

## Grammar for Teachers: A Guide to American English for Native and Non-native Speakers -Book Review

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**Abstract:** *Grammar is essential in language studies. Grammar books do not only help grammar teachers but they help improve the writing skills of students whose parents can provide them with this essential resource. One grammar book that is comprehensively written in plain language is the second edition of DeCapua's (2017) Grammar for Teachers: A Guide to American English for Native and Non-native Speakers. The book is aimed at improving the skills of teachers of grammar. This book review is done on a chapter-by-chapter basis.*

**Keywords:** American English, Grammar for Teachers, Non-native Speakers

### Book Review

Book Title	: Grammar for Teachers: A Guide to American English for Native and Non-native Speakers, Second Edition
Author	: Andrea DeCapua
Year of Publication	: 2017
ISSN	: 2366-7672
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ISBN	: 978-3-319-33914-6
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### Introduction

Grammar is essential in language studies. Without material or some guidelines on grammar studies, stakeholders of language would find it taxing to appreciate some key concepts. Grammar teachers are strategic stakeholders of grammar studies whose needs should be constantly met. One vital need of every grammar teacher is getting access to resources that can facilitate their learning and subsequent teaching of grammar. Grammar books do not only help grammar teachers but they help improve the writing skills of students whose parents can provide them with this essential resource. In a study conducted by Owusu et al. (2015), it was realized that the educational background of parents has an impact on student's academic writing skills. A lot of books on grammar contain essential information for users; however, one grammar book that is comprehensively written in plain language is the second edition of DeCapua's (2017) Grammar for Teachers: A Guide to American English for Native and Non-native Speakers. Although the book is aimed at improving the skills of teachers of grammar, it is a usual material for students as well. Therefore, I realized that reviewing such useful material would provide my readers (especially those within my context) an opportunity of comprehending the synopsis of the book. The review is done on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

### Chapter1: What is Grammar?

This chapter has four main sections: grammarians and grammar, language and change, linguists and grammar, and prescriptive and descriptive grammar. The essence of this chapter is to introduce readers to the basics of grammar. So, the author examines the 'rules' of grammar from two classical points of view: prescriptive and descriptive. The author reviews the traditional notion of prescriptive grammar (i.e. the grammar taught in schools, and discussed in written and spoken discourse) by citing several examples. The author cites these examples:

1. *Me and John are going to the store.*
2. *John and me are going to the store.*
3. *Me and Sue had lunch.*
4. *Sue and me had lunch.*

In prescriptive grammar, examples 1-4 do not conform to grammar rules since objective pronouns are not permitted to take the place of subjects in a sentence. Therefore, subject pronouns (i.e. *I, you, we, he, she, it, and they*), would be permitted to occur in the highlighted positions in examples 1-4. From a perspective of prescriptive grammar, sentences 1-4 should be:

5. *I and John are going to the store.*
6. *John and I are going to the store.*
7. *I and Sue had lunch.*
8. *Sue and I had lunch.*

Descriptive grammar, however, describes how adult native speakers use their language. In this section, the author re-emphasizes that descriptive grammar does not subscribe to the notion of 'this is right' or 'this is wrong.' The focus of this grammar is to comprehend how language is arranged into meaningful, systematic patterns which are mostly below the level of conscious alertness of most speakers. For example, descriptive grammar would accept a sentence that arranges adjectives this way: *The child painted a wooden beautiful big box*. However, prescriptive grammar would insist that a series of adjectives have got a way of ordering them: *The child painted a big, beautiful, wooden box*.

## Chapter 2: Morphology: Words and their Parts

In chapter 2, the author discusses two sections: word classes and morphology. According to the author, some grammar texts segment parts of speech into **form** and **structure** classes. The form and classification are the major parts of speech (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) that contain the content or meaning of a sentence. The structure classes are the minor parts of speech (i.e. prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, and quantifiers) that supplement specific form classes. The word section in chapter 2, also, discusses the classical segmentation of parts of speech: open word classes, and closed word classes. The closed word classes (i.e. pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, determiners, and quantifiers) do not easily welcome new members into their category. However, the open word classes (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) constantly welcome new members into their category. Most of the words in the form or open class category can function or fit in more than one class as illustrated in examples 9-12:

9. *Please **round** the figure up* (verb).
10. *This is the last **round*** (noun).
11. *Go **round** the building* (adverb).
12. *I have a **round** box* (adjective).

In the second section of chapter 2, the author reviews free morphemes (i.e. words with meaningful units), and bound morphemes (i.e. prefixes and suffixes that do not have meaning on their own. Examples of such morphemes are *pre-*, *non-*, *ex-*, *-ment*, *-ly*, *-ful*, and *-er*). Again, this section reviews derivational and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes are lexical morphemes that change the meaning of a word (examples are *child-childish*, *hand-handly*, and *politic-political*). However, inflectional morphemes are used to indicate a grammatical feature of a major word class (examples are *pens*, *taller*, *laughed*).

### Chapter 3: The Noun Phrase

Chapter 3 discusses the noun phrase (NP) from four perspectives – identifying nouns; count, non-count, and crossover nouns; structure words that signal nouns; and pronouns. The author indicates that in identifying nouns (or noun phrases), certain clues are imperative. These are semantic clues (i.e. the meaning of the word), structural clues (i.e. the characteristics of the word; for example, nouns are usually headed by determiners – *a book*, *the water*, *his pen*), and morphological clues (i.e. the existence of prefix, suffix, or inflectional morpheme of a word should aid in determining its class). This chapter also indicates that one way of determining an NP is to check whether the item is a count noun (i.e. nouns with both singular and plural forms), non-count nouns (i.e. nouns with only one form – *advice*, *air*, *information*, *weather*), and crossover nouns (i.e. nouns with both count and non-count meanings – *oil*, *oils*, *water*, *waters*, *sugar*, *sugars*). Also, the author mentions that structure words that signal nouns are used in identifying NPs. So, noun signals – determiners that precede nouns – are instrumental in this exercise. Articles (i.e. *a*, *an*, *the*), demonstratives (i.e. *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*), and quantifiers (e.g. *many*, *several*, and *some*) are all examples of noun signals. Pronouns (e.g. *I*, *we*, *you*, *he*, *they*, and *it*) are also essential in listing NPs.

### Chapter 4: Adjectives and Adverbs

In chapter 4, the author uses two sections to review adjectives and adverbs. On adjectives, the author mentions that clues that exist in identifying adjectives are semantic clues, morphological clues, structural clues, and the order of adjectives. For the order of adjectives, the author names variables such as *opinion*, *general description*, *size*, *shape*, *colour*, *place of origin*, *material*, and *use/type* as useful guidance, although he disclaims that they are not hard-and-fast rules of word order. On adverbs, the author reviews prototypical/descriptive/manner adverbs (i.e. *adverbs that take the derivational -ly*) with several examples. The author also uses several examples in listing the subclasses of adverbs – frequency, time, place, movement, compass points (i.e. *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west*), degree, attitude, possibility, and focus.

### Chapter 5: Overview of Verbs and Verb Phrases: The Heart of the Sentence

Chapter 5 has five sections on *identifying verbs*, *main and auxiliary verbs*, *transitive and intransitive verbs*, *verbs followed by gerunds and infinitives*, and *phrasal verbs*. The author specifies that the heart of every sentence is the verb since it provides the central meaning to a sentence. So, identifying it will need semantic, morphological, and structural clues. With several examples, the author reviews the main verbs and auxiliary verbs in the second section. However, only primary auxiliary verbs are mentioned in this section since chapter 7 is dedicated to modal auxiliary verbs. In section 3, the author lists some examples and features of transitive, intransitive, and di-transitive verbs and their complements. The use of linking verbs is instrumental in the description of intransitive and transitive verbs. Section 4 discusses verbs followed by gerunds and infinitives. Gerund variations cited in this section are:

- Verb + preposition + gerund (e.g.: He *thought about leaving* early).
- Verb + object + preposition + gerund (e.g.:The police *suspected him of robbing* the bank).

Section 5 classifies phrasal verbs into intransitive and inseparable, transitive and inseparable, and transitive and separable. The section, again, differentiates between phrasal verbs and idioms in this way:

- *Idioms are figurative language, where the meanings of a group of words do not relate to their literal or actual meanings (e.g.: He kicked the bucket – He died).*
- *Phrasal verbs consist of a verb + preposition used as a particle (e.g.: I will do you in – I will kill you).*

## Chapter 6: Time, Tense, and Aspect of Verbs

Chapter 6 discusses five sections of verbs and inflections, present, past, future, and the perfect. Section 1 summarizes verbs and verb inflections that have been already discussed in previous chapters. Section 1 presents a chart about English verb inflections:

English Verb Inflections			
he, she, it	-s	simple present tense, 3rd person singular	walks
I, you, we, they, he, she, it	-ed	simple past tense	walked

Again, the author uses section 1 to make a distinction between time, tense, and aspect. Section 2 discusses the simple present and present progressive tenses, and their uses. Section 3 discusses the simple past and past progressive tenses, and their uses. Section 4 looks at the future tense, and other ways of expressing the future time – be going to present progressive for future, and future progressive. Section 6 provides us with descriptions and examples of the present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect tenses. This section has a lot of examples for readers.

## Chapter 7: Modal Auxiliary Verbs and Related Structures

In chapter 7, the author uses two sections to review the chapter's contents. Section 1 discusses the meanings and use of the modal auxiliary verbs. Here, the functions of the modal auxiliary verbs such as ability, permission and polite requests, possibility or probability present and past time, necessity or obligation, prohibition, advice or suggestion, expectation, unfulfilled expectation, and mistake have been reviewed with several examples. For each of the verbs discussed, the author provides related sentences that perform the same or similar function of the modal verb under discussion. In the second section, the author showcases *would* and *will* modal auxiliary verbs and the other conditional sentences (i.e. *if clauses*). In this section, we see several instances of type 1, 2, and 3 conditional sentences.

## Chapter 8: Basic Sentence Patterns and Major Variations

Chapter 8 of the book is segmented into 4 sections. Section 1 discusses types of sentence constituents from the perspective of noun phrases, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, and adjective and adverb phrases. Section 2 showcases several examples and functions of *yes/no questions*, and *wh-questions*. Section 3 treats the passive by projecting the passive and tense, the passive versus the active, the verb *get*, and understanding the uses of the passive. Section 4 has information on substitution and the first auxiliary rule, and substitution and inversion.

## Chapter 9: Compound Sentences and Introduction to Complex Sentences: Adverbial Clauses

Chapter 9 discusses complex sentences by projecting the various adverbial clauses. This chapter has 3 sections. Section 1 treats the various compound sentences found in the English language. These are clauses and phrases used as compound sentences, compound sentences and coordinators, transitional words or phrases, and sentence position and punctuation. In section 2, the author discusses complex sentences from two main angles: complex sentences and multiple subordinate clauses, and subordinate

clauses and word order. The author uses a lot of examples to project information on the various adverbial clauses. Section 3 discusses reduced adverbial clauses, and reducing adverbial clauses.

### Chapter 10: Complex Sentences Continued: Relative Clauses

Chapter 10 is a continuation of the complex sentences treated in chapter 9. In chapter 10, the author uses three sections to treat relative clauses versus relative pronouns, relative adverbs, and reduced relative clauses. In this chapter, the author talks about relative pronouns such as *which*, *that*, *who*, *when*, *whom*, and *whose*. Again, the author discusses how relative pronouns function as subjects and objects, and how to determine these functions. Another point worthy of mentioning in this chapter is learner difficulties with relative pronouns, and situations where relative pronouns are omitted in sentences.

### Chapter 11: Complex Sentences Continued: Noun Clauses

In chapter 11, the penultimate part of the book, the author uses two sections to publish two main contents – noun clauses, and reported speech. In section 1, the author discusses *that* clauses and its different functions. In his explanation, he showcases different patterns of *that* clauses that pose challenges for most ESL/EFL learners. Again, he explains how noun clauses are derived from questions. The second section of chapter 11 looks at word order in reported speech, changes between direct speech and reported speech, and other patterns found in reported speech. The section also looks at error analysis in reported speech, and how to avoid these errors.

### Chapter 12: Verbal Constructions

Chapter 12, the last major part of the book, is dedicated to verbal constructions. Here, three sections have been used to discuss gerunds and gerund phrases, participles, and participial phrases, and infinitives and infinitive phrases. In the first section, the author explains what a good gerund phrase is, and also explains the functions and learner difficulties of gerunds. In section 2, types of participles, their sentence positions, functions, and time in participial phrases. In section 3, infinitives, and various infinitive phrases have been discussed with several examples.

### Conclusion

The content of the book is uniquely designed. In addition to the contents, each chapter has a summary, practice activities, and answer keys. Apart from the main 12 contents, the book has information-filled appendices. Appendix A has comprehensive information on lists of tables of irregular verbs that have been conjugated. Because irregular verbs are unpredictable, such inclusion will not only help teachers of grammar but all stakeholders of language studies. Appendix B has a table that lists the 8 functions of the inflectional morphemes attached to nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. In Appendix C, some essential spelling rules emanating from inflections have been listed. Appendix D highlights some minor categories of structural words. In Appendix E, the author has itemized some gerunds that occur after verbs. Appendix F showcases the functions of 11 *wh*-question words. While Appendix G contains common adverbial subordinators, Appendix H contains a summary of major learner difficulties. Apart from the appendices, the book has a rich collection of glossary items that basic and complex language registers in plain language for lay stakeholders to understand. Lastly, the book has a list of subject index section that guides readers in their quest for searching for specific content.

### References

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