EXPO E-5a: BASIC GRAMMAR
J-Term 2016, Harvard University Extension School

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Because J-term is short, the syllabus for this course takes a different pattern from the conventionally cumulative introduction to grammatical principles: Each of our class meetings is built around a few of the most common grammatical errors in writing. All students are encouraged to bring in “real life” examples of their own and others’ writing about which they have questions—by all means send them to me even before class starts on Jan. 5. From these examples, we’ll turn to the textbook to work with the principles of correct grammar. The hope is that if you encounter a situation in your own writing that doesn’t exactly match an example we’ve worked with, you will still be able to work your way through it using the grammatical precepts we discuss in class. (Or you could ask me—I have occasionally heard from students even a couple of years after class ended!)

Even if English is your native language, it’s a very good idea to approach the study of its grammar as you would a foreign language. This means lots of practice is required, and preferably daily—not only through homework, but also through active reading of others’ writing, and active thinking about your own writing even in the shortest of notes. If possible, you should do the homework for this class in small bites, spread out over a few days, rather than all in a lump right before class meetings, so that you revisit the coursework frequently.

Rules for Writers has been through a number of editions, so be sure you get the right one (the most recent, 7th edition, published in 2011). Available at the Harvard Coop in both textbook division and main bookstore, this book is a common choice as supplement or reference book for other writing classes at the Extension School and elsewhere, so it is a good investment. A good dictionary—not pocket-sized, but a college edition dictionary—is also a good resource, as such dictionaries provide not only definitions of words, but also the occasional example of usage and information about the parts of speech. The American Heritage Dictionary college edition is good. And, since you’ll be receiving a fair few handouts in the class, I recommend a 3-ring binder to hold your papers.

In this course we will explore the most basic and most useful rules of grammar, rules that help us speak and write with confidence and grace. By studying grammatical principles in action, by practicing variations on those principles through in-class and take-home exercises, and by putting those principles into action in our own writing, we'll see that the use of good grammar need not be considered neither an overwrought science nor a social bludgeon—and that it actually can be fun.

Attendance and completion of all assignments, exams, and quizzes are required. The course grade will be based upon completion of writing assignments (sentences) and performance on quizzes and the final exam. These components will be weighted as follows:

40% for total quizzes
20% for total written assignments
40% for the final exam

Following is a tentative schedule of the assignments for the semester. We will probably make adjustments to meet the needs of the class. Please be alert to any changes in the syllabus that I might announce. All assigned work (readings, exercises, and brief writing assignments) should be completed by the dates below.
Some preview grammar & usage teasers for you:
1. Why *it’s* and *its* in this sentence? What’s the difference?
2. Why “pocket-sized” and not “pocket-size”?
3. Is it proper to begin a sentence with “And”?
4. Why “are required” and not “is required”?

CLASS 1
1/5/16
(1st hour) Beginnings: What we’re working with. Go over Hacker chapter 46 Parts of Speech: Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs (good idea to look at chapter ahead of time). Work on 46.3 Verbs — 48.2 Verbal Phrases (Verbals)

(2nd hour) VERBS: The heartbeat of grammar.
COMPLETE SENTENCES: Subjects, True Verbs vs. Verbals, Fragments (lacking true verb)
APOSTROPHES: Possessives, Contractions, Plurals
POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS a.k.a. “Errors that make writers look dumb.”

Errors addressed: Sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)
its vs. it’s; your vs. you’re
Things like “The grape’s are good.”

CLASS 2
1/7/16
Quiz #1
Homework to be completed for today:
Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 46.1 Nouns — 46.2 Pronouns — 46.3 Verbs 48.2 Verbal phrases — 47.1 Subjects — 48.1 Prepositional Phrases — 21.1, 21.2 Subject–Verb Agreement (plurals show up a lot) — 22.1 Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement — 36.1 Apostrophe (also 24g, possessive with gerund) — Additional homework on possessives and plurals from Borzoi handout.

Write out and turn in: Read Hacker pp. 596–598 (“a, an” through “back up, backup”). Select three entries (two usage examples per entry) from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for each example write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly (i.e., 3 entries = 6 examples = 6 sentences).

In-class activities and lessons:
(1st hour) Go over homework exercises completed for today; review AGREEMENT (S–V and pronoun); review APOSTROPHES;
(2nd hour) Introduce CLAUSES: Independent and Subordinate.

INTRODUCE JOINING CLAUSES (2 kinds of joining for indep.)
Introduce FRAGMENT, COMMA SPICE
SUBORDINATORS: make subordinate clauses
TRANSITIONERS: however, therefore, etc. don’t affect clauses.

Errors addressed: Fragments
Apostrophe use
Wrong word
CLASS 3  Quiz #2
1/12/16
Homework to be completed for today: Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 48.3 Subordinate Clauses — 19.1 Sentence Fragments — 20.1, 20.2 Run-on Sentences

Write out and turn in: 19.2 Repair Sentence Fragments
Write out and turn in: 14.4 Subordinate ideas in subord. clauses,
Write out and turn in: 14.3 Subordinate ideas in subord. clauses

Write out and turn in: Read Hacker pp. 599–601 (“bad, badly” through “everybody, everyone”). Select three entries (two usage examples per entry) from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for each example write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:
(1st hour) Go over homework exercises; review JOINING INDEP. CLAUSES (comma splices, fused sentences); review FRAGMENTS
Review AGREEMENT: pronouns and S-V

(2nd hour) Introduce PRONOUNS: CASE (who vs. whom, she vs. her, etc.)

Errors: Subject–verb disagreement, e.g., “The flowers on the table is pretty.”
Pronoun–antecedent disagreement, e.g., “Does everyone have their book?”
Pronoun: Case (“I” vs. “me”)
Wrong word

CLASS 4  Quiz #3
1/14/16
Homework to be completed for today:
Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: review 48.1 Prepositional Phrases (see also 46f) — 24.1, 24.2 Pronoun Case – 25.1 Who, Whom — Additional Hacker website exercises on pronoun case 24.3, 24.4, 25.2
http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rules7e/#t_669460

Write out and turn in: Read Hacker pp. 602–604 (“everyone, every one” through “lie, lay”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for each example write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:
(1st hour) Go over homework exercises; review PRONOUN CASE.

(2nd hour) Introduce PUNCTUATION esp. COMMAS (“that” vs. “which” clauses). COLON, SEMI-COLON, QUOTATION MARKS

Errors: Common pronoun errors: Vague pronoun reference, disagreement in number.
Pronoun case; “It is a secret between he and I.”
Wrong word: LIE vs. LAY
CLASS 5  Quiz #4
1/19/16
Homework to be completed for today:
Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 32.1, 32.2, 32.3, 32.4, 32.5, 32.6, 32.7
Commas, wrong commas — 33.1 wrong commas — 34.1, 34.2 Semi-colons — 35.1
Colons — 37.1 Quotation Marks — 39.1 Other Punctuation. Additional homework:
Handout on punctuation (quotation marks).

Write out and turn in: 33.2: Wrong/unnecessary commas
Write out and turn in: 36.2: Apostrophe use
Write out and turn in: 38.1: End punctuation

Write out and turn in: Read Hacker pp. 605–607 (“like, as” through “supposed to, sure and, take”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for each example write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:
(1st hour) Go over homework exercises; review PUNCTUATION

(2nd hour) PASSIVE vs ACTIVE VOICE (verbs). MODIFIERS: mixed, dangling, adjectives, adverbs

Errors: Wrong pronoun case (pay attention to clauses; find the S–V relation first)
Shift in person (don’t fall into “you,” 2nd person)

CLASS 6 Quiz #5
1/21/16
Homework to be completed for today:

Write out and turn in: 26.2 Errors in Adjectives/Adverbs
Write out and turn in: 12.1, 12.2 numbered exercises only

Write out and turn in: Read Hacker pp. 608–609 (“than, then” through “your, you’re”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for each example write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:
(1st hour) Go over homework exercises; review MODIFIERS, COMMAS, PUNCTUATION. Review for final exam.

(2nd hour) Final Exam.

Errors: Misplaced commas
Misplaced or dangling modifier
Misused punctuation marks