

# KNOW YOUR LANGUAGE 1

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# WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?

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1

**Excuse me, madam.**

**Hi, babe.**

**Look out, grandad.**

**Watcha mate!**

**Thank you, sir.**

**Ta, love.**

Language is rarely neutral.

Every time we use it, we have to make choices.

If we make the wrong choice, we can provoke a reaction we don't expect.

The elderly man addressed as 'grandad' or the young lady as 'love' may well feel patronised or insulted by words intended to be friendly.

Using appropriate language

isn't just a question of knowing WHAT you want to say.

The TONE and EFFECT also matter.

Does it sound friendly?

persuasive?

flattering?

offensive?

patronising? etc.

\* What difference does it make if we call those aged from 13 to 16:

<b>kids</b>	<b>children</b>	<b>teenagers</b>
<b>adolescents</b>	<b>schoolchildren</b>	<b>pupils</b>
<b>youngsters</b>	<b>youth</b>	<b>young people</b>
<b>students</b>	<b>juveniles</b>	<b>boys and girls</b>
<b>lads and lasses</b>	<b>minors</b>	<b>teeny boppers</b>
<b>the younger generation</b>		

\* Can you add to this list?

\* Compile similar lists of words that would denote people under the age of 5, or over 65.

\* Which of these words would you use in which situations? What reactions would you expect to provoke?

When you use language you need to think about all sorts of important details:

- how well you know the person(s) you are addressing
- whether you are speaking or writing
- whether the situation is formal or casual
- your relationship to the person(s) addressed
- your purpose or intention
- the order in which you put the words together
- the way in which you use punctuation
- grammatical correctness
- political correctness and so on.....

In one sense, each A statement below means the same as the corresponding B statement:

**A            Whom are you addressing?**

**This is all wrong.**

**Big frocks for fat old women.**

**B            Who do you think you're talking to?**

**There appear to be some discrepancies.**

**Mature dresses for the fuller figure.**

but the messages conveyed are not the same.

\* Why not?

The more you know about your language, the easier it will be to make the right choices, so that what you say or write conveys the message you intend to convey - or not, as the case may be:

Here lies

Sir John Browne

1888 - 1920

Accidentally shot by his gamekeeper.

Well done,

thou good and faithful servant.

# JUST THE JOB

# 3

Words are labelled as different parts of speech (noun, verb, etc.) according to the job they do. This can vary in different sentences:

**Have you seen the PAPER? (noun)**  
**Put it in a PAPER bag. (adjective)**  
**Dad's going TO PAPER my room. (verb).**

*Why did the shop blow away?*  
*Because it was a paper shop!*

Briefly, nouns NAME things, ideas or people; adjectives DESCRIBE nouns; verbs DO or FEEL.

\* Work out the parts of speech of the words in capital letters:

**UGLY** came to tea.  
She gave me a lovely **BECAUSE** for Christmas.

I like that **PETER** ice-cream best.  
Do you want the **AND** pears or the **BUT** pears?

She **WAS BRACKNELLING** along, when her front wheel broke.  
When he **MONDAYS**, the world seems a brighter place.

\* Make up three 'words' of your own. Use each of them in a sentence as a noun, adjective and verb (i.e. a total of NINE sentences). Label them.

\* Use the following words as:

a) nouns,                      b) adjectives,                      c) verbs:  
STAR              ROUND      SQUARE      PENCIL      BOOK

\* In the following sentences Underline the verbs, circle the nouns and put [square brackets] round the adjectives:

**The cat stretched out its sharp claws.**  
**Josh kicked and screamed, but his weary mother ignored him.**  
**I hate wet weekends.**  
**Sing a new song.**  
**Please fetch the large green box.**

There are 7 nouns, 7 verbs and 6 adjectives. Have you found them all?

# MORE WORDS AT WORK

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# 4

Here are some more labels for the jobs words do:

## ADVERBS

tell us more about verbs

**(She ran STYLISHLY, EFFORTLESSLY and FAST)**

or about adjectives

**(Bill wore some VERY old jeans)**

or even about other adverbs

**(The jeans were REALLY very old indeed).**

PRONOUNS stand in for nouns:

**I, we, he, she, it, they,** (personal pronouns)

**my, your, his, her, our, their,** (possessive pronouns)

**no-one, somebody, everyone, etc.**

**this, that, these, those,** (demonstrative pronouns)

Without pronouns, language would be boringly repetitive:

**Jack gave Jack's bucket to Jill to carry as well as Jill's own bucket, because Jack was too lazy to carry Jack's bucket. So Jill carried Jill's bucket and Jack's bucket up the hill empty, but Jill made Jack carry Jack's bucket and Jill's bucket back down the hill full.**

\* How much shorter would this be with pronouns instead of nouns?

## PREPOSITIONS

show the connection between words, often giving place:

**I went TO the cafe;**

**don't jump OUT OF the frying pan INTO the fire.**

## CONJUNCTIONS

join two words or groups of words:

**and, but, or, if, because, although, when, if, while, etc.**

*Teacher: Jake, name two pronouns.*

*Jake: Who? Me?*

*Teacher: Correct!*

## LOOK IT UP - IN THE DICTIONARY.

# 5

A good dictionary provides lots of useful information:

- meanings of words
- pronunciation, stress
- what part(s) of speech the word is
- examples of usage (slang, vulgar, technical, American, etc.)
- ways in which meanings of words change over time
- spelling
- other linked words

An ETYMOLOGICAL dictionary gives the origin and derivation of words.

\* Read the introduction to your dictionary.

Find out how it indicates stress, pronunciation and usage.

What do the different abbreviations mean?

When was it published?

Some dictionaries give newer meanings in an appendix. Does yours?

\* Work with a partner, with two different dictionaries.

Look up words and see how the dictionaries vary.

Try these for starters:

***nice, laid-back, groovy, disc, blitz, karaoke, coke.***

If you can't find some words or meanings, why not?

Do you prefer one dictionary to the other? Why?

Can you find examples of words whose meanings have changed?

Words with different meanings in American and British usage?

\* Use an etymological dictionary to find:

Words which have come into English from the following languages:

**Hindi Irish Latin French Greek**

Words which have come from the names of people?

\* Why is it useful to have access to both a small dictionary and a larger one?

\* Look in your library:

See how many different dictionaries you can find.

How many volumes make up the largest dictionary?

## ARE WE ALL AGREED?

# 6

### SUBJECT AND VERB MUST AGREE.

This is a basic rule of language.

If the subject is singular (one) the verb must be singular.

if the subject is plural (more than one) the verb must be plural too.

This usually presents no problems:

**The girl was playing football.**

**The girls were playing football.**

**The boy was reading.**

**The boys were reading.**

Sometimes in casual speech people use verbs that don't agree:

**He was waiting. We was all waiting.**

This use is not acceptable in standard or written language.

It's easy to make the verb agree with the *nearest* word, not the SUBJECT:

**The bag of books were heavy.**

**The bag of books was heavy.**

The subject here is the bag, not the books. The second sentence is correct.

When a sentence is longer, the correct choice of verb may be less obvious:

**ONE of the visitors who watched the gymnastic displays on the open days WAS uncomplimentary, but MOST WERE enthusiastic. Luckily, though, NONE of them WAS disappointed by the basketball.**

Note that *either*, *neither* and *none* are all singular.

It can also be difficult if the verb comes before the subject:

**Waiting for us in the rain after the rehearsal were our parents.**

\* Decide whether WAS or WERE fit the gaps:

**No matter what Mrs. Moss tried to do, at least one of her children    always complaining about something. Even when the choice of television programmes    left to them, they couldn't agree. The worst    her youngest son and daughter, the twins, Charlie and**

**Charlene. Arguing over everything from breakfasts to bedtimes    their main occupation.**

## ENJOY YOUR DICTIONARY

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\* Use your dictionary to play the following games:

### **PLAY THE LADDER GAME:**

Think of a word with 5 or more letters.

Then find a word starting with the last 3 letters of the first word. See how long a ladder you can make.

**EDUCATION**

**IONISED**

**SEDIMENT**

**ENTERTAIN**

### **PLAY CALL MY BLUFF:**

Each team chooses a word from the dictionary, then gives four different definitions of the word. One is correct, the others are invented. The other team(s) have to guess the correct definition.



## A SENTENCE IS

### A COMPLETE STATEMENT OR COMMAND OR QUESTION

- \* IT MAKES SENSE by itself -
- \* It has a SUBJECT - the person or thing doing the action (unless it's a command or order).
- \* It has a COMPLETE VERB - a verb that is singular or plural and has a tense (not just a part of a verb, e.g. ending with -ING)
- \* It starts with a capital letter.
- \* It ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.

The VERBS in the following sentences are in capitals.

- \* Underline the SUBJECTS. (The subject may include more than one word).

**A large black dog RAN into the road.**

**Inside the bus, Susan SCREAMED.**

**The driver SCREECHED to a halt.**

**An old man and a child BANGED their heads.**

**Where WAS the dog's owner?**

- \* Which of the following are NOT sentences?
- \* What is needed to complete them?

**Television viewing should be a compulsory part of homework.**

**Lots of useful information about the world we live in.**

**Don't be so stupid!**

**Stormy black clouds racing across the sky.**

**What do you know about it?**

**Always rushing, too busy to clear up, leaving your mess for me.**

- \* How many sentences are in the following passage?
- \* Put in the missing punctuation.

**Come here at once get out of those muddy clothes go and wash your hands you know we've got to go to the dentist's in five minutes can't you keep clean for five minutes?**

# LOOK IT UP - IN A THESAURUS

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# 9

A thesaurus is a dictionary of SYNONYMS, words of similar meanings.

It is a very useful tool for a writer.

With it you can

- Find the exact word for a vague idea

- Avoid repetition

- Find formal words to replace casual expressions (or vice versa)

- Increase your vocabulary.

A traditional thesaurus is divided into two main sections:

The INDEX at the back of the book, which is organised alphabetically like a dictionary;

The MAIN TEXT in the front part of the book, which is arranged in categories under numbered headings.

To find the word you want, **look first in the index.**

- This will give a list of words of similar meaning.

- There is also a NUMBER.

- This tells you where to find the word in the front section. (*It is not a page number.*)

It will help if you know whether the word you are looking for is a

NOUN, VERB, ADJECTIVE or ADVERB.

Words are listed under these categories beneath each heading.

\* USE A THESAURUS TO HELP ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

How many words can you find to describe

**different shades of RED?**

How many alternatives can you find

for the verb **TO SHOUT?**

How many different ways can you describe

**a selfish person?**

**an unpleasant smell?**

**a lazy pupil?**

Find words the OPPOSITE of those

in the last question.

(*How does the arrangement of words in the text help you in this task?*)

## WHAT TIME IS IT?

# 10

The VERB in a sentence tells you WHEN the action takes place:

**Yesterday I ate four doughnuts for lunch and I was sick (PAST).**

**Now I don't like doughnuts any more. (PRESENT).**

**Tomorrow I will buy some eclairs instead (FUTURE).**

A sentence must contain a COMPLETE verb tense.

The verb with TO in front of it, the INFINITIVE (to eat, etc.) doesn't have a tense.

Some verbs are only parts of a tense (PARTICIPLES): eaten, buying.

Verb tenses often consist of more than one word:

**Bob asked Rita if she *would have finished* her essay by four o'clock.**

**The players *had all been hoping* to win.**

(The different parts of a verb may be separated by other words.)

\* Underline all the parts of verb tenses in this sentence:

**Nathan had always expected that he would be chosen as man of the match in the final game of the season, so he was going to be extremely disappointed when he learned that he would not even be able to play because of his damaged ankle.**

\* What tenses are the verbs in the following?

**Last night we all WENT to bed early.**

**Now it IS breakfast time - at 5.30 a.m.**

**We ARE GOING on holiday today.**

**We SHALL HAVE tea in Spain.**

**Perhaps it WILL BE warmer there!**

\* COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES, adding at least one more verb. Say what TENSE you have used.

**If John phones...**

**When John phoned ...**

**John always phones...**

**When I was five...**

**When I leave school...**

**Whenever I feel bored...**

## A THESAURUS WILL HELP YOU

find more precise words  
avoid repetition,  
write in a more formal style, be polite and tactful

\* Without using the same word twice, replace the overworked words in the following:

**We had an awful holiday this year. The weather was awful and the sea was awfully rough so I was awfully sick on the ferry. There were awful traffic jams on the motorway, and some awful drivers. The campsite was awful but the food was nice and some of the scenery was nice too and we met some awfully nice people.**

\* Find more formal expressions to replace the casual language:

**The Head told me I've got to to get my act together this term. Last term I seemed to get a kick out of getting into trouble and getting on the teachers' nerves. Now I've got to get stuck in and get down to work. If I don't get on with it, then she'll get my parents in, and then I'll really get it in the neck!**

\* You want to tell a friend that she is clumsy and tactless, but you don't want to hurt her feelings.

\* Use the thesaurus to help you.

**Roget's Thesaurus**  
**dominates, regulates,**  
**rules, OK,**  
**all right,**  
**agreed.**

Use your dictionary to help sort out the confusions given on this page. Some words with different spellings sound the same (homophones):

**allowed / aloud**                      **no / know**                      **whether / weather**                      **patience /patients**  
**stationery /stationary**              **curreant /current**              **principle / principal**              **waste / waist**

There are triplets:

**sent / scent/ cent**

**praise / prays /preys**

And even quads: **write / right / rite / wright**

There are hundreds of homophones in English: how many can you think of?

Many traditional jokes depend on this confusion.

\* Can you compile a list of jokes? Here are some to start you off:

*Knock, knock.*

*Who's there?*

*Cornflakes.*

*Cornflakes who?*

*Wait for the next episode*

*-it's a cereal.*

*Why can't I bring my*

*pet hen to school?*

*There's enough fowl*

*language already.*

*I'll have some bean soup, please.*

*Sorry, it's been and gone.*

Other words change their spelling when they change their job:

**practice (noun, with C)/ practise (verb, with S)**

**device / devise**

**advice / advise**

**licence / license**

\* Write sentences with the above words. Spell them correctly!

## DON'T BE SO MEAN!

Some words have two or more totally unrelated meanings.

Some jokes depend on a word having more than one meaning:

*How do you charge a battery?*

*With a credit card*

*Why did the one-eyed monster*

*close his school?*

*He had only one pupil.*

\* What different meanings can you find for the following words?

**cross, pole, board, wave.**

\* Can you think of any jokes using these words?

Sometimes confused words sound or look NEARLY the same:

**affect / effect**

**accept / except**

**formally / formerly**

**apart / a part**

**counsel / council**

**all together / altogether**

**brought / bought**

**always / all ways**

To add to the stress of using language correctly, some words change their meaning if you stress a different syllable:

**REfuse, reFUSE; inVALid, INvalid; DESert, desERT.**

\* Compile your own lists of such words. Try to work out sentences or jokes to help you sort out the differences.

\* Solve these anagrams and use them in sentences:

RICE

PACT

I TRY

A STONE

RAM

FOLLY

NO

CLUES

ICE

LENS

HE

THREW

LOW

DEAL

ROB

THUG

SIEVED

WET

HARE

ASPIRE

CART

RUN

**The point is there's no point writing without punctuation it's like talking without stopping for breath without punctuation it's hard to read properly for instance what are the connections between words where do you put the stress who's speaking**

How easy is it to read this passage aloud?

\* Now put in the punctuation and try again.

### **Basic punctuation is essential:**

- full stops between sentences;
- question marks after questions;
- apostrophes for possession or abbreviations;
- commas to separate the words in a list;
- or to separate speech from speaker.
- speech marks round words spoken in conversations,
- or round quotations or titles.

\* Can you work out the meaning of the following sentences?

**If where were now is where they were then well be ill too.**

**Time flies you cant theyre too fast.**

\* This passage needs the following punctuation:

12 speech marks, 10 capital letters, 6 full stops, 5 commas, 3 question marks, 2 apostrophes, 1 hyphen.

**mr green a mans voice asked**

**speaking he replied**

**i hear you sell second hand goods**

**yes thats right answered mr green what can i do for you**

**well can you let me have a second hand for my watch**

\* How many of the punctuation marks have you inserted correctly?

\* Can you explain why the passage is set out on five separate lines?

If we create new inventions or undergo new experiences we need new words to express these ideas.

When we can't find the word we need, we sometimes invent it.

Two year old Dylan, feeling unwell,  
complained that he was "all floppen".

Poets and other writers make words up, too.

Slang also creates or changes words.

Often, we borrow words from other languages.

\* Use your dictionary to help you find examples of these word origins.

\* Draw an invention of your own. Make up a new word for it. We also make new words by adding existing words together:

**black + board = blackboard**

**over + coat = overcoat**

\* How many similar compound words can you think of?

**PARTS** of words can be added before the word (PREFIX), or after (SUFFIX).

Suffixes usually change the way a word works:

word + s = plural (**farmS**);

+ ed = past tense of verb (**farmED**);

+ er = person who does something (**farmER**), etc.

\* Can you think of other examples?

Prefixes often alter the meaning of the word:

**un + happy = unhappy**

**non + sense = nonsense**

Other negative prefixes include:

**in- il- ir- im- neg- a- mis- dis-**

\* Find some words that use these prefixes.



## MIX AND MATCH

Mix and match prefixes and suffixes to word stems to make new words:

You should be able to make at least 50 words from the parts given below.

in	FORM	al
un		ed
uni		ly
con		ity
mal		ation

re	PORT	ed
ex		able
im		ant
de		ing
trans		er

It's very useful to know the meaning of the most common prefixes. Prefixes for numbers, for example, take several different forms:

**bi- duo- di- all mean two:**

**bisect, bicycle; duet, dual; dilemma.**

\* Use your dictionary or thesaurus

to find as many prefixes as possible for these numbers:

**1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 100, 1000.**

\* Work out the answers to the following 'sums':

**How many chairs needed to seat an octet, a quartet and a quintet?**

**How many kids in a family with twins, triplets and sextuplets?**

**How many decades are there in a millennium?**

**Subtract a monocycle from a tricycle.**

\* Make up some more verbal sums, the sillier the better.

**What do you get if you add a centipede to a tripod?**

\* Can you invent words to describe the result. Or draw it?

The **ROOTS** of many English words come from Latin or Greek. If we understand these basic building blocks, we can increase our vocabulary.

A good **ETYMOLOGICAL** dictionary will help.

For example, if you know that both the root forms **VID** and **VIS** come from the Latin verb meaning to see, then the links between groups of words in English become *visible*:

<b>evident</b>	<b>provide</b>	<b>vision</b>	<b>revise</b>	<b>invisible</b>
<i>clearly seen</i>	<i>look forward</i>	<i>sight</i>	<i>look again</i>	<i>not seen</i>

Similarly, **TEND**, **TENT**, **TENS** come from a Latin word meaning to stretch.

\* Can you explain the links of meaning between the following words?

<b>tent</b>	<b>intensive</b>	<b>attend</b>	<b>tension</b>	<b>extent</b>
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Many scientific words are based on Greek roots. For example, the Greek word **BIO** means life. From it we get the following words:

<b>microbiology</b>	<b>antibiotic</b>	<b>sybiosis</b>	<b>biodegradable</b>
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\* Use your dictionary to work out the links between these words and the idea of life. What other words can you find using the same components?

The following Greek roots are the basis of many English words:

**chronos = time**

**phone = sound**

**pathos = feeling**

\* Find out the meaning of these roots.

\* See how many words you can make based on them.

\* Use the words in paragraphs of your own.

Writing needs structure. Clear writing is evidence of clear thought and logical planning. It is also easier to read and understand.

**Each paragraph**, usually a group of sentences, **should focus on ONE incident, topic or theme.**

**When you change focus, start a new paragraph:**

**par.1** sets the scene:

an ill-lit street at midnight.

**par.2** a suspicious character

slinks along in the shadows.

**par.3** s/he stops

at one particular entrance...

Similarly in writing speech, there are clear steps in paragraphing.

A change of speaker needs a change of paragraph:

**“Can you hear something?” asked Liz, putting down her book.**

**“No, you’re imagining it,” said Tom.**

**“Listen,” she insisted. “A scraping sound outside the door.”**

In other kinds of writing - essays, letters, reports etc. - it may not be so easy to see where paragraph divisions should come.

The same rules apply: when you shift the focus of your report or argument, start a new paragraph.

You may decide to split a paragraph simply because it is becoming too long. If so, choose a logical place at which to divide it.

\* Compare two newspapers:

a popular (tabloid) newspaper and a quality (broadsheet) one.

\* Which has longer paragraphs? Why?

What is the effect of short paragraphs?

We don't always *speak* in complete sentences:

**“Time we got going.”**

**“Not yet, surely?”**

**“Well, perhaps another ten minutes, but no more.”**

**“OK How about another cup of coffee, then?”**

\* Rewrite this conversation in complete sentences. Which version sounds more realistic? Why?  
Not all *writing* needs complete sentences.

e.g. shopping lists, labels, notes, captions.

\* Write the opening paragraph of a story without using any sentences. Compare your work with that of a friend. What is the effect of the lack of sentences?

\* Put FULL STOPS between sentences in the following passage:

**Gingerly, Chris pushed open the door, trying not to make a noise it was hopeless the hinges creaked the heavy wood grated on the uneven floor anyone lurking in there was bound to hear him he held his breath and waited a minute before daring to cross the threshold at last he crept into the darkened hallway and stood looking up the stairs just as he thought he was safe he heard a cough someone was up there waiting for him.**