



INSIGHT

ENGLISH HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Underpinning all English usage is the need and desire to express ourselves, to communicate effectively with others, and to participate in and understand a rich cultural heritage. The *Insight English Handbook* is designed for students and others who are interested in improving their use of English. Developing skills in using the English language goes far beyond knowing grammatical rules, covered in Section 1: hence, the inclusion of sections on thinking skills, literature, writing and media texts.

Section 1 is a comprehensive and self-contained reference. It contains numerous examples to illustrate the definitions, rules and conventions of grammar and punctuation, as well as covering tips and strategies for learning spelling conventions and developing vocabulary.

Section 2: Thinking skills introduces this dynamic area by highlighting particular applications to English throughout, particularly the capacity to think both critically and creatively. In this section, thinking skills are developed to solve problems, understand diverse viewpoints and find ways to contribute meaningfully to any discussion, whether written or spoken. The value of clear and focused thinking applies to all subjects, as well as to a purposeful, ongoing approach to learning throughout life.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 focus on the skills of writing and reading, building confidence with the basics as well as with the finer points of literary analysis, the image-rich world of media texts and stylistic conventions. Each of these sections contains a set of activities showing how the thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy can be applied to specific writing and reading tasks.

The *Insight English Handbook* is comprehensive, informative and practical – an essential reference for all students and teachers.



Section 1

Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling, Vocabulary

Learning the rules of grammar, punctuation and spelling will enable you to express yourself with confidence and precision. The ability to express yourself accurately and eloquently will also equip you to think more precisely and in greater depth.

This section outlines the key rules for grammar, punctuation and spelling. These rules are illustrated by examples and accompanied by tips and strategies for learning and applying them. The final chapter in this section looks at the origins of the English language, identifies common Latin and Greek roots, and offers advice about developing your vocabulary to enrich both your spoken and your written communication.

NOTE: Particularly in the areas of grammar and punctuation, there can be disagreement among experts or variations in practice regarding the rule or guideline for using a particular language element. Where such variation exists, this book notes the different practices and recommends the approach advocated by the Australian *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (2003).

Chapter 1: Grammar

Chapter 2: Punctuation

Chapter 3: Spelling

Chapter 4: Vocabulary

CHAPTER 1

Grammar

This chapter outlines key grammatical rules and principles. The chapter begins with the basic building blocks of the English language – the letters of the alphabet – before moving on to explain the parts of speech. A part of speech identifies a function that a word has in a language: the rules of grammar are the rules for classifying, forming and combining the different parts of speech.

The chapter then examines different types of sentences and the relationships between their parts. Finally, strategies for avoiding common causes of confusion are identified.

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Letters and syllables

The English alphabet is derived from the Roman alphabet, which was developed from the Greek alphabet more than 2000 years ago. The Roman alphabet is used for writing the languages of Western Europe, North and South America and Southern Africa. It is also used to write many Eastern European, Australian, Asian and Pacific languages.

Some languages that use the same basic alphabet as English also use *diacritics* – distinguishing marks placed on certain letters which affect their pronunciation. For example, French, among other languages, uses circumflexes and German uses umlauts.

côte (circumflex; French for 'coast') **füllen (umlaut; German for 'to fill')**

These diacritics are usually not retained when a word is adopted into the English language.

Other similar alphabets may also differ from the English alphabet in terms of:

- the number of letters (for example, the Spanish alphabet has 27 letters)
- the pronunciation of letters (for instance, in German the letter 'z' is pronounced 'ts').

Vowels and consonants

The 26 letters in the English alphabet are divided into two groups – **vowels** and **consonants**.

The five vowels are *a, e, i, o* and *u*.

The remaining 21 letters are consonants.

- Sometimes the consonant 'y' is used as a vowel sound as, for example, in 'fly'.
- Similarly, the vowels 'o' and 'u' may occasionally be used to create consonant sounds as, for example, in 'one' or 'ukulele'.

Syllables

Syllables are the building blocks of words. A syllable is a unit of sound. It is usually made up of a **syllable nucleus** (commonly a vowel) and possibly beginning and/or concluding **margins** (commonly consonants).

- cat (one syllable)
- donkey (two syllables – ‘don’ + ‘key’)
- elephant (three syllables – ‘el’ + ‘eph’ + ‘ant’)

There are no absolute rules regarding how to correctly divide a word into syllables. Often, words may reasonably be divided in more than one way. However, the following guidelines will help you to identify the best way to separate a word into syllables.



The word ‘communication’ has five syllables.

- Each syllable must contain at least one vowel or vowel sound.
 - crying → cry + ing
 - pattern → pat + tern
- Generally, it is preferable for second and subsequent syllables to begin with a consonant, except where a suffix beginning with a vowel, such as ‘ing’, is added to a word to form the final syllable.
 - questioning → ques + tion + ing
 - water → wa + ter
- If a word ends in ‘ed’, the ‘ed’ becomes a separate syllable only if it is pronounced separately.
 - crooked → crook + ed
 - wretched → wretch + ed
- If the ‘ed’ ending is not pronounced separately, it should form part of the preceding syllable.
 - complained → com + plained
 - looked → looked (one syllable)
- Generally, if a word contains a doubled consonant it should be divided between these consonants.
 - bigger → big + ger
 - snaffle → snaf + fle
- However, generally, if a word consists of a root word ending in a doubled consonant and a suffix, the doubled consonant should not be separated.
 - grabbing → grabb + ing
 - thinner → thinn + er

Remember that no matter how a word is divided, it will always contain the same number of syllables.

The grave accent

The grave accent is a diacritical mark used in English to indicate that a vowel which is usually silent should be pronounced. It is most commonly seen in poetry or Shakespearean dialogue, when the addition of an extra syllable is required to make the word fit the rhythm of the poem. The example below is from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

Here from Verona art thou banishèd.

The word ‘banished’ is usually pronounced as two syllables, but here the addition of the grave accent on the ‘e’ indicates that it should be pronounced as banish + ed. This ensures that the line has ten syllables, consistent with the form of verse that Shakespeare was writing in.

A grave accent is also occasionally used to identify the difference between two words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently.

- learned (the one-syllable past tense of ‘learn’)
- learnèd (a two-syllable adjective used to describe someone who is well educated)