Basic English Grammar Module

Unit 1A – Grammatical Units

INDEPENDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning Centre



BASIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROGRAM GRAMMATICAL UNITS

OBJECTIVES OF THE BASIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR MODULE

When you write your essays, reports and assignments, your writing needs to be grammatically well-structured. If you are unable to produce sentences that are appropriately structured and clear in meaning, the reader may have difficulty understanding the meanings that you want to convey. Here are some typical and frequent comments made by markers on students' written assignments.

- Please be careful of your written expression.
- At times it is difficult to follow what you are saying.
- You must be clearer when making statements.
- Sentence structure and expression poor.
- This is not a sentence.
- Please be careful of your expression. At times your sentences do not make sense.

In this module we are concerned with helping you as a student to develop a knowledge of those aspects of the grammar of English that will help you deal with the types of errors that are frequently made in writing sentences.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THIS UNIT

In this first unit we will give you an overview of the grammar of the sentence so that you will be able to identify the different parts. Some of the typical problems that students have with sentence-level grammar will also be explained where appropriate (subsequent units will explore these different parts of the grammar in more detail). If you want to study how paragraphs operate, you should study a different ILP module, namely, Cohesive Writing.

2. What is Grammar?

The main parts of the grammar we are concerned with in this course are clauses, phrases, groups, words and morphemes. Each of these is called a rank and they are ordered from highest to lowest with clause as the highest rank to morpheme as the lowest rank:

clause group and phrase word morpheme

Although the clause is the highest grammatical rank, it may combine with other clauses to form a **clause-complex**. Note that a sentence and a clause-complex are not necessarily the same since a sentence may consist of one clause only, or several clauses. The following sentence, for instance, contains two clauses:

Because chlorofluorocarbons last for a long time, they usually outlive their purpose.

As Diagram 1 below shows, each rank is a part of the rank above it. Thus, a morpheme is part of a word, a word is part of a group or phrase, and a group or phrase is part of a clause.

Diagram 1. Ranks of Grammar

Clause	Because	CFC's		last	for	а	long	t i me -
Phrase					for	а	long	time
Group				last		а	long	time
Word	Because	CFC's			for	а	long	time
Morpheme		CFC	+s					

Clause	they	usually		outlive		their	ригрозе
Phrase				1		Т	
Group	they	usually		outlive		their	ригрозе
Word	they	usually		outlive		their	purpose
Morpheme		usual	+ ly	out	+live		

So, why do we need to know about these parts of the sentence? Basically, understanding what the basic of units of grammar are allows us to see how these units can be manipulated (by us or the writer of the text) in order to make sentences and texts which make sense and which are appropriate to academic writing style.

2.1. Clause

How do we recognise clauses?

- A clause usually expresses a single idea, ie. it is a group of words which seem to "go together".
- A clause contains a main (content) VERB.

eg. This relatively inert gas HAS many applications

It is quite easy to identify clauses in a sentence if the sentence contains only one clause: the capital letter at the beginning of the sentence signals the beginning of the clause and the full stop at the end of the sentence indicates the end of the clause.

It is a little more difficult identifying clauses in the "clause-complex" kind of sentence. There are three main clues where one clause ends and another begins:

- Conjunctions
 - eg. and, when, if, etc. often appear at the beginning of a clause.
- Relative pronouns
 - eg. which, that, who, where, also may appear at the beginning of a clause.
- Punctuation
 - eg. commas (","), colons (":") and semi-colons (";"), may signal a clause boundary.
 - eg. Here it BECOMES photodissociated and BECOMES reactive, which IS one of its most distinguishing characteristics.

Together, these features (a main verb, conjunctions, relative pronouns, and punctuation) help us distinguish clauses in the sentence. Two other examples are shown below:

So they COULD REDUCE costs and INCREASE productivity, chemists INVENTED chlorofluorocarbons. (3 clauses)

Because it IS abundant and LASTS for a long time, it usually OUTLIVES its purpose and MIXES with the atmosphere when RELEASED from its containers. (5 clauses)

Now you will have some practice in identifying clauses.

Exercise 1

Read the following sentences and say how many clauses they contain. Follow the procedure below.

- First, underline the main verb in each clause of the sentence.
- Then, circle any conjunctions and/or punctuation which suggest clause boundaries.
- Finally, use the symbol || to mark the clause boundaries.
- 1. Children are not born with standards for evaluating behaviour, social skills or moral values.
- 2. As I have suggested, the non-addicted parent is involved in a co-dependent relationship with the addicted child.
- 3. Over this period, the population in Waverley decreased by 2.8%, while the population in the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area increased by 5%.
- 4. If we conceptualise caring as a finite set of caring behaviours, then caring can be examined in the traditional scientific way, even though this approach may not be acceptable in some circles.
- 5. This space constraint has led to a number of problems and these do not seem capable of being resolved although everyone is willing to be involved.
- You can now check the answers in the key at the back of the unit.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Do all commas indicate a clause boundary?
- Do all conjunctions indicate a clause boundary?

Typical problems

Sentences of one clause:

1. Incomplete sentence (the verb is missing)

An assessment of the association between the disease outcomes and the characteristics of differing socio-economic groups.

Corrected version: An assessment of the association between the disease outcomes and the characteristics of differing socio-economic groups is needed.

2. Incomplete sentence (subject is missing)

Naturally, delayed in finding a first job.

Corrected version: Naturally, he was delayed in finding a first job.

Sentences of more than one clause:

3. There is confusion between different types of clauses. Some clauses cannot stand independently as sentences. They need to be linked to other clauses in order to make their meaning complete, eg.

They have little disposable income. Because they are unemployed.

Corrected version: They have little disposable income because they are unemployed.

Because they are unemployed is what is called a "subordinate" or "dependent" clause. The use of the conjunction "because" signals that another clause is needed to complete the argument.

- If you are having difficulty in identifying subjects and verbs and sentences of one clause you should work on Unit 2 "The Verb Group" in the Basic English Grammar Module.
- If you are having difficulty in constructing sentences of more than one clause you should work on Unit 3 "Relationships Between Clauses" in the Basic English Grammar Module.

The next rank down from clauses includes both phrases and groups. A phrase has been referred to as a "shrunken clause" whereas a group can be thought of as a "bloated word". Both phrases and groups can be part of the clause structure, eg. for a long time, their purpose. We will look at these two units separately, starting with phrases.

2.2. Phrase

There are several different kinds of phrases, eg. prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases, and so on. The kind of phrase we will be looking at is the **prepositional phrase**.

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, such as for, with, by, to, at, in, etc, followed by a noun group, eg.

Because chlorofluorocarbons last for a long time, they usually outlive their purpose.

for	a long time
preposition	noun (noun) group

Prepositional phrases modify either a verb or noun.

When they **modify** a **verb** they tell us about the **circumstances** surrounding the action or happening suggested by the verb. These "circumstantial" prepositional phrases answer questions such as *when*? (time), *where*? (place), *how*? (manner), *why*? (reason), and so on.

When they modify a noun they give us more information about that noun (Unit 1A).

Exercise 2

- Underline the prepositional phrases in the following sentences.
- Circle what they modify, ie. a verb or a noun.
- 1. Each organism was grown in nutrient broth and cells in log-phase growth were centrifuged, washed and resuspended in double-strength minimal medium.
- 2. In 1962, the premium income received by all voluntary health insurance organizations in the United States was US\$ 6.3 billion.

- 3. The pyrroles are partly excreted in the urine but some are bound to the tissues of the liver and to the lungs and other tissues.
- 4. Several policies have been set by the government, at all levels, to assist low income households.
- 5. The magnetic field may affect both the velocity and temperature distributions of a conducting fluid between two parallel disks (Battaiah et al, 1979).
- You can now check the answers in the key.

Phrase-Complex

Just as clauses may group together into clause-complexes, phrases also may group together into "phrase-complexes", ie. phrases which "go together" or are dependent on one another in some way, eg. the prepositional phrase (Circumstance) in the following clause answers the question "How did he move?"

He moved in silence and without hesitation.

Typical problems in using prepositional phrases

Inappropriate preposition

Health inequalities tended to flourish towards the Aboriginal population.

corrected version:

Health inequalities tended to flourish within the Aboriginal population.

The use of the preposition "towards" indicates direction whereas what is needed is a preposition indicating place.

If you are having difficulty identifying prepositional phrases and using the correct preposition you should refer to one of the grammar texts in the reference list.

2.3. Group

There are a number of different types of groups in English, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of groups in English

Type of Group	Examples
Noun	the classes, those biology classes, those two biology classes we attended last week
Verb	took, had taken, would have taken
Adverb	quickly, more quickly, much more quickly
Conjunction	even if, as soon as, almost as soon as
Preposition	right behind, immediately in front of

So what is a group? A group is basically an extension of a word: **a group of words** with a particular function in the clause. A group consists of a **Head** word plus any words which add information to the Head, ie. **Modifiers**. The Head usually presents the most crucial information in the group.

	Modifiers	Modifiers	
Noun	those	biology	classes
Verb	would	have	taken

In this course we will concentrate on two of these groups, the noun group and the verb group, since these are the most critical to academic writing style.

2.3.1. Noun Group

A noun group is a group of words whose **Head word is a noun**. Any additional information related to that noun is expressed in the form of **Modifiers**. These may come either before the Head — "**Pre-Modifiers**" — or after the Head — "**Post-Modifiers**".

Pre- Modifiers		HEAD	Post-Modifiers
		CFCs	
а	long	time	
		they	
	their	purpose	
those	biology	classes	we attended last week

Post-Modifiers in the noun group are in most cases a phrase or a clause. These are described in more detail in the Basic English Grammar Module 1A "The Noun Group".

Exercise 3

- Underline the noun groups in the following sentences.
- Circle the head noun.
 (Remember that a noun group can consist of a single noun!)
- 1. Several policies have been set by the government, at all levels, to assist low income households.
- 2. The lowest nutrient intake values have been found among those people who had never attended school or gone beyond primary school.
- 3. Because the agar solution tends to evaporate during subsequent incubation, the edges of the coverslip were sealed to the slide with paraffin.
- 4. One of the policies produced by the Waverley Municipal Council aimed at retaining the function of boarding/lodging houses as low income accommodation and controlling the establishment of tourist accommodation was gazetted in the Waverley Local Environmental Plan in 1985.
- You can now check the answers in the key.

Noun-group-complex

Like the clause-complex and the prepositional phrase-complex, a "noun group-complex" consists of several units which depend on one another, eg.

Advice and comments will be sought from the senior members of the staff.

In such cases, the group has two Heads:

Advice	and	comments
Head		Head

Exercise 4

- Underline the noun group-complexes in the following examples.
- Circle the Heads of these groups.
- 1. These include such activities as smoking, alcohol consumption, overeating and sexual promiscuity.
- 2. The sample of amino acid or other growth factor being assayed need not always be in solution.
- 3. DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell.
- You can now check the answers in the key.

2.3.2. Verb Group

The verb group consists of a **Head** verb plus any **Premodifiers** (auxiliaries, modals or particles).

Premodifier	Head		
		was	submerged
has	not	been	established
	тау	be	correlated
			lasts

Exercise 5

- Underline the verb groups in the following text.
- Circle the Head word in each verb group.
- Use these verb groups (and the other cues, eg. punctuation and conjunction) to locate the clause boundaries in sentences with more than one clause.

If we look at the structure of any cell, we can see a nucleus. The nucleus is the cell's controlling centre and directs the cell's activities. Without it a cell will die. The instructions for the cell's activities are contained in the chromosomes. Chromosomes can be seen under a light microscope when a cell is dividing. On biochemical analysis we discover that chromosomes are composed of proteins and the nucleic acid DNA. DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell. Each type of organism has a particular number of chromosomes in each of its nuclei.

You can now check the answers in the key.

Verb Group-Complex

A "verb group-complex" consists of several verb groups which are dependent on one another, eg.

A fundamental aim of higher education is to enrich and empower its graduates by fostering in them generic skills and attributes that will enable them to participate in and contribute more effectively to society in the coming years.

Exercise 6

- Underline the verb group-complexes in the following sentences.
- Circle the Heads in each group.
- 1. Each organism was grown in nutrient broth and cells in log-phase growth were centrifuged, washed and resuspended in double-strength minimal medium.
- 2. In some disciplines, women equal or even outnumber their male colleagues.
- You can now check the answers in the key.
- If you are having difficulty identifying verb groups you should work on either Unit 2A "The Verb Group: Finites and Non-Finites" in the Basic English Grammar Module or 2B "The Verb Group: Tenses" in the Basic English Grammar Module.

2.4. Word

The grammatical unit that is familiar to most people is the **word**. In traditional grammars, words are placed in a number of different word classes (Table 2).

Exercise 7

Classify the words in our sample sentence in the spaces provided below.

Because	CFS's	last	for	а	long	time
	·	1				
thev	usuali	y I	outlive	their	purpos	se
inc y		·		1		

You can now check the answers in the key.

Word-Complex

A "word-complex" consists of two or more words which are dependent on one another, eg. I will be staying three or four days.

Table 2. Word Classes in English

Word	Sub-class	Description	Example
class		_	
Nouns	Concrete	These are words which refer to things or people, ie. things that are real, visible, or touchable.	rock, table, student
	Abstract	These are nouns which refer to abstract concepts.	insanity, interpretation
Pronouns	Personal	Personal pronouns take the place of or refer to a noun. To find out who or what they refer to we have to look elsewhere in the text or the context.	she, they, it
	Relative	Relative pronouns refer to someone or something that has already been mentioned.	who, whom,which, that, those
	Possessive	Possessive pronouns are used to indicate that something belongs to someone or is associated with them.	mine, yours, etc.
	Demonstrative	Demonstrative pronouns refer to specific people or things.	this, that, these, those
Adjectives	Descriptive	Adjectives which assign qualities and attributes to nouns.	blue, nice, quick
	Possessive	Adjectives which indicate that the noun belongs to someone or something or is associated with them.	his book, her lecture, my grandmother, Australia's policy
	Demonstrative	Adjectives which suggest which noun is indicated, based on near or far, and singular or plural.	these (books), those (books), this (book), that (book).
Verbs	Main verbs	These are verbs of "doing", "happening", "being" etc.	do, be, go, write
	Auxiliaries & Modals	These provide additional information about the verb, eg. tense, probability	may have (gone), is (going)
Adverbs		Adverbs modify the verb by suggesting Circumstances accompanying the action or event.	often, slowly
Articles		Articles provide information about how to identify a particular noun being referred to in a noun group.	the, a
Prepositions		Prepositions express a circumstantial relationship between a noun group contained in a prepositional phrase and the rest of the clause.	to (the station), for (Bob)
Conjunctions		Conjunctions show logical connections between clauses, phrases, groups and words.	and, but, so

Typical problem

The wrong word class is used for the context (see also Unit 1A "Noun Group Structure" for discussion of derivational morphology).

The worker is fired and becomes <u>unemployment</u>. The worker is fired and becomes <u>unemployed</u>.

In the first version the writer has used a noun "unemployment"; the word used should describe "worker" therefore an adjective such as "unemployed" is more appropriate, as in version two.

If you are having difficulty using the appropriate word class you should refer to one of the grammar texts in the reference list.

2.5. Morpheme

Morphemes are **parts of words** and are the smallest grammatical units. In English there are three main types of morphemes: **root, inflectional**, and **derivational**.

A word may consist of a root morpheme only, eg. science, or a root morpheme plus other morphemes, eg. release + ed = released; motivate + ion = motivation; science.

Inflectional morphemes provide information about things such as tense and voice (passive or active) in the verb group and number in the noun group, eg.

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released = releas + ed (past tense or passive voice)
chlorofluorocarbons = chlorofluorocarbon + s (plural)
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Derivational morphemes allow you to shift words from one word class to another, eg.

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general (adjective) + ly —> generally (adverb) 
explore (verb) + ation —> exploration (noun)
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Our sample sentence illustrates both these types of morphemes:

```
Because chlorofluorocarbons last for a long time || they usually outlive their purpose.

inflectional (plural) derivational (adjective ---> adverb)
```

Of these two types, derivational morphemes are the most important in academic writing, and we will look at these in more deteail in Unit 1A.

Exercise 9

Change the following words to the word class indicated. Mostly this will require you to use a derivational morpheme.

different (adjective)	(adverb)
cell (noun)	(adjective)
regulate (verb)	(noun)
description (noun)	(verb)
model (noun)	(verb)
respiration (noun)	(adjective)
measuring (verb)	(noun)

You can now check the answers in the key.

You have now completed a brief overview of the main parts of the grammar that make up the English sentence. In the following units, the grammar will be discussed in more detail as it relates to the typical problems that students have with their writing. You will learn how to identify these problems so that you will then be able to edit and correct your own writing more effectively.

Basic English G	rammar Module:	
Unit 1A	"The Noun Group"	
Unit 2A	"The Verb Group: Finites and Non-Finites"	
Unit 2B	"The Verb Group: Tenses"	
Unit 3A	"Logical Relationships Between Clauses"	
Unit 3B	"Interdependency Relationships Between Clauses"	

Reference List of Grammar Texts:

- 1. Collins Cobuild English Grammar (1990) London.
- 2. Freeborn, D.A. A Course Book in English Grammar.
- 3. Garner, M. (1983) Grammar: warts and all. River Seine Publications. Melbourne.
- 4. Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. (1975) A Communicative Grammar of English. Longman Group Ltd: Essex.
- 5. Murphy, R. (1991) English Grammar in Use. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- 6. Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech & J. Svartvik. (1972) A Grammar of Contemporary English. Longman Group UK Ltd: Essex.
- 7. Thompson, R.A. (1991) Sense and System in English Sentences. CR Press, Newtown.
- 8. Thompson, A.J. & A.V. Martinet. (1979) A Practical English Grammar. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

GRAMMATICAL UNITS: KEY TO EXERCISES

Exercise 1

Key: (relevant conjunctions and punctuation in bold; clause boundaries are marked ||)

- 1. (1 clause)
 - Children are not born with standards for evaluating behaviour, social skills or moral values.
- 2. (2 clauses)
 - **As** I <u>have suggested</u>, \parallel the non-addicted parent <u>is involved</u> in a co-dependent relationship with the addicted child.
- 3. (2 clauses)
 - Over this period, the population in Waverley <u>decreased</u> by 2.8%, \parallel while the population in the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area <u>increased</u> by 5%.
- 4. (3 clauses)
 - If we <u>conceptualise</u> caring as a finite set of caring behaviours, || then caring <u>can be examined</u> in the traditional scientific way, || even though this approach <u>may not be</u> acceptable in some circles.
- 5. (3 clauses)
 - This space constraint <u>has led to</u> a number of problems || **and** these <u>do not seem</u> capable of being resolved || **although** everyone <u>is</u> willing to be involved.

Exercise 2

Key: (prepositional phrases underlined; the word modified is in bold; double underlining suggests prepositional phrases within prepositional phrases).

- 1. Each organism was grown in nutrient broth (modifies the verb grown) and cells in log-phase growth (modifies the noun cells) were centrifuged, washed and resuspended in double-strength minimal medium (modifies the verbs centrifuged, washed and suspended).
- 2. <u>In 1962</u>, (modifies the verb received) the premium income received by all voluntary health insurance organizations (modifies the verb received) in the United States (modifies the noun organizations) was US\$ 6.3 billion.
- 3. The pyrroles are partly excreted <u>in the urine</u> (modifies the verb excreted) but some are **bound** to the tissues (modifies the verb bound) of the liver (modifies the noun liver) and to the lungs and other tissues (modifies the verb bound).
- 4. Several policies have been set by the government (modifies the verb set) at all levels, (modifies either the verb set or the noun government) to assist low income households.

5. The magnetic field may affect both the velocity and temperature distributions of a conducting fluid (modifies the nouns velocity and distributions) between two parallel disks (modifies the noun fluid) (Battaiah et al, 1979).

Exercise 3

Key: (noun groups have been underlined; the Head word is in bold; double underlining suggests noun groups within noun groups)

- 1. <u>Several policies</u> have been set by the government, at all levels, to assist low income households.
- 2. <u>The lowest nutrient intake values have been found among those people who had never attended</u> school or gone beyond primary school.
- 3. Because the agar solution tends to evaporate during subsequent incubation, the edges of the coverslip were sealed to the slide with paraffin.
- 4. One of the policies produced by the Waverley Municipal Council aimed at retaining the function of boarding/lodging houses as low income accommodation and controlling the establishment of tourist accommodation was gazetted in the Waverley Local Environmental Plan in 1985.

Exercise 4

Key: (noun group-complexes have been underlined; the Head words are in bold)

- 1. These include such activities as <u>smoking</u>, alcohol <u>consumption</u>, <u>overeating and sexual</u> promiscuity.
- 2. The sample of amino acid or other growth factor being assayed need not always be in solution.
- 3. DNA contains coded chemical instructions and directs the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell.

Exercise 5

Key: (verb groups have been underlined; the Head word is in bold)

If we <u>look</u> at the structure of any cell, || we <u>can see</u> a nucleus. The nucleus <u>is</u> the cell's controlling centre || and <u>directs</u> the cell's activities. Without it a cell <u>will die</u>. The instructions for the cell's activities <u>are contained</u> in the chromosomes. Chromosomes <u>can be seen</u> under a light microscope || when a cell <u>is dividing</u>. On biochemical analysis we <u>discover</u> || that chromosomes <u>are composed of</u> proteins and the nucleic acid DNA. DNA <u>contains</u> coded chemical instructions || and <u>directs</u> the growth, differentiation and functioning of a cell. Each type of organism <u>has</u> a particular number of chromosomes in each of its nuclei.

Exercise 6

Key: (verb group-complexes have been underlined; the Head words are in bold)

- Each organism was grown in nutrient broth and cells in log-phase growth were centrifuged, 1. washed and resuspended in double-strength minimal medium.
- In some disciplines, women equal or (even) outnumber their male colleagues. 2.

(nb. even is an adverb which modifies the verb group but is not part of the verb group.)

Exercise 7

Key:

Because	CFC's	last	for	а	long	time
conjunction	noun (concrete)	verb (main)	preposition	article	adjective (descriptive)	noun (abstract)

they	usually	outlive	their	purpose
pronoun	adverb	verb	pronoun	noun
(personal)		(main)	(possessive)	(abstract)

Exercise 8 Key:

different (adjective)	differently (adverb)		
cell (noun)	cellular (adjective)		
regulate (verb)	regulation (noun)		
description (noun)	describe (verb)		
model (noun)	model (verb)		
respiration (noun)	respiratory (adjective)		
measuring (verb)	measurement (noun)		