

You know more about grammar than you think

Yes, you really do know more about grammar than you think. You may not know what a prepositional complement is or what it does, and may never have heard of subordinator conjunctions or modal auxiliaries – and why on earth should you?

But from an early age you acquired a knowledge of grammar that saw you through your elementary and primary schooling. Whether your memories of what you were taught about grammar are fresh or distantly hazy, pleasant or mordantly painful, a surprising amount of grammatical know-how is parked somewhere in your memory. By reading and listening to others, you added to your knowledge and developed further grammatical skills. Thus you will find that this book will often merely explain and clarify what you already intuitively know about the principles and usage of grammar.

To prove this to yourself, try the following test, consisting of twenty examples of right and wrong use of the language. Record

your answers by ticking the appropriate boxes. And here's a tip before you begin: although some grammar rules may seem hare-brained, most follow logical, commonsense principles. Rather than try to analyse the examples, try to 'listen' to what is being said.

1. One of these isn't a proper sentence. Which one is?
 - A. *Any failure of the buyers to comply with the sale conditions, the damages are recoverable.*
 - B. *Any failure of the buyers to comply with the sale conditions may result in damages being recovered.*

2. Here's another pair of sentences. One contains a fairly common mistake. Which one is correct?
 - A. *On Sunday we heard the first chaffinch sing, we have several that come into our garden for crumbs.*
 - B. *On Sunday we heard the first chaffinch sing; we have several that come into our garden for crumbs.*

3. There's something jarring in one of these sentences because in it there's an inconsistency. Which one is the correct sentence?
 - A. *The Prime Minister, accompanied by several aides, were entertained by President Clinton at the White House.*
 - B. *The Prime Minister, accompanied by several aides, was entertained by President Clinton at the White House.*

4. Oh, dear! There are some unwelcome and unnecessary marks in one of these statements. Which one is correct?
 - A. *The three shops supplied all Jim's shirts and suits.*
 - B. *The three shop's supplied all Jim's shirt's and suit's.*

5. Do you have an ear for good grammar? If you do you'll quickly spot the mistake. But which sentence looks and sounds right?
- A.** *The public always expects us firemen to be at the scene of a fire within minutes.*
- B.** *The public always expects we firemen to be at the scene of a fire within minutes.*
6. Although you may not know the difference between an adjective and an adverb you should easily pick the sentence that uses adverbs correctly.
- A.** *Bert always drove real careful, and was proud of his record.*
- B.** *Bert always drove really carefully, and was proud of his record.*
7. Many of us aren't sure about using *among* and *between*. Can you pick the correct usage?
- A.** *The ice cream was shared among the three of them.*
- B.** *The ice cream was shared between the three of them.*
8. Something weird is happening in one of these sentences. Which one avoids a rather bizarre atmospheric condition?
- A.** *Tearing down the motorway at 80mph, the fog suddenly enveloped the car, forcing me to pull over.*
- B.** *As I was tearing down the motorway at 80mph, the fog suddenly enveloped the car, forcing me to pull over.*
9. If you read these sentences carefully, you'll see that one doesn't make sense. Which one is clear and correct?
- A.** *The judge remained both unimpressed by evidence and argument.*
- B.** *The judge remained unimpressed by both evidence and argument.*

10. Don't get carried away by the racy prose; there's a fundamental error in one of these sentences. Which is the sentence without the error?
- A.** *Then, as he lay silently beside her, she cried: A broken, hoarse cry that sprang from a buried memory of adolescence.*
- B.** *Then, as he lay silently beside her, she cried: a broken, hoarse cry that sprang from a buried memory of adolescence.*
11. One sentence uses a word correctly; the other abuses it. Which is correct?
- A.** *I gazed in wonder at the diamond, one of the most unique in the world.*
- B.** *I gazed in wonder at the diamond, thought by many to be unique.*
12. In which sentence is the question mark used correctly?
- A.** *Her mother was always asking? 'When are you going to get married?'*
- B.** *Her mother was always asking, 'When are you going to get married?'*
13. Frank was confused in the following sentences, but do you get confused by *drink*, *drank* and *drunk*? Which is correct?
- A.** *It was pretty obvious that Frank had drank rather too much.*
- B.** *It was pretty obvious that Frank had drunk rather too much.*
14. One of these sentences contains a very common error – so common, in fact, that many now regard it as acceptable usage. But if you were a careful user of English, which sentence would you say was correct?

- A. *The teacher asked Judy to try and do better.*
- B. *The teacher asked Judy to try to do better.*
15. If you know the rule here, fine; but if not, your ear should tell you which sentence is grammatically correct. Well, which one?
- A. *Every man, woman and child is requested to assemble in the departure lounge.*
- B. *Every man, woman and child are requested to assemble in the departure lounge.*
16. Because it asks you to decide between *who* and *whom*, this question is one of the toughest in the test. But try, anyway, to pick the correct usage:
- A. *The Foreign Secretary, whom we are pleased to see is now fully recovered, will speak tonight.*
- B. *The Foreign Secretary, who we are pleased to see is now fully recovered, will speak tonight.*
17. Haven't had much to do with gerunds? Never mind – use your ear to choose the sentence which is strictly correct.
- A. *I hope she won't take exception to me calling in unannounced.*
- B. *I hope she won't take exception to my calling in unannounced.*
18. These sentences are worth thinking about. Which one do you think is correct?
- A. *A thousand visitors is not unusual on an average weekday.*
- B. *A thousand visitors are not unusual on an average weekday.*

19. If you listen carefully to what is being said here, one sentence will be quite clear in its meaning while the other could confuse you. Which is the unambiguous sentence?
- A. *After the game he talked at length to the captain and the manager.*
- B. *After the game he talked at length to the captain and manager.*
20. There are some discordant notes in one of these sentences. Which one is consistent and harmonious?
- A. *If one is to live happily among one's neighbours, you must learn to mind your own business.*
- B. *If you are to live happily among your neighbours, you must learn to mind your own business.*

If you are interested to know where you stand in your knowledge and use of English grammar, you should have attempted to answer all 20 questions. If you've made a guess at some of them, don't feel too guilty; some guesses will be right while others will be wrong.

Answers Now turn to page 20 for the answers and explanations. The correct answers to questions considered to be more difficult receive more marks than those to easier questions.

Answers to the Grammar Test

- B** is a proper sentence. **A** is not because it is incomplete, having no active verb, and makes no sense. See *Let's Look at Sentences*, page 25.
- B** is correct. **A** is what is called a 'run-on' construction – two sentences spliced by a comma. The first sentence should have ended after *sing* and the second sentence begun with *We*. But as the two thoughts are related a better idea is to keep them in the same sentence and separated by a longer pause – a semi-colon. See *The Semi-colon*, page 164.
- B** is correct. Although the PM was accompanied by several aides, we don't know whether they were entertained or not. However the sentence makes clear that President Clinton entertained the PM, singular, so the use of the singular *was* and not the plural *were* is correct. If sentence **A** read: '*The Prime Minister and several aides were entertained . . .*' the use of *were* would be correct. See *Singular and Plural Nouns*, page 66.

- A** is correct. The apostrophes in *shop's*, *shirt's* and *suit's* serve no grammatical purpose and are redundant. The apostrophe in *Jim's* is correct because it tells us that the shirts and suits are possessed by Jim.
- A** is correct. *Us* is the objective form of the pronoun *we* and is used here to include the speaker and others – other firemen. *We* would be correct if the sentence were written *We firemen are expected by the public to be at the scene of a fire within minutes*.
- Sentence **B** is correct because it calls for the adverbs *really* *carefully* to describe how Bert drove. See *How adverbs work*, page 128.
- You share *between* two, or *among* three or more, so **A** is correct.
- The 'something weird' in sentence **A** is the bizarre spectacle of an 80mph fog tearing down the motorway (*Tearing down the motorway at 80mph, the fog*)! Sentence **A** contains what is known as a dangling or unattached participle, but **B** is quite correct. See *The Dangling, or Misplaced Participle*, page 109.
- Sentence **B** is clear and correct. If you study **A** closely you'll see that it makes no sense. The only way that *both* would work in that position would be in a sentence such as *The judge remained both unimpressed and bemused by the evidence and the argument*.
- A simple error but perhaps difficult to spot. In sentence **A** the colon after *cried* is followed by a capital *A*. A colon is not a full stop so what follows should not be capitalised. Sentence **B** is correct. See *The Colon*, page 168.
- The word *unique* means 'one of a kind', so it follows that you cannot have something or someone that is *most unique*, *quite unique* or *almost unique*. Either it is or it isn't. Sentence **B** is correct.
- B** is correct. The question mark does not precede a question, it follows one.

13. **B** is correct. To indicate the correct sense of lapsed time the past perfect tense of the verb *drink* is called for: *had drunk*.

14. **B** is correct. While both *try and* and *try to* are generally considered to be acceptable, the careful user will regard *try and* as idiomatic and prefer the grammatically correct *try to* in sentence **B**. See *Prepositions*, page 141.

15. **A** is correct, because *every* refers to each individual. So regardless of how many men, women and children there are, the singular verb *is* is called for.

16. **B** is correct. In this case, apply the *he = who, him = whom* rule (see discussion of *who/whom* in the section on *Pronouns*, page 82). As the Foreign Secretary (*he*, the subject) is fully recovered, and will speak (the object), *who* is appropriate.

17. **B** is correct. Here, the pronoun *me* is converted to a verb which can be used like a noun and which can be possessive, hence *my calling*. See *Gerunds*, page 110.

18. **A** is strictly correct. Although *visitors* is plural, a *thousand visitors* here is short for 'to have a thousand visitors'. In other words the number of visitors has become a single unit (you could say, 'to have a big crowd') which requires a singular verb – *is* and not *are*. See *Singular and Plural Nouns*, page 66.

19. **A** is the unambiguous sentence because it makes clear that he talked to the captain *and* the manager – two people. **B** is unclear and could confuse, because he could have talked to the captain/manager – one person.

20. **B** is consistent and correct. The pronouns in sentence **A** lack concord: it begins with *one's* but then moves on to *you* and *your*. It would be correct if it were written as '... **one** must learn to mind **one's** own business.'

Grammar Test Scorecard

Check your answers to the Grammar Test on pages 20-22 with the correct versions and explanations and enter the results on the scorecard below. Award the appropriate points for every correct answer.

Question	Score for correct answer	Your score
1	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	3	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOTAL	50	<input type="checkbox"/>