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Introduction



Grammar makes lots of people nervous. Chances are, you're reading this now because you're one of those people. Perhaps you went to school in an era when grammar wasn't really taught. And what mattered was that you expressed yourself freely without feeling restricted by mundane things like correct spelling and accurate sentence structure. Maybe you did learn some grammar but you found all the terminology boring and have forgotten most of the rules. As an adult, you may find yourself in circumstances where your language skills aren't as good as they need to be — in a job interview, preparing your first report in a new job, or writing essays for tertiary studies. This can be stressful and make you feel self-conscious. And it's worse if everyone else seems to understand, or if you find to your horror that the boss or tutor is one of those people who even uses perfect grammar in text messages.

English grammar can be tricky but, happily, it's easier than you may think. You don't have to memorise all of the technical terms, and you're likely to find that you already know a lot of it anyway. In this book we tell you the tricks of the trade, the strategies that help you make the right decision when you're facing such grammatical dilemmas as how to choose between *I* and *me*, or whether to say *had gone* or *went*. We explain *what* you're supposed to do, tell you *why* a particular way of doing things is correct or incorrect, and even show you *how* to revise your sentences if your grammar checker puts a squiggly green line under some part of your sentence. When you understand the reason for a particular choice, you'll pick the correct word automatically.

About This Book

In this book, we concentrate on the common errors. We tell you what's what in the sentence, in logical, everyday English, not in obscure terminology. You don't have to read the chapters in order, but you can. And you don't have to read the whole book. Just browse through the table of contents and look for things that have always troubled you. For example, if you

know that verbs are your downfall, check out Chapters 2 and 3 for the basics. Chapters 11 and 19 show you how to choose the correct verb in a variety of situations. You decide how picky you want to be.

Each chapter in this book introduces some basic ideas and then shows you how to choose the correct sentence when faced with two or three choices. If we define a term — *linking verbs*, for example — we show you a practical situation in which identifying a linking verb helps you pick the right pronoun. The examples are clearly displayed in the text so that you can find them easily. One good way to determine whether or not you need to read a particular section is to have a go at the ‘Have a Go’ tasks that are sprinkled around every chapter. If you get the right answer, you probably don’t need to read that section. If you’re stumped, however, backtrack and read the chapter. Also, watch for Demon icons. They identify the little things — the difference between two similar words, commonly misused words and so on — that may sabotage your writing.

What You Don’t Need to Read

Here and there throughout this book, you see some items marked with the Black Belt icon. No human being in the history of the world has ever been in life-threatening situations that required them to know those terms. You have our permission to skip them and do something more interesting. For those of you who actually enjoy obscure terminology for the purpose of, say, clearing a room within ten seconds, the Black Belt icons define such exciting grammatical terms as *subject complement* and *participial phrase*. Everyone else, fear not. Look for the Black Belt icons so you know what to avoid.

Similarly, the grey boxes with text — the sidebars — contain information that you may find interesting but isn’t required for your understanding of the subject. Feel free to flick straight past them.

Foolish Assumptions

We wrote *English Grammar For Dummies* with a specific person in mind. We assume that you, the reader, already speak English (although you may have learned it as a foreign language) and

that you want to speak and write it better. We also assume that you're a busy person with better things to do than worry about *who* and *whom*. You want to speak and write well, but you don't want to get a doctorate in English grammar. (Smart move. Doctorates in English don't move you very far up the salary scale.)

This book is for you if you aspire to:

- ✓ better marks for your essays
- ✓ a job with better pay or a higher status
- ✓ having your speech and writing present you as an educated, intelligent person
- ✓ being able to write and say exactly what you mean.
- ✓ developing a sound understanding of good grammar.

How This Book Is Organised

The first two parts of this book cover the basics: the minimum for acceptable, correct English. Part III addresses the nuts and bolts of writing: punctuation, capital letters and when to use numerals.

Part IV moves you on to the finer points of grammar, the ones that separate regular people from grammar-gurus. If you understand all the information in this section, you're on your way to being an honorary brown-cardigan-wearing grammar-geek! This part also introduces you to the important connection of good grammar with good writing style.

Here's a more specific guide to navigating *English Grammar For Dummies*.

Part I: Understanding Verbs and Sentences

This part explains how to distinguish between the levels of English: from I'm-on-my-best-behaviour English, through slightly more proper conversational language and on to the casual slang of friend-to-friend chat. We explain the building blocks of a sentence (subjects and verbs) — and show you how to put them

together properly. In this part, we also provide a guide to the complete sentence, telling you what's grammatically legal and what's not. We also give details about objects and complements and show you how to use each effectively.

Part II: Adding Detail and Avoiding Common Errors

In this part, we describe the remaining members of 'team grammar' — the other parts of speech. We show you how to join short, choppy sentences into longer, more fluent ones and discuss which joining words do this best. We also explain descriptive words and show you how the location of a description can alter the meaning of the sentence. Prepositions — which trip up many speakers of English as a second language — are handled in this part, as are pronouns. Choosing the correct pronoun need never trouble you again. Finally, in this part we tell you how to avoid mismatches between singular and plural words, by far the most common mistake in ordinary speech and writing.

Part III: Punctuating for Precision

If you've ever asked yourself whether or not you need a comma or got lost in quotation marks and semicolons, Part III is for you. We explain all the rules that govern the use of the apostrophe. We also show you how to quote speech or written material as well as how to use dots and dashes. We even provide advice about the correct way to present a bibliography. Lastly, we outline the ins and outs of capital letters and numerals: when you need them, when you don't and when they're optional.

Part IV: Grammar with Style — the Finer Points

Part IV moves into trickier territory — not all the way into the land of pernickety grammar pedants, but pretty close. Importantly, in this part, we introduce you to the way good grammar and good writing style go hand in hand, and venture into the world of text messages, emails and visual presentations. We tell you the difference between subject and object pronouns, and pronouns of possession. (No, you don't need an exorcist.)

We go into detail about verb tenses, explaining which to choose for all sorts of purposes. We show you how to expand your sentences with clear, carefully placed descriptions and comparisons. We acquaint you with the best way to organise your ideas into sentences and your sentences into cohesive paragraphs, how to distinguish between active and passive verbs, and when to use each. This part also puts into plain words how to write in plain English, and clarifies when and how to use abbreviations and bullet point lists. Finally, we show you how to achieve success in creating visual presentations.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Part V offers some quick tips for better grammar. Here we explain how to deal with ten common grammar errors, and warn you about ten ways your grammar and spell checker can't help you. We show you ten ways to finetune your writing skills and suggest ten ways to improve your editing and proofreading skills. We also provide you with a glossary of the grammar terms you'll encounter in your journey through the book, just in case you need a refresh button for your memory.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book you can find useful icons to help you note specific types of information. Here's what each icon means:



Here's where we get a little technical. If you master this information, you're guaranteed to impress your oldest relations and bore all of your friends.



Keep an eye out for these little devils: they point out the difference between easily confused words and show you how to make your sentence say what you want it to say.



Have you ever been confused by the message your grammar checker gives you when it puts a wiggly line under a possible problem and asks you to 'consider revising' some part of your sentence? Your days of confusion end here. This little fellow appears at the same points that a wiggly line would appear, and the information alongside it tells you exactly how to revise those troublesome sentences.



Think you know how to find the subject in a sentence or identify a pronoun? Have a go at these exercises, located throughout this book, to find out what you know and what you may want to learn.



Wherever you see this icon, you'll find helpful strategies for understanding the structure of the sentence or for choosing the correct word form.



Not every grammar trick has a built-in trap, but some do. This icon tells you how to avoid common mistakes as you unravel a sentence.

Where to Go from Here

Now that you know what's what and where it is, it's time to get started. Before you do, however, one last word. Actually, two last words. *Trust yourself.* You already know a lot. You'd be amazed how much grammar can be absorbed by osmosis from day-to-day language. If you're a native speaker, you've communicated in English all of your life, including the years before you set foot in school and saw your first textbook. If English is an acquired language for you, you've probably already learned a fair amount of vocabulary and grammar, even if you don't know the technical terms. So take heart. Browse through the table of contents, have a go at a few tasks and dip a toe into the sea of grammar. The water's fine.

Chapter 1

Who Cares about Grammar?

.....

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding when following the rules is necessary
 - ▶ Identifying accepted patterns of speech and writing in Australia
 - ▶ Recognising friendly, conversational and formal English
 - ▶ Knowing when to use the various levels of English
-

You may be reading this book for a number of reasons. Perhaps you're hoping to impress your English teacher or tertiary tutor (if so, it's a good idea to be caught casually reading it). Or maybe you're one of the many people who didn't learn much English grammar at school and felt you didn't really understand what you did learn. If English was your first language, you probably learnt English grammar by osmosis, by hearing what others say, which, all too often, means absorbing a fair chunk of incorrect grammar along with the correct bits. Or perhaps you want to improve your writing at work so your boss will give you a promotion.

Whatever your ultimate goal is, you seem to have decided that learning better grammar is a valuable strategy. Good for you! In this chapter, we look a little more closely at why good grammar is so important. We also look at how the definition of *better grammar* changes according to your situation, purpose and audience.

Functioning with Good Grammar

Back when you were stuck in English class, you probably thought that grammar was invented just to give teachers something to test. But grammar — or, to be more precise, formal grammar teaching — exists to help you express yourself clearly.

Good communication and good grammar go hand in hand. Without a thorough knowledge of grammar, you can get by just fine chatting with your friends and family. But you may find yourself at a disadvantage when you're interviewed for a job or a place at university, or when you're trying to convince someone to publish your novel. And heaven help you if your boss turns out to be a *stickler* — one of those people who knows every grammar rule that was ever invented (and thinks you should know them too) and insists that the English language must never be allowed to change.



Rightly or wrongly, your audience or readers judge you by the words you use and the way you string them together. Ten minutes at the movies will show you the truth of this statement. Listen to the speech of the people on the screen. An uneducated character sounds different from someone with five diplomas on the wall. The dialogue reflects reality: educated people follow certain rules when they speak and write. If you want to present yourself as an educated person, you have to follow those rules too.

Following grammar rules is just a matter of deciding which type of grammar to use. We can hear the groan already. *Which* grammar? You mean there's more than one? Yes, several different types of grammar do exist, including *historical* (how language has changed through the centuries) and *comparative* (comparing languages). Don't despair. In this book, we deal with only two — the two you have to know in order to improve your speech and writing: descriptive grammar and functional grammar.

Descriptive grammar gives names to things — the parts of speech and parts of a sentence. When you learn descriptive grammar, you understand what every word *is* (its part of speech) and what every word *does* (its function in the sentence). Learning some grammar terms has a couple of important advantages — to understand *why* a particular word or phrase is correct or incorrect (and sometimes to be able to explain to someone else why it's wrong), and to understand the explanations and advice given when you check something in a dictionary or style guide.

Functional grammar makes up the bulk of *English Grammar For Dummies*. Functional grammar tells you how words behave when they're doing their jobs properly. It guides you to the right expression — the one that fits what you're trying to say — by ensuring that the sentence is put together correctly. When

you're agonising over whether to say *I* or *me*, you're solving a problem of functional grammar.

So here's the formula for success: a little descriptive grammar plus a lot of functional grammar equals better grammar overall. And better grammar equals better self-expression. And better self-expression equals improved self-confidence. And with improved self-confidence, anything is possible. The news is all good!

Aussie English: What's the Standard?

In the Middle Ages, *grammar* meant the study of Latin, because Latin was the language of choice for educated people. In fact, knowing Latin grammar was so closely associated with being an educated person that the word *grammar* was also used to refer to any kind of learning. That's why *grammar schools* were called grammar schools; they were places of learning — and not just learning about how Latin and English work.

These days, grammar is the study of language — specifically, how words are put together to create meaning. Through time, because of all those obsessive English teachers, grammar has also come to mean a set of standards that you have to follow in order to speak and write correctly. No doubt in your career as a student, you discovered that different teachers have different pet hates — English teachers included. The emphasis placed on the importance of certain points of grammar differs from classroom to classroom. Don't worry; we're consistent.

Although English follows patterns and rules of grammar, the way those rules and patterns are applied varies in different English-speaking countries. Standard Australian English isn't the same as either standard American English or standard British English. Certainly, we choose different standard spellings for the same word (such as *-ise* endings in Australia versus *-ize* endings in America) or different words for the same thing (for example, a sidewalk in America is a pavement in England and a footpath in Australia). More than this, the way we use certain punctuation marks varies, and sometimes we even put words in a different order to express the same meaning.

Don't *come the raw prawn* about what's un-Australian

Being a *wowser* about the uptake of American vocabulary into everyday Australian conversations is a waste of time and energy. It's like still expecting the kitchen floor to be covered with *lino* or the *thunderbox* to be in the backyard. Fashions change; populations shift. Today, just as your average Australian *dunny* is indoors, your average Australian neighbour is not a *bush cocky*. The way Australians play with language and collect or invent new words is alive and well and living in the suburbs. (All italicised terms in this sidebar are defined in the list at the end of the sidebar.)

Naturally, the earliest examples of *true blue* Australian language come from the convict days. Early Australian vocabulary was borrowed from various forms of British English. The *crims* sent here by *Her Maj* were not well educated, and spoke a kind of street language that set them apart from the wealthy and privileged. Doing so made them feel comfortable together (like the *homies in the hoods of the States*). *Lagging* on your *mates* has always been un-Australian, and *dobbing* continues to be a social crime in classrooms today — with the only worse crime being *big-noting*. Australia's convict heritage has even been blamed for the all-too-prevalent *tall poppy syndrome* that characterises the culture.

Australians took other words that we claim as Australian English from the languages of our indigenous peoples.

Let's face it, what would anyone who'd never been *within cooe* of one before call a *wallaby* or a *wobbe-gong*? And in modern households all over the nation, high-tech equipment regularly *goes bung*.

Making fun of others and being irrelevant has always been a feature of Australian language. *Bananabenders* and *Sandgropers* argue about who has the best beaches. We affectionately refer to each other as *dags* or *ratbags*. Even our first female prime minister was regularly referred to as a *ranga* after the word was made popular in 2007 by comedian Chris Lilley in the satirical *telly* show *Summer Heights High*.

Around half of the population of Australia has mixed cultural backgrounds and some 40 migrants arrive here every hour. So, exactly what makes an Australian *dinky-di*? When large numbers of migrant Australians began coming from southern Europe, they were taunted with the derogatory and racist term *wogs*. Nowadays, their children and grandchildren have reclaimed the term and often refer to themselves in this way. (They still, however, consider it racist if someone not of this descent uses the term.)

Even our *pollies* help keep Australian English healthy. John Howard gave us *economic rationalism* when he was prime minister. And where else in the world would there be *anti-hoon legislation*?

Australian vocabulary has always absorbed words from the languages and dialects spoken and heard here. English-speakers have always played with language and invented new ways to express themselves. Words go in and out of fashion in the way that songs do. Nothing is un-Australian about that.

- ✓ anti-hoon legislation: Laws to curb anti-social driving
- ✓ Bananabender: Person from Queensland
- ✓ big-noting: Bragging about one-self
- ✓ bush cocky: Farmer
- ✓ cark it: To die
- ✓ come the raw prawn: To say something that is difficult for the hearer to believe (or swallow)
- ✓ crim: Criminal
- ✓ dag: A likeable person who is unconcerned about fashion
- ✓ dinky-di: Genuine
- ✓ dobbing: Informing on another
- ✓ dunny: Toilet
- ✓ economic rationalism: Market- and money-oriented economic policy
- ✓ goes bung: Breaks down (from the Yagara language, originally meaning dead)
- ✓ Her Maj: Her Majesty the Queen of England
- ✓ homies in the hoods of the States: People who live in the same neighbourhood in American cities (American slang)
- ✓ lagging: Informing on another
- ✓ lino: Linoleum floor covering
- ✓ pollie: Politicians
- ✓ ranga: Person with red hair
- ✓ ratbag: An amusing troublemaker
- ✓ Sandgroper: Person from West Australia
- ✓ tall poppy syndrome: The systematic criticism of high achievers
- ✓ telly: Television
- ✓ thunderbox: Outdoor toilet
- ✓ true blue: Patriotic Australian
- ✓ wallaby: Small pouched marsupial like a kangaroo
- ✓ within cooee: In close proximity to
- ✓ wobbegong: A species of shark
- ✓ wog: Person of southern European descent (previously derogatory; now reclaimed by some of this descent)
- ✓ wowser: Person who tries to impose their own strict moral code on others

The accepted way that English is spoken is called *usage*, and this includes both *standard* and *non-standard usage*. Standard usage is the one that earns an A grade. It consists of the commonly accepted correct patterns of speech and writing that mark an

educated person in our society. You can find standard usage in government documents, in formal newspapers and magazines, and in textbooks. Non-standard usage includes slang and just plain bad grammar. It's common in everyday conversations, but should be avoided in formal situations. Examples of non-standard Australian English include using *verse* as a verb meaning 'to compete against' (*Our team is versing yours next week*) and choosing *youse* as a plural form of you (*Youse can all come too*). Using non-standard Australian English isn't likely to get you that promotion you wanted. (But using plain English, where you keep your language clear, might — for more on this, see Chapter 21.)

So how do we decide what is standard Australian English? We refer to authorities. We use Australian dictionaries and Australian style guides. We follow the advice provided by the Australian National Dictionary Centre at the Australian National University, and scour the bulletins on English in Australia published by the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University. Relax. In this book, all the research has been done for you. That's a promise.

Understanding the Levels of English

So, using good grammar clearly sounds like a great idea, but you may not always need to use standard English because the language of choice depends on your situation. Here's what we mean. Imagine that you're hungry. How would you invite someone to join you for lunch?

Would you care to accompany me to lunch?

Do you feel like getting a sandwich?

Wanna go grab a bite?

r u frE 4 lnx ☺

wants 2 get samich kthnx

These variations illustrate levels of English used in everyday life. We'll call them formal English, conversational English, friendspeak, txtspk and LOLspeak.

Before you choose the most suitable level of language, you need to know where you are and what's going on. Most importantly, you need to know your audience.

Formal English: Would you care to accompany me to lunch?

At the top end of the language spectrum, you're using only standard Australian English: formal, grammatically correct speech and writing. Formal English displays the fact that you have an advanced knowledge of what's appropriate. You may use formal English when you have less power, importance and/or status than the other person in the conversation. Formal English shows that you've trotted out your best behaviour in someone's honour. You may also speak or write in formal English when you have *more* power, importance or status than the other person (to maintain the distance between you). The goal of using formal English is to impress, to create a tone of dignity, or to provide a suitable role model for someone who is still learning.

Situations and types of writing that call for formal English include

- ✓ authoritative reference books
- ✓ business letters and emails (from individuals to businesses, as well as from or between businesses)
- ✓ homework
- ✓ important conversations such as job interviews, university interviews, parole hearings, sessions with teachers in which you explain that it wasn't you who did what they think you did, that sort of thing
- ✓ letters to government officials
- ✓ notes or letters to teachers
- ✓ office memos
- ✓ reports
- ✓ speeches, presentations and formal oral reports.

Think of formal English as English in a business suit. If you're in a situation where you want to look your best, you're also in a situation where your words matter. In business, homework or any situation in which you're being judged, use formal English.

Conversational English: Do you feel like getting a sandwich?

The next level down is *conversational English*. Conversational English, although casual, doesn't stray too far from the rules, but it does break some. It's the tone of most everyday speech, especially between equals. Conversational English is — no shock here — usually for conversations, not for writing.

Specifically, conversational English is appropriate in these situations:

- ✓ comments made on public internet sites
- ✓ communication with extended family members, neighbours and acquaintances
- ✓ friendly conversations (without mentioning that you want that promotion) with bosses
- ✓ informal conversations with teachers and co-workers
- ✓ novels.

Conversational English has a breezy sound and usually a more rapid pace than formal English. Letters are dropped in contractions (*don't, I'll, would've*). Even whole words are omitted (*Got a minute? Later. On the fridge.*). In written form, conversational English relaxes the punctuation rules too. Sentences run together, dashes connect all sorts of things, and half-sentences pop up regularly. This book is in conversational English because we like to think we're chatting with you, the reader, not teaching grammar in a classroom. Think of conversational English as being like English in clean jeans and a T-shirt.

Friendspeak: Wanna go grab a bite?

Friendspeak is informal and filled with slang. Its sentence structure breaks most of the rules that English teachers love. It's the language of *I know you and you know me and we can relax together*. In friendspeak, the speakers are on the same level. They have nothing to prove to each other and they're comfortable with each other's language choices. In fact, they make some grammatical mistakes on purpose, just to distinguish their

personal communication from the language they use on other occasions. Here's a conversation in friendspeak:

Hey, I'm gunna go to the gym. Wanna come? I dunno if he gives you the irits, but no way I'm gunna go with Stevo again.

Yeah. He's, like, I did 60 push-ups, and I go, like, no way.

I mean, what's he reckon? We're stupid or something? Sixty? More like one.

Yeah, I know. In his dreams.

The preceding conversation may not make much sense to many other people, but the participants understand it completely. Because they both know the whole situation (the guy they're talking about gets muscle cramps after four seconds of exercise), they can talk in shorthand. It helps, of course, that they're speaking to each other (not just reading the words). The way they say the words helps to communicate their meaning, and if that fails they can wave their hands or shake their heads in significant ways. Think of friendspeak as being language in thongs and shorts. It's not appropriate in any official communications, and should only be used for chat between mates, either in person or online. We don't deal with friendspeak in this book. You're already an expert at it.

Txtspk: r u frE 4 lneh ☺

The proliferation of mobile phones soon led to the growth of the shorthand form of written communication we're calling *txtspk*. Initially, messages were restricted to a set number of characters, which accounts for the official name for text messaging being *short message service* (SMS). Shortening words and leaving words out was, therefore, useful in this form of communication. It was also faster.

On the acceptability, standard versus non-standard scale of using language, *txtspk* ranks even lower than friendspeak. The language choices made in text messages are often so specific to the people who are sending and receiving them that they can be indecipherable to anyone else. Hence, *txtspk* is absolutely, completely and utterly only acceptable in communication

between people who are on the same page, so to speak, and know each other very well. Think of txtspk as being language dressed in something that's totally now, ready for some serious clubbing.

It may surprise you to know that you can actually apply some 'rules' to txtspk in English, so that even your gran/nonna/mama/halmoni/jadda/yia yia or whatever you call her can understand your message. We cover this in Chapter 22.

LOLspeak and beyond: wants 2 get samich kthnx

Okay, so this one is just weird, but it does serve to remind you how quickly language use can change these days. *LOLspeak* is a playful language game that developed, believe it or not, from the language used online for captions that accompanied funny pictures of cats — *LOL* as in laugh out loud. Some people call this crazy language *LOLcatz*, but it's now used to create amusing captions for cute images of any kind of animal. The aim is to deliberately write in non-standard English, to break the rules in order to amplify the cuteness of the image and to make the audience laugh.

The Web makes this kind of language play readily accessible to all, and *LOLspeak* is just one example of the way non-standard language use can spread. However, as clever as it may be, you need to remember that it's a joke. Absolutely no acceptable use for *LOLspeak* and its buddies exists in any other forum. Think of it as language wearing a furry costume.

Using the Right English at the Right Time

If you're like most people, you use and understand several levels of English, and switch from one to another without thinking, dozens of times each day. (Refer to the preceding section for more on the different levels.) Chances are, the first level of English — formal English — is the one that gives you the most trouble. In fact, it's probably why you bought this book. (Okay, one more possibility exists. Maybe you borrowed it, or

maybe your granny gave you your copy of *English Grammar For Dummies* and you're stuck with it. But right now you're obviously reading the book instead of playing solitaire or waiting for your phone to buzz, so you've at least acknowledged that you may be able to get something useful from it, and we're betting that it's some inside tips about how to handle formal English.) All the grammar lessons in this book deal with formal English, because that's where the problems are fiercest and the rewards for knowledge are greatest.



Which is correct?

A. Dear Ms Stakes

I regret that I was not able to do my homework last night.
I will speak to you about this matter later.

Yours sincerely

Lucinda Robinson

B. Dear Ms Stakes

Just a brief note to let you know that I won't be handing
in my homework today. I didn't manage to get it done last
night. Sorry. I'll explain later!

Your student

Lucinda

C. Hi Ms Stakes!

How's it goin'? Here's the thing. I didn't do the homework
last night — too much goin' on. See ya!

Luv, Lucinda

Answer: The correct answer depends upon a few factors. How willing are you to get a failing grade for this piece of work (assuming you do get around to handing it in eventually)? If your answer is 'very willing', send note C. It's written in friendspeak. Does your teacher come to school in casual clothes and seem like someone who'd happily have a beer or coffee with the class some time? If so, note B is acceptable. Note B is written in conversational English. Is your teacher one of those old-fashioned sticklers who expects you to follow all rules? If so, note A (which is written in formal English) is your best bet.

Understanding the dangers and benefits of e-English

Have you ever listened to Chaucer's poetry or Shakespeare's plays and thought they don't sound like English? Well, imagine what those dead dudes would think of hip-hop lyrics or SMS messages. Until the advent of the Web, change in English was constant, but very slow. (Think about it. If English wasn't a dynamic, organic language, we'd all be communicating in Anglo-Saxon.) But anyway, having the capacity to communicate instantly across the globe not only leads to the rapid uptake of new words that describe and accompany each new technology and product, but also allows anyone with access to a computer and the internet to become a published writer. Some of we English purists would say that's where the problem starts!

Sadly, material on the Web is often littered with errors. Too few people bother to have their internet writing professionally edited, so they write whatever they think is correct, and send it out into cyberspace to bounce around forever riddled with mistakes. As a reader of this kind of online material, if you see something often enough, you can begin to think it's correct. Besides, a standard e-English doesn't yet exist, so the 'rules' get bent out of shape by English speakers from different parts of the globe. Alternatively, writers may depend on the default settings of their grammar checkers, which are likely to be based

on standard American English, thus more and more Americanisms are accepted into other languages and forms of English.

Writing for the Web has created positives too. Readers of internet material bore easily, and tend to click links that take them somewhere else when they lose interest. So information needs to be restricted to short chunks, usually constructed from short sentences or in point form. Web writing also needs to make good use of colour and have plenty of illustrative material to engage the audience. Web writing is enriching our skills in graphic communication.

Happily, the lexicon is also being expanded and enriched by e-English. New meanings evolve for existing words (*link*, *mouse*, *text*). New words are created based on existing words (*phish*, *chatgroup*), and vast numbers of new expressions enter the language. Once upon a time, birds were the only creatures that would tweet, but now people do it all the time, and *tweeting* opened the way for other related words such as *twitterverse*, *twittersphere* and *hashtag*.

E-English is developing its own 'rules' based on existing ones. People are adjusting the way they communicate, losing old habits and adopting new ideas as they go along, the way they always have.

About the Authors

Wendy M Anderson spent the first decade or so of her professional life as an English teacher in secondary schools before reinventing herself as an education publisher. She then moved on to teaching editing and professional writing to adult learners, simultaneously guest lecturing in grammar and tutoring in a university English department. From there, it was a short hop to facilitating corporate workshops in business communication and grammar. She occupies the remaining daylight hours (and lots of the non-daylight hours too) enjoying the feast or famine world of the freelance writer/editor and has been widely published. Although usually casual, she's not sure how she got to be so part-time. She's sure that she used to be far more permanent.

PS She has never owned a brown cardigan.

Geraldine Woods' career as a grammarian began in her elementary school, which in those days was called 'grammar school' for very good reason. With the guidance of a series of nuns carrying long rulers (good for pointing at the board and slapping unruly students), she learned how to diagram every conceivable type of sentence. She has been an English teacher for over 25 years and has written 40 books, give or take a few. She loves minor-league baseball, Chinese food and the novels of Jane Austen.

Lesley J Ward has worked in the publishing industry for over 30 years, editing and proofreading books and journals. She is a founder member of the Society of Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP), and regularly leads training courses for SfEP, the Irish Book Publishers' Association and the London College of Communications. She is also a distance-learning tutor for the Publishing Training Centre. Her favourite course is *Brush Up Your Grammar*. She lives in Berkshire and is notorious for being a harmless eccentric/dangerous radical who refuses to have email.

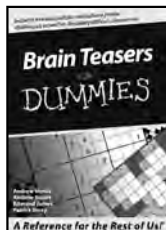
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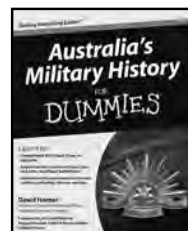
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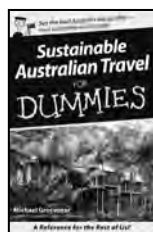
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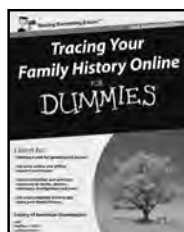
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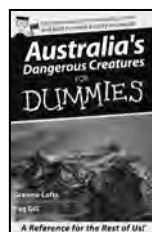
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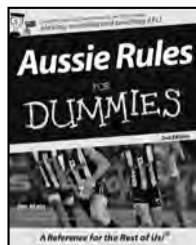
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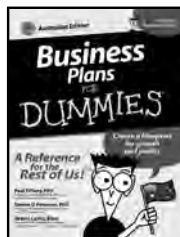
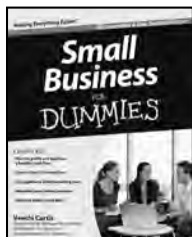
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