

**CORRECT ENGLISH IN
THE SCHOOL: TWELVE
GOLDEN HELPS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649327331

Correct English in the School: Twelve Golden Helps by Josephine Turck Baker

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Cover @ 2017

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JOSEPHINE TURCK BAKER

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GOLDEN HELPS**

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA
CORRECT ENGLISH IN THE SCHOOL

TWELVE GOLDEN HELPS

BY

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AUTHOR OF

**CORRECT ENGLISH: A COMPLETE GRAMMAR
TEN THOUSAND WORDS: HOW TO PRONOUNCE THEM
ART OF CONVERSATION: TWELVE GOLDEN RULES
THE CORRECT ENGLISH DRILL BOOK
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**CORRECT ENGLISH PUBLISHING COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

CORRECT ENGLISH IN THE SCHOOL

TWELVE GOLDEN HELPS

GOLDEN HELP NUMBER 1

Transitive and Intransitive Verbs—How to Distinguish Them.

Pupil.—I still have some difficulty with transitive verbs. Now, of course I understand such constructions as, "John struck James;" that is, I know that *struck* is transitive, because it has a direct object to receive its action; *James* being the object—the receiver of the action.

Teacher.—That is right. Now, can you not formulate a simple rule for transitive verbs?

Pupil.—A transitive verb is a verb that has an object to receive its action. I suppose, then, that transitive verbs are always followed by object nouns; that is, nouns in the objective case that receive the action of the verb.

Teacher.—No; that is not so. A better rule is as follows: "A transitive verb is a verb that has a *receiver* for its action."

Pupil.—Why is that wording of the rule better than mine?

Teacher.—Because it is broader in its application,

for the reason that the receiver of the action *may be either the object noun or the subject noun.*

Pupil.—That is just the point which confuses me. You mean, that whenever there is a receiver for the action,—subject or object noun—the verb is then transitive.

Teacher.—That is right. Now give some examples in which the subject is the receiver.

Pupil.—“John was struck by James,”—*John*, the subject, is the receiver; “The pupil was reprimanded by his teacher,”—*pupil*, the subject, is the receiver.

Teacher.—When the object receives the action, what is the *voice* of the verb?

Pupil.—The active voice; and, of course, when the subject of the verb is acted upon, receives the action, the verb is in the passive voice. Somewhere, I have seen the rule that some verbs in the passive voice are followed by predicate complements. I know now why I have never understood that. It is because I have always thought that a verb was transitive only when the *object noun* received the action, and I could not see how a verb could have an object noun, and a predicate complement at the same time.

Teacher.—But you can understand how the verb in the sentence, “He *was elected* president,” can have a receiver for its action in the subject *he*, and at the same time have a predicate complement in the noun *president*

Pupil.—Yes; I see that now, but I used to think that transitive verbs were never followed by predicate complements; and so, formerly, I should not have called *elected* a transitive verb.

Teacher.—You understand perfectly now why it is?

Pupil.—Yes; because it has a receiver for its action in the subject *he*.

Teacher.—And why is *president* the predicate complement?

Pupil.—Because it denotes the same person as the subject.

Teacher.—Now, give me further examples of transitive verbs that may be followed by predicate complements.

Pupil.—“He was made *secretary* and *treasurer*;” “The boy was named *John*;” “The baby was christened *Mary*.”

Teacher.—So we see that a transitive verb is not necessarily followed by an object noun; that it may be followed by a predicate complement, and that when it is, the subject noun is the receiver of the action. But of course, you understand that when the receiver of the action is the subject, the verb is not necessarily followed by a predicate complement.

Pupil.—Oh, yes! I understand that perfectly.

Teacher.—Give some sentences in which the transitive verb is not followed either by a predicate complement or by a direct object.

Pupil.—“John was punished by his teacher;” “The door was opened softly.” I see that whenever a noun in the objective case follows a transitive verb that has the subject noun for the receiver of its action, then the noun in the objective case is always the object of a preposition, and not the direct object of the verb.

Teacher.—There is an apparent exception to this rule

in sentences like these: "He was given a benefit;" "The nations should have been given warning;" but constructions of this kind are censured by grammarians, for the reason that the indirect object is made the subject and receiver of the action. Thus: in the sentence, "He was given a benefit," the real meaning is, "A benefit was given to him." In the sentence, "The nations should have been given warning," the meaning is, "Warning should have been given to the nations." In other words, in the original constructions, there are apparently two receivers for the action, namely, the subject and the object noun, whereas there is in reality but one. It is better, probably, to avoid forms of this kind, and make the subject the indirect object.

Pupil.—Oh! There is one construction that I must not forget to ask you about. In the sentence, "I gave the child an apple," there seems to be two direct objects.

Teacher.—Yes; but there is only one, namely, the word *apple*, *child* being the indirect object, the object of the preposition *to* understood; thus: "I gave *to* the child an apple."

Teacher.—Now give sentences exemplifying all the points considered in this discussion.

Pupil.—"John was struck by James." (The subject is the receiver of the action, and the verb is followed by an *indirect* object; that is, the object of a preposition.) "John struck *James*." (The object noun is the receiver of the action.) "*He* was appointed secretary." (Subject is the receiver of the action, and the verb is followed by a predicate complement; that is, a noun that denotes or refers to the same person as the subject.) "They

called *him John*." (The object is the receiver of the action and is followed by a noun that denotes the same person as the object.)

Teacher.—Now we must discuss the last construction; that is, where the object is the receiver of the action, and is followed by a noun in the same case.

Pupil.—Grammarians seem to have some trouble in agreeing upon the name to give the noun that follows the object noun in constructions of this kind.

Teacher.—Yes, some grammarians call the noun under consideration the *factitive* object; some call it the *supplement*, but whatever its name, it denotes or refers to the same person or thing as the object. I see that you understand this perfectly. Now tell me what is the difference between the factitive object, or supplement, and the predicate complement.

Pupil.—The factitive object, or supplement, denotes, or refers to, the same person or thing as the object, while the predicate complement denotes, or refers to, the same person or thing as the subject.

Teacher.—That is right. Then the factitive object is in the objective case, while the predicate complement is in the same case as the subject.

Pupil.—Then it is always in the nominative case, isn't it?

Teacher.—Yes, unless we designate as the predicate complement the noun or pronoun that follows the infinitive *to be* when the infinitive has a subject.

Pupil.—Oh, yes. In such sentences as "I supposed it to be *him*," *him* is in the objective case, for the reason that *it* is in the objective case. *It* is, of course, in the

objective case, because it is the subject of the infinitive *to be*.

Teacher.—Yes; there are two rules involved in that construction: Rule 1. The subject of an infinitive is always in the objective case. Rule 2. The noun or pronoun after the verb *to be* is always in the same case as the noun or pronoun before the verb *to be*.

Pupil.—Some grammarians always call the predicate complement the predicate *nominative*. How, then, can a noun in the objective case be a predicate complement?

Teacher.—Grammarians differ as to the application of these terms. In such constructions as "I supposed it to be him," we might call *him* simply the complement, and use the term "predicate complement" only when it can be used synonymously with the term predicate nominative. It is necessary for us to adopt specific terms and then to use them understandingly.

Pupil.—I should like to adopt the terms used in CORRECT ENGLISH, in the chapter entitled "The Complement."

Teacher.—Now define an intransitive verb.

Pupil.—An intransitive verb is a verb that expresses existence, state (condition), or action that requires no object to receive it.

Teacher.—Give some examples of intransitive verbs.

Pupil.—"I *am* he"; "I *feel* sad"; "He *looks* ill."

Teacher.—That is correct. Now, do not forget that the distinguishing characteristic of the transitive verb is that it always has a receiver for its action,—the receiver being either the subject or the object noun,—while the intransitive verb either stands alone, or is followed by some word that modifies it or is related to the subject.