

A Guide to
English Language Usage
for non-native speakers

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The wind on the heath

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accents and diacritic marks.

English words do not have these, although they are sometimes written on foreign words used in English such as *FIANCÉ*. When a word is more accepted as an English one the accent is gradually dropped.

Their names in English are *acute*, *grave* /grɑ:v/, *circumflex*, *cedilla*, *tilde*, *umlaut* (German) or *diaeresis* /daɪ'eri:z/ (other languages). The names of letters with these symbols are spoken as *é e-acute*, *à a-grave*, *î i-circumflex* etc. Spanish-speakers should note that in English the word *tilde* refers only to the *~*, the mark which distinguishes *ñ* from *n*. English typewriters and computer keyboards do not have these accents and marks. The best rule seems to be to use the accent whenever possible if it makes a difference to pronunciation: *façade*, *cliché*, *Müller*, *Muñoz*, though some publishers ignore them almost completely or are inconsistent in their use of them in foreign names, possibly for fear of misunderstanding the complications of the large number of accents and marks in some central European languages. Publishers vary considerably in their treatment of accents and diacritic marks on foreign words.

adjectives without nouns

An ATTRIBUTIVE *ADJECTIVE must be followed by a noun or pronoun; it cannot be left hanging in the air. If there is no obvious pronoun, use *one*: *Which do you prefer? The green one or the red one/this one or that one?* or THING: *The most difficult thing will be...; The most exciting thing about the holidays was...* See ONE REPRESENTING A NOUN.

exceptions to this rule

- Certain adjectives which are used to define groups of people in society; in these cases the adjective takes a plural verb: *the rich have all the pleasure; the poor have all the problems; the healthy; the sick, the unemployed.*
- Certain nationality adjectives: *the French; the Irish*. See COUNTRIES AND NATIONALITY for the nationality adjectives that can be used in this way.
- Certain adjectives used in philosophical contexts: *A journey into the unknown; The best is the enemy of the good.*
- Ordinal numbers, superlatives, last, next, other and own. These can be used without a following noun: *the second (one); ALL is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; the other (one); No thanks, I prefer my own.*
- Some fixed expressions with prepositions: *for your own good; for good (=forever, permanently); in public, in private, in secret; in the nude, in the wild; in short; to the full; from bad to worse; out of the ordinary; in the extreme; above normal; in common.*

Adjectives used without nouns cannot take a POSSESSIVE: *John was the last to arrive; The last person's (not ~~The last's~~) arrival time.*

dynamic and stative

Dynamic verbs describe an action: *do, sit, walk, work, write*. They have a CONTINUOUS ASPECT, which describes a current action or state: *I was sitting on the wall* and an imperative, which orders an action: *Sit there*. *GET* as a passive auxiliary is dynamic.

Stative verbs are not used in the continuous and imperative forms since the state that they describe is always valid (but see FUTURE CONTINUOUS). For example, ~~*I'm knowing that*~~ are impossible.

(... article continues ...)

ellipsis

This is the omission of certain words which can be clearly understood from the context. For example, *Thank you* is an elliptical form of *I/we thank you*. In *I didn't tell him yesterday but I will (tell him) tomorrow* the second *tell him* is usually ellipated (i.e. omitted).

Ellipsis is the term for the three dots (...) that indicate an omission in a quotation.

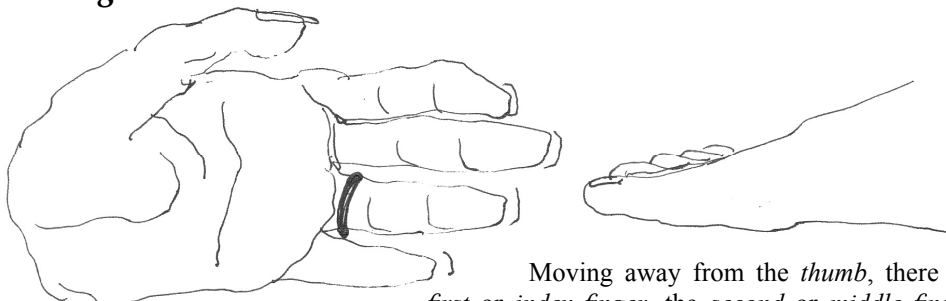
eponyms

An eponym is the use of the inventor of a thing as its name. A *sandwich* is named after the fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-1792) who ate meat between slices of bread while he was gambling so that he would not have to leave the table; *Wellington* boots are boots in a style made famous by the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) but now they are always waterproof rubber boots, usually black or green and often known as *wellies*; the *Bodleian* Library (in Oxford), the *cardigan*, the *diesel* engine, the *mackintosh* (waterproof coat), the

.....
Morse code and *sadism*, are also examples of eponyms, from Sir Thomas Bodley, the Earl of Cardigan, Rudolf Diesel, Charles Macintosh, Samuel Morse, and the Marquis de Sade respectively.

In literature an eponymous hero is one whose name is also the title of the work: *Jane Eyre* is the eponymous HEROINE of the book by Charlotte Brontë.

fingers & toes



Moving away from the *thumb*, there are the *first* or *index finger*, the *second* or *middle finger*, the *third* or *ring finger*, and the *fourth* or *little finger* (*pinky* in American English). The word *finger* is only used in relation to the hands; the parts of the feet that correspond to fingers are called *toes*. *BIG* and *LITTLE* toes have special names; the other toes do not.

get

(*Get*, *got*, *got* in British English; in American English the past participle *gotten* is common. This is found in British English in the compounds *beget* and *forget*, *-got*, *-gotten*.)

This word has a large number of meanings, many of which are phrasal verbs, but they can generally be placed in three groups. Because of the number and range of words that it can

replace it is common in informal and colloquial use, but it is usually avoided by careful writers precisely because its use suggests a lack of care and thought in choice of language.

hit etc.

This article contains sub-articles on the two main words *hit* and *strike* followed by the following in alphabetical order: *bang, bash, batter, beat, belt, bump, butt, dash, flog, kick, knock, pound, punch, slap, smack, thrash, thump*.

hit, hit, hit

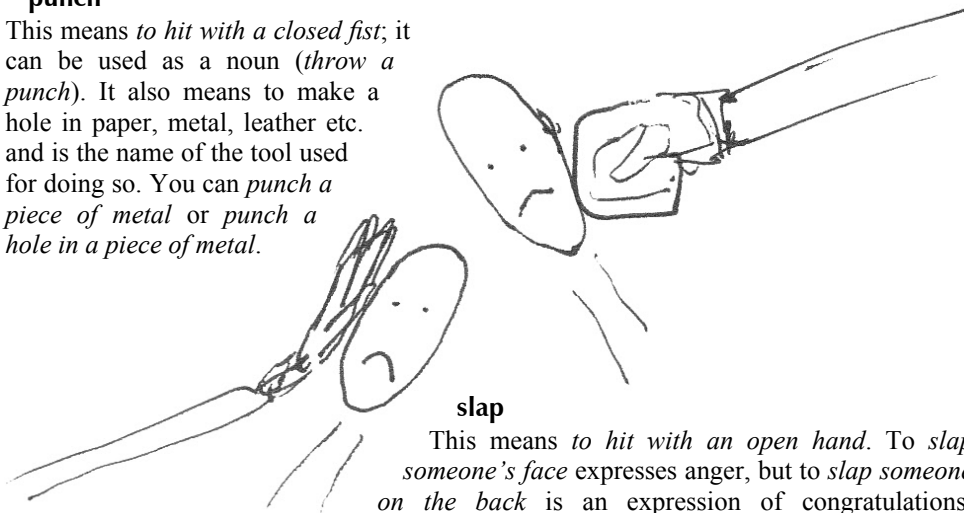
Hit is the most general of these words. It is transitive except when compounded with certain adverbs such as *hit back* and *hit out*. You can hit somebody or something with a part of your body (hand, head), with a hand-held instrument (hammer, stick) or with something that is thrown or projected (ball, bullet). One thing can hit another: *The apple hit the roof as it fell from the tree; I hit my head on a low door frame*. You can be hit by something that comes forcefully to your mind: *The importance/seriousness/difficulty/danger etc. of the situation only hit me later. Hit* can mean affect badly: *He was hit hard by the financial recession; The country was hit by an earthquake*.

The usual noun for the act of hitting something is *blow*. The usual verbs are *deal* and *strike*: *That dealt a blow to my hopes; Strike a blow for freedom*. It can mean a sudden problem: *His resignation is a serious blow for the company*. *Hit* can be used as a noun but is usually limited to these three meanings:

- A success: *That pudding was a hit with the children*.
- The number of people visiting a website: *Our site had 10,000 hits last month*, or something found by an internet search engine: *The search gave me 13,974 hits*.

punch

This means *to hit with a closed fist*; it can be used as a noun (*throw a punch*). It also means to make a hole in paper, metal, leather etc. and is the name of the tool used for doing so. You can *punch a piece of metal* or *punch a hole in a piece of metal*.



slap

This means *to hit with an open hand*. To *slap someone's face* expresses anger, but to *slap someone on the back* is an expression of congratulations.

Children are sometimes punished by being *slapped* on the legs or hands. A *slap on the wrist* is often used figuratively for a punishment or criticism. *Slap and tickle* is light-hearted amorous play, kissing and cuddling, snogging (slang).

Keats and Yeats

The surname of the English Romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821) is pronounced /ki:ts/. The surname of the Irish Nationalist poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) is pronounced /jets/.

make love

At one time *make love* meant to approach someone with the intention of establishing a loving relationship or to flirt. In the twentieth century it came to mean precisely to have sexual relations with someone. It is important to bear this in mind when reading books written before the middle of that century.

modal auxiliary verbs

This article has an introduction followed by sections dealing with ability, permission, and possibility; these together cover the verbs *can*, *be able*, *may*, and *might*. There are sections dealing separately with the verbs *must*, *ought to* & *should*, *shall* & *should*, and *will* & *would* followed by sections covering the use of modal verbs with the perfective aspect (*She might have come*) and with the continuous aspect (*He may be coming*). The final section deals with semi-modal verbs (*dare* and *need*).

introduction

Like other Germanic languages English has modal verbs that modify other verbs with relation to willingness, possibility, obligation, and other moods. They are also used to indicate some future and conditional forms.

present	past*	
<i>can</i>	<i>could**</i>	*It is very important indeed to understand that with the exception of <i>could</i> , which is the past of <i>can</i> , the use of the word <i>past</i> with respect to modal verbs has no connection at all with chronological time. Those words are used when a past form of the verb is required for reasons of syntax. See INDIRECT SPEECH; TENSE & TIME. ** <i>Could</i> is also the conditional of <i>can</i> .
<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>	
<i>must</i>	–	
<i>shall</i>	<i>should</i>	
<i>will</i>	<i>would</i>	

Modal verbs have four things in common that distinguish them from other verbs:

- They have no *s* in the third person singular: *he can*, *it must*.
- They are followed by a bare infinitive (without *to*): *You may go*, *It will rain*.
- They make question and negative forms without *do/does/did* as auxiliary verbs: *May I go?* *She must not go*.
- They are defective, i.e. they do not have all tense forms, and in particular they have no infinitive forms. Where necessary, this deficiency is made up by using other verb forms.

Modal verbs are used to indicate such ideas as possibility, ability etc.:

ability	<i>can/could</i>
possibility	<i>can/could; may/might</i>
permission	<i>can/could; may/might</i>
logical necessity	<i>must; have got to</i>
logical impossibility	<i>cannot</i>
obligation, compulsion	<i>must; have got to</i>
tentative inference	<i>should, ought to</i>

obligation (suggestion) *should, ought to*
 prediction *will, would, shall*
 volition, willingness *will, would*

The dividing lines between these categories are not always clear.

musical instruments

The usual instruments of a symphony orchestra are as follows:

Strings: violin, viola, cello /'tʃeləʊ/, double BASS /beɪs/. **Woodwind:** clarinet, oboe, cor anglais /kɔːr'ɒŋgleɪ/, bassoon, flute, piccolo. **Brass:** trumpet, cornet, trombone, tuba, French horn. **Percussion:** drums, kettle drums (timpani), cymbals, triangle.

An orchestra is *conducted* by a **CONDUCTOR** (not *director*), who uses a *baton*. The *leader* of the orchestra is the principal violinist. See MUSICAL NOTATION AND TERMINOLOGY.

musical notation and terminology

In musical notation in Britain the letters are the constant, absolute names of the notes while the *sol-fa* /'sɒlfɑː/ names are relative. Below are three scales showing this system.

scale of C major



<i>letter name</i>	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
<i>sol-fa name</i>	doh	ray	me	fah	soh	lah	te	doh

In this scale of C major, the lower C is on a *ledger* /'ledʒə/ line. This is *MIDDLE C*.

nouns

(...)

gender, case, and plural forms

English nouns do not have GENDER as such although the PRONOUNS *he, him, his, she, her, it* and *its* vary with the sex of the referent. With the exception of the possessive they have no indications of CASE, and with very few exceptions English nouns make their PLURAL FORMS with (*e*)s.

(... article continues ...)

numbers

(...)

numbers in writing

When numbers are written by hand in English, *one* /wʌn/ is a single vertical stroke (l), though it is often printed (1 or 1); *seven* has no cross (7). This can be confusing for people from countries where these numbers are written by hand as 1 and 7.

Note the variant spelling of some forms: *four, fourteen, forty, fourth; five, fifteen, fifty, fifth; eight, eighteen, eighty, eighth* /eɪtθ/; *nine, nineteen, ninety, ninth*.

Commas separate thousands, millions etc. A point indicates a decimal fraction.

When numbers are written as words a HYPHEN is placed between the tens and units but not in any other position. €327,934.69 is *three hundred and twenty-seven thousand nine hundred and thirty-four euros and sixty-nine cents*.

(... article continues ...)

odd

This word has a wide range of meanings as adjective and noun.

(...)

odds for proportion and chance

Odds is the term used to describe proportional chances, especially in betting: *I'll give you odds of 5-1 (spoken as five to one) against that horse winning the race*. This means that if the horse loses, you will give me a certain sum of money (e.g. £100), and if it wins I will give you five times that sum (£500).

Long odds represent a small chance (100-1, 1000-1); *short odds* represent a good chance (2-1); *evens* (1-1) is when the chances are equal; an *odds-on chance* (1-2) is a possibility of more than 50% (see OFF for *off-chance*), I will give you £50 if the horse wins and you will give me £100 if it does not. Odds can *lengthen* and *shorten* (become *longer* and *shorter*) as the situation changes and the balance of probability changes. If the *odds are in your favour*, your chances of success are high. If you *win against (all) the odds* you have had great difficulty or opposition.

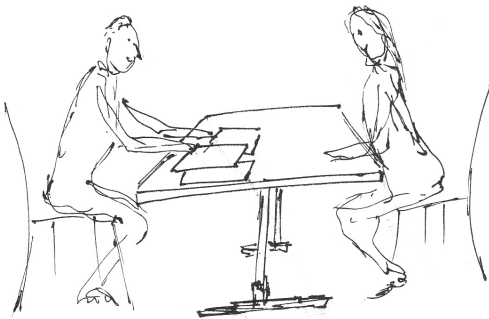
In statistics the term *odds ratio* is used.

offspring

This refers to children and adults in the sense that they are produced by their parents; it is a synonym of *descendant* and is the term used in genetics. It does not mean *child* in any other sense; it is incorrect to say *How many offspring do you have?* or *Stop behaving like an offspring*. It does not change in the plural *offsprings*.

opposite & in front of

(...)



Arthur and Helen are sitting *opposite* EACH OTHER at this table. However, Arthur's papers are on the table *in front of* him because their position is described in relation to the front part of his body.

(... article continues ...)

palace

In Britain a *palace* is an official residence of the royal family or of a bishop; the *Palace of Westminster*, the building in which Parliament meets, is a royal palace. The word is not usually used for a private residence, however grand it is; the exceptions are *Blenheim Palace*, the residence of the Duke of Marlborough, and *Dalkeith Palace* near EDINBURGH, which is now used by the University of Wisconsin. The very ornate pubs of Victorian times were ironically called *gin palaces*.

participle clauses

A participle clause is one in which the present participle (-ING FORM) or past participle is used alone; it can be considered as a reduction of a continuous verb when it contains a present participle. The sentence *While/When/As I was cycling along the street, I saw a dog* can be rewritten as *While/When cycling along the street, I saw a dog* (NB not ~~*As cycling along the street, I saw a dog.*~~) or simply *Cycling along the street, I saw a dog.*

It is wrong to say ~~*Cycling along the street, the dog ran away from me*~~ because this suggests (grammatically, though illogically) that the dog was cycling.

(... article continues ...)

perfective aspect

For comparison and contrast of past simple and present perfect see PAST SIMPLE & PRESENT PERFECT. For further details about the future perfect see FUTURE.

There are three perfect forms: *present*, *past*, and *future*. They are formed with the appropriate tense of the verb *have* and the past participle.

present perfect

This is used:

- for states (stative verbs) that began in the past, continue in the present, and will probably continue in the future: *I have lived here for over 20 years; He's always supported that team; She's never owned a car.*

(... article continues ...)

q, Q /kju:/

The seventeenth letter of the alphabet. In English words it is found in the combination *qu*, which is pronounced /kw/: *quick, equal*.

In words of French origin that end with *-que* it has the French pronunciation /k/: *Basque, bisque, boutique, brusque, CALQUE, cheque, grotesque, mosque, mystique, oblique, picturesque, unique* among others, and also in the words *chequer* /'tʃekə/, *marquee* /mɑ:'ki:/, *quay* /ki:/, and *queue* /kju:/.

In some words that have been transliterated from Arabic it is written without the *u* that always follows it in English: *Iraq(i), Qatar, al Qaeda*. In such cases it is usually pronounced /k/ in English, though the sound that the Arabic letter represents is not found in English and is pronounced rather differently in that language.

tag questions

form

Like other languages, English has a way of adding words to a statement to make a question and invite the hearer to respond. The way in which this is done is more complex in English than in other languages, involving both verb structure and intonation.

The structure of tag questions is simple enough to describe and understand, but their use requires a fluency in language management that learners find considerable difficulty in acquiring. A tag question takes the auxiliary verb from the main clause and turns it into a question using the auxiliary verb and a pronoun. An affirmative sentence has a negative tag question and vice versa.

John has lived in Paris, hasn't he?

Mary hasn't lived in Moscow, has she?

Your brother will be there, won't he?

She can swim, can't she?

The school is open now, isn't it?

The hospital isn't far away, is it?

He likes ice cream, doesn't he?

Wales, a brief history

(...)

The Norman invasion of England extended into Wales, with the building of castles to maintain Norman power in the land they had conquered. With time, these new Norman landowners became accepted by the Welsh people and alliances and marriages became more frequent. Resistance to Norman occupation continued however. Llewelyn Olaf (Llewelyn the Last; for pronunciation of Welsh *ll* see L, L) was recognised by England as Prince of Wales, but in 1282 Edward I declared him a rebel and defeated and killed him in battle. In 1284 all Welshmen were declared subjects of the English Crown; many more castles were built to maintain the occupation. These castles and fortified towns established the pattern, which can be found even today, that Welsh language and culture survive in rural areas while the commercial towns are more English in character. In 1404 Owain Glyndwr had united the Welsh people under his leadership and he drove the English out of much of Wales. He planned to establish a Welsh nation with a university. But he failed; his capital Harlech fell in 1409 and he became a fugitive. There is no record of his death. Welsh customs and laws were abolished by the English and in 1536 Henry VIII of England (whose own family, the Tudors, were Welsh in origin) signed an Act of Union making Wales entirely subject to English law. This incorporated Wales into England more comprehensively than the Act of Union with Scotland.

(... article continues ...)

INDEX

This index lists incidental references. A word listed here with a reference to another entry may have its own full entry as well. For example, *pepper* is referenced here to *corn* but it also has its own article under its own name. This index does not contain any cross-references to these articles: *abbreviations*; *American English*; *anger, surprise and insults, (with other taboo words)*; *countries and nationalities*; *irregular verbs*; *personal names*; *prepositions*; *proverbs*.

A

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| abdomen | belly | agenda..... | plural |
| ability | modal auxiliary | agent | passive voice |
| | verbs | airplane | aeroplane |
| abreast..... | breast | all right..... | already |
| accent | stress differences | always | ever & always |
| accustomed | used to, would & | altogether | already |
| | accustomed to | among(st)..... | amid(st) |
| acre | weights and | Anglican | catholic; Church of |
| | measures | | England; clerk; |
| actual(ly)..... | false friends | | dog-collar |
| addict | stress differences | antenna..... | aerial |
| adopt | adapt | Anthony | notes for personal |
| advertise..... | -ise & -ize | | names |
| advise | -ise & -ize | antique | ancient |
| afraid..... | adjective | antonym | synonym |
| aft..... | ship | apostrophe..... | punctuation |
| again(st)..... | amid(st) | advise..... | -ise & -ize |