SPEAK WITH DARSHANA

Grammar Basics

A complete reference to rules, exceptions and everyday usage

15
chapters, from parts of speech to punctuation

1
rule, exception and example for every topic

12
tenses explained with real examples

6
word pairs people often confuse at work

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How to use this book: each chapter opens with the core idea, then walks through the sub-topics inside it. Every rule is paired with its most important exception and a practical example, so you see the rule the way it's actually used, not just how it's written in a textbook.

CHAPTER 1

Parts of Speech

Every word in a sentence plays one of eight roles. Knowing the role tells you how a word behaves and where the common mistakes happen.

Noun

RULE

Names a person, place, thing, or idea. Includes common, proper, abstract, and collective nouns.

EXCEPTION

Some nouns look plural but are grammatically singular and take a singular verb (news, mathematics, physics).

EXAMPLE

The news is on at nine. / Physics was her favorite subject.

Pronoun

RULE

Replaces a noun to avoid repeating it (he, she, it, they, this, someone).

EXCEPTION

Indefinite pronouns like everyone and everybody take a singular verb, even though they refer to many people.

EXAMPLE

Everyone is welcome to join. / Somebody has left their umbrella.

Verb

RULE

Shows an action or a state of being. Includes action verbs, linking verbs, and auxiliary verbs.

EXCEPTION

Many common verbs are irregular and don't take -ed in the past tense.

EXAMPLE

She go went to the office early. / They have eaten already.

Adjective

RULE

Describes or modifies a noun.

EXCEPTION

Longer adjectives use more/most instead of -er/-est (beautiful, difficult).

EXAMPLE

This is more beautiful than that one, not beautifuller.

Adverb

RULE

Modifies a verb, adjective, or another adverb. Often ends in -ly.

EXCEPTION

Some adverbs don't end in -ly (fast, hard, well), and some -ly words are actually adjectives (friendly, lovely).

EXAMPLE

He runs fast. / She is a friendly manager.

Preposition

RULE

Shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words (in, on, at, by).

EXCEPTION

Ending a sentence with a preposition is grammatically fine in modern spoken English, despite older teaching against it.

EXAMPLE

Who did you go with? is natural in speech.

Conjunction

RULE

Connects words, phrases, or clauses (and, but, or, because).

EXCEPTION

Starting a sentence with and or but is acceptable in spoken and modern written English.

EXAMPLE

But that's not the whole story.

Interjection

RULE

Expresses strong emotion and stands alone (wow, oh, ouch).

EXCEPTION

No major exception, interjections are informal by nature and rarely appear in formal writing.

EXAMPLE

Wow, that's a great result!

CHAPTER 2

Sentence Structure

A sentence needs the right building blocks in the right order. This is where most awkward or broken sentences start.

Subject and Predicate

RULE

Every sentence needs a subject (who or what) and a predicate (what is said about it).

EXCEPTION

Imperative sentences drop the subject because you is implied.

EXAMPLE

Close the door. (subject you is understood)

Phrases vs. Clauses

RULE

A phrase is a group of words with no subject-verb pair. A clause has both.

EXCEPTION

Distinguishing independent from dependent clauses matters most for punctuation, not meaning.

EXAMPLE

In the morning (phrase) vs. When she arrives (clause).

Sentence Types

RULE

Simple (one clause), compound (two independent clauses), complex (independent + dependent), compound-complex (a mix of both).

EXCEPTION

Joining two independent clauses with only a comma is a comma splice, a common and avoidable error.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: He was late, he missed the meeting. Right: He was late, so he missed the meeting.

CHAPTER 3

Nouns and Pronouns

A closer look at two areas that trip up even advanced speakers: countability and agreement.

Countable vs. Uncountable Nouns

RULE

Countable nouns have singular and plural forms (book/books). Uncountable nouns don't (water, advice, information).

EXCEPTION

Some nouns are countable in other languages but uncountable in English, this causes frequent errors (advice, furniture, luggage, information).

EXAMPLE

Wrong: She gave me an advice. Right: She gave me some advice.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

RULE

A pronoun must match the noun it refers to in number and gender.

EXCEPTION

Singular they is now widely accepted when the gender is unknown or unspecified.

EXAMPLE

Someone left their bag on the chair.

Reflexive Pronouns

RULE

Used when the subject and object of a sentence are the same (myself, yourself, himself).

EXCEPTION

Never use a reflexive pronoun as the subject of a sentence.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: Myself and John went. Right: John and I went.

CHAPTER 4

Verbs and Tenses

English has twelve tenses across present, past, and future. Most learners only need to actively use six or seven in daily speech, but understanding all twelve prevents confusion.

Present Simple

RULE

Habits, facts, and routines. Form: base verb (+s for third person).

EXCEPTION

Stative verbs (know, want, love, believe) never take the continuous form, even for a current state.

EXAMPLE

I know the answer, not I am knowing the answer.

Present Continuous

RULE

Actions happening now, or temporary situations. Form: am/is/are + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Can also describe a planned future action.

EXAMPLE

I am meeting him tomorrow at ten.

Present Perfect

RULE

A past action with present relevance, or an unspecified time. Form: have/has + past participle.

EXCEPTION

Never paired with a specific past time marker like yesterday or last week, use past simple instead.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: I have finished it yesterday. Right: I finished it yesterday.

Present Perfect Continuous

RULE

An action that started in the past and continues now, with focus on duration. Form: have/has been + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Not used with stative verbs.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: I have been knowing him for years. Right: I have known him for years.

Past Simple

RULE

A completed action at a specific past time. Form: verb-ed or the irregular past form.

EXCEPTION

Many common verbs are irregular (go/went, see/saw) and must be memorized individually.

EXAMPLE

She called me last night.

Past Continuous

RULE

An ongoing action in the past, often interrupted by another action. Form: was/were + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Frequently paired with past simple to show interruption.

EXAMPLE

I was cooking when he called.

Past Perfect

RULE

An action completed before another past action. Form: had + past participle.

EXCEPTION

In casual speech, past simple often replaces it when the sequence is already clear from context.

EXAMPLE

By the time she arrived, the meeting had already started.

Past Perfect Continuous

RULE

An ongoing past action that happened before another past action, with focus on duration. Form: had been + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Rare in everyday speech, mostly used in formal narrative or writing.

EXAMPLE

He had been working there for years before the merger.

Future Simple (will)

RULE

Spontaneous decisions, predictions, and promises. Form: will + base verb.

EXCEPTION

Not used for pre-arranged plans, use going to or present continuous instead.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: I will meet him tomorrow (if it's already arranged). Right: I am meeting him tomorrow.

Future Continuous

RULE

An action in progress at a specific point in the future. Form: will be + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Also used to politely ask about someone's plans.

EXAMPLE

Will you be using the car tonight?

Future Perfect

RULE

An action completed before a specific point in the future. Form: will have + past participle.

EXCEPTION

Rare in casual speech, mostly used in formal planning or project contexts.

EXAMPLE

By next year, she will have completed her certification.

Future Perfect Continuous

RULE

Emphasizes the duration of an action up to a future point. Form: will have been + verb-ing.

EXCEPTION

Rarely used in everyday conversation, mostly formal or written.

EXAMPLE

By December, he will have been working here for ten years.

CHAPTER 5

Subject-Verb Agreement

The basic rule is simple, singular subjects take singular verbs, plural subjects take plural verbs. The exceptions are where most errors happen.

Collective Nouns

RULE

Words like team, family, and staff can take a singular or plural verb depending on whether the group acts as one unit or as individuals.

EXCEPTION

British and Indian English often treat collective nouns as plural more freely than American English.

EXAMPLE

The team is presenting today. / The team are all attending separately.

Some / None / All / Most of + Noun

RULE

The verb agrees with the noun that follows of, not with some, none, all, or most itself.

EXCEPTION

This is one of the most common agreement errors in speech.

EXAMPLE

Most of the report is finished. / Most of the reports are finished.

Subjects Joined by Or / Nor

RULE

When two subjects are joined by or or nor, the verb agrees with the subject closer to it.

EXCEPTION

This rule is easy to forget when subjects differ in number.

EXAMPLE

Neither the manager nor the employees were informed.

Indefinite Pronouns

RULE

Words like everyone, everybody, and each always take a singular verb.

EXCEPTION

This holds true even when the meaning feels plural.

EXAMPLE

Everyone is expected to attend.

CHAPTER 6

Adjectives and Adverbs

These two word types shape how precise and natural your descriptions sound.

Degrees of Comparison

RULE

Use the comparative (-er or more) for two things, and the superlative (-est or most) for three or more.

EXCEPTION

Some common adjectives are irregular and don't follow the pattern (good/better/best, bad/worse/worst).

EXAMPLE

This plan is better than the last one, not more good.

Order of Adjectives

RULE

When stacking adjectives, the natural order is opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material, purpose.

EXCEPTION

Reversing this order sounds unnatural to native speakers, even though the meaning stays clear.

EXAMPLE

A beautiful small old wooden table sounds natural, an old wooden small beautiful table does not.

Adverb Placement

RULE

Adverbs of frequency (always, usually, often) go before the main verb, but after the verb be.

EXCEPTION

For emphasis, frequency adverbs can move to the start of the sentence.

EXAMPLE

She usually arrives early. / Often, I wonder if we moved too fast.

CHAPTER 7

Articles

Articles are small words that cause large, recurring errors, especially for speakers of languages that don't use them the same way.

Indefinite Articles: a / an

RULE

Used with singular countable nouns for first mention or something unspecified. Choice depends on sound, not spelling.

EXCEPTION

Use an before a vowel sound, even if the letter is a consonant (an hour), and a before a consonant sound, even if the letter is a vowel (a university).

EXAMPLE

An hour passed. / A university degree.

Definite Article: the

RULE

Used for something specific or already mentioned.

EXCEPTION

No article is used with plural general nouns or with most proper nouns, though some countries are exceptions (the United States, the Netherlands).

EXAMPLE

Dogs are loyal animals (general), not The dogs are loyal animals.

Zero Article

RULE

No article is used with uncountable nouns in general statements, meals, languages, and most proper nouns.

EXCEPTION

This is the single biggest recurring error among learners, usually over-adding the where it isn't needed.

EXAMPLE

She speaks French fluently, not the French.

CHAPTER 8

Prepositions

Prepositions rarely follow a consistent logic. They're best learned through the patterns below, not memorized as a single rule.

Time

RULE

In for months, years, and long periods. On for days and dates. At for specific times.

EXCEPTION

At night is the exception to the in-pattern used for other parts of the day (in the morning, in the evening).

EXAMPLE

I'll see you at night. / I'll see you in the evening.

Place

RULE

In for enclosed spaces, on for surfaces, at for specific points.

EXCEPTION

Transport is inconsistent: in the car, but on the bus, train, or plane.

EXAMPLE

She's in the car. / He's on the train.

Movement

RULE

To, into, onto, through, and across describe direction and movement.

EXCEPTION

In casual speech, these are often shortened or merged informally.

EXAMPLE

Come here, not come to here.

CHAPTER 9

Conjunctions and Linking Words

Conjunctions connect ideas. Choosing the right one, and punctuating it correctly, is what makes reasoning sound clear instead of choppy.

Coordinating Conjunctions (FANBOYS)

RULE

For, and, nor, but, or, yet, so join two equal elements.

EXCEPTION

Starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is grammatically acceptable in modern usage.

EXAMPLE

And that's exactly why the plan changed.

Subordinating Conjunctions

RULE

Because, although, since, if, and when join a dependent clause to an independent one.

EXCEPTION

When the dependent clause comes first, it needs a comma. When it comes second, it usually doesn't.

EXAMPLE

Although he was tired, he finished the report. / He finished the report although he was tired.

Correlative Conjunctions

RULE

Pairs like either/or and neither/nor connect two related elements.

EXCEPTION

Subject-verb agreement follows the noun closer to the verb.

EXAMPLE

Either the manager or the employees are responsible.

CHAPTER 10

Modals

Modal verbs express ability, permission, obligation, possibility, and advice. The same word often carries different meanings depending on context.

Ability

RULE

Can and could express general ability.

EXCEPTION

Could works for general past ability, but not for a single completed achievement, use was able to instead.

EXAMPLE

She could swim as a child. / She was able to finish the race despite the injury.

Permission

RULE

Can, may, and could all ask for or grant permission.

EXCEPTION

May is more formal, can is standard in everyday speech.

EXAMPLE

May I take tomorrow off? (formal) / Can I leave early today? (everyday)

Obligation

RULE

Must expresses internal or subjective obligation. Have to expresses external or imposed obligation.

EXCEPTION

They aren't always interchangeable, even though they're often taught as synonyms.

EXAMPLE

I must finish this before I feel right about the day. / I have to submit this by five, it's the policy.

Possibility and Certainty

RULE

Might, may, could, and must express different degrees of likelihood.

EXCEPTION

Must for logical certainty (she must be tired) is a different use from must for obligation, same word, different meaning.

EXAMPLE

He must be in a meeting, his line is busy.

Advice

RULE

Should and ought to give advice or a recommendation.

EXCEPTION

Should have plus a past participle expresses regret about something that didn't happen.

EXAMPLE

You should have called me before deciding.

CHAPTER 11

Active and Passive Voice

Voice determines whether the subject performs or receives the action. Speech leans active far more than writing does.

Forming the Passive

RULE

Passive voice is formed with be plus the past participle, and shifts focus from the doer to the receiver of the action.

EXCEPTION

Passive voice is useful when the doer is unknown, unimportant, or obvious from context, but overusing it in speech sounds evasive and indirect.

EXAMPLE

The window was broken. (doer unknown) vs. Someone broke the window. (active, if known)

CHAPTER 12

Direct and Indirect Speech

Reporting what someone said accurately, without sounding stiff, is a common gap in workplace communication.

Tense Shift Rule

RULE

Reported speech usually shifts the tense back one step (present to past, past to past perfect) and adjusts pronouns and time references.

EXCEPTION

No tense shift is needed if the reported fact is still true or a general truth.

EXAMPLE

She said the sun rises in the east, not rose.

Modals in Reported Speech

RULE

Would, could, should, and might stay the same in reported speech, they don't shift further back.

EXCEPTION

This is a frequent point of confusion since most other modals do shift.

EXAMPLE

He said he could help tomorrow (unchanged from could).

CHAPTER 13

Conditionals

Conditionals express cause and consequence across different levels of likelihood, from certain facts to impossible pasts.

Zero Conditional

RULE

General truths and facts. If + present, present.

EXCEPTION

This is the most consistent conditional, with no real exceptions.

EXAMPLE

If you heat water to 100 degrees Celsius, it boils.

First Conditional

RULE

Real or possible future situations. If + present, will + base verb.

EXCEPTION

Other modals (can, might, should) can replace will depending on the level of certainty.

EXAMPLE

If it rains, we will reschedule. / If it rains, we might reschedule.

Second Conditional

RULE

Hypothetical or unlikely present or future situations. If + past simple, would + base verb.

EXCEPTION

Use were instead of was for all subjects in formal usage, especially with I and he/she.

EXAMPLE

If I were you, I would take the offer.

Third Conditional

RULE

Hypothetical past situations that cannot be changed. If + past perfect, would have + past participle.

EXCEPTION

Mixed conditionals combine two different time frames in one sentence.

EXAMPLE

If I had studied medicine, I would be a doctor now. (mixes third and second conditional)

CHAPTER 14

Punctuation Essentials

Punctuation carries meaning on its own. A misplaced comma or apostrophe changes how confident and careful your writing looks.

Comma

RULE

Separates items in a list, joins independent clauses with a conjunction, and sets off introductory phrases.

EXCEPTION

Never join two independent clauses with only a comma, this is a comma splice. Use a period, semicolon, or add a conjunction.

EXAMPLE

Wrong: He was late, he missed the meeting. Right: He was late, so he missed the meeting.

Apostrophe

RULE

Shows possession or forms a contraction.

EXCEPTION

Possessive pronouns (its, yours, hers, ours, theirs) never take an apostrophe. Its and it's are two different words.

EXAMPLE

The company lost its biggest client. / It's been a long week.

Semicolon

RULE

Joins two related independent clauses without a conjunction.

EXCEPTION

Never use a semicolon directly before a coordinating conjunction, a comma is enough there.

EXAMPLE

The meeting ran long; we still covered everything.

Colon

RULE

Introduces a list, explanation, or quote after a complete sentence.

EXCEPTION

Don't use a colon after such as or including, since those phrases already introduce the list.

EXAMPLE

We need three things: time, budget, and buy-in.

CHAPTER 15

Common Confusions and Errors

These pairs cause the most repeated mistakes in professional writing and speech, even among advanced speakers.

Their / There / They're

RULE

Their shows possession, there indicates place, they're is a contraction of they are.

EXCEPTION

All three sound identical, which is why the error is so common even for fluent speakers.

EXAMPLE

Their office is over there, and they're planning to expand it.

Your / You're

RULE

Your shows possession, you're is a contraction of you are.

EXCEPTION

No major exception, the confusion is purely about sound versus spelling.

EXAMPLE

You're doing great work on your project.

Its / It's

RULE

Its shows possession, it's is a contraction of it is or it has.

EXCEPTION

This is one of the most common errors in professional writing.

EXAMPLE

The team hit its target. / It's been a productive quarter.

Affect / Effect

RULE

Affect is usually a verb meaning to influence. Effect is usually a noun meaning a result.

EXCEPTION

Effect can rarely be used as a verb meaning to bring about (to effect change).

EXAMPLE

The delay will affect the timeline. / The delay had a major effect on the timeline.

Fewer / Less

RULE

Fewer is used with countable nouns, less is used with uncountable nouns.

EXCEPTION

Less people is common in casual speech but technically incorrect, fewer people is correct.

EXAMPLE

We have fewer clients this quarter but less overall risk.

Who / Whom

RULE

Who is used as the subject, whom is used as the object.

EXCEPTION

Whom is rarely used in casual spoken English, who is acceptable in most informal contexts.

EXAMPLE

Who is presenting today? / To whom should I address this? (formal)
