



### Lazy Pronoun

A pronoun that doesn't refer explicitly or precisely to an antecedent.  
Example: Xena wears her hat every day , Yana wears it only on Sundays.



### Burlesque Metaphor

Is an amusing, overstated or grotesque comparison or exemplification.  
Example- "a phosphorescent fish in a cupboard dressed in cream-coloured muslin"- description of a girl



### Echo Question

A type of direct question that repeats part or all of something which someone else has just said.  
Example: What do I want?

### Gapping

A construction in which part of a sentence is omitted rather than repeated.  
Example: I prefer tea and Ma coffee.



### Historical Present

The use of a verb phrase in the present tense to refer to an event that took place in the past.  
Example: So this dog walks into the garden...

# Teacher Talk

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*The flesh of prose gets its shape and strength from the bones of Grammar —Constance Hale*

## What's in it !

An Introduction to Real Grammar.....	1
Real Grammar-Language in Use.....	2
All's in a name!.....	4

## An Introduction to Real Grammar

Everyone has an opinion about grammar. Some people get upset about what they regard as bad grammar, and believe we must all follow the rules. But where do these rules come from? And are they all valid?

In our Real Grammar series we re-open the debate, this time insisting that the only reliable way of understanding English grammar is to study the evidence of language in use.

We all agree that grammar is important. The rules of grammar describe the structure of a language, and explain how words fit together to create meanings. Whether English is your first language or a language you're learning, knowing how the grammar works is essential for effective communication. So you need to know the rules – but which ones?

Prescriptive grammarians believe that grammar is a simple matter of "right or wrong", and that if everyone just followed their rules the language would be preserved from degenerating

into a chaotic free-for-all. Yet many of the "rules" laid down by prescriptive grammarians no longer reflect the way people use language when they communicate with one another. Despite this, these rules are passed down from generation to generation as if they were set in stone and incapable of ever changing. This is a "top-down" approach to grammar, where a group of "experts" tell the rest of us how we should speak and write.

However, "Real Grammar", on the other hand, recognises that language is more complex and subtle than this. Context and register are important: what might be inappropriate in a very formal setting may be perfectly acceptable in a conversation between friends.

In some cases too, grammatical norms vary according to region, with different preferences in different parts of the English-speaking world. And grammar can change over time. Even prescriptivists accept that the vocabulary of a language is subject to change and renewal – but

grammar is no different.

Above all, Real Grammar is based on evidence. When we explain meanings and usages everything we say starts from an analysis of the real language data in our corpus. Prescriptive rules on grammar are not evidence-based, and some prescriptivists claim that evidence is irrelevant to questions of grammar. Just because many people adopt an "incorrect" usage, they argue, that doesn't make it right. Well, that may be true up to a point. But what we are talking about is unmistakable, long-term trends, where the corpus evidence clearly demonstrates that most people, in all types of text (whether conversations, novels or serious academic textbooks). have adopted grammatical conventions which are different from those of fifty or a hundred years ago.

Therefore, descriptive grammar is the trend of today. Whatever suits the needs of time and place are acceptable and may vary.

From the Editor's Desk

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# Real Grammar: Language in Use

## ✓ Can I start a sentence with however?

This question is often up for debate. Consider these two sentences:

1. These findings, however, may not be conclusive.

Or

2. However, these findings may not be conclusive.

Some traditionalists will tell you that sentences should never start with words like however or therefore but should be embedded in the middle of the sentence (as in the first example above), rather than appearing at the beginning. This would mean our second sentence here is wrong. But is it? When we look at real language usage, the evidence shows that it's twice as common and perfectly natural to use however at the start of a sentence than middle of it and, in case of therefore, either position is used with same frequency. So both sentences are fine until anyone tells you otherwise.

## ✓ Can or may?

The traditional rule is that you should use "may" when asking for (or giving) permission to do something, while "can" is reserved for talking about someone's ability or capacity to do something – as in "Can you play the guitar?" This is what we have learnt at school.

The evidence of usage tells a different story. May – when used for asking permission – has been declining for several decades, and in present-day discourse can is over ten times as common in this use. This is so because can is the simplest and frequent choice, while may is "a more formal and polite way of asking permission, introducing or commenting" with: "May I suggest that we postpone this discussion till the next meeting?"

## ✓ Can I use like as a conjunction?

Like must be the most versatile word in the English Language. Like is used as an adverb, adjective, preposition, verb and noun. But can it also be used as a conjunction? Conjunctions are used to connect clauses.

"I arrived late because my train was delayed". In this case, because is a conjunction, introducing the last part of the sentence.

Consider these two sentences:

1. We cook our porridge as the people in Scotland do.
2. We cook our porridge like the people in Scotland do.

Traditional grammar books tell you that the correct conjunction in the above case would be as and like should never be used. However, today there is frequent use of like as a conjunction, though it is a little more informal than as.

## ✓ Different from or different to?

Choosing the right preposition can be quite a challenge for the learners of English. Let's look at the word different. It's another common case where people disagree about which preposition you should use. For example, let's look at these sentences:

1. These results are completely different from the ones we got last week.
2. These results are completely different to the ones we got last week.

Different from is used three times more often but different to is also commonly used. Different than is also not incorrect, but is mainly used by speakers of American English.

## ✓ Which pronoun should I use?

English has no gender-neutral pronoun for referring to a person in the singular. You can say he (when referring to a man) or she (when referring to a woman) – but what do you say when the gender of the person you're referring to is not known or not relevant?

One traditional solution was to use he as a generic pronoun, and this was common until quite recently. But the notion is debunked now. So what do we do, especially when we want to refer to a person in singular but don't know the person's gender or don't want to specify it?

Using either he or she might cause confusion or offence, it's also bit of a mouthful and does not sound natural. So instead we could use an all-inclusive pronoun they.

For example:

1. We should give everyone a chance to say what he or she thinks.
2. We should give everyone a chance to say what they think.

The first sentence goes by the rules but the second is far more commonly used.

## ✓ Can nouns be used as verbs?

Some traditionalists insist that nouns cannot be used as verbs. But this process, known as Conversion, is as old as the English language itself. Think of a word like text which was for centuries used only as a noun referring to any piece of writing but. Now we routinely use it as a verb saying things like "text me your contact details". This is a very useful and common mechanism in English. It's an economical way of extending the meaning of a familiar word. Also, it's anytime easier to say "text me your contact details" than "send me a text with your contact details".

## ✓ Would or should?

Is it better to use would or should when the subject is I or we? Your favourite band is giving a concert next month and you are keen to see them play. Do you say: "I would like to go to the concert" or "I should like to go to the concert"? According to traditional grammar we use shall or should in first person constructions and will or would when the subject is in second or third person constructions. But very few people observe this rule today. So both would/should are acceptable though, should sounds a little old-fashioned!

## ✓ Who or whom?

Let's imagine that you are going to a party and you want to know which of your friends have been invited. So what do you ask? "Who did you invite to your party?" or "Whom did you invite to your party?" By rule, you should use whom here because people who are going to the party are the object of the verb invite and whom is the object form of who. But the evidence of language in use shows that the way we use whom and who has changed over the years. So in many cases the traditional rule does not apply. Whom is mostly used with preposition of or with but almost never used in the beginning of the sentence. But grammatically, both are correct.

