

Bas. English Syntax

Basic
English
Syntax

Second edition



Berta M. Flores Mora • Vilma Alfaro Murillo • Marco A. Flores Mora

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Preface

Basic English Syntax is an intermediate grammar textbook for university students of English as a second language, as well as a resource book for teachers of English. It contains detailed explanations on syntactic fundamentals indispensable to the process of learning English.

Although the emphasis is on English structures, the relationship between syntax and semantics has also been taken into account. The exercises are, therefore, designed to challenge the students not only to identify, analyze, and reproduce the syntactic patterns but also to understand their semantic implications.

The material is presented in seven chapters, each focusing on aspects of the syntactic system of English.

Chapter one refers to types of nouns and pronouns. It also contains the rules that govern subject-verb agreement in English. Each rule is illustrated with examples to enhance comprehension.

Chapter two deals with determiners. It includes explanations on most of the uses of the definite and indefinite articles, quantifiers, possessives, and demonstratives. Explanations on when to omit the article “the” are also included.

Chapter three focuses on the use of noun modifiers to expand the noun phrases in the sentence. The first part of the chapter concentrates on determiners and their correct order in the noun phrase. The second part deals with other structures (nouns, adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc.) that function as adjectivals to enrich the noun phrase.

Chapter four refers to the various structures that function as adverbials.

Chapter five focuses on the basic sentence patterns. It includes lists of verbs used in each pattern.

Chapter six deals with coordination or the process of joining parallel structures. It covers both compound sentences and compound structures within the sentence.

Chapter seven is devoted to the process of subordination. Adverbial clauses, adjectival clauses, and nominal clauses are explained thoroughly so that the students can produce complex sentences by using different types of subordinators.

In general, the learner is exposed to rich material that will help him/her produce grammatically correct and stylistically varied texts.

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Chapter **1**

Nouns and Pronouns

Nouns

English nouns can be either common (desk, boy, toy) or proper (October, Martha, Spain). They can also be classified as mass nouns (water, salt, love) or count nouns (a sofa, two experiments, some trees).

Mass Nouns

Mass nouns, also called noncount, are always singular. Here is a list of some commonly used mass nouns.

Gases hydrogen methane nitrogen oxygen propane	Fluids ink milk soup oil water	Natural Phenomena darkness electricity heat sunshine weather
Materials dirt dust flour grass hair rice sand	Academic Fields biology chemistry economics linguistics mathematics physics psychology	Ideas-Emotions-Behavior bravery courage fun happiness love luck peace

Names of languages, in general, are mass nouns.

French is a romance language.

Spanish is spoken in many countries.

Count Nouns

Count nouns can be either singular or plural.

A book is always good company.

Books are always good company.

There are mass-to-count shifts that occur frequently in English. That is, some mass nouns become more concrete if we treat them as countable. The word "beauty," for example, may have this dual mass/count function.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

The beauty of the Braulio Carrillo landscape is one of the tourist attractions in Costa Rica.

The landscape of the Braulio Carrillo National Park is **a real beauty**.

Regular shifts from mass to count involving common nouns are those where the count noun denotes a type or a kind, as in

beer	a beer	beers
cheese	a cheese	cheeses
tea	a tea	teas
wine	a wine	wines

Cheese is made from the curds of milk.

Camembert is **a delicious French cheese**.

A delicatessen sells specially prepared **cheeses**.

or a unit or a serving of, as in

coffee	a cup of coffee	three coffees
chocolate	a bar of chocolate	two chocolates
pastry	a piece of pastry	several pastries

I bought **a bottle of excellent wine** yesterday.

Bring us **three coffees** and **two herb teas**, please.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are generally count nouns. When used as subjects, they may take singular or plural verbs. If the speaker or writer refers to the collective noun as a unit, the verb is singular.

The jury **is** paying attention to the closing arguments.
(the jury as a group of jurors)

If the speaker or writer refers to the individual members that make up the unit, the verb is plural.

The jury **are** paying attention to the closing arguments
to draw **their** conclusions.
(each jury member individually)

The use of a pronoun or possessive determiner that refers back to the collective noun may clarify the meaning.

Note: In American English, virtually all speakers and writers would insert the word “members” after some collective nouns to reduce the dissonance in number.

The jury members are drawing their conclusions.

Collective nouns may be divided into the following categories:

Common Collectives	Unique Collectives	Generic Collectives
(a/the) class	(the) Congress	the aristocracy
crew	the Kremlin	the bourgeoisie
crowd	(the) Parliament	the clergy
family	the Vatican	the intelligentsia
gang		the faculty
government		
group		
jury		
team		
tribe		

Collective nouns are also used to describe a variety of animal groups.

a band of deer	a pod of dolphins
a colony of penguins	a pride of lions
a flock of geese	a remuda of horses
a herd of cattle	a school of fish
a pack of wolves	a swarm of bees

Subject-Verb Agreement

Since subject-verb agreement involves syntactic and semantic aspects, it poses a problem to learners of English at all levels and even to native speakers at times.

For verbs other than **BE**, only the third person singular form in the present tense is explicitly inflected.

Singular	Plural
I run every morning.	We run every morning.
You run every morning.	You run every morning.
He/She/It runs every morning.	They run every morning.

Our approach to subject-verb agreement is prescriptive since we refer to the grammatical rules that govern subject-verb agreement and not to what educated native speakers actually say.

Rules to Make Subjects and Verbs Agree

Rule 1: Singular verbs follow singular subjects, and plural verbs follow plural subjects.

This shirt **is** small.
Those shirts **are** large.

She **works** as a secretary.
They **work** as electricians.

Rule 2: When the expletive **it** appears at the beginning of the sentence in the subject, the verb that follows is always singular.

It was the students who organized the talent show.

Rule 3: When the expletive **there** appears at the beginning of the sentence, the verb agrees with the noun or nouns that follow the verb.

There **is** a map on the wall.
There **are** several maps on the wall.
There **are** a map and a chart on the wall.

Rule 4: Nouns that occur in sets of two take a singular verb when the noun "pair" is present, but a plural verb when "pair" is absent.

This pair of pants **is** nice.
My pants **are** torn.

Rule 5: Collective nouns are followed by singular verbs when they are thought of as units, but they are followed by plural verbs if they are thought of as separate individuals.

The team **is** preparing for the championship.
(the team as a group)
The team **are** picking up **their** gear.
(each player individually)

continued

Rule 6: Titles of books, magazines, poems, movies, or newspapers are singular even when they contain plural forms.

The New York Times **is** a famous newspaper.
A Hundred Years of Solitude **was** written by
García Márquez.

Rule 7: Singular indefinite pronouns (another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, something, such) are followed by singular verbs.

Nothing **is** better than taking a shower
after working out.

Rule 8: Plural indefinite pronouns (both, few, many, several, others) are followed by plural verbs.

Many **come** looking for help.

Rule 9: Indefinite pronouns that are either singular or plural (all, any, more, most, none, some) are followed by a plural verb when the meaning is plural and by a singular verb when the meaning is singular.

All **are** alive. (*survivors*)
All **is** lost. (*hope*)

More **are** required. (*volunteers*)
More **is** required. (*money*)

Rule 10: Nouns that are plural in form are followed by plural verbs if their meaning is plural; otherwise, they are followed by singular verbs.

Statistics **are** important to support an argument.
(*"Statistics" refers to numbers.*)
Statistics **deals** with the collection, organization, and
interpretation of numerical data.
(*"Statistics" refers to the science.*)

continued

Rule 11: Some common nouns ending in “s” are singular and take a singular inflection.

The news **is** bad.

The series **comes** first.

Linguistics **is** an interesting field of study.

Rule 12: A subject made of two nouns joined by “and” is followed by a plural verb unless the two nouns are so closely related that they mean one person, thing, or idea.

The tall man in blue pants and the thin woman
in red **are** my parents.

Rice and beans **is** the main dish in Costa Rica.

Rule 13: A subject composed of two singular nouns joined by “or,” “nor,” “either...or,” “neither...nor,” or “not only...but also” is followed by a singular verb because each noun is thought of as a separate unit.

Either the first statement or the second one **has**
to be eliminated from the declaration.

Rule 14: If the headnoun of the subject is singular, the speaker or writer should ignore all plural forms in intervening prepositional phrases and other expressions, such as “together with,” “along with,” and “as well as.”

The manager, together with his assistants, **is** here.

Rule 15: No matter how two plural nouns are joined, they are always followed by a plural verb.

The boys or the girls **have** to explain what happened
in the classroom.

Rule 16: When we have a plural noun joined to a singular one by “or,” “nor,” “either...or,” “neither...nor,” or “not only...but also,” the verb agrees with the noun that is closer to the verb.

Neither the books nor the purse **is** mine.

Neither the purse nor the books **are** mine.

continued

Rule 17: "A number of" takes a plural verb, but "the number of" takes a singular verb.

A large number of professors **have** retired.

The number of professors in this department **is** 70.

Rule 18: Arithmetical operations take a singular verb.

Addition: Two plus five {**is, equals**} seven.

Subtraction: Ten minus eight {**is, equals**} two.

Multiplication: Three times five {**is, equals**} fifteen.

Division: Twenty divided by two {**is, equals**} ten.

Rule 19: When there is a fraction or percentage in the subject noun phrase, the verb agrees with the noun that is closer to the verb.

70% of the houses **were** destroyed by the flood.

30% of the trash **goes** into the rivers.

Two thirds of the land **is** cultivated.

Two fifths of the books **come** from England.

Rule 20: A clause functioning as a subject takes a singular verb.

That extraterrestrial beings exist **is** controversial.

What they propose **is** amazing.

Rule 21: When the subject of an adjectival clause is a relative pronoun, the verb of the clause agrees with the noun that the pronoun refers to.

This is the chapter that **has** to be edited.

These are the chapters that **have** to be edited.

He is the only one in the audience who **agrees** with the syndic.

John and Don are the only ones in the audience who **agree** with the syndic.

Exercise 1.

Underline or circle the correct form of the verb in parentheses.

1. Most fish (is, are) frozen to be shipped.
2. A number of young men (is, are) reported to have disappeared in the battlefield.
3. Crime and a life of violence (is, are) an occupational choice for some youngsters.
4. Each one of the flotilla of cars and trucks (bears, bear) the emblem of the university.
5. That newspaper often prints news that (is, are) sensationalist.
6. The faculty of the seminary (tends, tend) to be politically conservative.
7. He complained that none of the orders (has, have) been delivered yet.
8. Twenty times five (equals, equal) one hundred.
9. This is the claim that (has, have) to be defended.
10. My pair of glasses (is, are) brand new.
11. The driver, as well as the passengers, (is, are) not allowed to smoke on the bus.
12. Fortunately, only 5% of the students (has, have) to attend remedial classes.
13. Not only the people but also the animals (was, were) very nervous after the earthquake.

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that may take the place of a noun or noun phrase. A pronoun, however, derives its meaning from the context in which it occurs and is not generally limited by the definite and indefinite articles, except for the pronouns “one” and “ones.”

Personal Pronouns

The personal pronoun gets its name “personal” from the fact that it changes form to indicate “person.” Like nouns, pronouns are used in different ways in sentences.

Subject Pronouns

Pronouns in English have three grammatical persons:

first person (*the person speaking*)

second person (*the person spoken to*)

third person (*the person or object spoken about*)

These grammatical persons can be either singular or plural:

singular (*I, you, he, she, it*)

plural (*we, you, they*)

In English, only the third person singular can indicate gender:

masculine (he)

feminine (she)

neuter (it)

These pronouns may function as

1. subject

Junior told me his plans. **He** was going to the game.

2. appositive in subject position

The boys, Tom, Pete and **I**, went by bus.

3. subject complement

It was **he** who bought the tickets.*

*Note, however, that most native speakers use the object pronouns me, him/her, us, and them after the verb **BE**. (*It was him who bought the tickets.*)

Subject pronouns also appear in elliptical (*shortened*) sentences when we compare two or more things.

I am 5 feet tall. My brother is 6 feet tall.

I am shorter. He is taller.

I am shorter than he (is).**

He is taller than I (am).**

I sing as well as he (does). However, he plays the guitar better than I (do).**

He sings as well as I (do). However, I play the guitar worse than he (does).**

**Again, native speakers insist on using me, him/her, us, and them after “than” when the verb is deleted: He is taller than me.

Object Pronouns

Object pronouns are

Singular	Plural
me	us
you	you
him/her/it	them

They function as

1. direct object

John invited **them**.

2. indirect object

He gave **them** flowers.

3. object of a preposition

He danced with **them**.

4. appositive in object position

He danced with the girls, Kim and **her**.

5. subject of an infinitive

He wanted **them** to enjoy the dance.

6. object of a gerund, infinitive, and present participle

He would be happy about inviting **them** again.

(object of a gerund)

He would be glad to invite **them** again.

(object of an infinitive)

He was pleased inviting **them** to the dance.

(object of a present participle)

Exercise 2.

Circle the correct pronoun in the dialogue below.

A divorced man met his son Danny, his ex-wife Patty, and her new husband Bob downtown. Now he is telling a friend about his encounter.

A: I saw Danny, Bob, and Patty downtown.

B: Did you avoid Danny and (they, them)?

A: No, it was (he, him) who spoke first.

B: How did (they, them) react?

A: I think all of (we, us) felt awkward.

B: Do you still have feelings for (she, her)?

A: Yes, but let's keep the secret between you and (I, me).

B: What does Danny say about (he, him)?

A: You know kids. He still thinks I am a better soccer player than (he, him).

Exercise 3.

Fill in the blanks with appropriate personal pronouns.

A Famous Man

Bill Gates, executive officer of Microsoft Corporation, was born in Seattle, Washington, on October 28, 1955. When Gates was a child, his grandmother taught _____ card games and always told _____ to "think smart." By age 9, _____ had read every volume of an encyclopedia. Gates excelled in mathematics and science; however, _____ sometimes got into trouble with his teachers and principal because his behavior was not that good. His parents decided, then, that what _____ needed was more challenging schoolwork. _____ sent _____ to a private school that ended up being perfect for _____ since _____ was one of the first schools in the United States to have a computer.

Gates and his friends spent a lot of time exploring the possibility of making money writing computer programs. At the age of 16, _____ and a friend wrote a class-scheduling program, and _____ were paid more than four thousand dollars for _____. In 1975, only 19 years old, Gates started his own computer company. Today, Bill Gates is one of the richest men in the world.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are

Singular	Plural
mine	ours
yours	yours
his/hers	theirs

Possessive pronouns function as

1. subject

Our books are on that shelf.

Theirs are on the table.

2. direct object

If you go to pick up your mail, could you please bring me **mine**?

3. indirect object

The jury gave Ann's song first prize.

They gave **ours** second prize.

4. object of a preposition

A friend of **yours** is looking for you.

5. subject complement

This purse is **hers**.

Exercise 4.

Fill in the blanks with the pronouns corresponding to the underlined words.

1. It is the citizens' responsibility to keep the streets clean.

The responsibility is _____.

2. This is Paul's umbrella, and that one is Mary's.

This one is _____, and that one is _____.

3. Here is your ticket. It's _____.
4. I saved money to buy this brand new car for myself. It is all _____ now.

Exercise 5.

Write the possessive pronoun to complete the meaning.

1. She bought a house. The house is _____.
2. I sold the little farm I used to have in Atenas. The farm is not _____ anymore.
3. We didn't bring our books, so those books on the table are not _____.
4. Jane and John made the final payment on their dream camper. The camper is _____ at last.
5. Here is the gold ring you have always wanted. Now, you can say that it is _____.

Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are also called compound personal pronouns. They add the suffix **-self** or **-selves** to possessive adjectives or object pronouns.

Singular	Plural
myself	ourselves
yourself	yourselves
himself	themselves
herself	
itself	

There are two ways in which they are used.

Intensive

These pronouns emphasize the subject as the performer of the action.

I saw the student do the experiment **myself** rather than hearing about it from someone else.

I **myself** saw the student do the experiment.

Reflexive

These pronouns follow the verb, refer to the subject, and function as direct object, indirect object, or object of the preposition.

The girl saw **herself** in the mirror.

She bought **herself** a dress.

When the reflexive pronoun is the object of the preposition **by**, the meaning of the pronoun changes. "By herself" now means "on her own" or "alone."

She bought the dress **by herself**.

(Nobody helped her choose or buy the dress.)

Exercise 6.

Complete the text by using a verb or verb + preposition from the given list and an appropriate reflexive pronoun. Use the correct form of the verb in each case.

behave	go by	imagine	look after
care about	hurt	introduce	rely on

Michael Peters and Jenny Sanders were in love, so they hid their relationship from his mother, who opposed it. Mr. Sanders had taught his daughter to _____. He knew that she would solve her problem. He believed that she was old enough to _____. Michael and Jenny _____ on a fantastic Caribbean cruise for their honeymoon, but first Jenny wanted Mrs. Peters' consent. Michael was so selfish that he only _____; he wanted to elope. Jenny knew that if she was going to have a happy marriage, she and Michael had to _____ and act according to Mrs. Peters' conventions. Jenny decided to visit Mrs. Peters. She _____ without telling

Michael. When Mrs. Peters met Jenny, she realized that she would only _____ if she opposed Jenny’s love for Michael. After the wedding ceremony, Mrs. Peters asked all her clan members to _____ to the grateful blushing bride.

Reciprocal Pronouns

There are only two reciprocal pronouns: **each other** and **one another**. These pronouns show that the action is the same for the two persons or objects involved.

They wrote to **each other** on the Internet, but they haven’t met **one another** personally yet.

A: Aren’t the facades of the buildings facing **each other**?

B: Of course, they are facing **one another**.

Indefinite Pronouns

These pronouns refer to an unknown person or object. There are three groups of indefinite pronouns.

1. Those that are always singular and thus take a third person verb form.

everyone	someone	no one	anyone	one	either
everybody	somebody	nobody	anybody	another	neither
everything	something	nothing	anything	each	much
			any	such	

Everyone has a right to live. Therefore, does **anyone** have the right to condemn **another** to die?

Such is the decision we must make.

The pronouns “anyone,” “anybody,” and “anything” are used in questions and negative sentences.

He didn’t tell **anybody** the truth. So, do you have **anything** to say about this case?

The pronouns “no one,” “nobody,” “nothing,” and “neither” are used in sentences where the particle **not** does not appear.

Nobody was content with the result of the trial. For instance, the juror said **nothing** when the reporter approached him.

2. Those that are always plural.

both few many several others

Among men, **many** receive training to kill, yet **few** are free of remorse.

3. Those that can be either singular or plural.

all any more most none some

All are here to offer us an apology.

All is ready for the reception.

Exercise 7.

Fill in the blanks with one of these pronouns: **one**, **another**, **others**.

I found lots of interesting articles in the magazines you loaned me. Do you have a few _____ I can borrow? There were two articles that I enjoyed very much. _____ contained a couple of suggestions on plant care. The other one was on setting the table. This last one said that you should make the best of the dishes you have. Some occasions require a few dishes while _____ require many more. It also said that if you don't have one complete set of dishes, you might combine dishes of different sets, so long as you have _____ in a solid color to place under them. I think I need more information on this. Do you know of a magazine specializing in setting a table? There is _____ that I know of, but I would like to find _____.

Exercise 8.

Change the following sentences as directed.

1. Ask somebody for help if you are in trouble.
(negative) _____
2. I couldn't see anything.
(affirmative) _____
3. I will take neither.
(negative) _____
4. Did she say something to you?
(negative) _____
5. Give this to someone.
(negative) _____

Demonstrative Pronouns

There are four demonstrative pronouns: **this**, **that**, and their corresponding plural forms **these**, and **those**.

I like **those**.
Who's **that**?
Omit **this**.

We also use "this" or "that" to refer to something that has already been said or is about to be said.

Competition and materialism lead to social strife.
This is one of the reasons why poverty still prevails.

The pronoun "those" can be used before adjective clauses with "who."

Those who fear death often act immaturely.
Those who are elderly or infirm, please be seated.
Those who can, please stand.

Those is also used before the construction “who...to.”

Those who want to object, please do so now.

Those who came to help, please come in.

The pronouns “that” and “those” can also be used in comparative structures.

The exams given by Professor Hill are easier than

those given by Professor Mountain.

This theory is more interesting than **that** exposed by the previous lecturer.

Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns ask a question. There are only five of these pronouns.

who	what	whose	which	whom
-----	------	-------	-------	------

They appear as the subject, the direct object, or the object of a preposition in a sentence.

Who gets the good things in life? (subject)

What do you say? (direct object)

To **whom** do you complain? (object of a preposition)

Exercise 9.

Underline and identify the interrogative and demonstrative pronouns in the following dialogue.

A: He then asked, “How is happiness achieved?”

B: How did you answer that?

A: What I said was this: “Four things make up happiness:

1) control in your life, 2) a fulfilling job, 3) some loving support, and 4) a sense of belonging to a group or community.”

B: What is the importance of money in this explanation of yours?

A: Well, money is important for the basic necessities in life, but that is all.

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns introduce a subordinate clause. There are several pronouns of this kind.

who	whom	which	what	whose
whoever	whomever	whichever	whatever	that

These pronouns function as the subject, the direct object, the indirect object, the subject complement, the object complement, or the object of a preposition in the subordinate clause.

Do you know of a book **that** explains reincarnation? (*S*)

I need the book **that** our professor recommends. (*DO*)

I have to find the book in **which** reincarnation is explained. (*OP*)

Do you know **which** it is? (*SC*)

For further reference, see the chapter on Subordination.

About the Authors

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Basic English Syntax is an intermediate grammar textbook for university students of English as a second language, as well as a resource book for teachers of English. It contains detailed explanations on syntactic fundamentals indispensable to the process of learning English. The first half of the book includes the various forms of nominal structures and their functions, as well as the rules for subject-verb agreement in English. It also deals with the different kinds of adjectival and adverbial modifiers. The second half covers sentence patterns, coordination and subordination. Although the emphasis is on English structures, the relationship between syntax and semantics has also been taken into account. The exercises are, only to identify, analyze, and reproduce the syntactic patterns but also to understand their semantic implications.