

GRAMMAR AND PRACTICE

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Grammar and Practice by Susan Isabel Frazee & Chauncey Wetmore Wells

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PREFACE

The cynic has remarked that there are but two sorts of person who can profit by the study of formal grammar: a very young person whose speech-habits are unformed, and an older person who has formed bad habits he wishes to correct. For the former, the cynic adds, grammar, being a science, comes too early; what he needs is a good example, practice, and incidental correction, since use gains by use rather than by rule. For the latter, grammar comes too late, since he is either past helping or he must be reformed bit by bit; he also needs a good example, practice, and incidental correction. Grammar, the cynic concludes, is a useless study.

This little book audaciously pretends to be useful to both these persons. But there is another person whose habits of thought no less than of speech are in process of forming; he is enrolled in the upper class of an elementary school, in the lower class of a high school, or in the junior high school, and in beginning his indispensable training in formal composition finds himself baffled by mere problems of correct grammar, and therefore, much hindered in expression. His need is great. Under the illusory title of "English" he is in many cases being taught a mixture of grammar, rhetoric, and literature, with somewhat indefinite ideas on each and no definite ideas at all as to the right relations of one branch to another. Properly enough, composition is being emphasized in his training, but often without any sound instruction in the grammatical functions of words, phrases and clauses in a sentence; structural grammar particularly is being neglected. This book is meant for this person especially; it is, so to speak, aimed at his head.

For this person's sake the authors have tried to distinguish their work by three things: (1) its colloquial manner, (2) its informal method, and (3) its examples.

We have written colloquially within the limits set by good taste, in the hope of saying things in words a high-school boy will recognize at least, and perhaps accept as like his own. We have arranged the book as informally as we could without destroying its systematic organization, relegating to the appendices most of the paradigms, outlines, and schemes of analysis, those bugbears of the "young idea." We have phrased the definitions and drawn the distinctions as simply, but as strictly, as possible. Minor distinctions we have put into frequent notes and remarks.

Perhaps we have taken the greatest pains with the examples, which are, briefly, of two kinds, the literary and the colloquial. Those who object to using literary examples on the ground that they stimulate a disgust rather than a taste for literature, need only to omit them in teaching. They may at least serve to catch the wandering attention of a browsing boy, and stimulate interest while they emphasize grammatical points, for they are fresh and not hackneyed. The colloquial examples, meant to fill everyday needs, are cast in the terms of everyday speech. The best teachers will go further and supplement if not supplant these examples with those of their own choosing, preferably with those taken from the very words and experiences of the pupils before them.

The authors hope that their plan of exemplifying in complete sentences will be conscientiously followed. Psychologically nothing can be better to form or to correct speech-habits than the practice of *definite predication*, for by way of predication every sentence states a judgment, and by means of it the pupil may learn to attach correct speech-uses to definite ideas. Secondly, nothing in grammatical study can be of more direct and constant support to the study of

composition. Even the study of literature may profit by this practice, since the one fundamental difficulty in understanding books is in grasping the central meaning of each successive sentence, and the habit of seeing sentences as essentially subject and predicate directs the mind to the essential and so trains it to distinguish the important from the unimportant.

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S. I. F.
C. W. W.

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