

# ABRAMS' —GUIDE TO— GRAMMAR

THIRD EDITION

Ellie Abrams





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## **Abrams' Guide to Grammar Third Edition**

"Skills and Drills" Learning

Ellie Abrams



## **About The Author**

**Ellie Abrams**, president of ESA Editorial and Training Services Inc., has conducted training seminars for a wide spectrum of clients. Writers, editors, secretaries, managers, administrative staff, proofreaders, lawyers, educators, scientists, and students have benefited from her expertise. Ellie co-authored *The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage* and *STET Again!*

*to my mother,  
Edith W. Silverblatt,  
who taught me that learning never stops*



# Contents



<b>Preface</b>	
Tools... Tools... Tools.....	v
<b>Module 1: Parts of Speech and Parts of a Sentence</b>	
Parts of Speech.....	1
Definitions.....	2
Basic Patterns.....	7
<b>Module 2: Clauses and Phrases</b>	
Clauses.....	9
Prepositional Phrases.....	13
Verbals.....	16
Verbal Phrases.....	19
Sentence Fragments.....	21
Run-on Sentences.....	30
<b>Module 3: Punctuation</b>	
Commas.....	42
Commas after Introductory Constructions.....	47
Commas with Nonrestrictive Material.....	55
Commas in a Series and with Coordinate Adjectives.....	64
Special Comma Problems.....	68
Colons.....	71
Semicolons.....	74
Hyphens.....	77
Apostrophes.....	82
Quotation Marks.....	85
Parentheses.....	88
Ellipses, Dashes, and Brackets.....	91
<b>Module 4: Verb Tense, Mood, and Voice</b>	
Verbs.....	95
The 12 Verb Tenses.....	96
Mixing and Matching Tenses.....	98
Mood.....	102
Voice.....	107
<b>Module 5: Subject–Verb Agreement</b>	
Subject–Verb Agreement.....	111
<b>Module 6: Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement</b>	
Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement.....	121
<b>Module 7: Pronoun Case</b>	
Nominative and Objective Case.....	128
Possessive Case.....	131
The Pronouns Who and Whom.....	134
<b>Module 8: Parallelism</b>	
Parallelism.....	141

**Module 9: Modifiers**

Modifiers ..... 147  
 Squinting Modifiers ..... 147  
 Misplaced Modifiers ..... 148  
 Dangling Modifiers ..... 148  
 Careless Placement of *Only* ..... 149

**Supplemental Exercises**

Commas with Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Material ..... 157  
 Comma Review..... 158  
 Colons and Semicolons ..... 160  
 Minor Marks of Punctuation ..... 161  
 Punctuation Review ..... 162  
 Subject–Verb Agreement ..... 164  
 Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement ..... 165  
 Pronoun Case ..... 166  
 Pronoun Case Review ..... 167  
 Verb Tense and Mood ..... 168  
 Verb Forms ..... 169  
 Verb Tense ..... 170  
 Verb Mood ..... 171  
 Verb Tense ..... 172  
 Parallelism ..... 173  
 Grammar Review ..... 174

**Supplemental Exercises: Answer Key**

Commas with Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Material ..... 177  
 Comma Review..... 179  
 Colons and Semicolons ..... 181  
 Minor Marks of Punctuation ..... 183  
 Punctuation Review ..... 185  
 Subject–Verb Agreement ..... 188  
 Pronoun–Antecedent Agreement ..... 189  
 Pronoun Case ..... 191  
 Pronoun Case Review ..... 193  
 Verb Tense and Mood ..... 195  
 Verb Forms ..... 196  
 Verb Tense ..... 197  
 Verb Mood ..... 198  
 Verb Tense ..... 199  
 Parallelism ..... 200  
 Grammar Review ..... 201









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## Preface

If you are a "word" person—a writer, editor, or proofreader—you will get a refresher on every aspect of English grammar and increase your ability to analyze, correct, and explain grammar and punctuation problems you find in the materials you work on. If you are a student, you will get a strong foundation in the fundamentals of English grammar. If English is not your first language, you will find clear, concise information on the structure and grammar of the English language. If any of this rings true, my book can help. Each exercise offers a thorough explanation in the answer key.

To master grammar, you have to have the right tools for the job. Every profession has its tools: electricians have their wires, artists have their palettes, programmers have their computers, and surgeons have their scalpels. But we "word" people are often expected to do our jobs with no tools. In addition, most professionals do not have to share their tools, but we in the "word" world usually do.

What tools do "word" people need? Actually, there are lots of helpful tools, but three are essential.

### Tools... Tools... Tools...

First, you need an up-to-date, in-depth **grammar book**. You might find it useful to keep the following in mind: *no rule of grammar is worth memorizing, but every rule is worth looking up*. You are not a walking encyclopedia of grammar knowledge. It is not necessary to know, for instance, if a question mark goes inside or outside quotation marks. If you have a good grammar book, the answer will be easy to find. Look up "question mark," use it correctly, and be done with it. (Don't worry about memorizing rules that are in the "get-a-life" category. You can use your grammar reference book to look things up again and again. The rules that you use most often will become ingrained.) We must know what we do not know and take the time to use our resources.

Second, you need a **style manual**. Whether you use the *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual*, *Chicago Manual of Style*, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, or your own



company style manual, the style manual is essential in resolving style issues such as spelling, capitalization, numbers, compounding, abbreviations, and optional punctuation (for example, the serial comma and apostrophes).

Third, you need a **dictionary**. Your dictionary should have a copyright date within the past five years. Our language is ever-changing; society dictates language, and language dictates society. We “word” people need to keep up with the times. Here’s another important point concerning dictionaries. Does your spell check match the dictionary in your word processor? It should. Does your style manual dictate which dictionary you should be using? *Random House*? *American Heritage*? *Webster’s*? Are you using an online dictionary? Is everyone on your project using the same dictionary? Is *copyediting* one word? Two words? Hyphenated? Does *dissension* end in *-tion* or *-sion*?

Checking a document for errors takes a lot of time. A document can be “slow and clean” or “quick and dirty.” Although most “word” people believe in “slow and clean,” many supervisors expect “quick and clean”—an unlikely pair.

This book will help “word” people, from writer to substantive editor to copyeditor to proofreader to student, produce “slow and clean” documents.



# Module 1: Parts of Speech and Parts of a Sentence

## Parts of Speech

If I were to ask you how many parts of speech we have in the language, I'm sure you would say "eight" and rattle them off: *noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection*. So I won't ask.

Remember those horrible vocabulary assignments given to you by your seventh-grade English teacher: "Look up twenty-five words and write the definition, the part of speech, and a sentence." By the time you got to the end of the list, you were just happy to be done. You probably had no idea what any of the words meant or how they should really be used. The truth is, *no word is a part of speech until it's used in a sentence*.

I'll give you six sentences using the word *down*, and each time I use it, it will be a different part of speech.

- Eric fell *down*. (In this sentence *down* is an adverb because it modifies the verb *fell*.)
- Eric fell *down* the stairs. (In this sentence *down* is a preposition because it shows the relationship between two nouns: *Eric* and *stairs*.)
- The quilt is made of eider *down*. (In this sentence *down* is a noun because it names a thing.)
- The *down* escalator was broken. (In this sentence *down* is an adjective because it modifies a noun.)
- She *downed* the ball on the fifty-yard line. (In this sentence *down* is a verb because it is the action of the sentence.)
- Down!* (Okay, so I cheated a bit here. In this sentence *down* is acting like an interjection, but I guess we would agree that it is really an adverb because it modifies the understood verb *get* as in "Get down!")

As a word person, you may not be asked often to label the part of speech of words, but when you are editing and proofreading, it's a good idea to have the ammunition to support your changes.



## Definitions

**Noun:** Names a person, place, or thing. A noun can be a common noun, such as *friend, monument, river, and street*, or a proper noun, such as *Ellen, Washington Monument, Hudson River, and Main Street*. A noun can name something concrete, such as a *chair, computer, dog, or desk*, or something abstract, such as *love, justice, honor, or friendship*. Possessive nouns are adjectives because they modify nouns: *Susan's bike, Alfonso's idea, Jacob's car, and Hasim's music*.

**Pronoun:** Takes the place of a noun. Pronouns include personal pronouns, such as *I, she, we, and they*. Pronouns also include words such as *this, that, these, those, who, whom, some, most, many, all*. Possessive pronouns such as *his, hers, ours, and mine* can stand alone (This is his). Possessive pronouns such as *his, her, our, and my* modify nouns and are adjectives (This book is his book).

**Adjective:** Describes a noun or a pronoun. Adjectives answer the following questions: What kind? How many? Which one? Adjectives include words such as *large, one, the, a, funny, and happy*.

**Verb:** Expresses an action or a state of being. Verbs include overt actions, such as *run, laugh, write, and sing*. Verbs also include mental actions, such as *think, decide, review, and love*. State of being verbs include words such as *is, are, was, will be*.

**Adverb:** Describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Adverbs answer the following questions: How? Why? When? Where? To what degree? What direction? In what manner? The following words can function as adverbs: *quickly, very, quite, somewhat, intelligently, there*.

**Conjunction:** Connects two words or phrases or clauses. Conjunctions include simple coordinating conjunctions: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet*. Conjunctions also include subordinating conjunctions (*if, until, unless, when, where, because*) and correlative conjunctions (*either/or, neither/nor*).

**Preposition:** Stands before a noun or pronoun and together with that noun or pronoun becomes a phrase modifying something else in the sentence. A preposition shows the relationship between two nouns, two pronouns, or a noun and a pronoun. The following words are examples of prepositions: *in, for, to, under, around, above*.

**Interjection:** Expresses an exclamation in the middle of a sentence without grammatical connection to other words. The following words are interjections: *ouch, ah, oh, oops*. Interjections should not be used in business or academic writing.

## Confidence Check

Identify the nouns (N), the verbs (V), and the pronouns (P) in the following sentences.



1. We saw an exciting game last Tuesday.
2. The pitcher threw him a fastball.
3. She and I go every Saturday to the game at the stadium.
4. Switch-hitting Mickey Mantle was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1974, the first year he was eligible.
5. Hurricane Katrina left New Orleans a disaster area.
6. In Katrina's aftermath, the Coast Guard rescued or evacuated more than 33,500 people.
7. The Coast Guard was saving lives before any other federal agency, even though almost half the local Coast Guard personnel lost their own homes in the hurricane.
8. Aviation-safety programs focus on the prevention of accidents and incidents.
9. The focus of the program is on safety issues during adverse weather conditions.
10. General aviation pilots must modify personal lifestyle factors because they may cause fatigue.
11. The Smithsonian, America's national education facility, consists of 19 museums, 9 research centers, and over 140 affiliate museums around the world.
12. During their senior year, students research a topic of interest to them.
13. The Census Bureau serves as the leading source of quality data about the nation's people and economy.
14. We honor privacy, protect confidentiality, share our expertise globally, and conduct our work openly.
15. The association provides business management articles, webcasts, online learning, and books to anyone who purchases a one-year membership.
16. She liked geography, hated home economics, and tolerated algebra, but she adored history.
17. An estimated 190 million acres of federal forests and rangelands in the United States face high risk of catastrophic fires.
18. These fires could severely impact people, communities, and natural resources.
19. We manage a variety of water and underwater resources, including 472 dams and 348 reservoirs.
20. The U.S. Geological Survey scientists monitor and assess water quality, streamflows, and ground water at thousands of sites across the nation.





## Confidence Check Answers

1. We (P), saw (V), game (N), Tuesday (N)
2. pitcher (N), threw (V), him (P), fastball (N)
3. She (P), I (P), go (V), Saturday (N), game (N), stadium (N)
4. Mickey Mantle (N), was inducted (V), Hall of Fame (N), 1974 (N), year (N), he (P), was (V)
5. Hurricane Katrina (N), left (V), New Orleans (N), area (N) (some dictionaries may have "disaster area" as a two-word noun)
6. aftermath (N), Coast Guard (N), rescued (V), evacuated (V), more (P), people (N)
7. Coast Guard (N), was saving (V), lives (N), agency (N), half (N), personnel (N), lost (V), homes (N), hurricane (N)
8. programs (N), focus (V), prevention (N), accidents (N), incidents (N)
9. focus (N), is (V), issues (N), conditions (N), program (N)
10. pilots (N), must modify (V), factors (N), they (P), may cause (V), fatigue (N)
11. Smithsonian (N), facility (N), consists (V), museums (N), centers (N), museums (N), world (N)
12. year (N), students (N), research (V), topic (N), interest (N), them (P)
13. Census Bureau (N), serves (V), source (N), data (N), people (N), economy (N)
14. We (P), honor (V), privacy (N), protect (V), confidentiality (N), share (V), expertise (N), conduct (V), work (N)
15. association (N), provides (V), articles (N), webcasts (N), learning (N), books (N), anyone (P), who (P), purchases (V), membership (N)
16. She (P), liked (V), geography (N), hated (V), home economics (N), tolerated (V), algebra (N), she (P), adored (V), history (N)
17. acres (N), forests (N), rangelands (N), United States (N), face (V), risk (N), fires (N)
18. fires (N), could impact (V), people (N), communities (N), resources (N)
19. We (P), manage (V), variety (N), resources (N), dams (N), reservoirs (N)
20. scientists (N), monitor (V), assess (V), quality (N), streamflows (N), water (N), thousands (N), sites (N), nation (N) (Some dictionaries may list *groundwater* as one word.)

## Confidence Check

Identify the part of speech of each italicized word as a noun (N), pronoun (P), verb (V), adjective (Adj), adverb (Adv), or preposition (Prep).

1. Most of the *other* accountants consider Newman *reliable*.
2. Too much *reliance* on *others* can stifle a person's independence.
3. The company president *relied* on the new marketing director to increase sales *considerably*.
4. The young hikers *climbed up* the steep, slippery slope.
5. Sit *down*, Melissa, and please speak *quietly*.
6. *Your* coffee mug is here; *theirs* are on the counter.
7. Of the three CD players, the *portable* one works *best*.
8. We get the *best* sound *from* the portable CD player.
9. This fifth draft *finally satisfied* the chairperson.
10. Because I had not studied adequately, I performed *unsatisfactorily* on the *final* examination.
11. *After* the rehearsal, the choir sang *better*.
12. A *better* choice might be the less expensive one.
13. A *friendly* airline employee led *us* to the correct terminal.
14. *One* of the scout leaders *befriended* the shy newcomer.
15. *One* survivor of the earthquake sought *refuge* in an abandoned warehouse.
16. Aunt Martha *still* exhibits a *youthful* appearance.
17. *Nobody* ranked *above* us in the science fair.
18. High *above*, an eagle soared *majestically*.
19. *That* was a *most* important observation.
20. *That* law affects *most* public schools.
21. *Neither* of his two new novels was *popular* with his fans.
22. *Neither* novel gained the *popularity* he had hoped for.
23. Your *behavior* at the family reunion was *deplorable*.
24. She *behaved deplorably* at the family reunion.
25. *Several* of the skiers ventured *beyond* the safety fence.
26. *Several* skiers returned *safely* to the lodge after dark.
27. *Who* felt *bad* about the situation?
28. She *felt* the different yarns *carefully* before she purchased the mohair.







## Confidence Check Answers

1. other (ADJ), reliable (ADJ)
2. reliance (N), others (P)
3. relied (V), considerably (ADV)
4. climbed (V), up (Prep)
5. down (ADV), quietly (ADV)
6. Your (ADJ), theirs (P)
7. portable (ADJ), best (ADV)
8. best (ADJ), from (Prep)
9. finally (ADV), satisfied (V)
10. unsatisfactorily (ADV), final (ADJ)
11. After (Prep), better (ADV)
12. better (ADJ), choice (N)
13. friendly (ADJ), us (P)
14. One (P), befriended (V)
15. One (ADJ), refuge (N),
16. still (ADV), youthful (ADJ)
17. Nobody (P), above (Prep)
18. above (ADV), majestically (ADV)
19. That (P), most (ADV)
20. That (ADJ), most (ADJ)
21. Neither (P), popular (ADJ)
22. Neither (ADJ), popularity (N)
23. behavior (N), deplorable (ADJ)
24. behaved (V), deplorably (ADV)
25. Several (P), beyond (Prep)
26. Several (ADJ), safely (ADV)
27. Who (P), bad (ADJ)
28. felt (V), carefully (ADV)

## Basic Patterns

A sentence is made of two basic parts: the subject and the predicate. When you are writing and editing, you may not have to identify the parts of a sentence, but knowing the five basic sentence patterns can be helpful. The following chart gives you the basic sentence patterns with examples. Subjects of a sentence can be single words, phrases, or clauses (we will discuss phrases and clauses in a later module). The predicate always includes a verb and may include a direct object, a subject complement (it “completes” the subject and is often called either a predicate noun (nominative) or a predicate adjective, an indirect object, and/or an object complement (it “completes” a direct or indirect object). Both the subject and the verb can contain modifying words, phrases, and clauses.

<b>Five Basic Sentence Patterns</b>			
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicate</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>		
The plane	landed.		
Interest rates	have dropped.		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>	
The hurricane	flooded	the city.	
Giant pandas	eat	bamboo.	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Subject Complement</b>	
Knowledge	is	power. (predicate noun)	
Lemmings	are	intriguing. (predicate adjective)	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Indirect Object</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>
The manager	offered	Louise	the baseball tickets.
The golf pro	gives	my brother	a weekly lesson.
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Direct Object</b>	<b>Object Complement</b>
The contractor	painted	the house	green. (adjective)
The governor	declared	the county	a disaster area. (noun)



