

11-2022

Working with English Grammar: An Introduction Louis Cummings
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 372 pp.

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Recommended Citation

Mordaunt, Owen G. (2022) "Working with English Grammar: An Introduction Louis Cummings New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 372 pp.," *International Dialogue*: Vol. 12, Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.ID.12.1.1199>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal/vol12/iss1/7>

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Review

Working with English Grammar: An Introduction

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372 pp.

*Owen G. Mordaunt**

The purpose of this book is to give an introduction of the grammar of the English language to students with little or no knowledge or no prior knowledge of English grammar. It could be part of a linguistics program and could include students working toward a TEFL/TESOL degree or even those students working towards certificates in these areas. It could also be suitable for students in Advanced Placement in the U.S. and Advanced Levels elsewhere. In addition, this text could be useful to those who need to increase their knowledge of English grammar, be they professionals, writers, editors, teachers, speech pathologists, and those planning to teach English overseas.

This text consists of seven chapters:

1. The Study of Grammar,
2. Word Structure,
3. Major Word Classes,
4. Minor Word Classes,
5. Phrases,
6. Clauses, and
7. Sentences.

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Each chapter covers grammatical features of Standard English in a descriptive rather than prescriptive manner. Examples are meant to explain and illustrate grammar but also include actual grammatical forms speakers and writers use. That is why the grammar of nonstandard dialects of English, the language used by children acquiring their native language, and the language of individuals with language disorders is discussed throughout this book. This study of grammar is connected to academic use and applicable to Standard English. This is significant, in particular, since non-native speakers of English, when they come to a university, have to sort out the differences between non-standard dialects of English and Standard English, and classes are presented in Standard English.

At the end of each chapter is a summary, website, homework assignment, suggestions for further, questions, and revision. The text also includes a glossary with 300 entries, bold terms throughout the text that refer to the glossary, a detailed index, figures and tables, and appendixes.

This text also includes topics of interest, labeled “Special Topics.” These topics add a dimension to this grammar, and these somewhat distinguish this text from grammar texts in general. It is necessary to highlight these topics for purposes of informing the reader of their relevance:

1. African American Vernacular English,
2. American and British English,
3. Zero plural and past tense markers in Asian and Caribbean English,
4. Morphology in Australian youth language,
5. Past tense and past participle in non-standard dialects,
6. Passive sentences in aphasia,
7. Lexical and auxiliary *be* in non-standard dialects,
8. Intransitive verbs in Australian English,
9. Article use in different varieties of English,
10. Grammatical features of Hong Kong English,
11. Expressive language in aphasia,
12. Negative forms in non-standard English dialects,
13. Grammatical features of New Zealand English,
14. Adjective phrases in talk about food,
15. Clause patterns in Alzheimer’s dementia,

16. Clause in children with specific language impairment,
17. Declarative sentences in children with specific language impairment, and
18. Echo sentences.

These special topics can whet the appetites of instructors, professionals, students, instructors, and others interested in looking at the enrichment of language and even discourse analysis. However, depending on one's field of language study, it might be advisable to merely highlight what is not deemed essential and focus on what is. Certain topics are more applicable to psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics rather than second language learning issues. Students in university settings will generally focus on standard language use, be they native speakers of English or international student enrolled in universities where English is the language of instruction. Professionals, writers, and others, of course, can log onto whatever topics will enhance their special grammar interests.

All in all, this text is a wonderful resource for those whose focus is the understanding of and the use of English grammar as covered in each chapter. The applications referenced as well as websites listed greatly help enhance the acquisition and the use of grammatical knowledge. The author intentionally presented this information in greater detail than meets the eye, so this text is not a short-cut to English grammar. It should, therefore, take a whole semester of intense focus, to cover all on material in this text. Knowing English is of great importance due to the fact that English is a global language and the general lingua franca of the world.