

# Why Grammar?

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial considers the significance of grammar: why it matters, and how an understanding of grammar will help you to become a better writer. It includes an example in which two sample paragraphs are compared to demonstrate the importance of studying grammar (and using it correctly). The example illustrates how the rules of grammar benefit readers, as well as writers.

This tutorial examines the importance of grammar in three parts:

1. Why Does Grammar Matter?
2. The Benefits of Grammar
3. Grammatical Rules: Example

## 1. Why Does Grammar Matter?

It's likely that you've learned something about grammar previously — in elementary and/or high school, or perhaps in another college course. But how can an understanding of grammar help *you* to become a better writer?

Let's begin to answer this question by defining terms. **Grammar** refers to the rules that govern the use of a language. These rules, like the languages to which they apply, evolve continuously.

Languages evolve as new words are added, and others become obsolete. The definitions of words also change as time passes: commonly-understood meanings of a previous era can be replaced by definitions that are slightly — or radically — different. Even the function of a word can change over time. A word which was a noun, for example, may later be used more often as a verb).

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Read a passage from one of Shakespeare's works. How many of his sentences violate modern rules of grammar? (The answer is "many.") Even the English usage of only 100 years ago is very different from that which is taught currently. It's almost certain that similar changes will continue to occur as the years pass.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Grammar

The rules that govern the use of a language

Although languages, and rules on how to use them, change constantly, the study of grammar remains essential for those who want to communicate effectively. The use of a set of agreed-upon standards establishes a conventional language — one in which we can communicate with each other in an understandable way. The rules of grammar facilitate the process of learning a language, and how to communicate in that language. If there were no rules, how would people learn to read or write? (The answer is "with great difficulty!")

The rules of grammar streamline communication because readers of grammatically-sound text don't need to spend lots of time and effort deciphering it. Instead, they can focus on the ideas, images, and arguments conveyed in grammatically-correct language.

Writers who observe the rules of grammar don't worry whether their readers will understand what they've written. Instead, they can focus on what they want to communicate through their writing (i.e., what they want to say to readers). Language is fluid; but proper use of grammar can calm the waters.

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## 2. The Benefits of Grammar

Grammar enables writers and readers to engage in effective academic conversation, but how can a good understanding of grammar help *you*?

Writing that is grammatically correct creates a good impression with readers. It is taken seriously and read carefully, even though some (or many, or most, or all) readers may not agree with the analysis, conclusions or opinions presented. The ability to write clear, concise and grammatically-correct English (i.e., the kind of writing that is taught in colleges in the U.S. and elsewhere) goes a long way towards convincing employers (and potential employers), coworkers, customers, clients, and others that the writer is an effective communicator and a capable person.

Grammar is not often noticed in written work unless it's deficient. Incorrect grammar can lead readers to disregard a writer's work (and, perhaps, the writer). A good understanding of the rules of grammar enables writers to communicate effectively because readers can focus on *what* has been written, without being distracted by *how* poorly it has been written.

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## 3. Grammatical Rules: Example

Let's examine two very similar paragraphs. The main difference between them is in how well they apply the rules of grammar. Read the paragraph below carefully. Take your time, and re-read it as necessary to get a good idea of what's going on, grammatically-speaking.

What more can I say when you go to the beach you wood expect a relaxing day and just kick it, soak up some son, hang with friends but oh no that has turned completely different went Ben thought of a more aggressive way of spending the day at the beach. Me and him met in kindergarten and we've been pretty much close friends all throughout elementary school and middle school Ben always the type to talk to ladies, I on the other hand, was shy and innocent and who was adored by all an didn't

want to get away with much because I was always to myself. so the beach was going to be fun just not the fun I usually had.

Do you understand what the writer wants to communicate in this paragraph? You probably do, but it's likely you worked hard to do so. Some of the rules of grammar have been applied inconsistently by the writer. Others have been completely ignored.

Here's the second paragraph. Again, read carefully, take your time, and re-read it as often as you need to understand what's going on.

What more can I say? I went to the beach expecting a relaxing day: just hanging out with my friend Ben, soaking up some sun and having a good time. But if you know Ben then you know that's not what happened. We've been friends since kindergarten, even though Ben has always been outgoing with women while I'm more reserved, and usually happier spending time alone. As it turned out, our trip to the beach was a blast, if not the kind I usually want.

As a reader, which paragraph do you prefer? Which was easier to understand? It's probably safe to assume that your answer is "the second."

This example was designed to demonstrate how much we rely on the rules of grammar, as they are used in academic English. Because English is a language that you speak, you should work to understand not only what you say, but how you say it, so that it will be understood by others.



## SUMMARY

This tutorial considered the subject of grammar: its importance, and the benefits it provides, to writers and readers. An example, in which two paragraphs containing the same information were compared, illustrated grammar's crucial role in effective communication.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Grammar**

The rules that govern a language.