

The When, Where, How & Why of the English Language: A Reference Guide to Grammar

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Learning the rules of English grammar can seem like putting together a complex puzzle with several key pieces missing. No wonder some young students develop speaking and writing habits by repetitive correction and sound recognition, instead of learning the rules. Those who study English later in life haven't had this early rote training and need other ways to understand the grammar puzzle.

When Joyce Leininger Wineinger began teaching English to adults from other countries, she recognized their frustrations with the mechanics of grammar. She thought they might benefit from learning the positions of parts of speech within a sentence. Having taught at various grade levels and in adult classes in both Michigan and Texas, she had the experience to develop the idea. Wineinger had previously earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Michigan State University and Eastern Michigan University respectively.

The *When, Where, How & Why of the English Language* presents grammar from this positional point of view. Designed to be a reference guide rather than a textbook, the book begins with a detailed table of contents. The text covers functions of the eight parts of speech, their positions in sentence structure, and examples of correct usage. Fully half of the book concerns verb forms, basic to sentence construction and often frustratingly difficult for students to figure out.

The chapter on adjectives explains the differences among the three degrees of adjectives: positive, comparative, and superlative. The author notes that only the comparative and superlative degrees require memorization of spelling rules. This section includes other helpful tips about the vagaries and subtleties of adjectival degrees. "Sometimes the COMPARATIVE or SUPERLATIVE forms are used to give strength to the expression of an idea rather than to show comparison," the author says.

Chapter eleven covers participles, the verb form that determines tense. After discussing the formation of past participles for regular verbs, Wineinger writes, "The PAST PARTICIPLES of IRREGULAR VERBS must be memorized from the list of irregular verbs." Three pages of those exceptions appear at the book's conclusion.

Similar reminders of the fine points of grammar occur throughout the book, under headings of "REMEMBER" or "INFORMATION." In the section on rules to follow when using the present perfect tense, one such reminder notes, "The simple past and the present past perfect tenses can often be used interchangeably, but the implications differ." Appropriate examples of these applications follow.

Presented in outline form, this book competently explores the intricacies of English grammar. Format and design choices, such as bold-typed text and capitalized titles, headings, and phrases challenge readability, particularly for adult students striving to learn English. Color-coded parts of speech, intended to enhance sight recognition, only add to reader confusion. A self-test in the chapter on prepositions does not include a key to correct answers.

Teaching English grammar as a positional language to non-native speakers seems like a sound idea. Despite the dense text, those wishing to clarify specific grammatical points would benefit from having *The When, Where, How & Why of the English Language* on their library shelves.

MARGARET CULLISON (February 7, 2011)

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