



In Class Exercises Set A

Social Science Passage 2

Why Grammar Matters

An unmistakable theme in English classes throughout grade school is the constant drilling of grammar. Teachers' pride and students' downfall in these classes seem to originate from knowledge disparity. Many students, especially those who communicate their ideas effectively through the amalgam of customs and preferences that have created "spoken English," find these grammar rules repulsive. However, it is becoming more important than ever to protect the grammar of formal English. The art of writing is decaying. To maintain the world that we know and love as readers and writers, it is imperative to use proper grammar.

Since ancient times, any art ultimately has derived value from its muses: the face that inspired a painting or the moment that inspired a symphony. The issues that move people to write are similarly momentous. Anyone can imagine a moment so intense, so breathtaking that they had to share their experience. The quality of a work of writing, by this same token, is crucial to honor the muse. Grammar is ultimately fundamental to this quality. Reading a good piece of literature is inspiring because of the beauty created by the words on the page. Using proper grammar communicates a degree of organization that guides the structure and development of the idea in a reader, allowing the author greater control. Grammar is crucial to the very existence of writing but much like the symbols we use to represent words, is entirely arbitrary.

Much like the English language itself, grammar is constantly in flux. The Romans didn't use spaces to separate words. Readers were meant to infer where one word ended and the next began. Typewriters introduced the necessity of adding an extra space after periods: a supplement to punctuation in telling where one sentence ended and the next began. Nowadays, with most writing being done on computers, grammarians have declared it okay (and even preferred) to use a single space after a sentence. Those who grew up typing on typewriters, or even those who were just taught

to always press space twice after a sentence, will maintain style. Just when writers settle on one convention, a theorist will propose an alternate, supposedly 'more efficient' way to represent ideas. The benefits in sticking to these seemingly random norms are convention and consistency.

Developing thought in a uniform way allows the greater proliferation of unique ideas. The development of a global culture requires norms of "translation" or cross-cultural communication. A speaker in Illinois may speak differently than one in South Carolina, but their formal writers will express themselves in the same way. Gustav von Straßendorf, a renowned Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin, considers grammar to serve as a necessary cultural equalizer which "smooths over regional distinctions in dialect, leading not only to better levels of mutual comprehension cross-regionally but also higher overall quality of writing. In his study on the subject, von Straßendorf found that those elementary schools which taught and tested grammar consistently produced students who exhibited significantly greater writing success in both high school and college writing assignments. The laws of grammar should thus be strictly enforced in our grade schools. How else will they learn the linguistic discipline necessary to present themselves formally to a learned person?

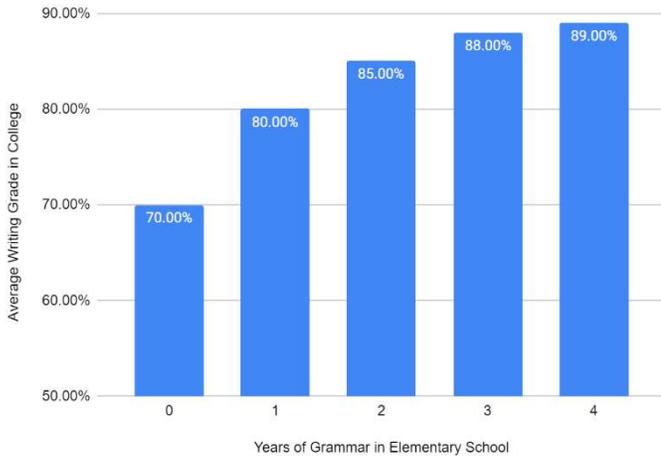
The rules of grammar can certainly be challenged, though, if this challenge serves a purpose. Many an English student has struggled to understand the dialogue of slaves as written by Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, yet Twain's use represents Southern society as it was in that era. Even in the modern day, society is moving towards the use of they as a more inclusive singular neuter pronoun. Nonetheless, just as any mode of communication needs rules to guide it, the field of formal writing must maintain the use of proper grammar.



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Grammar as the Ultimate Equalizer: A Longitudinal Study on Comparative Dialectics
Across American Subcommunities

Percentages averaged across a study of 10,000 students



- 1) Write the paragraph blueprints for the passage:

P1:

P2:

P3:

P4:

P5:

- 2) In the context of the passage as a whole, it is most reasonable to infer that the author believes that proper grammar
- A) is necessary for clear communication in spoken English.
 - B) is necessary to provide structure to formal writing.
 - C) is unnecessary if the author does not naturally communicate in that fashion.
 - D) is impossible to have based on changing norms.

- 3) The author suggests that writers, as artists, have continued to obey the conventions of grammar because
- A) they were taught that way in grade school.
 - B) it is key to understanding people with bad grammar.
 - C) they respect the subjects that they write about.
 - D) it allows them to communicate with people from the South.
- 4) Which of the following most closely describes the effect that fixed structures provide to great writing?
- A) They afford an author greater control over the development of the text.
 - B) They provide a degree of certainty over which segment of the writing is which.
 - C) The author can more effectively persuade those who use the same structures.
 - D) The author better understands what he or she is writing before writing it.
- 5) Which of the following best summarizes the third paragraph?
- A) Grammar is an arbitrary, but necessary, set of rules that changes over time.
 - B) Changes in grammar over time have gradually produced the most effective way to communicate.
 - C) People born in different eras will use different grammar, diminishing grammar's importance.
 - D) The rules of grammar are gratuitous and originate only from grammarians' opinions.
- 6) As it is used in line 35, the phrase "in flux" most nearly means
- A) unhinged.
 - B) changing.
 - C) impractical.
 - D) unnecessary.



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- 7) The example about Roman writing in lines 35 – 38 is used primarily to
- A) emphasize that stylistic writing is dependent upon technology.
 - B) provide a counter-example to the view that grammar is important.
 - C) show how grammar has evolved to express ideas more clearly.
 - D) undermine the effectiveness of modern conventions.
- 8) It can be most reasonably inferred that the author would describe the theorist in Line 49 as
- A) disruptive.
 - B) expendable.
 - C) crucial.
 - D) banal.
- 9) The author indicates that “developing thought in a more uniform way” (Line 54) serves what end of “translation?”
- A) More effective communication to those who are learning English.
 - B) More effective communication in one’s own community in everyday life.
 - C) More effective communication amongst members of a homogeneous population.
 - D) More effective communication through formal writing among people with different dialects.
- 10) The author presents Twain’s challenges to grammar as
- A) necessary and universally applicable.
 - B) underappreciated and always pertinent.
 - C) important but not effective in other scenarios.
 - D) misguided but well-intentioned.
- 11) The author would most likely explain the differences in dialect between a peer-reviewed journal and a daily conversation as:
- A) the difference between art and a quotidian mode of communication.
 - B) a fallacious underlying assumption possessed by academia.
 - C) an evil that should be eliminated from society.
 - D) the necessary harm of our poor educational system.
- 12) Which claim about learning grammar in elementary school is supported solely by the figure?
- A) At least one year of elementary school grammar is necessary for a student to receive an average college writing grade higher than 75%.
 - B) Going from the third to the fourth year of elementary school grammar increases average college writing grades less than going from zero years of grammar to one year of elementary school grammar does.
 - C) Teaching elementary school grammar for all five years from first to fifth grade would result in students with average college writing grades higher than 89%.
 - D) Every student who received two years of elementary school grammar went on to achieve a college writing grade of 85%.