Alpha Omega Publications®

LANGUAGE ARTS 1101
THE USES AND VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

CONTENTS

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THE USES AND VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

Language is a system of sounds that have meaning to all people with the same cultural background. The purpose of language is communication, or transfer of meaning from one person to another. Spoken language uses sound patterns to accomplish this transfer; written language uses graphic symbols (written signs) to represent the spoken sounds.

Language is a tool. To use it effectively requires practice and training. Skill in the use of language is a necessity in our complicated culture, which relies upon the transfer of ideas in many fields of knowledge. Like any tool, language must be used responsibly. As a Christian you need to be aware of the impact of your words on others and choose your words accordingly.

Well–developed language skills will aid you in presenting a sincere and effective witness. People who understand the needs and frustrations of others and who can put them into words are the most effective teachers, counselors, ministers, and parents. Such people can react to the needs and frustrations of others without becoming angry or self-protective.

This LIFEPAC® will help you to build and strengthen relationships and to achieve goals through the responsible and effective use of language. The ability to distinguish standard (acceptable) English from nonstandard and to use standard English in all situations will insure that your language is understood and accepted by everyone with whom you come in contact. Your relationships with family and friends will improve if you can express your needs and desires clearly. Whether you are writing an essay or being interviewed for a job, the ability to express your ideas in standard English will increase your chance for success. This LIFEPAC will help you to build a command of standard English by teaching you the varieties of acceptable usage and the types of usage to avoid. You will also learn in detail about the purpose and use of a dictionary and the methods of research involved in compiling a standard English dictionary.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have success fully completed this LIFEPAC.

When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between nonstandard and standard English.
2. Cite six kinds of ungrammatical speech and explain the kinds of errors made in each case.
3. Recognize jargon, dialect, and slang in language samples.
4. Write a paragraph using standard English.
5. Recognize examples of legal, medical, and business English.
6. Explain the different ways language is used in prose and poetry and to identify examples of these differences in a passage.
7. Be able to use a dictionary to find the correct pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and use of a word.
8. Explain how dictionaries are compiled.
9. Identify the contributions of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* to lexicography.
10. Explain the historical method of dictionary research.
11. List and explain the use of the parts of a standard English dictionary.
12. List and define a minimum of ten common dictionary abbreviations.
13. List and explain the purpose of at least five different kinds of dictionaries.

Survey the LIFEPAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

I. LEVELS OF ENGLISH USAGE

English usage is divided into two levels, standard and nonstandard. Standard English is the norm (standard) by which English usage is judged by educated people to be acceptable or unacceptable. While members of certain groups can communicate with one another using nonstandard English, such people may find their educational and employment opportunities limited by English which is not readily understood and accepted by educated people. Job opportunities may be lost, employees fired, and applications rejected because a worker cannot present his abilities and strengths to an employer. In school students fail tests, do homework incorrectly, and leave projects incomplete because they are not able to understand and follow directions. Every student should master English for communication that is clear and effective and for usage that is acceptable to the educated community.

To express yourself clearly, you must use language that people understand. In this section you will learn to distinguish standard from nonstandard English and to identify other types of unacceptable speech, including slang, jargon, dialect, and ungrammatical English. Although all these varieties except ungrammatical English have legitimate uses, they are not as readily understood as standard English and therefore are not so useful as methods of communication.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between nonstandard and standard English.
2. Cite six kinds of ungrammatical speech and explain the kinds of errors made in each case.
3. Eecognize jargon, dialect, and slang in language samples.
4. Write a paragraph using standard English.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

dialect	jargon	standard English
idiom	slang	ungrammatical speech

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

NONSTANDARD ENGLISH

Although **standard English** is the language of educated people, users of nonstandard English are not necessarily uneducated or illiterate. If the definition of nonstandard English is expanded to include all English which is not appropriate for public use by educated people, nonstandard English will include **ungrammatical speech**, some **dialect** words, **slang**, and **jargon**.

Ungrammatical speech. Ungrammatical speech is not synonymous with nonstandard usage. To understand the distinction, one must know the difference between *grammar* and *usage*. Grammar is the study of words as they are used in a language, including their form and function and their relationships with one another. Usage is a way of using words and grammatical forms. *I ain't hungry* is not ungrammatical, but it is not currently acceptable usage. *I haven't saw him* is ungrammatical because the past tense form is used in a structural context that requires the past participle. *The ate cow brown the grass* is ungrammatical because the position of the words is not consistent with their grammatical functions. Any construction that incorrectly uses the eight parts of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition, conjunction, and interjection) is ungrammatical.

The grammar (structure) of English is not readily apparent to a non-native speaker. Someone learning English as a second language is likely to be confused by features that are unlike those of his native language. Irregular verbs may be particularly confusing for him since they follow no clearly evident pattern. The type of error such a student might make is illustrated by the sentence, *She bring good food to church supper*. The speaker has forgotten the correct form of the verb *to bring*. *Brings*, *is bringing*, *has brought*, *brought*, or *will bring* all can be used, depending on the time (tense) that the speaker wishes to convey. An adult learning English may simplify the entire problem by using one easily remembered form in all tenses, hoping that his listener will understand what he means.

The sentence *She bring good food to church supper* also illustrates a second type of error frequently made by non-native speakers, the omission of an article. This omission is an understandable error since some languages omit articles or change them according to the gender of the noun. In French, for example, *the chair* is *la chaise* (feminine) and *the pen* is *le stylo* (masculine), and no particular reason for the difference in gender is apparent. Articles are sometimes dropped in English sentences: *She brought good food to church*. The unsuspecting student of English as a second language may have no way of knowing that as soon as *supper* is added to the sentence, *the* must be inserted. Native English speakers learn such patterns as children by listening and imitating. An adult learning English must also listen to learn.

Complete these activities.

1.1   Rewrite the sentence *She bring good food to church supper* using correct grammar.

_____

_____

1.2   What two types of grammatical errors is a non-native speaker of English likely to make?

a. _____

b. _____

A child learning English makes fewer mistakes than an adult learning it as a second language because the child has no prior experience with language. A three- or four-year-old has already mastered the past tense inflection *-ed,* and he applies it indiscriminately to regular and irregular verbs. similarly, he forms the plural of all nouns by adding *-s*. A child might say, for example, "We seed some deers today." Although he cannot explain the rules about *-s* and *-ed* inflections, the child has learned the rules and is trying to apply them. As parents, teachers, and others provide him with more information and examples, the child will learn that *see* and *deer* are exceptions to the rules. Errors that are tolerated in a child because of his limited experience are assumed to indicate disinterest, inattention, or carelessness in adolescents and adults.

A child's ignorance may result in grammatical error, but his problem is a temporary one. The sentence *Me* and *him brang our lunch today* illustrates poor grammar of another sort. Such a sentence marks the speaker as illiterate or poorly educated. His meaning is clear, but the value judgments made by a listener about the speaker's worth and education may overshadow the message he is trying to convey. An error of this sort is usually viewed with less tolerance than an error by a child or foreign speaker since the assumption is that the speaker ought to know better.

Actually, the error is understandable. Why shouldn't *to bring* be divided into the principal parts *bring, brang, brung* so that it conforms with *to sing* and its principal parts, *sing, sang, sung*? The answer lies in the history of the English language.

Linguists who have studied English know that during the Anglo-Saxon period, roughly A.D. 450 to 1050, English had seven classes of strong (irregular) verbs, each with its own pattern for forming principal parts. *To sing* (*singan*) belonged to one class and *to bring* (*bregan*) belonged to another. For this reason *brang* and *brung* do not conform to the structural pattern of *to bring*. Errors of this sort detract from the message a speaker wants to communicate and should be avoided.

The example *Him and me brang our lunch* illustrates a second type of error, the incorrect use of pronouns. Even well-educated people frequently are confused over which form of a pronoun to use. Glaring pronoun errors can be avoided by observing the function of a pronoun in a sentence: subjects take the nominative case, objects take the objective case. Listening to standard speech patterns and imitating speakers who use the language effectively will help you to distinguish correct pronoun usage.

The following examples show pronouns used correctly.

a. *He* and *I* brought our lunch today.

b. *She* and Ellen gave me a party.

c. I asked Bob and *him* to go to church.

d. Everyone brought *his* picture for the poster.

e. The people chosen to represent the eleventh grade were Bruce and *I*.

f. I had to choose between Grace and *him*.

g. I questioned *their* answering those calls on Thursday.

h. Jeanne, *whom* I respect, can do that.

i. Beth is one *who* will win.

Answer *true* **or** *false*.

1.3 _____ *Brang* and *brung* are examples of a child's English.

1.4 _____ *Dad brought presents for her and me* is grammatically correct.

1.5 _____ The principal parts of *to bring,* are *bring, brought, brough*t.

1.6 _____ Foreign speakers learning English often omit prepositions.

1.7 _____ Most speakers of nonstandard English are illiterate.

Educated speakers sometimes make careless errors in English. A common error is the dangling modifier. An example of this careless construction is the sentence, "Being a mother herself, the crying child climbed onto the teacher's lap." The sentence should read, "Being a mother herself, the teacher let the crying child climb onto her lap." The error occurs when the writer or speaker loses sight of the subject-verb-modifier relationships in the sentence. In the first version of the sentence, the phrase *being a mother herself* modifies *child*, which is not at all what the writer intended to say. This complex sentence has two thoughts in it and can be broken down into two simple sentences: *The* teacher *was a mother herself* and *The crying child climbed onto the teacher's lap*.