OUR MOTHER TONGUE
AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Nancy Wilson
To Douglas,
my favorite wordsmith
# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION .................................................... 1

## DAILY LESSON PLANS ........................................... 6

### UNIT 1

## THE EIGHT CLASSES OF WORDS ................................. 7

1. Nouns ......................................................... 8
2. Verbs ......................................................... 14
3. Adjectives ..................................................... 21
4. Adverbs ....................................................... 28
5. Pronouns ...................................................... 34
6. Prepositions .................................................. 42
7. Conjunctions .................................................. 47
8. Interjections .................................................. 52
9. Review ......................................................... 55

### UNIT 2

## THE SENTENCE ................................................... 61

10. Kinds of Sentences. ........................................... 62
11. The Subject ................................................... 67
12. The Predicate ................................................ 72
13. The Subject Modified by an Adjective ..................... 76
14. The Subject Modified by a Possessive Noun ................ 79
15. The Subject Modified by an Appositive .................... 82
16. The Prepositional Phrase Used as an Adjective ............ 86
17. The Subject Modified by an Adjective Clause ............ 90
18. The Predicate Modified by an Adverb ..................... 94
19. The Prepositional Phrase Used as an Adverb .............. 97
20. The Predicate Modified by an Adverb Clause .............. 100
21. The Predicate with a Direct Object ......................... 104
22. The Predicate with an Indirect Object ...................... 108
23. The Predicate with a Predicate Nominative ................. 111
24. The Predicate with a Predicate Adjective .................. 116
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SPECIAL PROPERTIES OF NOUNS AND PRONOUNS</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Types of Nouns</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>The Declension of a Noun</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>The Personal Pronoun</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Who, Whom, and Whose</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Other Pronouns</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Pronoun Agreement</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SPECIAL PROPERTIES OF VERBS</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>The Principal Parts of a Verb</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Conjugating Verbs</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Active and Passive Voice</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Transitive and Intransitive Verbs</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Subject-Verb Agreement</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>VERBALS</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Participles</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Gerunds</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Infinitives</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SPECIAL PROPERTIES OF MODIFIERS</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Comparative and Superlative Modifiers</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Dangling or Misplaced Modifiers</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDIX: PUNCTUATION AND TEXT FORMATTING</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 diagraming, 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
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>pp. 72–73 Exercises A–C</td>
<td>pp. 73–75 Exercises D–E</td>
<td>pp. 75–78 Exercise A</td>
<td>pp. 79–81 Exercise A</td>
<td>pp. 82–85 Exercises A–C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although 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
5. Pronouns ........................................................... 34
6. Prepositions ....................................................... 42
7. Conjunctions ....................................................... 47
8. Interjections ....................................................... 52
9. Review ............................................................... 55
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,
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?
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 (theAngles, 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.
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.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naming</th>
<th>Asserting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>beholds the face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>looks upon the heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>considers the actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>weighs the intentions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>will sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prizes</td>
<td>were awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>has been running</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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?