

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:sis/ (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 an ñ from an *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 form: *John was the last to arrive; The last person's* (not ~~The last's~~) *arrival time.*

car

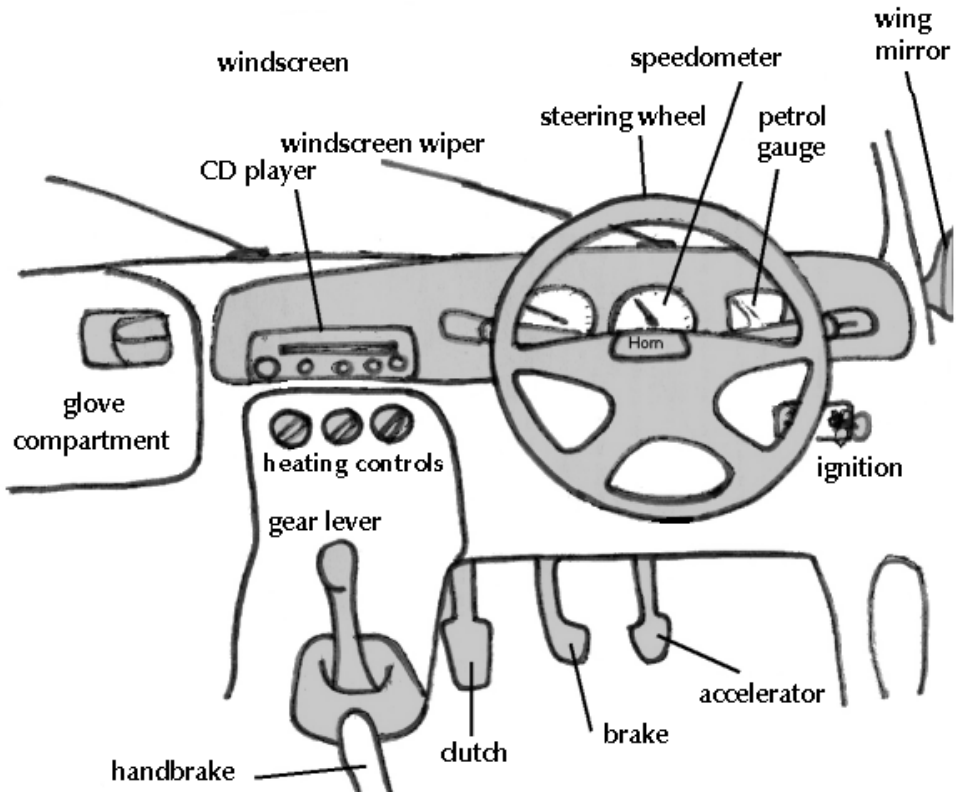
A car has a *bonnet* (American English *hood*) at the front to cover the *engine*, at the back it has a *boot* (American English *trunk*) to contain the luggage, and it has *wings* to cover the front wheels. A car has two *front wheels*, two *back or rear wheels*, and a *spare wheel* for use if one wheel has to be replaced; each wheel consist of a metal *hub* surrounded by a rubber *tyre*. Cars usually have four doors (two *front* and two *back or rear*) though many cars are *hatchbacks*, with a door at the back that lifts up. A *central locking* system allows all the doors to be locked easily at the same time from outside the car, and a *child-lock* prevents the internal

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door handles from working. The *headlights* are the powerful lights at the front of the car; they can be *dipped* so that they do not disturb other drivers. The *sidelights* are less powerful. Red *rear lights* make the car visible from behind, *indicator lights* show when the car is about to turn, *brake lights* show that the brakes are being used, and *hazard warning lights* flash to show that the car is STATIONARY in a potentially dangerous position. A *petrol cap* is removed to put

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petrol into the *tank*. The *nearside* of the car is the side nearest to the side of the road (the left side in the UK) and the *off side* is the side by the centre of the road. The picture below shows the interior of a British car with the controls on the right-hand side. The panel below the windscreen is the *DASHBOARD*. (*Gauge* is pronounced /geɪdʒ/.)



dynamic and stative

Dynamic verbs describe an action: *do, sit, walk, work, write*. They have a CONTINUOUS form, the form that describes a current action or state: *I was sitting on the wall*, and an imperative

form, the form that 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 liking/knowing that*~~ are impossible.

(... *article continues ...*)

ellipsis

This is the omission of certain words which are clear 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 ellipsed (i.e. omitted).

Ellipsis is also 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 in colour 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.

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 its meanings 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.

(... *article continues ...*)

herbs and spices (and other flavourings)

These are the names of some common herbs and spices.

basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>
bay	<i>Laurus nobilis</i>
caper	<i>Capparis spinosa</i>
caraway	<i>Carum carvi</i>
cayenne*	<i>Capsicum anuum</i>
chilli*	<i>Capsicum anuum</i>
chive	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>
cinnamon	<i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>
clove	<i>Eugenia aromatica</i>
coriander	<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>
cumin	<i>Cuminum cyminum</i>
dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>
garlic	<i>Allium sativum</i>

(... *article continues ...*)

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:

- The number of people visiting a web site: *Our site had 10,000 hits last month, or something found by an Internet search engine: The search gave me 13,974 hits.*

(... *article continues* ...)

Keats & 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 /jetts/.

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 define other verbs with relation to willingness, possibility, obligation, and other moods. They are also used to indicate some future and conditional forms.

The modal verbs are:

Present	Past*
<i>can</i>	<i>could**</i>
<i>may</i>	<i>might</i>
<i>must</i>	–
<i>shall</i>	<i>should</i>
<i>will</i>	<i>would</i>

*It is very important indeed to understand that with the exception of *can* & *could*, the use of the word ‘past’ with respect to modal verbs has no connection with chronological time. Those forms are used when a past form of the verb is required for reasons of syntax.

See INDIRECT SPEECH; TENSE AND TIME.

** *Could* is also the conditional of *can*.

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.*

M

- 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;</i> <i>may/might</i>
permission	<i>can/could;</i> <i>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)	<i>should, ought to</i>
prediction	<i>will, would, shall</i>
volition,	<i>will, would</i>
willingness	

The dividing lines between these categories are not always clear.

(... *article continues ...*)

musical instruments

The usual instruments of a symphony orchestra are:

strings:

violin, viola, cello /'tʃeləʊ/, *double BASS* /beɪs/.

wind:

woodwind: *clarinet, oboe, cor anglais* /kɔ:r'ɒŋgleɪ/, *bassoon, flute, piccolo.*

brass: *trumpet, cornet, trombone, tuba, French horn.*

percussion:

drums, kettle drums (timpani), cymbals, triangle.

M

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

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 they make their PLURAL FORMS with (e)s.

(... *article continues ...*)

numbers

(...)

numbers in writing

When numbers are written by hand in English, *one* /wʌn/ is written as a single vertical stroke (l), though it is often printed (1 or 1); *seven* is written and printed without a 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 *four, fourteen, forty, fourth; five, fifteen, fifty, fifth; eight, eighteen, eighty, eighth* /eɪtθ/; *nine, nineteen, ninety, ninth*.

Note the pronunciation of *sixth* /sɪksθ/ and *sixths* /sɪksθs/.

When numbers are written as words a HYPHEN is placed between the tens and units. €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 meaning as adjective and noun.

(...)

odds for proportion and chance

Odds is the term used to describe proportional chances, especially in betting; in statistics the term *odds ratio* is used: *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 for example £50 if the horse wins and you will give me £100 if it doesn't.

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.

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*.

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 has not been in the hands of the Buccleuch /bʊ'klu:/ family since 1914. 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 reduced form 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/, *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 a form of 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?

(... article continues ...)

Wales, a brief history

(...)

The Norman invasion of England was extended into Wales, with the building of castles to maintain Norman power in the land they had conquered. With time, the Norman landowners became accepted in Wales and alliances and marriages with Welsh people 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 ...)

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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.

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

(... *index continues ...*)