

EXPLORING ENGLISH

By Ronald S. Horan BA (Hons) Dip Ed MACE
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About the Author

Ron Horan was born in Sydney and had his secondary education at Fort Street Boys High School just before and in the early years of the Second World War. He then entered the Faculty of Arts at The University of Sydney but interrupted his studies to serve in the Royal Australian Air Force for three years. After the war he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in French (Honours) and German. He also gained a Diploma in Education. After a short appointment at Sydney Boys High School he joined the staff of Fort Street, where he taught for 36 years. Many of those years were spent as modern languages master and later as deputy principal. His teaching subjects were French, German and English.

Throughout his career, Ron demonstrated great practical concern for correct English spelling, the importance of which is often neglected in schools. As a practical guide for students he compiled the Fort Street Speller, which is presented to all pupils upon their arrival at the school. The guide has made its way into many avenues of public administration.

Ron Horan has also been actively involved in the broader sphere of education. He served for ten years as a teacher and deputy principal at the Eastwood Evening College and then for another 22 years as its principal. His contribution to the teaching of foreign languages has been important. With a co-author, he has published French and German course books, which are widely used in Australia and around the world. He served on many education committees, and was president of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations. Ron was posthumously awarded the OAM in 2000.

Other Publications

A New French Course: Parts 1-5

Senior French: Parts 1-2

A Basic French Vocabulary

A New German Course: Parts 1-2

Everyday German for You (MS.)

The History of the Eastwood Evening College (to 1977)

The Next Seven Years (1977-1983)

Fort Street Speller

Fort Street Songster

Fort Street - The School

In Celebration - Fort Street Old Boys Union Centenary

Maroon and Silver - Fort Street Sesquicentenary

Spelling English

Using English

Preface

It is just on one hundred years since J.C. Nesfield published his *Manual of English Grammar and Composition*, the book becoming the main reference text on the functioning of the English language. In his work Nesfield provided a most comprehensive analysis of the function of the parts of speech and guidance on style and other aspects of English usage in his day.

While Nesfield's work remained the main guide on grammar, other writers composed books that have also served as valuable reference. The best-known is Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, regarded by many as the final arbiter on all manner of English language puzzles. Fowler's book takes up the discussion of various difficulties encountered in the use of English. Grammatical questions find their place, but there is no attempt at a complete analysis such as Nesfield's.

There are available texts that devote themselves to the perplexing field of English spelling. There are also books that have as their subject matter the presentation of the origins of the English vocabulary; of the different levels of language or of questions of style. Great omnibuses take up aspects of the English tongue alphabetically rather than having a comprehensive approach along a particular line. And then there are the workbooks affording practice in a certain area after a brief coverage.

There are indeed many components to the English language and many hundreds of books have been published concerning them. Why then does this book make its appearance at the end of the twentieth century? The reason is that of the hundreds, possibly thousands, no modern book has done precisely what *Exploring English* does.

The book's basic aim is to present a comprehensive analysis of the grammar of modern English in a practical manner. While the same bases are operative as far as the eight parts of speech are concerned as in Nesfield's day a century ago, there have been changes in the functions of words, account of which has not been fully taken up in the updating of older works. Further, it was considered that a more simple, concise and cohesive approach was possible than that forming the construction of the many other texts. A ponderous, convoluted style is not a *sine qua non* in an exploration of English grammar. The material could be presented in a fluid and uncomplicated way; In being comprehensive, a work does not have to be ponderous. In such guise this grammar of the English language is presented, treating all aspects of operative usage today.

Firstly, detailed attention is paid to the eight parts of speech, the grammatical function of each being described together with its syntactic relation to another word or other words in the sentence. Thus will it be possible to parse each word in order to ensure that one's sentences hold together. Special attention is given to words that afford syntactical difficulty.

The three elements of a word are its spelling, its meaning and its sound. A dictionary will of course provide the meaning. However, one's vocabulary can be strengthened by the ability to analyse the parts of which it is composed.

To this end, an investigation of the roots of words is made, together with the changes afforded by the use of prefixes and suffixes. Careful examination is made of the ways in which compound words are formed.

A detailed study of the phonetic system of the English language is given. Tables of the vowel sounds and the vowel combinations together with a table of the consonants show the complex patterns of the pronunciation and spelling of English. The companion volume *Spelling English* presents a complete analysis and should be used in conjunction with the present work.

An essential component of the formulation of a sentence is the punctuation used to give meaning and to enable the most direct grasp of the meaning. The role played by the range of punctuation marks is fully explained. There is thus provided a complete guide to ensure that a sentence can be formulated to present clearly and effectively what one wishes to say or write.

A complete analysis of the nature of clauses as the make-up of a sentence is undertaken. The detailed material on the individual relevant parts of speech provides a basis for the analysis. Then too the role played by phrases is described, the various types being studied. After such exploration of the parts of speech, the formation of words, the phonetic system of the language and its spelling, the art of punctuation, the function of clauses and phrases, the point is reached to undertake a study of how the whole is put together. The section on style explains fully the do's and don'ts of composition. The various levels of vocabulary and language are illustrated and the purposes that they serve. This is followed by an exposition of idiomatic expressions and figurative language.

The journey of exploration of the wonderful English language will thus have been completed. While at times my role has had to be that of an instructor, I have endeavoured throughout not to appear to be one on a podium. Rather have I made effort to include you the reader closely and warmly in the journey - advising, warning, encouraging.

Ronald S. Horan

Sydney
July 1996

THE NOUN

A noun is the name of a person, place or thing.

The word 'thing' is to be interpreted as any object, feeling, action, quality, that a statement can be made about.

The word *noun* comes from the Latin word meaning a 'name'.

There are four *categories* under which nouns are classed:

Proper: designating a person or place -Elizabeth, Paris, Antarctica.

The word *proper* means 'own', i.e. a person's own name or a place's own name.

Common: a name applying to any person or thing of the same kind, not peculiar to just one -boy; woman, table, house, street, ball, fence, castle.

Abstract: denoting a quality or state or action - colour, happiness, anger, poverty.

Collective: a name for a group of individuals or things -committee, herd, crowd, set, pack.

Gender

Nouns have four classifications, determined according to sex: masculine, feminine, common {masculine or feminine}, neuter (ascribed to things).

The gender of males is masculine.

The gender of females is feminine.

The gender of common nouns other than persons is neuter.

The gender of a collective noun is always neuter.

The feminine form can be indicated by change or addition of ending, a change of word, or by placing a word before or after: widower, widow; host, hostess; ram, ewe; manservant, maidservant; peacock, peahen.

Just as a common noun (queen, king, etc.) can become a proper noun (the Queen of England), so a proper noun can become a common noun (sandwich, quisling, limerick, etc.).

Number

Nouns have number: singular or plural. When a noun denotes one person or one thing, it is singular. When it denotes more than one, it is plural. Abstract nouns normally have no plural form.

The Cases

Case is the term used to describe the form of the noun to show its relationship with other words in the sentence.

For practical purposes, in modern English grammar there are four cases as defined in what follows.

Nominative case: the subject, the word about which the statement is made.

Objective case: the word 'governed' by or the object of a verb or preposition. (Accusative)

Possessive case: the word possessing something. (Genitive)

Vocative case: the person being spoken to.

Note the alternative names for the cases -'accusative' for the 'objective', 'genitive' for the 'possessive' and 'nominative of address' for the 'vocative'.

Most nouns indicating a person or a living creature add '**s**' (apostrophe plus **s**) for the possessive case of the singular: Tom's book, the teacher's car. Inanimate objects form their possessive by the use of the preposition of: the door *of* the room, the windows *of* the building.

The plural of most nouns in English is formed by adding **s** or **es**. A full explanation is given in what follows under the heading *Plural of Nouns*.

In the possessive plural nouns not already ending in **s** add '**s**' (apostrophe plus **s**). If the noun already ends in **s** in the plural, then only an apostrophe is added. As examples: the women's hats, the boys' father.

The word *declension* is used to denote the forms taken by a noun to show number and case. In English, nouns have a change of form only for the possessive (genitive) case in the singular, for the plural and the possessive case of the plural.

The Sentence

The relationship of nouns with other words is determined for the most part by the position taken by the noun in the sentence - the statement being made. In this the function of nouns in English differs from the change of form used in such languages as German and Latin to determine the function of nouns. At basis it is the position a noun takes in the sentence in English that determines its function.

The simplest sentence consists of a subject and a verb.

The dog barks.

In this sentence *the dog* is called the *subject* and the verb *barks* is called the *predicate*. The predicate is what is said about the subject, consisting of the verb and the complement (the words completing the predicate).

The dog | barks loudly at the intruder.

The *subject* of any sentence or any clause (a part of a sentence containing a finite verb) is the noun or pronoun in the nominative case about whom or which a statement is made together with the accompanying adjuncts if any;

The enraged dog | barks loudly at the intruder.

The *predicate* of any sentence or of any clause (in sentences made up of more than one clause) is the verb and accompanying adjuncts if any:

Subject	Predicate
The boys in my class	played cricket at Birchgrove.
The senior girls	have a good debating team.

No matter how complex a sentence may be, its clauses can be viewed in this way: This elementary analysis of the form of a sentence as a whole is of importance in the appreciation of sentence formation. Only with such appreciation is a real understanding of the language possible. A full discussion of sentence analysis is given in the section *Clauses*.

The Function of the Cases

Nominative Case (The test is to ask *who* or *what* before the verb.)

A noun is in the nominative case:

- (a) As the doer of the action (i.e. as the subject of the verb).

The *plane* flew low over the village.
The *pilot* waved to the villagers.

- (b) After the verb 'to be', 'to become', 'to seem', 'to appear', etc. (Such verbs take the same case after them as before.)

He was the *king* for many years.

The word *king* is said to be the nominative complement. The complement is what completes or helps to complete the sense of the verb.

- (c) As a nominative absolute.

The *work* finished, the boys went off home.

- (d) In apposition with another noun in the nominative case. By apposition is meant the placing of a word next to another in order to qualify or explain the first.

Robert Redford, the *actor*, was present at the party.
William the *Conqueror* defeated Harold in 1066.

- (e) In the nominative of address (also called the 'vocative').

"Richard, what are you doing?"

Objective Case (The test is to ask *whom* or *what* after the verb or preposition.)

- (a) As the object of a transitive verb.

Where did he leave the *parcel*?

- (b) As the object of a preposition.

The messenger left it on the *doorstep*.

- (c) As the indirect object of verbs of 'giving', where the noun is governed by 'to' understood.

He handed the *woman* the parcel.
(He handed the parcel to the woman.)

Note that after the verb of giving the person stands before the thing given when 'to' is not used.

Similar verbs with two objects are 'pay', 'allow', 'promise', 'teach'.

- (d) As the objective complement of verbs of 'naming' 'electing', etc.

They elected Josh *captain*.

- (e) As a cognate object, where the verb and the noun object are the same concept.

He ran a good *race* .

- (f) As an adverbial complement of time', 'distance', 'cost' or 'weight', completing the sense of the predicate.

You'll have to wait a long *time*.
We hiked eleven *kilometres*.
The book cost thirty *dollars*.
The bin weighed more than a *tonne*.

Possessive Case

- (a) As the owner or possessor of something.

That is the manager's car.

- (b) Used with certain inanimate objects, when there is no actual ownership.

The sun's rays have faded the curtains.

- (c) Used with nouns denoting 'time' or 'distance', when there is again no ownership.

a year's absence
a stone's throw

Person

There are three grammatical persons:

First person:	the speaker or writer
Second person:	the person being spoken to
Third person:	the person or thing being spoken about

All nouns are third person except in the instances where they stand in apposition to a first or second person pronoun.

This grammatical concept of person, while of importance, does not affect the functioning of nouns in English in any way: Its significance is in the functioning of personal and relative pronouns and in verb agreement with nouns and pronouns. A full discussion of the agreement of the verb with its subject is given in the section *Analysis of Verb Agreement*.

A noun is sometimes referred to as a 'substantive'.

Observations on the Function of Case

(a) Accusative Infinitive

In the uses of the nominative case, the statement is made that the verb 'to be' takes the same case after it as before. In a construction given the name of the 'accusative infinitive', in which the object of one verb also acts as the subject of a following infinitive, it is to be noted that a noun or pronoun will be in the objective case by virtue of the verb 'to be' taking the same case after it as before.

I knew the thief to be him.
I knew him to be the thief.

(b) Apposition

A noun used in apposition is in the same case as the noun with which it stands in apposition.

I was informed by Martin his brother.

The word 'Martin' is in the objective case governed by the preposition 'by'. The word 'brother' in apposition with 'Martin' is thus in the objective case.

(c) Possessive Case

- (i) The possessive case is used mainly of human beings and living creatures: the girl's mother, the dog's paw; etc. 'Possession' by inanimate objects is normally indicated by the adjunct *of*:
the windows of the building, the trees of the avenue, the owner of the house, etc.

There are however, as stated, standard uses of the possessive with inanimate objects: the sun's rays, the flowers' leaves, the ship's course, etc.

With persons the *of* adjunct is also used: the prince's birth, the birth of the prince. In a choice between these two forms, the word carrying the meaning stress is usually placed first.

- (ii) With two nouns in apposition, 's is normally added only to the last.

That is my sister Emily's husband.
That is Shane the electrician's van.

Joint possession is indicated by 's on the second noun, separate possession by the addition of 's to both nouns.

Frank and Paul's father
Frank's and Paul's father

- (iii) A noun in the possessive case can be used as the complement of a verb, and as the subject or object of a verb.

"That car is Scott's, I think."
"No. Scott's has been towed away."
"Have they towed Scott's away?"

- (iv) A noun in the possessive case can be the subject of an elliptical clause.

Your car is much bigger than my brother's (is).

- (v) There exists alongside the possessive form 'Emma's friend' another possessive 'a friend of Emma's'. As a first reference this second form should be used -thereafter the former, the distinction being somewhat akin to the difference between the indefinite and the definite article. There can be the third formulation 'a friend of Emma', which is occasionally used for 'a friend of Emma's' in more formal usage.

- (d) Expressions of Time and Distance

An apostrophe is used in phrases denoting a span of time or distance when the noun is singular, but increasingly the apostrophe is omitted with a plural noun.

a week's holiday
a month's absence
a year's work
seven years hard labour
in four weeks time

a night's rest
a hair's breadth
a stone's throw
a three months course
two minutes silence

The Nature of Nouns

Proper Nouns

A proper noun always has a capital letter, a feature different from all other noun types.

Qualities may at times be personified, i.e. they take on the nature of persons, especially in poetry. In these instances the name of the quality bears a capital. As has been mentioned, at times a proper noun gives birth to common nouns without a capital.

As explanation of the three examples already given, the following notes are given.

The word 'sandwich' (two slices of buttered bread with a filling) derives from the fourth Earl of Sandwich, an English nobleman of the 18th century; said to have eaten food in this form so as not to have to leave the gaming-table.

The word 'quisling' (a traitorous collaborator) comes from the name of a Norwegian Army officer who during World War II collaborated with the Germans, who had occupied his country:

The word 'limerick' (a humorous five-line poem) takes its origin from the Irish county of Limerick, where such verse was first practised.

A fairly new source of nouns bearing a capital is found in words asserted to be proprietary names or trade marks. A few such nouns are indicated below; Some dictionaries choose to give these words a capital letter although in normal English the words are usually written with a small letter.

- a Thermos - a vacuum flask
- a Hoover - a vacuum cleaner, originally one manufactured by the Hoover company

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are of various types, which are to be carefully viewed when the question of verb agreement arises.

Words like 'luggage', 'clothing', 'furniture', 'crockery', 'china', 'linen', denoting a number of different things of the same 'class' always take a single verb.

Words like 'people', 'folk', 'clergy', 'police' have a plural meaning but no plural form (except in rare cases such as 'my folks' (my family), but they take a plural verb.)

Words such as 'committee', 'staff', 'family', 'audience', 'congregation', 'board', 'the public', take a singular or plural verb according to circumstances. When the emphasis is on the individualising of its members, then collective nouns take a plural verb. Generally the singular is to be preferred, but this is not always possible. Always watch that you are consistent in the use of relevant pronouns. Do not have a singular verb and then later in the same sentence a plural pronoun.

Many of such words have plural forms, which of course take plural verbs and are referred to with plural pronouns.

Feminine Nouns

A warning is first given against the addition of a French *e* to provide the language with a feminine gender form of some words. Included among such words are 'artist', 'typist', 'pianist', 'journalist', which are doing splendid battle for both man and woman.

Recently there has been an attack on 'sexist' language in English, any gender specific noun containing 'man' being considered unduly male oriented. In an impoverishment of the language, the gender neutral word 'person' is proposed as a substitute for 'man', thus providing 'chairperson' for 'chairman', etc.

In cases where a completely different word is used to denote the male and the female, there would be no problem. A husband is a husband, and a wife is a wife. In those instances where a 'different' word is placed before or after, the practice would appear to be entrenched - in such examples as 'landlord' and 'landlady', 'manservant' and 'maidervant', 'postmaster' and 'postmistress'. A language cannot be undone.

It is words that have traditionally taken a special feminine ending (most often -*ess*) that are in the firing line. What of 'actor' and 'actress', 'waiter' and 'waitress', 'author' and 'authoress'? Is a 'heroine' to become a 'hero'? Recent and present attempts on the part of some to have used only nouns of non-discrimination will not suddenly end. But the English language has never allowed itself to be forced on its way. The solution to the problem lies in a very long wait-and-see.

Perhaps a comment on the three nouns in -*ess* I have just mentioned will be allowed me. The words 'waiter' and 'waitress' seem fairly safe, although I note that *waitpersons* has been coined as a generic if the word is not yet taken up by the dictionaries. The word 'authoress' has never been favoured; something pejorative has always been attached to it. As for 'actress', the great female stars of the silver screen were always 'actresses'. Today female stars are usually referred to as 'actors'.