

EXPO E-5a: BASIC GRAMMAR  
J-Term 2016, Harvard University Extension School

*Instructor:* Naomi Stephen  
*e-mail:* stephen@fas.harvard.edu  
*Class hours:* Tuesday, Thursday 6–8:30 P.M.

*Phone:* 617-596-2217  
*Office Hours:* by appt.

**Required Text:** *Rules for Writers*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2012)

Because J-term is short, the syllabus for this course takes a different pattern from the conventionally cumulative introduction to grammatical principles: Each of our class meetings is built around a few of the most common grammatical errors in writing. All students are encouraged to bring in “real life” examples of their own and others’ writing about which they have questions—by all means send them to me even before class starts on Jan. 5. From these examples, we’ll turn to the textbook to work with the principles of correct grammar. The hope is that if you encounter a situation in your own writing that doesn’t exactly match an example we’ve worked with, you will still be able to work your way through it using the grammatical precepts we discuss in class. (Or you could ask me—I have occasionally heard from students even a couple of years after class ended!)

Even if English is your native language, it’s a very good idea to approach the study of its grammar as you would a foreign language.<sup>1</sup> This means lots of practice is required, and preferably daily—not only through homework, but also through active reading of others’ writing, and active thinking about your own writing even in the shortest of notes. If possible, you should do the homework for this class in small bites, spread out over a few days, rather than all in a lump right before class meetings, so that you revisit the coursework frequently.

*Rules for Writers* has been through a number of editions, so be sure you get the right one (the most recent, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, published in 2011). Available at the Harvard Coop in both textbook division and main bookstore, this book is a common choice as supplement or reference book for other writing classes at the Extension School and elsewhere, so it is a good investment. A good dictionary—not pocket-sized,<sup>2</sup> but a college edition dictionary—is also a good resource, as such dictionaries provide not only definitions of words, but also the occasional example of usage and information about the parts of speech. The *American Heritage Dictionary* college edition is good. And,<sup>3</sup> since you’ll be receiving a fair few handouts in the class, I recommend a 3-ring binder to hold your papers.

In this course we will explore the most basic and most useful rules of grammar, rules that help us speak and write with confidence and grace. By studying grammatical principles in action, by practicing variations on those principles through in-class and take-home exercises, and by putting those principles into action in our own writing, we’ll see that the use of good grammar need be considered neither an overwrought science nor a social bludgeon—and that it actually can be fun.

**Attendance and completion of all assignments, exams, and quizzes are required.**<sup>4</sup> The course grade will be based upon completion of writing assignments (sentences) and performance on quizzes and the final exam. These components will be weighted as follows:

- 40%** for total quizzes
- 20%** for total written assignments
- 40%** for the final exam

Following is a tentative schedule of the assignments for the semester. We will probably make adjustments to meet the needs of the class. Please be alert to any changes in the syllabus that I might announce. All assigned work (readings, exercises, and brief writing assignments) should be completed by the dates below.

**Some preview grammar & usage teasers for you:**

- <sup>1</sup> Why *it's* and *its* in this sentence? What's the difference?
- <sup>2</sup> Why “pocket-sized” and not “pocket-size”? *Should the question marks in*
- <sup>3</sup> Is it proper to begin a sentence with “And”? *these four questions be inside or*
- <sup>4</sup> Why “are required” and not “is required”? *outside of the quotation marks?*

CLASS 1  
1/5/16      In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)**      **Beginnings: What we're working with.** Go over Hacker chapter 46  
Parts of Speech: **Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs** (good idea to look at  
chapter ahead of time). Work on 46.3 Verbs — 48.2 Verbal Phrases  
(Verbals)

**(2nd hour)**      **VERBS:** The heartbeat of grammar.  
**COMPLETE SENTENCES:** Subjects, True Verbs *vs.* Verbals,  
Fragments (**lacking true verb**)  
**APOSTROPHES: POSSESSIVES, CONTRACTIONS, PLURALS**  
**POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS** a.k.a. “Errors that make writers look dumb.”

**Errors addressed:** Sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)  
**its** *vs.* **it's**      **your** *vs.* **you're**  
Things like “The grape's are good.”

CLASS 2  
1/7/16      Quiz #1  
Homework to be completed for today:  
Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 46.1 Nouns — 46.2 Pronouns — 46.3 Verbs  
48.2 Verbal phrases — 47.1 Subjects — 48.1 Prepositional Phrases — 21.1, 21.2  
Subject–Verb Agreement (plurals show up a lot) — 22.1 Pronoun–Antecedent  
Agreement — 36.1 Apostrophe (also 24g, possessive with gerund) — Additional  
homework on possessives and plurals from Borzoi handout.

*Write out and turn in:* Read Hacker pp. 596–598 (“a, an” through “back up, backup”).  
Select three entries (**two** usage examples per entry) from these pages of the Glossary of  
Usage and for **each example** write a sentence in which you use the standard English  
correctly (i.e., 3 entries = 6 examples = 6 sentences).

In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)**      Go over homework exercises completed for today;  
review **AGREEMENT (S–V and pronoun)**; review **APOSTROPHES**;

**(2nd hour)**      Introduce **CLAUSES: Independent and Subordinate.**  
**Introduce JOINING CLAUSES** (2 kinds of joining for indep.)  
Introduce **FRAGMENT, COMMA SPLICE**  
**SUBORDINATORS:** make subordinate clauses  
**TRANSITIONERS:** however, therefore, etc. don't affect clauses.

**Errors addressed:** Fragments  
Apostrophe use  
Wrong word

CLASS 3  
1/12/16

Quiz #2

Homework to be completed for today: Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 48.3 Subordinate Clauses — 19.1 Sentence Fragments — 20.1, 20.2 Run-on Sentences

*Write out and turn in:* 19.2 Repair Sentence Fragments

*Write out and turn in:* 14.4 Subordinate ideas in subord. clauses,

*Write out and turn in:* 14.3 Subordinate ideas in subord. clauses

*Write out and turn in:* Read Hacker pp. 599–601 (“bad, badly” through “everybody, everyone”). Select three entries (**two** usage examples per entry) from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for **each example** write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)** Go over homework exercises; review **JOINING INDEP. CLAUSES (comma splices, fused sentences)**; review **FRAGMENTS**  
Review **AGREEMENT**: pronouns and S-V

**(2nd hour)** Introduce **PRONOUNS: CASE** (who vs. whom, she vs. her, etc.)

**Errors:** Subject–verb disagreement, e.g., “The flowers on the table is pretty.”  
Pronoun–antecedent disagreement, e.g., “Does everyone have their book?”  
Pronoun: Case (“I” vs. “me”)  
Wrong word

CLASS 4  
1/14/16

Quiz #3

Homework to be completed for today:

Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: review 48.1 Prepositional Phrases (see also 46f) — 24.1, 24.2 Pronoun Case – 25.1 Who, Whom — Additional Hacker website exercises on pronoun case 24.3, 24.4, 25.2  
[http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rules7e/#t\\_669460](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/rules7e/#t_669460)

*Write out and turn in:* Read Hacker pp. 602–604 (“everyone, every one” through “lie, lay”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for **each example** write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)** Go over homework exercises; review **PRONOUN CASE**.

**(2nd hour)** Introduce **PUNCTUATION esp. COMMAS (“that” vs. “which” clauses). COLON, SEMI-COLON, QUOTATION MARKS**

**Errors:** Common pronoun errors: Vague pronoun reference, disagreement in number.  
Pronoun case; “It is a secret between he and I.”  
Wrong word: LIE vs. LAY

CLASS 5  
1/19/16

Quiz #4

Homework to be completed for today:

Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 32.1, 32.2, 32.3, 32.4, 32.5, 32.6, 32.7  
Commas, wrong commas — 33.1 wrong commas — 34.1, 34.2 Semi-colons — 35.1  
Colons — 37.1 Quotation Marks — 39.1 Other Punctuation. Additional homework:  
Handout on punctuation (quotation marks).

*Write out and turn in:* 33.2: Wrong/unnecessary commas

*Write out and turn in:* 36.2: Apostrophe use

*Write out and turn in:* 38.1: End punctuation

*Write out and turn in:* Read Hacker pp. 605–607 (“like, as” through “supposed to, sure and, take”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for **each example** write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)** Go over homework exercises; review **PUNCTUATION**

**(2nd hour)** **PASSIVE vs ACTIVE VOICE** (verbs). **MODIFIERS:** mixed, dangling, adjectives, adverbs

**Errors:** Wrong pronoun case (*pay attention to clauses; find the S–V relation first*)  
Shift in person (*don’t fall into “you,” 2<sup>nd</sup> person*)

CLASS 6  
1/21/16

Quiz #5

Homework to be completed for today:

Read and do exercises for Hacker chapters: 46.4 Adjectives, Adverbs — 26.1 Errors in Adjectives, Adverbs — 12.1, 12.2 Misplaced/Dangling Modifiers. Additional homework handout on Passive Voice.

*Write out and turn in:* 26.2 Errors in Adjectives/Adverbs

*Write out and turn in:* 12.1, 12.2 numbered exercises only

*Write out and turn in:* Read Hacker pp. 608–609 (“than, then” through “your, you’re”). Select three entries from these pages of the Glossary of Usage and for **each example** write a sentence in which you use the standard English correctly.

In-class activities and lessons:

**(1st hour)** Go over homework exercises; review **MODIFIERS, COMMAS, PUNCTUATION**. Review for final exam.

**(2nd hour)** Final Exam.

**Errors:** Misplaced commas  
Misplaced or dangling modifier  
Misused punctuation marks