

A ▶ **Z** **Wordpower**

The **Wordpower A-Z** is a usage guide to boost your confidence. It takes contentious points of contemporary English usage, explains the problem and offers some solutions. It is designed to help you form your own judgments and to increase your linguistic powers.

Part I

a or an The rule for the use of the indefinite article is usually *a* before consonants (*a box*) and *an* before vowels (*an egg*). One problem, though, concerns words beginning with *h*. Some people say and write *an hotel* (with no *h* pronounced) instead of *a hotel* (with the *h* pronounced). This arises only with words where the first syllable is unstressed and the *h* therefore isn't strongly sounded. Other examples include *historian* and *habitual* (but not *history*, where the first syllable is strong). *An* used to be the normal form before such words, but since the turn of the century this usage has been in steady decline. It is still used, however, especially by older people and in writing.

abbreviation A reduced version of a word, phrase or sentence. There are many types of word abbreviation, such as *acronyms* (*BBC*), *blends* (*brunch*) and *shortened forms* (*ad*). Sentence abbreviation is usually studied under the heading of *ellipsis*: *Mary left at three and caught the bus* (where there has been ellipsis of *she* before *caught*).

absolute construction

A part of a sentence that is separate or ▶

disconnected from the rest of the sentence. Adjectives and adverbs can often be used in this way, as in *Furious, he stormed out of the room* or *None the less, I'm very interested*.

absolutely The use of this word as a response, an intensive form of 'yes', hasn't passed without some purist criticism, on the grounds that it is misleading to use a word with such senses as 'perfectly' and 'unconditionally' in contexts where these meanings are not intended. However, there's no evidence to suggest that listeners are confused by these other meanings when they hear the word.

accusative case A change in the form of a noun or pronoun to show that it is the object of a verb. There is no longer an accusative ending for nouns in English (unlike Latin and German, for example), and the difference between subject and object can be seen only from the word order (*Boy likes girl, Girl likes boy*). Only with certain pronouns is there any sign of an accusative case, as in the change from *he* to *him* or *she* to *her*. The term 'objective' is often used instead of 'accusative' to describe such instances.

acronym A word made up of the initial letters of other words. Some are pronounced letter by letter (*BBC, EEC*); some are pronounced as whole words (*Nato, Unesco*). Lower-case letters may also be used (eg, eg). Some people restrict the term to those items that can be pronounced as whole words. Items that have to be spelled out are then called initialisms. ►

AD In formal usage, there is a long-standing convention to put **AD** before the date, which is always a specific year rather than a century: *He was deposed in AD 1132.*

(American English tends to omit the *in*.) Informally, it is often used like **BC**, which always follows the date, and which may be applied to any specified period: *in the 12th century AD*. Here, the meaning is loosely 'after Christ', rather than literally 'in the year of the Lord'. With increased attention being paid now to the sensitivities of non-Christian believers, some writers prefer to use **CE** ('Common Era') instead.

adjective A word modifying a noun, to express a characteristic quality or attribute. Adjectives typically occur within noun phrases, when they are called attributive adjectives (*a big banana*), but they may occur in other parts of a sentence, such as after a verb, when they are called predicative (*The banana is big*). They show contrasts of degree in English (*bigger, biggest*).

adverb A word specifying the mode of action of a verb, such as *quickly* in *They walked quickly*. However, several other kinds of word are often described as adverbs by grammarians, such as intensifying words (eg, *very*), negative particles (eg, *not*), and sentence connectors (eg, *however*). Adverbs are often classified by the kind of meaning they express, such as time (*yesterday*), place (*there*) and manner (*slowly*).

affect or effect People often mix up these two words in writing, particularly as both may be

used as verbs and as nouns. *Affect* is much more commonly used as a verb, and *effect* as a noun. The usual meaning of *affect* as a verb is 'bring about a change in' (*Her behaviour affected me greatly*), though the verb does have a few other uses (such as 'pretend to feel', in *She affected indifference*). The noun use of *affect* is rare, restricted to psychology, where it means 'strong feeling' or 'emotional behaviour': *the study of affect*. The usual meaning of *effect* as a verb is 'bring about' (*How shall we effect a solution?*). The everyday use of *effect* is as a noun meaning 'result' (*The effect was remarkable*) or 'influence' (*to have an effect on someone*).

affix A meaningful element attached to a word root in order to make a more complex word. Affixes in English may be found before the root (prefixes, such as *de-*, *un-* and *anti-*) or after the root (suffixes, such as *-ed*, *-tion* and *-ly*).

aggravate The original sense of this word is 'make worse': *Our actions aggravated the situation*. However, usage manuals have long been worried about the way this verb has come to mean 'annoy': *Don't aggravate her any further*. It has been used in this way for over 300 years, but some are still concerned about it.

ain't Any use of *ain't* in writing or formal speech is unequivocally condemned, unless a special effect (such as humour) is intended, or the sentence has an idiomatic function (as in *Things ain't what they used to be*). It is widely used in colloquial speech, especially in American English, ► 22

as a substitute for *aren't*, *isn't*, *hasn't* and *haven't*. *Ain't I*, while still condemned, is sometimes felt to be slightly less serious, but only because the alternatives available have also attracted criticism. *Aren't I* is often felt to be awkward (*Aren't I having a turn?*). *Am I not* sounds stilted. *Amn't I* is heard in some dialects (notably in Irish and Scots English) and occasionally in jocular use.

alright or all right The single-word spelling has been in use for over a century (and is known from the 12th century), but it is widely corrected when it occurs in formal writing. However, some commentators have argued that it would be a good thing for the language to distinguish between *alright* and *all right*, as it does between *already* and *all ready*. The distinction can be seen in *The answers are all right, alright?*, where the first usage means 'totally correct' and the second means 'OK?'

alternative Traditionally used only where there is a choice between two items: *There were two alternatives* is acceptable, but *There were three (or more) alternatives* is not allowed. However, there is no obvious alternative way of expressing 'other of more than two', and most people do not seem to think that the distinction is important.

amongst and among *Amongst* is widely considered a somewhat old-fashioned variant of *among*, but some people prefer it when speaking or writing formally. On the whole, its frequency seems to have reduced in recent years, ►

though it is still very common in some regional dialects.

and Several generations of people have been taught that it is bad style to begin a written sentence with one of the co-ordinating conjunctions – *and*, *but*, *or*. But many authors can use these conjunctions effectively at the beginning of a sentence. This example from Lord Macaulay's *The History of England* would be much less dramatic if the conjunctions were placed within the same sentence: *There were gentlemen and there were seamen in the navy of Charles the Second. But the seamen were not gentlemen; and the gentlemen were not seamen.*

apostrophe A punctuation mark that signals the omission of letters or numbers (*she'll*, *n't*, *the '70s*) or expresses a grammatical contrast (chiefly the genitive construction, as in *the cat's foot*). There is considerable uncertainty surrounding certain uses of the apostrophe in modern English, with forms such as *the 1960s* and *the 1960's* or *St Pauls* and *St Paul's* being used variously. There is some evidence to suggest that incorrect usage is increasing – both in errors of omission (when it should be present, as in *the girls hat*) and in errors of addition (when it should be absent, as in *I saw the dog's*).

appendix In its medical sense, the plural is the regular form, *appendixes*. In the sense of 'supplementary material at the end of a book', the traditional plural is *appendices*. The regular ending is increasingly used here, but not yet in formal or specialised contexts.

archaism An old word or phrase no longer in general

use, but found for example in poetry, nursery rhymes, historical novels, biblical translations and place names. Archaic vocabulary includes *damsel*, *hither*, *oft* and *yonder*. Archaic grammar includes the verb endings *-eth* and *-est* (*goeth*, *goest*). Archaic spelling can be seen in *Ye Olde Tea Shoppe*.

article A type of word that specifies whether a noun is definite (*the*) or indefinite (*a*). Articles were a separate part of speech in classical Greek grammar, but these days are seen as the 'basic' members of the class of determiners, alongside *some*, *my*, *this*.

assimilation The influence that one sound has upon the articulation of another, so that the sounds become more alike, or identical. For example, in contemporary usage the *n* in the phrase *ten mugs will in normal* (ie, reasonably fast) speech become *m*, because of the influence of the following sound. Several types of assimilation can be recognised in everyday conversation. In public speaking, and especially on the radio, the avoidance of assimilations is more usual.

bath and bathe There are some interesting variations between the British and American uses of these words. In British English you usually *have a bath*; in American English you *take a bath*. Both varieties use *bathe* in relation to going in the sea, and applying liquid in a soothing way; but only American English uses *bathe* for the domestic sense of taking a bath, and only in British English do you *bath* a baby. *Bathtub* is commonly found in American English, where the British prefer *bath*. ►

besides *Besides Jane, three people resigned.* Question: Did Jane resign? If you take *besides* in the sense of ‘in addition to’, yes, she did – four people resigned altogether – and this is the usual way in which the word is used. However, many people also use the word to mean ‘except for’: *Besides Jane, nobody agreed with the decision.* Both senses have been in use since the early Middle Ages, so the risk of ambiguity can’t be serious. The possibility of ambiguity is more real when people replace *besides* by *beside*. Standard English makes a clear distinction: *Besides her case, there were several boxes* and *Beside her case, there were several boxes* (where the preposition means ‘next to’).

between and among
Because of its etymology, *between* is recommended when only two items are to be distinguished: *Look at the difference in height between Mike and Fred.* For more than two, *among* is recommended. However, *between* is often used for more than two, if the items are considered individually: *The prize was divided equally between the six of us.* *Among* would be more likely in a collective (and often vaguer) context: *The prize was divided among all the workers.*

between you and me
Between governs pronouns in the objective case: *me, him, her, us, them.* However, there is a long-standing usage problem over the first-person pronoun when it is the second element in a combination: should it be *between you and me* or *between you and I*? The *me* form is the standard, as is shown by the fact that we

can reverse the order, and say *between me and you*. The *I* form seems to have developed as an alternative for people who think the *me* form too informal for careful speech.

biannual and biennial

Biannual, which has been known since the 19th century, means 'occurring twice a year'; *biennial*, known from some 200 years earlier, means 'occurring every two years'. *Biannual*, the more familiar construction, is now increasingly being used in both senses. Because of uncertainty over the difference, several alternative expressions have emerged, such as *twice yearly* or *half-yearly*. A similar problem affects *bimonthly* (meaning either 'twice a month' or 'once in two months').

billion The older British use of this term has the sense of 'a million million'. The American use has the sense 'a thousand million', and this sense is increasingly found in international English usage. As a result, the British situation is now extremely confused. For some years, the trend has been towards adopting the American usage as a uniform practice, but the older sense still has considerable support in Britain. To avoid ambiguity, specialists thus often avoid the use of the term altogether, preferring to state the numbers using superscripts (10^{12} or 10^9), or in a form such as *10 thousand million*.

blending A process in grammar or vocabulary that takes place when two elements that do not normally come together are combined into one unit. Vocabulary ►

examples include *brunch* (from *breakfast* + *lunch*) and *Eurovision* (from *European* + *television*). A grammar example is *I think it's the money is one problem*, which blends *I think it's the money* and *The money is one problem*.

blond French (from which *blond* derives) allows the use of two forms: one for masculine contexts (*blond*) and the other for feminine ones (*blonde*). In English, the word is used both as an adjective and a noun, but is generally restricted to women, female attributes, and male or female young children. In its written form, it is therefore usually spelled with an -e ending, as in *Look at that blonde*. On the much less frequent occasions when the subject is male, the recommended spelling is *blond*. However, this kind of gender distinction is not a feature of English grammar. As a result, usage has become less consistent. The same factors affect the use of the pair *brunet/brunette*, though this distinction is rare in British English. Most people do not know the *brunet* form.

borrowing The introduction of a word or other feature from one language or dialect into another. Vocabulary borrowings are usually called loan words. English examples include *restaurant* and *chic* from French. English likes to borrow words from other languages, and most of its vocabulary is now of foreign origin.

both Because the core meaning of this word is 'two', its use to refer to more than two entities or notions is generally seen as unacceptable, as in *The* ►

plan was clear in both its aims, content and timing. Any use with words that repeat the meaning of 'two' also attracts criticism, as in *both alike* or *both together*, or *both the boy as well as the girl*. There is also a concern to maintain a parallelism in the grammar of the construction that follows *both*. *Both for Mark and for Jean* is acceptable, because *for Mark* and *for Jean* are parallel phrases. Similarly, *for both Mark and Jean* shows parallelism in the use of single nouns. However, *both for Mark and Jean* would attract criticism.

British This term avoids having to choose between *English*, *Welsh*, *Scottish* and *Irish*, and is the only option for immigrants who have become citizens of the UK. There is no generally accepted noun for British citizens: they are variously called *Britons* (especially by newspapers), *Britishers* (especially by Americans) and *Brits* (though this last is informal, and sometimes felt to be insulting). None of these is much liked, and the adjectival usage (*I'm British*) is much preferred.

burned or burnt The past tense of *burn* has two forms, and it isn't easy to see the difference between them. Some people, indeed, use them interchangeably. *Burned* is the usual form in American English, but in British English it tends to be restricted to cases where the continuing nature of the activity is suggested, as in *The building burned for several hours*. *Burnt*, by contrast, tends to be used when the activity is completed: *The house burnt down*. There are several other verbs that work in a similar way, such as *lean*, *smell* and *spell*.

A ▶ **Z** **Wordpower**

The Wordpower easy reference of English usage continues this week from 'can' to 'future tense'

Part 2

can In formal English, in statements, a clear distinction is maintained between *can* and *may*. The former refers to ability (*I can swim*), the latter to permission (*You may leave*) or probability (*I may fall asleep*). In informal English, however, the use of *can* to refer to permission is widespread.

Many people will recall such dialogues as:

Pupil: *Can I have some paper?*

Teacher: *You can, but you may not.*

May is becoming more restricted in its use, and usually implies a clear distinction in status between the speaker and the person referred to: *You may go; he may leave now.*

chairman This word has long been in the forefront of the debate over gender in language. It is argued that such suffixes as *-man* symbolise the biases of a male-dominated society. Early proposals to revive an alternative form, *chairwoman* (in use since the 17th century) met with little success; but the 'neutral' form, *chairperson*, came to be used increasingly, especially in American English. The succinct *chair* is also now widespread. *Madam Chairman* is very formal.

classic and classical These words are sometimes interchangeable when used as adjectives. *Classical* is more common in senses relating to ancient Greek or Roman culture. *Classic* has a

more general range of use, including the broad sense of 'highest rank'.

Classic has also undergone considerable sense change in recent years, developing such meanings as 'typical' and 'appropriate', and it has widespread ironic use in informal speech: *That's a classic!* As a result, it is less likely these days to be a substitute for *classical*.

collective noun A noun denoting a group of entities, such as *government* and *committee*. Such nouns are formally different from others in that they have a distinctive three-way pattern of number contrast. *Government*, for example, may be used as a singular with a singular verb (*The government is interested*), with a plural verb (*The government are interested*) or as a plural with a plural verb (*The governments are interested*).

colon A punctuation mark whose typical function is to express that the following words in a sentence are an expansion of what has preceded. *We have an important principle here: there must be freedom of choice.* There is a clear interdependence between the separated units.

In British English it is not usual for the clause following the colon to begin with a capital letter, but this is more common in American English.

comma A punctuation mark with a wide range of functions, and displaying considerable flexibility in its use. Among its typical uses are the separation of certain clauses where they appear in a series (*John sang, Mary played, Tom listened and Mike drank*), the separation of words of the same grammatical ► 10

type where they appear in succession within a phrase (*tall, dark and handsome*), and the marking of an included unit (*the car, frankly speaking, is a wreck*). Certain rules do exist, especially stating where commas may not go: for example, phrases cannot be interrupted by a comma (we do not write *a, car*), and the comma is disallowed between subject and verb in simple sentences (we do not write *The car, has just been sold*).

committee People sometimes express uncertainty over the correct form of the verb to use when this word is subject of the sentence. Should it be *The committee is* or *The committee are*? Standard English in fact allows both constructions, depending on the point of view being expressed. The singular verb is used when the committee is viewed as a unified whole, a single group. The plural is used when the emphasis is on the individuals, seen as separate persons, who make up the committee. *A new committee is to be formed* is therefore far more likely than the alternative, as is *The committee are spending ages making up their minds*.

common noun A noun that refers to a class of objects or concepts, such as *chair, cat* and *information*. It is generally contrasted with a proper noun (or proper name), which refers to a unique person, place, animal, etc, such as *Mike, London, The Beatles*. The grammar of the two kinds of noun is different: for example, common nouns typically express a contrast between singular and plural, whereas proper ►

nouns generally do not – we can say *a chair* and *chairs*, but usually not *a Mike* and *Mikes*.

comparative A grammatical form used to make a comparison, such as the use of *-er* or *more* with adjectives (*taller*, *more interesting*). One use of a comparative is in a comparative clause: *This is easier than I thought*.

complement An element of clause structure traditionally associated with ‘completing’ the meaning specified by the verb. Sometimes (especially after forms of the verb *to be*) the complement relates directly to the subject of the clause (*She is a doctor*); but it may also relate directly to the object (*She called him a nuisance*).

concord The way in which a particular form of one word requires a corresponding form of another; also called ‘agreement’. Examples of English concord include the agreement between the subject and the present tense of the verb (*I walk*, *he walks*) and between subject pronouns and reflexive pronouns (*She washed herself*, *they washed themselves*).

conditional A clause expressing a hypothesis or circumstance under which a statement may be valid. Conditional constructions are usually introduced by *if* or *unless*: *If the bus comes soon, we’ll be home early*.

conjunction A type of word whose chief function is to connect words or other constructions. Conjunctions are traditionally classified as co-ordinating conjunctions (the main ones being *and*, *or*, and *but*) and subordinating ►

conjunctions (eg *because, although, when*).

co-ordination The linking of grammatical units, usually of the same type, such as a series of clauses or nouns; it contrasts with subordination, where the units are not of the same type. *I bought a hat and Mary bought a coat* is an example of a co-ordinate clause. The items that signal co-ordination (*and*, in this example) are called co-ordinating conjunctions or co-ordinators.

copula A verb with little or no independent meaning, whose chief function is to link elements of clause structure, typically the subject and the complement; also called a linking verb. The main copular verb is *be*, in its various forms: *She is a dentist, They are ready*. The somewhat unusual term derives from a Latin word meaning 'join', as seen also in *couple* and *copulate*.

dangling participle The use of a participle, or a phrase introduced by a participle, that has an unclear or ambiguous relationship to the rest of the sentence; also called a 'misrelated participle'. If taken literally, the sentence often appears nonsensical and/or laughable: *Driving along the street, a runaway dog gave me a fright*. To avoid such inadvertent effects, manuals of style recommend that such sentences be rephrased with the participial construction moved or replaced: *When I was driving along the street, a runaway dog gave me a fright*.

dash A punctuation mark that typically signals an included unit – such as this one – especially in informal writing. A single dash ► 18

may also precede an afterthought at the end of a sentence and be used as a sign that a construction is incomplete.

data The grammatical status of the word *data* has changed considerably in recent years. Originally it was used solely as a plural form (singular *datum*), but it has increasingly come to be used as a singular, in such constructions as *the data is* and *much data*. There is less criticism of the singular usage these days, but the issue is by no means resolved. The earlier controversy has left many writers uncertain as to which form they should use: *data is* may give an impression of ignorance, whereas *data are* may give an impression of pedantry. The field of computer data processing has given the singular use of the word a considerable boost.

decimate The first meaning of *decimate* in English followed the sense of the form in Latin, where *decimus* meant 'tenth': 'to kill one tenth of'. However, since the 17th century the word has come to be used to express the other end of the scale: 'to kill most of'. The verb cannot be used in all circumstances as a replacement for *kill*, though. It would be most unusual to hear someone say *I decimated him* or use the verb after a number: *They decimated 50% of the enemy*. Despite nearly 400 years of broader usage, it seems we do still have an intuition about the etymology.

declarative A verb form or type of sentence used in the expression of a statement – that is, a 'declaration' that something is or is not the ► 22

case. A contrast is intended with other types of utterance, primarily questions and commands.

determiner A type of word whose main role is to be used along with nouns to express such notions as quantity, number, possession and definiteness; it includes *the, a, this, some, my, much*. These words 'determine' the way in which the noun is to be interpreted: *a car, the car, my car, that car*.

dialect A language variety in which the use of grammar and vocabulary identifies the regional or social background of the user. The term is sometimes used in a pejorative way, as when someone refers to the speech of a primitive or rural community as *just a dialect*. In fact, everyone speaks a dialect, such as standard English – which is, technically, that dialect of English adopted as the norm for educated use.

dice The relationship between this word and its singular *die* (in the sense of 'a cube used in games of chance') is now obscure in everyday use. *Dice* has come to be used as the relevant noun in both singular and plural contexts: *The dice are on the table* (referring to more than one of the cubes), and *The dice is on the table* (referring to a single cube). Although *dice* as a singular is attested from the 14th century, this use still attracts some purist criticism, especially in American English, from those anxious to preserve the original distinction.

different Usage manuals have spent a great deal of space worrying about the correct choice of particle

after *different* and *differently* in such sentences as *This glass is different from that one* and *She argues differently to John*. *From* is the traditional standard form, in both British and American English, especially when followed by a simple noun, pronoun or phrase.

direct speech The use of an actual utterance, without grammatical modification, as part of a narrative. *Hilary asked, 'Is the car ready?'* (a direct question). The term contrasts with indirect speech (also called reported speech), where the words of the speaker are subordinated to a verb of 'saying' in the main clause. *Hilary asked if the car was ready* (an indirect question). Several grammatical changes are introduced into the sentence, such as different tense forms.

disinterested Usage manuals attempt to maintain a clear distinction between *disinterested* ('impartial, unbiased') and *uninterested* ('indifferent'): the former expresses a lack of self-interest, whereas the latter expresses a lack of any interest at all. A well-used example cites a judge, who should be *disinterested* in a case but not *uninterested* in it. The modern confusion between the two words has arisen because of the widespread use of *dis-*, meaning 'lack of' in modern English, which has promoted a strong tendency to use *disinterested* (and also *disinterest*) in the latter sense.

double negative A construction in which more than one negative word is used within the same clause (*I didn't say anything*). The two negative words ►

usually do not cancel each other out (as negative signs do in mathematics), but simply add emphasis. Modern standard English condemns many such constructions as uneducated.

each other and *one another*. Usage manuals traditionally recommend that *each other* should refer to only two entities, and *one another* to more than two. The distinction is by no means rigidly observed, and examples such as the following can be found in all styles: *The three kings stared at each other, Husband and wife should confide in one another.*

elision The omission of sounds, syllables or words in connected speech, as shown in such forms as *Febr'y, y'know, cup o' tea*; it contrasts with intrusion. Elision is largely avoided in formal public speaking.

ellipsis A sentence in which part of the structure has been omitted, for reasons of economy, emphasis or style; also sometimes called contraction or abbreviation. The omitted element can usually be recovered from a scrutiny of the context. An example of ellipsis can be seen in the sequence *Where are you going? To town* (elliptical for *I am going to town*).

elocution The art of speech training to produce effective public speaking, practised since ancient times (originally as part of rhetoric).

epithet A word or phrase that characterises a noun and is regularly associated with it. Examples include *haunted in the haunted house* and *the Conqueror in William the Conqueror*. A term of abuse is also sometimes called an epithet: ► 29

They hurled foul epithets at each other.

eponym The name of a person after whom something (such as an invention or the title of a book or film) is named. Examples include *Hamlet*, *biro* and *sandwich*.

-ess The use of this suffix is changing, following the emergence of fresh attitudes to feminine roles in society. Originally it acted as a female gender marker and had no emotional overtones: a *poetess* was simply a female *poet*. These days, several *-ess* forms are considered pejorative, in varying degrees, and would be avoided in general speech.

etymology The study of the origins and history of the form and meaning of words.

euphemism The use of a vague or indirect expression in place of one that is thought to be unpleasant, embarrassing or offensive. Examples include *pass on* for *die*, or *Where's the little room?* for *Where's the toilet?*

exclamation In traditional grammar, an emotional utterance that lacks the grammatical structure of a full sentence and is marked by strong intonation (eg, *Gosh!*); it is usually contrasted with statements, questions and commands.

finite Descriptive of a verb or construction that can occur on its own in an independent clause, and permits contrasts of tense, number and mood. The notion of finiteness basically refers to the extent to which a verb is limited by time, number and mood. Thus, *I walk* is a finite use of a verb, because it expresses only one ►

tense, number and mood (first person present indicative), as can be shown by such contrasts as *I walked* and *He walks*.

first or firstly In listing a set of points, there is some variation in usage over which of these two words to use. Usage manuals traditionally argue in favour of *first*, on the grounds that, because this word is used as an adverb (*I went first*) as well as an adjective (*the first prize*), the *-ly* ending is not needed. Analogy with *secondly*, *thirdly* and so on has led to the increasing use of *firstly*, even in formal contexts.

flammable Usage manuals are particularly worried about this word because of the real risks attached to its misinterpretation. The problem arises from the curious development that has led to *flammable* and *inflammable* both meaning 'highly combustible'. However, because of the widespread use of the prefix *in-* with a negative meaning (as in *invisible*), it is easy to misinterpret *inflammable* as if it were negative – and this would have potentially dangerous results. For this reason, *flammable* is the preferred term in technical writing and in contexts where people are being warned.

future tense A form of the verb which refers to future time. It comes as a surprise to many people to learn that English has no formal future tense (unlike, say, French, where there is a distinctive future ending for verbs). English has several ways of referring to future time, such as through the use of *will* and *shall*, other modal verbs, and future-time adverbs (such as *tomorrow*).

A ▶ **Z** **Wordpower**

The easy reference of English usage continues this week from 'gender of pronouns' to 'owing to'.

Part 3

gender of pronouns A long-standing controversy exists over the appropriate pronoun to use in sentences where such words as *anyone*, *everybody* and *someone* are subject: *Anyone can do what... wants*. To use the pronoun *he* in a generic way, including both males and females, is the traditional usage, but this can lead to ambiguity, and since the 1960s has attracted criticism for its male bias. On the other hand, the use of *she* in this context sounds odd. *They* is now commonly employed as a solution to the problem: *Anyone can sit where they want, can't they?* This usage upsets the grammarian, who wants the singular sense of *anyone* to be matched by a singular pronoun or verb.

generic A type of noun that refers to a class of entities. Examples include certain uses of nouns (eg, *A lion is a fierce animal*, where *A lion* means 'the class of all lions'), and several nouns derived from adjectives (eg, *the Japanese*, *the poor*).

genitive case A word ending used with nouns typically to express a possessive relationship (eg, *the man's glove*) or some other close semantic connection (eg, *a summer's day*). It is the only case ending in modern English nouns.

gentleman As a general reference, *man* is preferred to *gentleman*. The latter is used in special circumstances, and ▶

usually implies some kind of nuance: *He's not a gentleman* ('He does not act in a well-mannered way') or *That gentleman took my seat* (as might be said sarcastically by a lady). The form is widely used in direct address: *Ladies and gentlemen...*

get When schoolchildren use this word in their writing, they quickly find that adults don't much like it. It is said to be an 'empty' word, with no particular meaning, which is prone to overuse. Teachers try to make children replace it with a verb with a more specific meaning, such as *buy* in *I want to get a new car.*

grammar A systematic description of the structure of a language. A contrast is often drawn between a descriptive grammar, which provides a precise account of actual usage, and a prescriptive grammar, which attempts to establish rules for the correct use of language in society.

have There are several differences between British and American English in the use of this verb. British English tends to use *have* alone to express the notion of a continuous state of possessing: *I have three uncles.* *Have got* expresses the notion of possession at a particular time: *I've got a sore throat.* American English uses *have* for both senses.

historic present The use of a present-tense form while narrating events that happened in the past.

homonyms Words that have the same form but different meanings, as in *ear* ('of a body' or 'of corn'). When the identity is one of sound, as in *rode* and *rowed*, the words are called homophones. ▶ 12

hopefully In the sense of 'let us hope' or 'it is to be hoped', this word is now very often heard, especially at the beginning of a sentence: *Hopefully the government will see sense*. It has, however, attracted a remarkable amount of criticism from purists, who want the word to be restricted to its literal sense as a modifier of verb meaning: *She said it hopefully* ('in a hopeful way'). They recommend, as alternatives, such constructions as *I hope that the government will see sense* or *I'm hopeful...*

hyphen A punctuation mark which indicates a division within a word. It may appear at the end of a line of print, where a word will not fit without a break (*exclam-ation*), or to mark the parts of a complex word, such as a compound (*mother-in-law*) or certain prefixed forms (*ex-husband*). The conventions governing use are not clear-cut, however, in either function.

idiom A sequence of words that in grammar and meaning functions as a single unit. The meanings of the individual words cannot be combined to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. For example, the meanings of *go*, *fly* and *kite* cannot account for the use of the sentence *Go fly a kite!* in its sense of 'Go away' or 'Don't be silly.'

imply and infer Standard English makes a clear distinction between *imply* ('hint') and *infer* ('deduce'). To *imply* is to state something. To *infer* is to draw a conclusion from what is stated. The distinction can be seen in the following sentences: *The inspector implied that there had* ►

been a crime, and I infer from what the inspector said that there has been a crime. The speaker/writer *implies*; the listener/reader *infers*.

indicative A type of mood used in the expression of statements and questions. A contrast is usually made in English with the imperative mood of commands, and (in some languages) with other moods, such as the subjunctive.

infinitive A non-finite form of a verb which in many languages is cited as the verb's basic form (eg, *go, walk*). It may be used alone (the bare infinitive) or with the particle *to* (the to-infinitive). Different verbs make use of these alternatives: compare *The policeman saw the man leave* and *The policeman told the man to leave*, where it is not possible to insert the *to* in the first example or to leave it out in the second.

inflection An affix whose function is to signal a grammatical relationship, such as plural, past tense or third person. An inflection does not alter the part of speech to which it is attached: *walk, walks, walking* and *walked* are all verbs.

inquiry and enquiry These nouns, and their corresponding verbs (*inquire/enquire*), differ between American and British English. The *in-* forms are universal in American English. In the UK there is a tendency for the *en-* forms to be used in general contexts of seeking information, especially in the plural: *I'm making enquiries about a lost parrot*. The *in-* forms are more likely to be used in contexts of serious study or investigation: *There has*

been an official inquiry into what caused the trouble.

intensifier A word that typically has a heightening effect on the meaning of another element in a sentence. For example, *very* increases the strength of the meaning of the following word in *The book was very interesting.*

interjection In the traditional classification of parts of speech, an item whose function is purely emotive, such as *Gosh!* or *Tut tut.* These expressions do not enter into the grammar of a sentence.

interrogative A verb form or clause type used in the expression of questions; the notion contrasts with declarative. Words that mark interrogative constructions include *which*, *when* and *why.* Word order may also mark an interrogative, as in *Is he leaving?*

intrusion The addition of sounds in connected speech which are not heard when the words or syllables are spoken in isolation. A common example is the use of the intrusive 'r' as a linking sound between vowels in Received Pronunciation when there is no r in the spelling, as in *Africa(r)* and *Asia*, or *law(r)* and *order.*

inversion Reversing the order of elements in a sentence. The subject and verb invert in order to make questions from statements: *It is ready* becomes *Is it ready?*

-ise and -ize A few verbs are required to use the spelling *-ise*, such as *advise*, *disguise* and *exercise*, in all written English dialects. For most verbs with this ending, though, American English uses the spelling *-ize*: *finalize*, *modernize*, and thousands more. The ► 18

traditional British spelling is *-ise* in such cases.

However, British English is coming to be much influenced by American practices, and now shows great variability, with some journals, newspapers and books using the *-s-* form and some using the *˘z-* form.

Verbs ending in *-yse* in British English (such as *analyse*) are also beginning to show signs of the American convention, which is *-yze*.

lady The changing use of this word has been the subject of debate for over a century. Apart from its special use as a title within the British aristocracy, *lady* is the normal way of referring to a female person in her presence: *Give this lady a fresh cup of tea.* *Woman* would be rude, or imply some kind of nuance. In fixed phrases or special settings, however, *woman* is a permissible variant for *lady*: we may refer to either *the ladies' finals* or *the women's finals* in a sport, or to *a young lady* or *a young woman*. Following feminist critiques of the language, the neutral use of *woman* is becoming more general.

less and fewer Usage manuals take pains to distinguish between these two words. *Fewer* is the preferred word when the reference is to numbers, or to entities considered as individuals, capable of being counted or listed. *Less* is preferred when the reference is to collective quantity or to something abstract. So we find *fewer contributions*, *less pension* and *fewer opportunities*, *less opportunity*.

lexicon The vocabulary of a language, especially as listed in a dictionary. The study of a language's ►

lexicon is called lexicology. The art and science of dictionary-making is called lexicography.

like and as There is considerable antagonism to the use of *like* as a conjunction in formal spoken and written English. Instead, usage manuals recommend *as*. *Do like I told you* becomes *Do as I told you*. *They act like they have money to burn* becomes *They act as if they have money to burn*. The *like* forms are common in informal speech and writing, however. Also, when *like* introduces a clause in which the verb is not expressed, it proves to be generally acceptable: *It looks like rain*. However, fear of misusing it often causes writers to replace it by a form of *as* wherever it appears.

malapropism The inappropriate replacement of a word or phrase by another with a similar sound. The typical user of a malapropism has not fully understood a long word, but makes a shot at it, substituting a word that 'sounds right'. The term comes from the name of Mrs Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals*. The term itself comes from the French *mal à propos* ('not to the purpose'). *Illiterate him, I say, quite from your memory* is one of her substitutions (for *obliterate*).

mood A grammatical category that expresses how the speaker feels about a proposition in a particular sentence. Mood normally identifies the status of an utterance: for example, it may be indicative (the usual form), imperative (a command) or subjunctive (a subordination).

The English modal ► 24

auxiliaries are verb-like words which typically express such attitudes as uncertainty, possibility and necessity: *may, could, might, should, must*, etc.

morpheme The smallest distinctive unit of grammar. The notion includes forms that can occur as separate words as well as parts of words. The word *cups* has two morphemes in it, (*cup* and *-s*); *impossibility* has three (*im-*, *possibil-* and *-ity*). The study of word structure is called morphology.

neologism A new lexical item, created as a response to changed circumstances in the external world, which achieves some currency within a speech community; also called a coinage.

Examples in the 1990s include many new words using the prefix *Euro-*, referring to the emerging role of the European Community, such as *Euromeasures* and *Eurothuggery*.

nice This word has long been criticised as a lazy word when it appears in writing. Usage manuals argue that instead of employing such a vague term of commendation, a more precise adjective should be used: instead of *a nice computer*, *an impressive computer*, perhaps. Stylists point out that there are invariably several specific terms that could be used in a given context, if the writer could be bothered to think them up. However, the reason that *nice* has come to be so useful is that it allows people to make a generally approving remark without having to be precise.

note This word is one of the chief targets of purist criticism. It is found ► 28

with either a singular or a plural verb, depending on the construction in which it is used. When it precedes or refers back to a singular noun, the verb is also in the singular: *None of the sand is wet*. A singular verb is also used when *none* can be interpreted as 'not one' or 'no one': *None of us was aware of the problem*. A plural verb is used when *none* means 'not any of a group of persons or things'.

noun A word class, traditionally defined as 'the name of a person, place or thing', a definition that has often been criticised because it omits too much (concepts such as happiness, for example). Nouns are generally subclassified into common and proper types.

number A grammatical category used to analyse word classes, especially nouns, into such contrasts as singular, dual and plural – the concepts of 'one', 'two' and 'many', respectively. These contrasts generally correspond to the number of real-world entities referred to, but there is no straightforward one-to-one correlation. The noun *wheat* is singular and *oats* is plural, though there is hardly a difference between the number of stalks in a field in each case.

number and amount Standard English makes a distinction between *amount* and *number* in terms of whether they go with mass nouns or count nouns. *Amount* takes a mass noun: *I spent a large amount of time*. *Number* goes with count nouns: *I ate a number of cakes*. A glance at the dictionary definitions of the two words will show that there is no important difference of meaning

between them, but failing to maintain the distinction is generally taken to be a sign of carelessness or of a lack of education.

object An element of clause structure traditionally associated with the receiver or goal of an action, such as *the book* in *The dog chewed the book*. There is a widely recognised distinction between direct and indirect object, as in *The child gave the toy to her mother*, where *the toy* is the direct object and *her mother* the indirect object.

older or elder *Elder* and *eldest* refer only to persons; *older* and *oldest* apply also to things. There is also a difference in construction: *elder* is not followed by *than*, and neither *elder* nor *eldest* can be used without *the* when following a verb, as in *Mike is the elder* (compare *Mike is older*). These days, *elder* and *eldest* are largely confined to references involving members of a given family or business establishment, indicating age or seniority: *the elder Smith*, *the elder partner*. There are also a few set phrases, such as *elder statesman*.

one Formal British English is strict about maintaining the use of *one* as a generalising third-person pronoun, and sequences such as *One should keep oneself warm, shouldn't one?* will be heard. American English is more likely to mix *one* with forms of *he*: *One should ask himself...* Usage manuals criticise any change of pronoun mid-sentence, especially if a change of number is involved: *One can do whatever they want*.

only Most usage manuals insist that *only* is placed before the words it ►

limits, in written English, to avoid a potential ambiguity. Thus we should have *I saw only Fred* (and nobody else) and not *I only saw Fred* (unless we are suggesting, for example that 'I did not speak to him'). The tendency to place *only* away from the limited word, usually before the verb, is widespread in speech. It is rarely ambiguous there, because the stress pattern of the sentence clearly indicates which word goes with which. However, the weight of grammatical tradition, alongside the risk of ambiguity, is enough to foster widespread observance of the adjacency rule in formal written English

owing to and due to A long-standing controversy in English usage concerns the use of these two phrases. The traditional view is that, as *due* is an adjective, it can be used only when nouns are being related to each other, either joined by a linking verb (*The problem was due to his temper*) or in an adjectival construction (*The answer, due to the delay, was useless*). Criticism has focused on the adverbial use of *due to*, where there is no first noun to relate to, as in *Due to the snow, we arrived late*.

Purists, anxious to preserve the distinction between an adjectival and an adverbial construction, have for over a century attacked this usage as uneducated, recommending as alternatives such forms as *owing to*, *because of*, *on account of* or *through*. The adverbial use of *due to* has nonetheless been widely employed in informal speech and writing, and is increasingly to be heard in formal contexts.

A ► **Z** **Wordpower**

The Wordpower A-Z easy reference guide to English usage and grammar concludes this week, running from 'period' to 'word order'.

Part 4

period A punctuation mark whose main function is to signal the end of a sentence in statement form; it is usually called a full stop in British English. Other uses of the period include the marking of abbreviations, though there is a strong tendency in modern usage to omit these in such cases as *eg*, *ie*, *Mr* and *BBC*.

programme or program It is difficult to generalise about the spelling of this word in British English, because usage is changing. The American spelling is *program* in all contexts. In Britain, the traditional spelling is *programme*. However, in the context of computing, the reduced spelling has come to be standard in British English, and it is beginning to emerge in other contexts.

question A major type of sentence, typically used to elicit information or a response, and contrasting with statement, command and exclamation. Special questions are marked by a question-word (*eg*, *what*, *where*, *why*) followed by inverted word order (*eg*, *What did she see?*). General questions are marked by word order alone (*eg*, *Is she leaving?*).

quotation marks Punctuation marks typically signalling a piece of direct speech; also called inverted commas or, informally, quotes. Opening and closing quotation marks are ►

usually distinguished in print, but not in typescript, and often not in handwriting or on the computer screen. Single quotation marks (‘ ’) are generally used in American publishing. Double quotation marks (“ ”) are traditional in British publishing, but there is a notable tendency towards simplification, and single marks are increasingly the norm.

reason Usage manuals do not like the use of a *because* construction with *reason*, on the grounds that it would be expressing the same meaning twice: *The reason I left is because the pay was so bad*. Such constructions are commonly used in informal speech, but alternative constructions are recommended in formal speech and writing, such as use of *that*: *The reason you left is that the pay was so bad*.

Received Pronunciation

The regionally neutral, educationally prestigious accent in British English, sometimes loosely referred to as a ‘BBC’ or ‘Oxford’ accent. When you hear speakers of RP, it is impossible to say which part of the country they are from. Less than 3% of the population speak it now.

reflexive A clause in which the subject and the object refer to the same entity, as in *She washed herself* or *They saw themselves in the mirror*. Forms such as *herself* and *themselves* are reflexive pronouns.

refute and deny Perhaps because of the frequent use of these words in media debate and discussion in recent years, the confusion between *refute* and *deny* has attracted attention. In standard English both verbs share the sense of disputing the truthfulness ►

of a statement, but *deny* simply asserts that the statement is false, whereas *refute* stresses the marshalling of evidence in order to prove that the statement is false.

relative clause A clause that occurs after a noun in a noun phrase, as in *I read the book that you left on the table*. The pronoun that introduces the clause is a relative pronoun. Other relative pronouns include *who*, *whom* and *which*.

scarcely Because this word has a negative meaning, usage manuals disapprove of its use with another negative word in the same clause: *They could scarcely hear her* is preferred to *They couldn't scarcely hear her*. Standard English also prefers the use of *when* rather than *than* with a following clause: *Scarcely had they left when the fire broke out*.

semicolon A punctuation mark whose typical function is to co-ordinate clauses, in much the same way as does the conjunction *and*. It plays an important contrastive role when commas are used within the same sentence, as it then keeps the different levels of sentence organisation apart. *We first went to France, remembering to visit Helen; then to Germany, where we saw Paul; and finally to Spain, where we bumped into Peter*.

sentence The largest structural unit in terms of which the grammar of a language is organised. It is an independent unit which performs such functions as expressing statements, questions, commands and exclamations.

shall and will Usage manuals have insisted on a systematic distinction ►

between these two words since the 18th century. It is recommended that *shall* should be used in the first person to express simple futurity (*I shall arrive tomorrow*), and in the second and third person to express such meanings as obligation or determination (*Yes, you shall go to the ball*). *Will*, by contrast, is supposed to express simple futurity in the second and third persons (*He will arrive tomorrow*), and such meanings as obligation and determination in the first person (*Yes, I will go to the ball*). The two verbs are thus thought to complement each other very nicely. These rules are rarely followed in practice, though, and it is questionable whether the language ever maintained such a systematic distinction.

slow and slowly Both words can be used as adverbs, but they are often not interchangeable. Usage manuals prefer the use of *slowly* in writing and in formal speech; but spoken commands and exhortations generally use *slow* (*Go slow round this corner*), and it is the expected form in certain idiomatic constructions (*The trains are running slow today*). An important point is that if the adverb is located early on in a sentence, only *slowly* can be used: *We slowly skidded towards the wall*.

special(ly) and especial(ly) The *special* forms are more commonly used than the *especial* ones, and some people maintain a difference in meaning between them. They use the *special* forms when the sense intended is 'particular, specific, as opposed to what is general

or ordinary': They have displayed a special concern about our situation. The *especial* forms are used when the sense is that of 'pre-eminence, exceptional degree': *Mary is an especially gifted member of that family.*

split infinitive Usage manuals reserve some of their strongest criticism for the insertion of an adverb between *to* and the verb: *I should like to formally propose an amendment.* The opposition stems from the belief, fostered by the early grammarians of English, that the infinitive construction should preserve the same kind of structural unity as it manifested in Latin, where the infinitive marker was an ending attached to the verb stem (as in *am-are*, 'to love'). Because the infinitive form in English is shown by the particle *to*, it was felt that this word should stay close to the verb at all times. Although the construction is widely used in speech, and is often found in literature, criticism has made it a sensitive issue. It can also be difficult to avoid using a split infinitive without causing a highly unnatural style. An example is *Do you want to really help them?*, where placing *really* before *to* or after *help* leads to awkward results.

spoonerism A slip of the tongue which involves the exchange of (usually initial) sounds to produce an unintentionally humorous or embarrassing result. The term derives from the name of William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930), warden of New College, Oxford, to whom several examples are attributed, such as *dear old Queen* ►

becoming *queer old dean*.

standard A prestige variety of language used within a speech community, providing an institutionalised norm for use, eg, in the media and language teaching.

Linguistic forms or dialects that do not conform to this norm are called non-standard or, more pejoratively, substandard.

statistics This word, like *mathematics*, is used with a singular verb when it refers to the academic subject: *Statistics is a complex field*. It is used with a plural verb when it refers to a particular collection of numerical data: *The statistics about pay rises aren't impressive*. A singular usage is also possible, and has been attested for well over a century: *That's an important statistic*.

stress The perceived prominence of a unit of spoken language. A stressed syllable generally involves an increase in the force of articulation, and is heard as increased loudness. Several degrees of stress can be heard. In the word *consequence*, there is a primary stress on *con-*, a secondary stress on *-quence*, and a weak stress on *-se-*.

subject A major element of clause structure, traditionally associated with the 'doer' of an action, as in *The dog chased the cat*. In such a sentence, *the dog* is described as the grammatical subject, in order to allow for such cases as *The cat was chased by the dog*, where although *the dog* is the logical subject (it is still the doer of the action), it is no longer the grammatical one.

subjunctive A type of clause that expresses such attitudes as ► 18

tentativeness, vagueness or uncertainty. English does not have a system of verb endings to express these meanings, as Latin does, but subjunctive forms can be seen in such constructions as *If he were going* and formulae such as *So be it*.

substantive In some grammars, a word class that includes nouns and noun-like items (*the rich, the Chinese*). It also sometimes includes pronouns.

synonymy The relationship of sameness of meaning between words. Words are synonymous when they are close enough in meaning that they can substitute for each other in some contexts. *Range and choice* are synonymous in *You have a good... of vegetables*. *Car* and *automobile* are synonymous between British and American English.

syntax The study of the rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences. The subject also includes the study of the grammatical principles that govern the way sentences are connected.

take and bring Standard English distinguishes between these words in terms of the direction of movement with reference to the speaker. *Bring* is used when the movement is towards a place identified with the speaker (basically, 'come here with'): *Bring it to me*. *Take* is used when the movement is away from the place identified with the speaker (basically, 'go there with'): *Take it to Fred*.

tense The grammatical expression of the time of a situation described in a sentence, relative to some other time. Tenses are traditionally classified ►

into past, present and future, each of these being subdivided depending on the language. Tense forms are usually defined as variations in the form of the verb, and if this definition is accepted, English has only two tenses, present and past (*I jump, I jumped*).

than A persistent question is which pronoun to use after *than*. Usage manuals recommend that sentences such as *He is bigger than I* should be preferred to *He is bigger than me*, on the grounds that *than* is functioning here as a conjunction, not a preposition, and therefore the sentence is short for *He is bigger than I am*. In informal usage, the object form of pronouns is generally used, and with third-person forms this usage will often be encountered even in relatively formal contexts. *John is much taller than he is* widely felt to be stilted.

that and which When used as relative pronouns (that is, pronouns that introduce clauses), *that* and *which* are often interchangeable: *There's the car that/which had the accident*. But *which* cannot refer to people, and some grammarians argue that *that* should always be used in favour of *which* with a defining clause. However, some usage manuals consider *that* to be less formal than *which*, and recommend the use of the latter whenever there is a choice.

there When this word is used before a linking verb, such as *be* or *seem*, the verb agrees in number with the following noun: *There's a book on the table, There are several books on the table*. When the verb precedes more than one noun, ► 24

it is usually singular if the first noun is singular (*There's a book and two newspapers on the table*), and plural if the first noun is plural (*There are two books and a newspaper on the table*). Informally, also, there is a tendency to use *there's* even in sentences where the following noun is plural: *There's three books on the table*. This usage is strongly criticised in usage manuals.

though and although

These words are often interchangeable: *I went to the party (al)though I wasn't well*. *Though* is the more colloquial form, and tends to occur when the clause it introduces is in the second position in the sentence; *although* is preferred with clauses in the first position.

through The use of this word as a preposition to mean 'up to and including' is standard American English, and is used in that dialect in all styles: *We shall stay Monday through Saturday*. In British English, the use of *to* or *until* makes it unclear whether the last day is included, and as a result there has been an increased use of the American construction.

unique The absolute sense of this word to mean 'the only one of its kind' is seen as critical by purists, who insist that it should not be used in a comparative way in careful usage. Sentences such as *That animal displays one of the most unique features of behaviour seen in Africa* illustrate the use of the word to mean 'most unusual'. This is often encountered in informal contexts, and suggests that a less absolute sense of *unique* has emerged in modern English.

use As an auxiliary verb, *use* always occurs in the ► 28

past tense, followed by *to*: *They used to go to the cinema every Friday*. In questions, there is some variation in usage. *Used he to go to the cinema?* is an older construction, especially found in British English, and still sometimes employed in formal speech.

verb A word traditionally defined as a 'doing' or 'action' word, which displays contrasts of tense, aspect, voice, mood, person and number. It is the core of any clause, generally occurring with a subject (eg, *She arrived*) and dictating the number and nature of other elements in the predicate. Some verbs govern an object (eg, *She saw a car*). Others govern an adverb as well (eg, *I put the book there*). It is in fact more difficult to define the meaning of verbs than the traditional definition suggests: many (*be, seem*) are not action words at all.

vocative The function of a noun when it is used in direct address, as in *John, it's time for tea*. In Latin, the vocative is marked by a special case ending on the noun. In English there is no ending, and intonation (in speech) and punctuation (in writing) identify the use of any noun in this way.

voice A grammatical category expressing the way a clause may alter the relationship between subject and object without changing the meaning of the sentence. An example is *The cat ate the food* and *The food was eaten by the cat*. When the grammatical subject is the actor in relation to the verb, the clause is said to be 'active' (as in the first example). When it is the goal or recipient of the action denoted by the verb, it is ►

said to be 'passive' (as in the second example).

-ward and -wards These suffixes are both used for the expression of direction of movement: *backward(s)*, *eastward(s)*. The forms without the -s are predominant in American English, and those with -s in British English.

who In its use as a relative pronoun, this word has been a major source of controversy in English usage. *Who* and *whoever* are the standard forms to use when the pronoun functions as the subject of a clause, or follows a form of the verb to be: *Who's gone*, *That's the man who left*. *Whom* and *whomever* are the forms recommended by the usage manuals when the pronoun is the object of a verb or governed by a preposition: *That is the official whom I saw*; *To whom did you speak?* However, constructions with *whom* are generally felt to be very formal, or only appropriate to writing.

word class A group of words that behave grammatically in the same way; traditionally called a part of speech. The chief word classes are noun, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction and preposition, with article, determiner, particle, interjection, participle and other types of word also being recognised in various grammars.

word order The sequential arrangement of words or other elements in a sentence. In English the normal order of clause elements is subject-verb-object. Many specific grammatical contrasts are signalled by word order variations, such as statement vs question: *He's outside* vs *Is he outside?*