

# A few things that an educated person should know about English grammar

Jason Merchant, 2015

## 0. Types of 'language'

1. Importance, use, and definition of *standard* language: register, genre, norm, social and professional expectations, standard writing and pronunciation (and when and under what circumstances these conventions can be contravened, and the expected, intended or unintended, effects of such contravention: what a shibboleth is, and some common shibboleths)

## 1. Phonology of English vs. orthography of English

1. Standard American English has 14 vowels (9 monophthongs and 5 diphthongs), 24 consonants; not the same as 5 vowel *letters* (and sometimes *y*) and 21 consonant *letters* (and usually *y*). (Ambiguity, digraphs)
2. Syllables, syllable structure, metrical structure
3. Punctuation

## 2. Morphology of English

1. Definitions and examples of: affix (prefix, suffix), stem, root, word: *per-ceive, re-ceive, per-cept-ion, per-cept-ual, re-cept-ion, inter-cept-ion (\*inter-ceive); rely, reli-es, reli-ed; reli-ance, reli-ant; re-act(-s/-ed), re-act-ion, re-act-ive; re-do, un-inhibit-ed, un-happy, non-compl-iant, a-theor-et-ic-al, atom-ic, teach-er-s*
2. Inflectional vs derivational morphology
3. The productivity of compounding and its various spellings (*blackboard, blackbird, whitewash, blue-eyed, blueberry, fireman, firefighter, fire-hydrant, fire-truck, fire insurance, salesperson, fire insurance salesperson, English teacher, French English teacher, American French teacher ≠ Franco-American teacher*)

## 3. Syntax of English

1. Parts of speech (word classes):
  - noun: proper (*Laura, Zeus, Greece, Chicago, the Nile*) vs. common (*child, dog, book, virtue, dirt*)
  - verb: (including inflected and contracted verb forms)
  - adjective: (including numerals)
  - adverb: *slowly, yesterday, highly, very, how, also, even, only, too*
  - conjunction: coordinating: *and, but, or, either, both, neither, nor*  
subordinating: *if, that, whether, for*
  - interjection: *oh! dang! ouch! wow!*
  - preposition: with noun phrases: *after, before, during, in, on, for, with, because of, on account of, on top of, in spite of, by dint of*  
with subordinate clauses: *after, before, while, though, because, than, as*
  - determiner: articles: *a(n), the*  
others: *some, every, each, both, which, what, no*
  - pronoun: personal: *I, me, my, mine; you, your, yours; he, him, his; she, her, hers; it, its; we, us, our, ours; they, them, their, theirs*

- interrogative: *who, what, when, where, how, why*  
 relative: *who, which*  
 particle: *to* (in *They intend to leave*)
2. Formation of phrases and clauses (word groupings, structural vs lexical ambiguity); modification
  3. Basic clause structure, questions, relative clauses
- 

**Grammatical terminology** to be learned:

For describing **clauses**:

independent (main, matrix), dependent (subordinate, relative)  
 declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamative

For describing **verbs**:

Transitive (monotransitive, ditransitive), intransitive verbs  
 Tense: past, present, future  
 Aspect: simple/habitual, progressive, perfect, emphatic  
 Mood: indicative, subjunctive, imperative  
 Voice: active, passive, middle  
 Finiteness: finite, nonfinite: infinitive, gerund  
 Participles: perfect, progressive, passive  
 Auxiliary vs. main verbs  
 Modal auxiliary, aspectual auxiliary, passive auxiliary, copula

For describing **nouns** and **pronouns**:

Case: nominative (*he*), accusative (*him*), genitive (*his*)  
 Number: singular, plural  
 Person: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 Gender: masculine, feminine, neuter  
 mass/collective, pluralia tantum, appositive, gerundive

For describing **prepositions**:

Transitive, intransitive, compound (*because of, in spite of, except for*)

For describing **adjectives**:

Absolute, comparative, superlative, equative

**Grammatical relations:**

1. Subject, predicate, object (direct object, indirect object)
  - a. Predicates can be any of the major phrase types: AP, NP, PP, VP
  - b. How subject-verb agreement works
2. Subordination, coordination
3. Modification by adverbial and adjectival phrases (and uses of NPs as such: *He left last week; She is five inches taller than her brother*)