

# OUR MOTHER TONGUE

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR

*Nancy Wilson*

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Some exercises and examples are taken from *English Grammar and Composition for Public Schools*, a grammar text by G. H. Armstrong published in 1854 by the Hunter, Rose Co., Toronto.

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To Douglas,  
*my favorite wordsmith*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Someone has rightly said that manners are to be understood as love in the trifles. And because spelling, grammatical coherence, and standards for writing are necessary for clarity of communication, clarity in communication is therefore an act of love.*

DOUGLAS WILSON

## WHAT IS ENGLISH?

---

We know that God Himself created language. The Bible tells us that He spoke all things into existence. God spoke to man in the garden, and we see that He also gave man the gift of language and assigned man the task of finding words suitable for naming all the creatures. Language is truly a wonderful gift. In Genesis 11:1 we learn that “the whole earth had one language and one speech.” But due to man’s rebellion at the Tower of Babel, “the LORD confused the language of all the earth” (v. 9) so that the people could no longer understand one another. Since then, man has had to work very hard to learn the many languages of the world.

English belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Some of the other languages in this branch include German, Dutch, and the Scandinavian languages. English grew out of other languages as well, mostly as the result of wars and invasions. English has changed so much over time that early English is difficult for many to recognize as English at all. Consider this example of Old English from the Bible: *Ne beoth ge thy forhtran, theah the Faraon brohte sweordwigenra side hergas*. This means “Be not frightened thereat, though Pharaoh has brought sword wielders, vast troops . . . .”

The Romance languages constitute another branch of the Indo-European languages, but they grew out of Latin instead of Germanic roots. The languages derived from Latin are called Romance languages because Latin was the language of Rome. These include French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish. Although English is not a Romance language, over the years it acquired many words from Latin. In fact, over fifty percent of English vocabulary has Latin roots. The Romance languages can claim closer to eighty percent Latin roots. English has borrowed from many other languages besides Latin as well. We should strive to teach our students not only to love our mother tongue and how it works, but also to love the story behind it all.

Though English has many thousands of words, each one falls into one (or sometimes more than one) of the eight categories of words, called the parts of speech. English has old or archaic words, new words, foreign words, slang, and words for every discipline or study. Each word has a history, called its etymology. Etymology is the study of words and their origins. Words are very important for the Christian because God chose to reveal Himself to man through the words of the prophets and the apostles in the Bible, and through His Son, the *logos* or Word of God, Jesus Christ. Christians should, above all others, be people of the Word, and people who love words. Writing, reading, and language should be of great interest to God's people, for by means of these tools they can know Him better and glorify Him.

The logical starting point for the study of English is the study of grammar, which is the study of the rules that govern our mother tongue. Language is much like a family with its own culture, traditions, customs, and rules. And, like a family, a language changes with time. The story of how English acquired all its peculiar customs and rules is a fascinating story in itself. Many of our grammar rules came into being in the eighteenth century when the Enlightenment inspired man to reduce everything into neat, tidy, governable systems. In many cases these rules have no particular reason for existing apart from the fact



that someone loudly and authoritatively asserted them. Nevertheless, here we are now in the twenty-first century, and we have a body of widely accepted rules to govern our speaking and writing. It is good for us to know and understand these rules without becoming slaves to them. Like the Sabbath, they should exist for us, not the other way around. This means that a good writer will sometimes break the rules, but he does so for a designed effect and not out of ignorance or laziness. Because we live in a culture that wants no rules, we Christians should desire to preserve and pass on all the important tools of communication, knowing that language is a means, not an end in itself. Language is a God-given tool for our enjoyment and enrichment. It is a gift from Him we must not squander or misuse, but rather glory in. Studying our language enables us to choose our own words wisely, to enjoy and appreciate great literature, to understand the thoughts of others, to give clear and correct expression to our own thoughts, and to train our minds to think in an orderly fashion.

## **WHY ANOTHER GRAMMAR BOOK?**

---

That is a good question. The world seems to be quite full of grammar books, but it is not easy to find a text today that covers all the bases, still emphasizes diagramming, is not laden with politically correct jargon, and embraces a Christian worldview. I am certainly not claiming to have achieved all these things in this little book, but I have aimed for it. I wanted to produce a grammar book that could be used to teach junior-high students as well as high-school or college students and adults, a book that covered many of the aspects of English grammar succinctly; I also wanted a book that could assume the biblical view of language. At the same time I wanted to whet the appetite of the student to want to know more about the history of our language. In the classical Christian school movement, students and teachers often find that they learn more about English in Latin

# DAILY LESSON PLANS

*A schedule defends from chaos and whim.*

ANNIE DILLARD

The following schedule will cover this text in a semester. If you prefer to go slower, divide it in half and take a year. Most important for the student is not how fast they go, but how well they learn the material.

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1	pp. 8-12 Exercises A-D	pp. 12-13 Exercise E	pp. 13-17 Exercises A-C	pp. 17-19 Exercises D-E	pp. 19-20 Review Exercise
2	pp. 21-25 Exercises A-D	pp. 25-27 Exercises E-F	pp. 28-31 Exercises A-D	pp. 32-33 Exercise E etc.	pp. 34-38 Exercises A-B
3	pp. 38-41 Exercises C-D	pp. 42-46 All Exercises	pp. 47-51 Exercises A-C	pp. 52-54 Exercise A	pp. 55-56
4	pp. 57-59 Exercises A-C	pp. 59-60 Exercises D-E	pp. 62-66 Exercise A	pp. 67-69 Exercises A-D	pp. 69-71 Exercises E-F
5	pp. 72-73 Exercises A-C	pp. 73-75 Exercises D-E	pp. 75-78 Exercise A	pp. 79-81 Exercise A	pp. 82-85 Exercises A-C
6	pp. 86-88 Exercises A-C	pp. 88-89 Exercise D	pp. 90-92 Exercises A-C	pp. 92-93 Exercise D	pp. 94-96 Exercises A-B
7	pp. 97-99 Exercises A-B	pp. 100-102 Exercises A-B	pp. 102-103 Exercise C	pp. 104-105 Exercise A	pp. 105-107 Exercises B-C
8	pp. 108-109 Exercise A	pp. 109-110 Exercises B-C	pp. 111-112 Exercise A	pp. 112-114 Exercises B-C	pp. 114-115 Exercise D
9	pp. 116-118 Exercises A-B	pp. 118-120 Exercise C etc	pp. 121-123 Exercises A-B	pp. 123-124 Exercise C	pp. 124-126 Review Exercise
10	pp. 127-129 Exercise A	pp. 129-130 Exercise B	pp. 131-133 Exercises C-F	pp. 134-137 Exercises A-B	pp. 137-138 Exercises C-E
11	pp. 139-140 Exercise F	pp. 142-143 Exercise A	pp. 144-146 Exercise	pp. 147-148 Exercise A	pp. 149-151 Exercises A-B
12	pp. 152-153 Exercise A etc.	pp. 154-159 Exercises A-B	pp. 160-163 Exercises A-C	pp. 164-167 Exercise A	pp. 168-172 Exercises A-B
13	pp. 173-174 Exercises A-B	pp. 176-178 Exercise A	pp. 179-184 Exercises A-B	pp. 185-186 Exercises C-D	pp. 187-188 Exercise A
14	pp. 189-190 Exercise A	pp. 190-191 Exercises B-C	pp. 192-196 All Exercises	pp. 197-201 Exercise A	pp. 201-202 Exercise B
15	pp. 203-205 Exercises C-E	pp. 206-207 Exercise A	pp. 207-208 Exercises B-C	pp. 209-210 Exercise A	pp. 210-211 Exercise B
16	pp. 211-212 Exercise C	pp. 212-213 Exercise D	pp. 215-218	pp. 219-220 Exercises A-C	pp. 221-222 All Exercises

# UNIT

# 1

## THE EIGHT CLASSES OF WORDS

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**A**lthough the English language has many words, there are only eight different classes or kinds of words. Each of these classes has a definite job to do in the language. They are called the **parts of speech**. *Parts* means divisions and, of course, *speech* means language, so the **parts of speech** are simply the *divisions of language*.

1	Nouns . . . . .	8
2	Verbs. . . . .	14
3	Adjectives . . . . .	21
4	Adverbs . . . . .	28
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9	Review . . . . .	55

## LESSON

# 1

## NOUNS

*When we name things or discover the names for things, we are mimicking God's creativity. And, oddly enough, it shapes us when we do it.*

REBEKAH MERKLE

### INTRODUCTION

---

#### EXAMPLES

**1. God controls the history of the world perfectly.**

The word *God* is the name of the Supreme Being; the word *history* is the name of a thing (a field of study); the word *world* is the name of a place.

**2. A Christian student sees His hand in all events.**

The word *student* is the name of a kind of person; the words *hand* and *events* are names of things.

**3. Studying with this perspective provides hope and encouragement for the future.**

The word *studying* is the name of an activity; the words *perspective* and *future* are the names of things (concepts or ideas); and the words *hope* and *encouragement* are the names of qualities or ideas.

#### EXPLANATION

Man has been naming things since God gave Adam the job of naming all the animals. Naming is unique to man. It is a way that man takes dominion over the earth. Today we still name our children and our churches and schools, and man is forever coming up with naming words for new activities (*snowboarding*), new inventions (*microwave*,



#### DEFINITION

A *noun*, or a name word, is the name of a person, place, thing, activity, or idea. *Noun* comes from the Latin *nomen*, "name."

internet), new discoveries (*electricity*), and new ideas (*postmodernism*). English has one class of words used to *name* things. These words name persons, places, or things that we can see; they name things that we can perceive with our other senses (such as sounds, smells, or tastes); they name qualities or ideas that we can think about (such as *beauty*, *mind*, *soul*, *life*, or *liberty*); or they name activities (such as *running*, *thinking*, *singing*, or *shopping*). A **noun** is used to name anything that exists or anything that we can think of. The word *noun* comes from the Latin word *nomen* which means *name*. A noun is always the *name* of something.

### EXERCISE A

List two nouns for each of the categories below.

1. Persons you have studied in history.
2. Places you would like to visit.
3. Things you use on a daily basis.
4. Qualities you admire in a friend.
5. Physical feelings (such as *pain*).
6. Mental feelings (such as *pity*).
7. Activities.
8. Subjects to study (such as *history*).

### EXERCISE B

Write down all the nouns in the following paragraph (divided into sections for convenience) from chapter 9 of *Over the Teacups* by Oliver Wendell Holmes. For each word, write down why it is a noun (for example, *tree* is a noun because it is the name of a thing—a plant). Remember that a noun names persons, places, things, activities, or ideas. Be sure to look at what the word is *doing* in the sentence. Is it *naming* something?



### HISTORIA

Have you ever wondered why our language is called *English*? Because it was first spoken in England, of course! But why is England called *England*? The earliest inhabitants of England were called the Britons, a Celtic people living in southern England. The old Latin name for Britain is *Britannia*. (Only a few geographic names from the Britons' ancient tongue survive in modern English.)

The Roman general Julius Caesar invaded Britannia in 55 BC. Though it took nearly one hundred years to complete the conquest, for the next four hundred years Britain was a Roman province, and many Latin words were introduced into the language. The Romans built roads, established camps and forts, and constructed large walls to keep out the invading Scots and Picts from the north. The most famous Roman wall is Hadrian's Wall, and its remains are visible today. Latin words introduced into the British tongue during the Roman occupation include *wall* (from the Latin *vallum*), *mile* (from the Latin *milia passuum*, meaning a thousand

paces), and *street* (from the Latin *strata via*, meaning paved way).

When Rome began to fall to invading barbarians, the Roman soldiers were called home to help in its defense. By AD 410, the Romans had abandoned Britannia, leaving the country defenseless. Consequently, in the middle of the 400s, warring Germanic peoples (the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons) began to invade. They succeeded in pushing the Britons into the northern and western parts of Britain. The Angles settled in central Britain, and the land became known as *Angle-land*. Later this became *England*, and the language spoken, our own mother tongue, became known as *English*.

**Example:** A tree is an underground creature, with its tail in the air. All its intelligence is in its roots. All the senses it has are in its roots. Think what sagacity it shows in its search after food and drink! Somehow or other, the rootlets, which are its tentacles, find out that there is a brook at a moderate distance from the trunk of the tree, and they make for it with all their might.

1. They find every crack in the rocks where there are a few grains of nourishing substance they care for, and insinuate themselves into its deepest recesses.
2. When spring and summer come, they let their tails grow, and delight in whisking them about in the wind, or letting them be whisked about by it; for these tails are poor passive things, with very little will of their own, and bend in whatever direction the wind chooses to make them.
3. The leaves make a deal of noise whispering. I have sometimes thought I could understand them, as they talk with each other, and that they seemed to think they made the wind as they wagged forward and back.
4. Remember what I say. The next time you see a tree waving in the wind, recollect that it is the tail of a great underground, many-armed polypus-like creature, which is as proud of its caudal appendage, especially, in the summer-time, as a peacock of his gorgeous expanse of plumage.

### EXERCISE C

Write five sentences of your own and underline all the nouns you use.

# LESSON 2

# VERBS

*Every adjective and adverb is worth five cents.  
Every verb is worth fifty cents.*

MARY OLIVER

## INTRODUCTION

---

### EXAMPLES

1. **Columbus sailed from Spain on August 3, 1492.**  
The word *sailed* asserts or states something about Columbus.
2. **Did he lose any of his three ships on the voyage?**  
The words *did* and *lose* are used to ask a question.
3. **Read this book about his journey.**  
The word *read* is used to tell someone to do something.



### DEFINITION

A *verb* is a word which can assert action, being, or existence. *Verb* derives from *verbum*, “word.”

### EXPLANATION

A word used to assert what a person or thing *does* or *is*, or that *asks* what a person *does* or *is*, or *tells* another person to *do* or *be* something is called a **verb**. The verb is the only word that can assert; it asserts action (even action performed by the mind, like *think*, *consider*, or *love*), condition, being, or existence. Though it is difficult to explain what a verb actually does, it is the most important word in the sentence; it is the life of the sentence, for there can be no complete sentence without a verb. The word *verb* comes from the Latin word *verbum* which means *word*.

## EXERCISE A

Notice in the examples below that the sentences (paraphrased from a quote by Thomas à Kempis) have both naming and asserting parts.

<b>Naming</b>	<b>Asserting</b>
Man	<i>beholds</i> the face.
God	<i>looks upon</i> the heart.
Man	<i>considers</i> the actions.
God	<i>weighs</i> the intentions.

The naming parts of the sentences below are provided. Make up some action verbs which assert (or express) what the following things do.

1. The student \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The wind \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The desk \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The clock \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The bus \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The dentist \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Airplanes \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The tree \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The class \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The baby \_\_\_\_\_.

## AUXILIARIES OR HELPING VERBS

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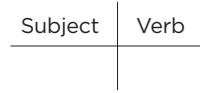
### EXAMPLES

Look at the italicized words in the sentences below. In each sentence the verb is comprised of more than one word.

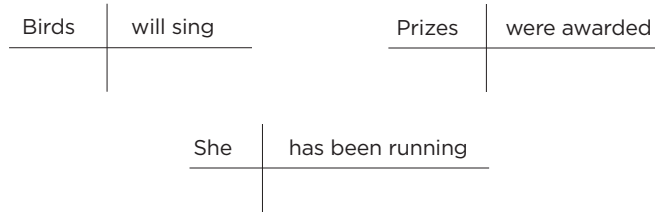
1. **The class is *studying* the history of England.**

The word *is* helps the main verb *studying*.





**Examples:**



**EXERCISE C**

Diagram the subjects and verbs in the following sentences.

1. Dogs growl.
2. Boys are watching.
3. Teams are competing.
4. Houses have been built.
5. I am studying.

**EXERCISE D**

If a sentence has a compound subject or compound verb, the diagram is structured differently. For the sentences *Bill and Jack are racing* and *Bill and Jack are diving and racing*, the diagrams look like this:

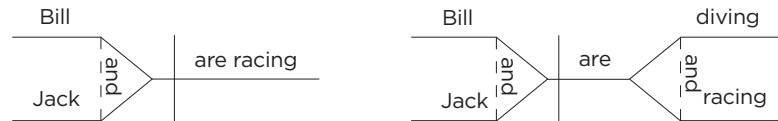


Diagram the compound subjects and compound verbs in the following sentences.

1. Poplars and willows were planted.
2. Dave and Jill are touring and traveling.
3. Mom and Dad are walking and jogging.

4. Men, women, and children rushed through the gates and filled the courtyard.
5. Camels, donkeys, carts, and bicycles moved slowly along the dusty road.

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What does the predicate do in the sentence?
2. Define the word *predicate*.
3. What two elements are needed to make a sentence?
4. What is the Latin root word for *predicate*?
5. To what other English word is it related?