

GOLDEN GRAMMAR RULES

By Michael Swan

1. Don't use *an* with *own*.

Sue needs **her own** room. (NOT Sue needs an own room.)
I'd like **a** phone line **of my own**. (NOT ... an own phone line.)

2. Use *or rather* to correct yourself.

She's German – **or rather**, Austrian. (NOT She's German – or better, Austrian.)
I'll see you on Friday – **or rather**, Saturday.

3. Use the simple present – *play(s)*, *rain(s)* etc – to talk about habits and repeated actions.

I **play** tennis every Saturday. (NOT I am playing tennis every Saturday.)
It usually **rains** a lot in November.

4. Use *will ...*, not the present, for offers and promises.

I'll **cook** you supper this evening. (NOT I cook you supper this evening.)
I promise I'll **phone** you tomorrow. (NOT I promise I phone you tomorrow.)

5. Don't drop prepositions with passive verbs.

I don't like to be shouted **at**. (NOT I don't like to be shouted.)
This needs to be thought **about** some more. (NOT This needs to be thought some more.)

6. Don't use a present tense after *It's time*.

It's time you **went** home. (NOT It's time you go home.)
It's time we **invited** Bill and Sonia. (NOT It's time we invite Bill and Sonia.)

7. Use *was/were born* to give dates of birth.

I **was born** in 1975. (NOT I am born in 1975.)
Shakespeare **was born** in 1564.

8. *Police* is a plural noun.

The police **are** looking for him. (NOT The police is looking for him.)
I called the police, but **they were** too busy to come.

9. Don't use *the* to talk about things in general.

Books are expensive. (NOT The books are expensive.)
I love **music**. (NOT I love the music.)

10. Use *had better*, not *have better*.

I think you'd **better** see the doctor. (NOT I think you have better see the doctor.)
We'd **better** ask John to help us.

11. Use the present progressive - *am playing, is raining* etc - to talk about things that are continuing at the time of speaking.

I'm **playing** very badly today. (NOT I play very badly today.)
Look! It's **raining!** (NOT Look! It rains!)

12. Use *for* with a period of time. Use *since* with the beginning of the period.

for the last two hours = since 9 o'clock

for three days = since Monday

for five years = since I left school

I've been learning English **for** five years. (NOT I've been learning English since three years.)

We've been waiting **for** ages, since eight o'clock.

13. Don't separate the verb from the object.

VERB OBJECT

She **speaks English** very well. (NOT She speaks very well English.)

Andy **likes skiing** very much. (NOT Andy likes very much skiing.)

14. Don't use the present perfect - *have/has seen, have/has gone* etc - with words that name a finished time.

I **saw** him **yesterday**. (NOT I have seen him yesterday.)

They **went** to Greece **last summer**. (NOT They have gone ... last summer.)

15. English (the language) normally has no article.

You speak **very good English**. (NOT You speak a very good English.)

16. After *look forward to*, we use *-ing*, not an infinitive.

I look forward to **seeing** you. (NOT I look forward to see you.)

We're looking forward to **going** on holiday. (NOT ... to go on holiday.)

17. *Information* is an uncountable noun.

Can you give me **some** information? (NOT Can you give me an information?)

I got a lot of **information** from the Internet. (NOT I got a lot of informations from the Internet.)

18. Use *-ing* forms after prepositions.

I drove there without **stopping**. (NOT I drove there without to stop.)

Wash your hands before **eating**. (NOT Wash your hands before to eat.)

19. Use *this*, not *that*, for things that are close.

Come here and look at **this** paper. (NOT Come here and look at that paper.)

How long have you been in **this** country? (NOT How long have you been in that country?)

20. Use a plural noun after *one and a half*.

We waited one and a half **hours**. (NOT We waited one and a half hour.)

A mile is about one and a half **kilometres**. (NOT A mile is about one and a half kilometre.)

21. Use the present perfect, not the present, to say how long things have been going on.

I've **been waiting** since 10 o'clock. (NOT I'm waiting since 10 o'clock.)

We've **lived** here for nine years. (NOT We live here for nine years.)

22. *The majority* is normally plural.

Some people are interested, but the majority **don't care**. (NOT ... but the majority doesn't care.)

The majority of these people **are** very poor. (NOT The majority of these people is very poor.)

23. Use *too much/many* before (adjective +) noun; use *too* before an adjective with no noun.

There's **too much** noise.

I bought **too much** red paint.

Those shoes are **too expensive**. (NOT Those shoes are too much expensive.)

24. Use *that*, not *what*, after *all*.

I've told you **all that** I know. (NOT I've told you all what I know.)

He gave her **all that** he had.

25. Don't say *according to me* to give your opinion.

I think it's a good film. (NOT According to me, it's a good film.)

In my opinion, you're making a serious mistake. (NOT According to me, you're making a serious mistake.)

26. Don't ask about possibilities with *May you ...?* etc.

Do you think you'll go camping this summer? (NOT May you go camping this summer?)

Is Joan likely to be here tomorrow? (NOT May Joan be here tomorrow?)

27. Use *who*, not *which*, for people in relative structures.

The woman **who** lives upstairs is from Thailand. (NOT The woman which lives upstairs is from Thailand.)

I don't like people **who** shout all the time. (NOT I don't like people which shout all the time.)

28. Use *for*, not *during*, to say 'how long'.

We waited **for** six hours. (NOT We waited during six hours.)
He was ill **for** three weeks. (NOT He was ill during three weeks.)

29. Use *to ...*, not *for ...*, to say why you do something.

I came here **to** study English. (NOT I came here for study English.)
She telephoned me **to** explain the problem. (NOT She telephoned me for explain the problem.)

30. Use reflexives (*myself* etc) when the object is the same as the subject.

I looked at **myself** in the mirror. (NOT I looked at me in the mirror.)
Why are you talking to **yourself**? (NOT Why are you talking to you?)

31. Use a present tense to talk about the future after *when*, *until*, *as soon as*, *after*, *before* etc.

I'll phone you when I **arrive**. (NOT I'll phone you when I will arrive.)
Let's wait until it **gets** dark. (NOT Let's wait until it will get dark.)
We'll start as soon as Mary **arrives**. (NOT We'll start as soon as Mary will arrive.)

32. Before most abstract nouns, we use *great*, not *big*.

I have **great** respect for her ideas. (NOT I have big respect for her ideas.)
We had **great** difficulty in understanding him. (NOT We had big difficulty in understanding him.)

33. Don't use *the* with a superlative when you are not comparing one person or thing with another.

Compare:

- She's **the nicest** of the three teachers.
- She's **nicest** when she's working with small children.
- This is **the best** wine I've got.
- This wine is **best** when it's three or four years old.

34. Put *enough* after, not before, adjectives.

This soup isn't hot **enough**. (NOT This soup isn't enough hot.)
She's old **enough** to walk to school by herself.

35. Don't use a structure with *that ...* after *want* or *would like*.

My parents want **me to go** to university. (NOT My parents want that I go to university.)
I'd like **everybody to leave**. (NOT I'd like that everybody leaves.)

36. After link verbs like *be*, *seem*, *feel*, *look*, *smell*, *sound*, *taste*, we use adjectives, not adverbs.

I feel **happy** today. (NOT I feel happily today.)
This soup tastes **strange**. (NOT This soup tastes strangely.)

37. Use *than* after comparatives.

My mother is three years older **than** my father. (NOT My mother is three years older that/as my father.)

Petrol is more expensive **than** diesel.

38. In questions, put the subject immediately after the auxiliary verb.

Where **are the President and his family** staying? (NOT Where are staying the President and his family?)

Have all the guests arrived? (NOT Have arrived all the guests?)

39. *Used to* has no present.

I **play** tennis at weekends. (NOT I use to play tennis at weekends.)

Where **do** you usually **have** lunch? (NOT Where do you use to have lunch?)

40. Use *through*, not *along*, for periods of time.

All **through** the centuries, there have been wars. (NOT All along the centuries, there have been wars.)

41. Use *can't*, not *mustn't*, to say that something is logically impossible.

It **can't** be the postman at the door. It's only 7 o'clock. (NOT It mustn't be the postman at the door. It's only 7 o'clock.)

If A is bigger than B, and B is bigger than C, then C **can't** be bigger than A. (NOT ... then C mustn't be bigger than A.)

42. Use the present perfect with *This is the first time ... etc.*

This is the first time I've **been** here. (NOT This is the first time I'm here.)

This is the fifth cup of coffee I've **drunk** today. (NOT This is the fifth cup of coffee I drink today.)

43. Use *be*, not *have*, to give people's ages.

My sister **is** 15 (years old). (NOT My sister has 15 years.)

44. Use *between*, not *among*, to talk about position in relation to several clearly separate people or things.

Switzerland is **between** France, Austria, Germany and Italy. (NOT Switzerland is among France, Austria, Germany and Italy.)

The bottle rolled **between** the wheels of the car.

45. We don't normally use *the* before abbreviations that are pronounced like words ('acronyms').

My cousin works for **NATO**. (NOT My cousin works for the NATO.)

The money was given by **UNESCO**. (NOT ... by the UNESCO.)

46. Everybody is a singular word.

Everybody **was** late. (NOT Everybody were late.)
Is everybody ready? (NOT Are everybody ready?)

47. Use *any*, not *some*, in negative sentences.

She hasn't got **any** money. (NOT She hasn't got some money.)
I didn't see **anybody**. (NOT I didn't see somebody.)

48. Use *interested* for feelings; use *interesting* for the things that interest people. The same goes for *bored/boring*, *excited/exciting* etc.

I'm **interested** in history. (NOT I'm interesting in history.)
History is **interesting**.
I'm **bored** in the maths lessons. (NOT I'm boring in the maths lessons.)
I think maths is **boring**.

49. Use *by*, not *until/till*, to mean 'not later than'.

Can you mend this **by** Tuesday? (NOT Can you mend this until Tuesday?)
I'll finish the book **by** tonight. (NOT I'll finish the book till tonight.)

50. Use *like*, not *as*, to give examples.

I prefer warm countries, **like** Spain. (NOT I prefer warm countries, as Spain.)
I eat a lot of meat, **like** beef or lamb.

51. Use *whether*, not *if*, after prepositions.

We talked about **whether** it was ready. (NOT We talked about if it was ready.)
It's a question of **whether** we have enough time. (NOT It's a question of if we have enough time.)

52. Use the present progressive passive, not the simple present passive, to talk about things that are going on just around now.

Our flat is **being decorated** this week. (NOT Our flat is decorated this week.)
Your bill is **just being prepared**, sir. (NOT Your bill is just prepared, sir.)

53. We don't normally use *must* to talk about the past.

I **had to** see the dentist yesterday. (NOT I **must** see the dentist yesterday.)
When I left school, young men **had to** do military service. (NOT When I left school, young men **must** do military service.)

54. When you put two nouns together, be careful to get the right order.

I like eating milk chocolate. (NOT I like eating chocolate milk.)
What's your phone number? (NOT What's your number phone?)

55. Use the *whole of*, not *whole*, before the name of a place.

The whole of Paris was celebrating. (NOT Whole Paris was celebrating.)
He knows the whole of South America very well. (NOT He knows whole South America very well.)

56. We don't normally use progressive forms of *believe*.

I don't believe him. (NOT I'm not believing him.)
Do you believe what she says? (NOT Are you believing what she says?)

57. Don't use *in front of* to mean 'facing' or 'opposite'.

She sat down facing me and looked into my eyes. (NOT She sat down in front of me and looked into my eyes.)
There's a hotel opposite our house. (NOT There's a hotel in front of our house.)

58. Use *it*, not *I*, *he*, *she* etc to identify people.

(on the phone): Hello. It's Alan Williams speaking. ((NOT Hello. I'm Alan Williams.)
'Who's that?' 'It's John.' (NOT Who's that?' 'He's John.')

59. *People* (meaning 'persons') is a plural word.

The people in this town are very friendly. (NOT The people in this town is very friendly.)
Who are those people? (NOT Who is that people?)

60. Use *although* or *but*, but not both together.

Although it was late, she went out.
It was late, but she went out.
(BUT NOT Although it was late, but she went out.)

61. With *if*, we normally use the present to talk about the future.

If I **have** time, I'll phone you. (NOT If I'll have time, I'll phone you.)
I'll be surprised if she **answers** my letter. (NOT I'll be surprised if she'll answer my letter.)

62. Use *almost*, not *nearly*, to say that one thing is very like another.

She is **almost** a sister to me. (NOT She is nearly a sister to me.)
I **almost** wish I had stayed at home. (NOT I nearly wish I had stayed at home.)

63. If you don't do something any more, you *stop doing* it.

The doctor told me to **stop smoking**. (NOT The doctor told me to stop to smoke.)
I'm going to **stop working** so hard. (NOT I'm going to stop to work so hard.)

64. A singular countable noun must normally have a determiner (e.g. *a/an, the, my, that*).

She broke **a/the/that/my** window. (NOT She broke window.)
Where is **the** station? (NOT Where is station?)

65. We don't often use *would* in subordinate clauses; instead, we use past tenses.

Would you follow me wherever I **went**? (NOT Would you follow me wherever I would go?)
I would tell you if I **knew**. (NOT I would tell you if I would know.)

66. With *when*, use the past perfect to make it clear that one thing finished before another started.

When I **had written** my letters, I did some gardening. (NOT When I wrote my letters, I did some gardening.)
When he **had cleaned** the windows, he stopped for a cup of tea. (NOT When he cleaned the windows, he stopped for a cup of tea.)

67. Don't use *can* to talk about the chance that something will happen.

It **may/might/could** rain this evening. (NOT It can rain this evening.)
I think Jane **may/might/could** come tomorrow. (NOT I think Jane can come tomorrow.)

68. Don't use an infinitive after *think*.

I'm thinking **of changing** my job. (NOT I'm thinking to change my job.)
Are you thinking **of going** home this weekend? (NOT Are you thinking to go home this weekend?)

69. Use a singular noun after *every*.

I play tennis every **Wednesday**. (NOT I play tennis every Wednesdays.)
He wrote to every **child** in the village. (NOT He wrote to every children ...)

70. When you say what somebody's job is, use *a/an*.

My sister is **a** photographer. (NOT My sister is photographer.)
I'm studying to be **an** engineer. (NOT I'm studying to be engineer.)

71. Use *at last*, not *finally*, as an exclamation.

At last! Where have you been? (NOT Finally! Where have you been?)
She's written to me. *At last!*

72. Get can mean 'become', but not before nouns.

It's getting *cold*.

It's getting *to be* winter.

(BUT NOT It's getting winter.)

73. Don't use negative questions in polite requests or enquiries.

Could you help me, please? (NOT *Couldn't you* help me, please?)

You haven't seen John, have you? (NOT *Haven't you* seen John?)

74. One negative word is usually enough.

She looked, but she *didn't* see *anything*. (NOT She looked, but she didn't see nothing.)

I *have never* heard of him. (NOT I haven't never heard of him.)

75. Much and many are unusual in affirmative sentences (except in a very formal style).

He has *a lot / plenty* of money. (NOT He has much money.)

My father has travelled to lots of countries. (More natural than *My father has travelled to many countries*.)

76. Don't use since to talk about the future.

I'll be home *from* three o'clock. (NOT I'll be home *since* three o'clock.)

The shop will be closed for two weeks *from* Monday. (NOT The shop will be closed for two weeks *since* Monday.)

77. Singular fraction + plural noun: use a plural verb.

A third of the students *are* from abroad. (NOT A third of the students *is* from abroad.)

A quarter of the trees *have* been cut down.

78. You listen to something.

She never listens *to* me. (NOT She never listens me.)

Listen *to* this! (NOT Listen this!)

79. Don't use the past progressive for past habits.

When I was 20 I *smoked* / I *used to smoke*. (NOT When I was 20 I was smoking.)

I *played* / I *used to play* a lot of football at school. (NOT I was playing a lot of football at school.)

80. Don't use most of directly before a noun.

Most of these people agree with me.

Most people agree with me.

(BUT NOT *Most of* people agree with me.)

81. In 'unreal' conditions with if, use would, not will.

If I knew the price, I *would* tell you. (NOT If I knew the price, I will tell you.)

It *would* be better if he told the truth. (NOT It will be better if he told the truth.)

82. Don't use *later* with an expression of time to talk about the future.

I'll see you *later*.

I'll see you *in a few days*.

(BUT NOT I'll see you a few days later.)

83. Don't use *in case* to mean 'if'.

Compare:

I'll take an umbrella *in case* it rains. (= '... because it might rain.')

I'll open the umbrella *if* it rains. (NOT I'll open the umbrella *in case* it rains.)

84. Use *so* before an adjective, but not before adjective + noun.

I love this country – it's *so beautiful*. (NOT I love this so beautiful country.)

Thanks for your help. That was *so kind* of you. (NOT Thanks for your so kind help.)

85. Only use *unless* to mean 'except if'.

Compare:

I'll see you tomorrow *unless* I have to work.

I'll be really upset *if* I *don't* pass the exam. (NOT I'll be really upset *unless* I pass the exam.)

86. Use *be* with adjectives, not *have* with nouns, to talk about physical sensations like cold, hunger, thirst etc.

I *am* thirsty. (NOT I *have* thirst.)

We *are* cold in this house. (NOT We *have* cold in this house.)

87. Don't use *to*-infinitives after *can, could, will, would, may, might, shall, should* or *must*.

I *can swim*. (NOT I *can to swim*.)

Must you *make* so much noise? (NOT Must you *to make* so much noise?)

88. Use *not*, not *no*, to make sentences negative.

I'm *not* asleep. (NOT I'm *no* asleep.)

We are open on Saturdays, but *not* on Sundays. (NOT ... but *no* on Sundays.)

89. We don't usually use present tenses after past reporting verbs.

She told me she *had* a headache. (NOT She told me she *has* a headache.)

I asked him what he *wanted*. (NOT I asked him what he *wants*.)

90. Use *to* after *married, engaged*.

He's *married to* a doctor. (NOT He's *married with* a doctor.)

My sister is *engaged to* a computer engineer. (NOT My sister is *engaged with* a computer engineer.)

91. Use *which*, not *what*, to refer back to a whole sentence.

She passed her exam, *which* surprised everybody. (NOT She passed her exam, what surprised everybody.)

My father has just climbed Mont Blanc, *which* is pretty good for a man of 75. (NOT ... what is pretty good for a man of 75.)

92. Don't use *the* with *society* when it has a general meaning.

We all have to live in *society*. (NOT We all have to live in the society.)

Rousseau said that *society* makes people evil. (NOT Rousseau said that the society makes people evil.)

93. Use a *to*-infinitive after *want*.

I want *to go* home. (NOT I want go home.)

The children want *to stay* up late. (NOT The children want stay up late.)

94. Use *make*, not *do*, with *mistake*.

I have *made* a mistake. (NOT I have done a mistake.)

You can't speak a language without *making* mistakes. (NOT ... without doing mistakes.)

95. Don't repeat a relative pronoun with another pronoun.

There's the man *that* I work for. (NOT There's the man that I work for him.)

She saw a doctor *who* sent her to hospital. (NOT She saw a doctor who he sent her to hospital.)

96. After a superlative, use *in* with a place expression.

Which is the biggest city *in* the world? (NOT Which is the biggest city of the world?)

This is the best restaurant *in* the city. (NOT This is the best restaurant of the city.)

97. You *explain* and *suggest* something *to* somebody.

Please explain *to* me what you want. (NOT Please explain me what you want.)

Can you suggest a good restaurant *to* us? (NOT Can you suggest us a good restaurant?)

98. *Work* is an uncountable noun.

I'm looking for *work*. (NOT I'm looking for a work.)

My brother has found *a new job*. (NOT My brother has found a new work.)

99. Be careful of the word order in negative infinitives.

It's important *not to work* too hard. (NOT It's important to not work too hard.)

I asked her *not to make* so much noise.

100. Possessives replace articles.

We stayed in *John's* house at the weekend. (NOT We stayed in the John's house at the weekend.)

She's been studying *Britain's* foreign policy since 1980. (NOT She's been studying the Britain's foreign policy since 1980.)