *sh*. Take *c* out of the alphabet, and we could write *kat, sity, speshal*, instead of *cat, city, special*, and in thus writing these words, we should be writing them according to their pronunciation.

The letters *j* and *x* would be removed for a different reason. They represent sounds which are not elementary at all. Now it is no business of the alphabet to furnish us with short-hand symbols which stand for compound sounds. The letter *j* represents a compound of *d* and the *zh* of *azure*: *jest* is really *d + zh + est*.

Similarly *x* represents a compound of *k* and *s*, or of *g* and *z*: *box* is really *bo + k + s*, *exert* is really *e + g + z + ert*.

Lastly, consider the case of *q*, which is always written with a *u* after it. In *quay* it has the sound of *k*, and in *queen* it has the sound of *k + w*. In both instances it expresses only what we can express quite well without it, and it is therefore superfluous, or redundant.

12. Extent to which our Alphabet is Imperfect.—We are now in a position to take stock of our alphabet, and of the simple sounds which it is supposed to represent.

The alphabet contains twenty-six letters, but four of these (*c, j, q, x*) we have seen reasons for rejecting as useless. This reduces the available assets of the alphabet to twenty-two letters.

On the other side of the account we have the following claims presented by elementary sounds :—

15	vowel-sounds,
2	semi-vowel sounds,
20	consonant sounds,
37	making a total of elementary sounds.

Our alphabet is clearly in an insolvent condition, for it contains only 22 letters, with which to satisfy the demands of 37 sounds requiring a letter apiece.

It is customary, moreover, to put in a claim for separate letters to represent the diphthongs, though indeed the justice of the claim is not quite obvious. For diphthongs are blends, or compounds, of two sounds, and the right way of representing these blends would therefore seem to be this,—to put alongside of each other the vowel-signs which stand for the combining vowel-sounds. But in most books on Grammar you will find five diphthongs added to the list of sounds requiring separate letters, and with this addition our 37 sounds will be increased to 42 sounds, the needs of which we have to meet as best we can with 22 letters.

13. Devices for supplying the place of missing letters.—The work of some of the twenty letters which are missing is often done in a very unscientific fashion. Notice, for example, the devices in use to show that an *e* or an *o* is to be pronounced long. With their separate signs for short *e* and long *e*, short *o* and long *o*, the Greeks were in this respect better off than ourselves.

We show that a vowel is long—

1, by adding a mute *e* at the end of the word ; as *gate*, *note*, *sile* :

2, by inserting an *a* after the vowel ; as *neat*, *coat* :

3, by doubling the vowel ; as *feed*, *cool*.

These three processes are illustrated by the words *mete*, *meat*, *meet*.

The want of consistency in English spelling is astonishing. Look at the following ways of representing the sound of *a* as it occurs in *fate* :—*laid*, *rein*, *say*, *prey*, *gauge*, *gaol*, *break*. Make similar illustrations for yourself of the ways in which the sound of *o* as in *no*, or of *e* as in *me*, is sometimes expressed in writing.

Then, again, observe on the other hand how the same letter, or collection of letters, stands at different times for various sounds :—how, for example, *s* has one sound in *sin*, another in *praise*, a third in *measure*, a fourth in *mansion*, and no sound at all in *isle*. Think of as many words as you can, which contain the combination *ough*, pronounced differently in each.

The result of our inquiry compels us to condemn the English alphabet, as (1) Defective, (2) Redundant, (3) Inconsistent.