

**E303\_1**

**English grammar in context**

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## Introduction

Some people think that the difference between speech and writing is that people use longer words in writing. In some writing this is true, but there are also significant differences, many of which are grammatical. In this free course, English Grammar in context, you will develop knowledge and understanding of the differences between spoken and written English, factors that influence our use of grammar and vocabulary in speech and writing, and different ways in which grammar has been described.

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## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

* Understand the differences between spoken and written English
* Understand the factors that influence use of grammar and vocabulary in speech and writing
* Understand the different ways in which grammar has been described.

## 1 Why study grammar?

## 1.1 The power of grammar



I wonder if you understand what Mrs Clark meant, or whether any teacher has ever made a similar remark about your work? In this course we look at some of the factors that contribute to differences between speech and writing and at ways of describing them. However, we shall try to avoid just helping you to get descriptive labels right, though that is important. We want you to discover that grammar is not a boring system for labelling parts of a sentence, but rather that it can give you an insight into how we present ourselves and our view of the world to other people. Our choices within the grammatical system together with our choices of vocabulary are our most powerful ways of putting together the meanings that we want to communicate. An advanced, sophisticated method of communication is what makes human beings so special, so a study of grammar is a way of exploring how these meanings get made.

The key terms we are looking at in this course are listed below. We have highlighted them in bold throughout the text as they are introduced.

Start of Table

|  |
| --- |
| **Key terminology** |
| context | monologue |
| descriptive, prescriptive and pedagogic grammars | question tag |
| dialogue | sociocultural context |
| dysfluency | structural grammar |
| ellipsis | tail [tag] |
| functional grammar | text |
| head [preface] | traditional grammar |
| hesitator | transcript |
| lexicogrammar | utterance |
| lexis | word class [part of speech, grammatical class] |
| mode |  |

Near equivalents are given in [ ].

End of Table

## 1.2 The importance of grammar

We want you to start thinking about what exactly we mean by a term like ‘grammar’ and how and why grammar differs in speech and writing. For some of you this will revise and build on your knowledge of previous study. Activity 1 is a way of raising questions in your mind and you will find some answers or explanations in the rest of the course.

Start of Activity

**Activity 1**

0 hours 10 minutes

Start of Question

Write down a few sentences which explain what you think grammar is about and why it is important. What do you expect to learn by studying English grammar? We shall come back to this activity again at the end of the course.

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session1_Discussion1) **[Activity 1](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session1_Discussion1)**

End of Activity

Many of the uses to which a knowledge of grammar is put are also starting to rely on the application of computer technology to language analysis. The new computational tools are changing the way we describe and understand language. Some of the activities that you will be trying out are important in writing many dictionaries and textbooks about English. But before we move on to recent approaches to grammar we shall take a short diversion into different types of grammatical description.

## 2 Developments in grammatical description

## 2.1 Different types of grammatical description

Start of Activity

**Activity 2**

0 hours 10 minutes

Start of Question

As a way of helping you to consider what we mean by ‘grammar’, look at the following sentences and see how many meanings of the word ‘grammar’ you can identify.

1. It's a really complicated area of grammar.
2. Why don't you look it up in a grammar?
3. Her spelling is good, but her grammar is almost non-existent.
4. Children don't do enough grammar at school.
5. We had to do generative grammar on the course.
6. He needs to work on his grammar and punctuation.
7. Systemic functional grammar is generally associated with the work of Michael Halliday.
8. I've always had problems with German grammar.
9. It's a grammar for learners of English as a foreign language.
10. Oh no! We're doing grammar again today!

(Based on Hewings and Hewings, 2004)

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion1) **[Activity 2](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion1)**

End of Activity

Different theories of language result in different types of grammatical description based on different premises and with different purposes. The first complementary grammatical description we are going to look at is sometimes referred to as traditional or structural grammar, a grammar that divides language on the basis of **parts of speech**, units such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. In looking at parts of speech, or **word classes** as they are also called, grammarians divide up sentences or smaller units into their constituent parts; for example:

Start of Table

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| David | played | his | guitar | in | the | concert |
| noun | verb | possessive determiner | noun | preposition | determiner | noun |

End of Table

Don't worry if you are not familiar with terms such as ‘possessive determiner’; you do not need to understand them to work through this course. In addition to this type of description, grammarians and others can also concentrate on how words combine to make meanings and this gives rise to a **functional grammar** which uses a different descriptive vocabulary. Functional grammar is another key approach to describing language. In a functional grammar the emphasis is on describing words or groups of words according to the function they are fulfilling in a sentence.

Both traditional grammars and functional grammars are largely **descriptive grammars**, that is, they set out to account for the language we use without necessarily making judgements about its correctness. However, the word ‘grammar’, as we have seen, can be used to indicate what rules exist for combining units together and whether these have been followed correctly. For example, the variety of English I speak has a rule that if you use a number greater than one with a noun, the noun has to be plural (I say ‘three cats’, not ‘three cat’). Books which set out this view of language are **prescriptive grammars** which aim to tell people how they should speak rather than to describe how they do speak. Prescriptive grammars contain the notion of the ‘correct’ use of language. For example, many people were taught that an English verb in the infinitive form (underlined in the example below) should not be separated from its preceding to.

So the introduction to the TV series Star Trek

Start of Quote

…to boldly go where no man has gone before

End of Quote

is criticised on the grounds that to and go should not be separated by the adverb boldly. We are not arguing that one form is better than another. Rather, we are going to analyse examples of English as it has been used and look at the different choices that have been made and the factors that might influence those choices.

The final type of grammar is a **pedagogic grammar**. These grammars are generally based on descriptions of ‘standard’ English and are designed to help people learn English if they are not native speakers of the language. Pedagogic grammars often give some of the ‘rules’ of English and lots of examples and practice material. They thus combine elements from descriptive and prescriptive grammars. Your reference grammar is a pedagogic grammar, but it relies on description rather than prescription to explain how English works.

## 2.2 The history of grammatical description

Of these approaches, prescriptive grammars are probably the best known. Originally associated with describing ancient Greek, a system of labelling parts of speech developed into a way of laying down rules on the socially correct usage of language. Because of their origin in the ancient languages, prescriptive grammars introduced rules into English which arguably imposed labels and expectations that had not evolved from within the living language.

Descriptive grammars in the USA and Europe have a more recent history. Linguists, and particularly grammarians, take examples of language that they have read, heard or invented to work out the rules underpinning our language use. The rules underlying actual practice are the structure or grammar of the language. The most notable attempts to make thorough descriptions of language occurred in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century when anthropologists sought to describe North American Indian languages which were disappearing as English became more powerful. There was no written record relating to these languages so careful description of speech patterns was necessary.

At approximately the same time, a European anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, was working among islanders in the Pacific. The importance of his work lies in his understanding that it is not enough to translate words into their rough equivalents in English or another language. In order to understand a language it is necessary to understand the contexts in which language is used and the cultural significance of different choices of words and grammar. Words and their meanings are not independent of their culture or of the situation in which they are being used.

## 2.3 Using grammatical description in context

Malinowski's anthropological work illustrates a more dynamic approach to the study of language which is still influential today, particularly in functional approaches to grammar. Many linguists are exploring ways of grounding their description of language in the cultural, geographical, social and economic conditions stressed by Malinowski. These factors are seen as influencing how language is used in **context**; that is, how variations in what we are doing, who we are communicating with, whether we are face to face or separated in time and space from our listener/reader and so on affect the grammatical and other language choices we make. This is a wide definition of context, and is sometimes called **sociocultural context**. This term is to distinguish it from a narrower meaning of context which refers to the words in the immediate textual environment of the word or grammatical feature that you are looking at. So in the following sentence we might be looking at how, for example, the word wide is used.

Start of Quote

This is a wide definition of context.

End of Quote

All the words that surround it form its immediate context, as does the whole paragraph. The notion of context and its influence on grammatical choice is important in this course. You will have opportunities to reflect on how the local textual context affects grammar and how the wider context of the local culture and the particular situation of people communicating influence the variations that you will observe in grammatical choices.

Start of Activity

**Activity 3**

0 hours 10 minutes

Start of Question

Before you continue reading, think about what the contextual factors are that might be influencing me as I sit here typing this course. What would be affecting me in the wider sociocultural context and in the immediate textual context surrounding each word I write?

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion2) **[Activity 3](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion2)**

End of Activity

## 3 Grammar and contextual variation

## 3.1 Spoken and written modes: an overview

Variations in context that can affect grammatical choice may relate to different **modes** of communication, such as whether it is speech or writing, telephone or email, and so on. I am communicating with you now through the written mode. I have no idea where you are or what is motivating you to look at this course. I don't know if you are alone, inside, outside, whether it is morning, afternoon or evening. To make my meanings clear to you, I type words into a computer that fit together in strings of phrases and clauses with boundaries marked by full stops and initial capital letters. I try to make what I write as clear as possible because you do not have the chance to ask me for clarification. If you were sitting with me here in my study and we were discussing grammar, most of the communication would be oral, though we might also make use of various reference books that I have on my shelves. There would be no full stops or capital letters in my speech. Instead there would be a stream of sounds, some of which would receive greater emphasis than others. The sounds would be broken up with pauses and often I would stop part way through and start to rephrase my thoughts. While we are talking I would be looking at you to make sure that you have understood what I have to say. I would be automatically monitoring your gestures, such as a nodding of the head to indicate understanding or a furrowing of the brow to indicate non-comprehension. You might interrupt and ask me to say something again or retell something in your own words to check your understanding.

In this way, the inherent difference of face-to-face communication and written communication creates different contexts which tend to lead people to communicate meanings differently through making different grammatical choices. The way I speak and write is different from the way you speak and write. However, the way I speak is probably closer to the way you speak (if you are a native speaker of English) than to the way either you or I write. Let me put that in a different way. Language varies for each individual, but it varies in systematic ways in different situations. So the language choices we make when we write will show similarities because the mode is writing and not speech.

To start you thinking about what the study of grammar can tell us about these systematic variations, let us consider the following two bits of language which come from some longer texts which you will read shortly.

1. So she piles her in the car and they go off.
2. Since 1840, maximum life expectancies have increased at a rate of about three months per year.

One of these is spoken and the other is written. You can probably guess that (1) is spoken and (2) is from a written text. What clues are you using to make this judgement? What choices have the speaker in (1) and the writer in (2) made that enable you to identify one as speech and the other as writing? You might say that (2) is more formal and (1) less formal. If you know some grammatical terminology, you might relate this to the long noun phrases like maximum life expectancy in (2) and the less formal ‘phrasal verbs’ such as pile in and go off in (1). In writing we often consider more carefully the words we use. We have time to plan and revise what we have to say to fit in with the meanings we want to convey and the person or people we are addressing. In speech we often do not consider our words so carefully, particularly in casual conversation. However, we are still making choices about how to express ourselves – just so quickly that we rarely have time to reflect on it. The speaker in (1) probably based her selection of informal-sounding phrasal verbs on the basis that she knew the friend she was talking to well. Or perhaps she thought that those choices would add to the contrast between the everydayness of the activities she was describing and what she was about to say next. Most of our language choices are subconscious choices, but they are nevertheless motivated. There must be a reason why you chose one word or expression and not another. One of the factors influencing this choice is whether or not we are in face-to-face contact with the person we are communicating with. While this is a major influence on variation in grammatical choices it is not the only one. There are many factors which influence our choices and this course will help you to see what some of these are.

## 3.2 Spoken and written modes: a comparison

As we have said, one of the most significant factors affecting our grammatical choices is whether we are speaking or writing. We can see these differences if we compare a spoken text and a written text. **Text** here is not being used in its usual sense to mean a piece of writing. ‘Text’ in language analysis can refer both to speech which has been prepared in a written form that can be analysed and to writing.

Start of Activity

**Activity 4**

0 hours 30 minutes

Start of Question

Read Texts 1 and 2 below. Which do you think is spoken language and which written? Make a list of the differences between them that indicate to you that one is a written text and one is a spoken text. Don't worry about using grammatical terminology to describe things – just make notes that mean something to you.

Start of Quote

**Text 1**

A friend of mine told me this amazing story the other day she a … she'd been shopping and she came back to this multi-storey car park that she's been in and it was kind of deserted … erm … and as she was walking towards her car she saw this figure sitting in the passenger seat … and she thought what's that I've been burgled and as she walked towards the car feeling a bit scared this person got out of the car and it was a little old lady… so she thought oh well probably it's not a burglar and … er … anyway she asked her and the woman said … er … apparently she'd been sitting there waiting for her daughter to arrive and the daughter hadn't turned up and she was feeling a bit giddy and faint and so she went and sat in the car … it seems a very strange thing to do … I mean … apparently she'd been trying all the door handles one was open so she sat in it … so anyway… this friend of mine … erm … said … you know … what are you going to do now … when are you meant to be meeting your daughter and the woman said half an hour ago so she said well … what are you going do now and anyway … finally this woman asked her if … er … she could possibly giver her a lift home because it was freezing and this old lady looked really ill and my friend thought oh … I'd better be nice and it was a bit out of her way but she thought she'd better do the … do the … do the right thing … so she piles her in the car and they go off … and as they're driving along she just happens to look across and sees her hands … and they weren't woman's hands at all … they were man's hands … it's got hairy big hairy hands…

(Brazil, 1995, pp. 24–5)

End of Quote

Start of Quote

**Text 2**

Industrialized societies throughout the world are greying. Since 1840, maximum life expectancies have increased at a rate of about three months per year and this trend shows no sign of slowing down. The good news is that people are getting healthier. But one downside is the net impact on healthcare. The overall improvement in health is more than countered by the much greater number of individuals reaching ages at which age-related health problems occur. An obvious example is Alzheimer's disease, which was almost unknown a century ago. The same is true of age-related macular degeneration, now the leading cause of blindness. Ageing is bad for us and yet it happens to everyone. So why does it occur at all?

(Partridge and Gems, 2002, p. 921)

End of Quote

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion1) **[Activity 4](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion1)**

End of Activity

The technical word for vocabulary is **lexis**, and this is combined with the word grammar in the term **lexicogrammar**. In this course our primary focus is on grammar, but it is important to realise that it is often the choices of both lexis and grammar, i.e. lexicogrammar, that convey the meanings we make with language.

## 3.3 Features of speech: dialogue

In [Section 3.2](#sec003_002), Texts 1 and 2 were both **monologues**, that is, one person speaking or writing. Speech is more often a **dialogue**, a communication between two or more speakers and this influences the grammar choices made. We can see this in the dialogue transcribed below.

Start of Quote

A: Oh well she wouldn't be there after the bingo then would she? Probably went to I know that she does go. She there most of the evening and she goes to bingo and

B: Yeah

A: Cos they live down round near Tina's but not like Tina's house before that off Allard Avenue round the back of Allard Sherwood is it?

B: Sherwood, yeah Sherwood Avenue

A: Yeah

B: Yeah they live up yeah.

(BNC-OU spoken corpus)

End of Quote

This transcript looks different from Text 1 and is even more difficult to make sense of. In natural speech, people often speak at the same time as each other, or complete each other's remarks. There are therefore many utterances that seem incomplete when read on the page. Although transcripts of conversation may seem ‘ungrammatical’ in comparison to text specifically composed to be read, the participants in them have no problem understanding and responding. This indicates that the grammatical choices made in speech are often just different from those we make in writing. The use of the context surrounding the participants means that they do not need to make everything explicit. In fact, they need to do different things in conversation and therefore need different grammatical resources. For example, in the context of a face-to-face conversation we see grammatical features such as **question tags** (would she? is it?) which invite a response, either verbally or through gestures such as nodding the head, from the other member of the dialogue. This helps to keep all participants in the conversation involved. Missing out words such as personal pronouns is common, e.g. Probably went to, where the pronoun she is omitted. This is allowable in conversation because such words can be inferred from the surrounding text. It also helps to create a feeling of closeness between the participants. They can leave out words because they can rely on their shared understanding to fill in the meanings.

## 3.4 Features of speech: interaction

Once we start to consider the ongoing interactive nature of speech, many of the differences between speech and writing become explicable.

Start of Activity

**Activity 5**

0 hours 15 minutes

Start of Question

Read the extract below from a conversation among three people. Using your own words, underline and describe things that indicate that this is spontaneous conversation. To get you started, here is an example from the first two lines.

Start of Quote

A: I've got [informal everyday expression with contraction] something [general noun rather than specific] new on the computer [specific reference to a particular computer shows shared context] here [reference to specific place that is clear to those in the conversation].

B: What do you got? [questions reflect interactive style: do and got show a lack of concord (agreement) as perhaps the speaker changed his/her mind halfway through the utterance.]

**A conversation**

A1: I've got something new on the computer here.

B1: What do you got?

A2: If you turn it on, it turns on here and that turns on the monitor, the speakers and the uh, printer so now <unclear> shut off my printer. I just put a, a plug strip in here.

B2: oh okay.

A3: And there there's another switch inside here that allows me to turn everything off, the computer, so like when I go away I can hit that and then everything is down.

C1: The one I like is the uh, little console.

B3: Yeah.

C2: You can, well you know <unclear>

A4: Well you know the other thing is though, see I can shut this off.

End of Quote

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion2) **[Activity 5](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion2)**

End of Activity

Many of these features can be put down to the pressures of thinking and translating our thoughts into comprehensible language in the milliseconds available during face-to-face conversation. They also rely on the sharing of immediate physical contexts and often much sociocultural context knowledge as well. They result in the range of features noted above. Easily observable in most conversations is the increased use of pronouns to refer to people and things in the vicinity or recoverable in the wider context of the conversation. Writing, in contrast, usually uses fuller combinations of nouns and adjectives to specify who or what is being referred to.

## 3.5 Features of speech: ellipsis

Another feature of relying on the shared linguistic or sociocultural context is **ellipsis**. This occurs when some elements of a phrase or other unit of language are not specified because they can be inferred from the context. Ellipsis occurs in both speech and writing, but is more common in speech. The following two-part exchange between myself and my daughter is an illustration. We have a cordless phone which can be used anywhere in the house and my daughter, like many teenagers, is constantly phoning and being phoned by her friends.

Start of Quote

MOTHER Suzanne, have you got the phone up there?

SUZANNE No. Dad's using it.

End of Quote

The ellipsis occurs in the first part of Suzanne's response. No could be expanded to ‘No, I haven't got the phone up here’, but this is unnecessary because we both know what she is saying ‘no’ to.

Start of Activity

**Activity 6**

0 hours 10 minutes

Start of Question

In the examples below there is ellipsis. Try to work out what words have been omitted. The place where they could go has been indicated with the symbol ^. Write a version of each of these sentences with the ellipsed material included.

Start of Quote

1. He and his mate both jumped out, he ^ to go to the women, his mate ^ to stop other traffic on the bridge.
2. Perhaps, as the review gathers steam, this can now change. It needs to ^.
3. A: Have you got an exam on Monday? B: ^ Two exams ^.

(Biber et al., 1999, pp. 156–7)

End of Quote

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion3) **[Activity 6](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion3)**

End of Activity

## 3.6 Features of speech: dysfluency

Another of the differences between conversation and writing is sometimes referred to as **dysfluency.** This is the use of **hesitators** (sounds such as erm, urn), pauses and repetitions which reflect the difficulty of mental planning at speed. We can see all three of these dysfluencies in the next example.

Start of Quote

That's a very good – er very good precaution to take, yes.

(Biber et al., 1999, p. 1053)

End of Quote

There is a pause after good, a hesitator er and repetition of very good. While such dysfluencies might be considered as random occurrences during unplanned speech, analysis of large amounts of conversational data shows that there are systematic patterns in how they are used. Before you read on, consider when you might use a pause as opposed to a hesitator in conversation.

Hesitators are devices for indicating that a speaker has not yet finished their turn, and thus does not want to be interrupted. Hesitators are commonly used at a point when a speaker has not yet finished all they want to say, but they need to give themselves time for forward planning. In contrast, a pause occurs more often at places where a speaker is about to start on a new part of their utterance. They are often followed by words such as okay which signal this new section, as in this example:

Start of Quote

Mmm I just thought you know I okay it's only a cheque I know

(BNC-OU)

End of Quote

This transcript does not have pauses marked. However, when I say it in my head I certainly feel that there would be a pause before okay.

Start of Activity

**Activity 7**

0 hours 5 minutes

Start of Question

Read the examples below which show uses of repetition. Do you think repetitions function more like hesitators or pauses?

Start of Quote

1. I hope that, uh, Audrey sent in that article to the News Press to, to get back with them
2. Hopefully he'll, er, he'll see the error of his ways.

(Biber et al., 1999, p. 1055)

End of Quote

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion4) **[Activity 7](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion4)**

End of Activity

## 3.7 Features of speech: language in real life

In our discussion of dysfluency, we specifically avoided the use of the word ‘error’. In the past, because written grammar was used to judge speech, common features of speech were judged as errors because they do not occur in the more planned environment of written text.

Thus what type of data is analysed is crucial to what the grammatical findings are. We said earlier that grammar descriptions were increasingly being developed on the basis of examining how language is really used. This is in contrast to methods which rely on introspection; that is, grammarians consider examples of the language that they use or that is published and devise ways of accounting for the word combinations they find. This method has two consequences. The first is that it is associated with a particular variety of the language, usually that used by those with higher levels of education. The second is that written rather than spoken language often forms the basis of the description. Nowadays, many authors writing grammar books or books to help learners of English are using large databases of natural language to give them insights into how language is used in real life, not just how we think it is used. We want to show you an example of a grammatical feature which would not have been evident to grammarians using just introspective methods or even those describing actual uses of language based on limited examples.

The example comes from a project investigating grammatical patterns in speech. One of the discoveries made by the project team is referred to as ‘**heads** and **tails**’. These are items that are placed at the beginning or the end of the main utterance. Example (1) illustrates ‘heads’ (in bold) and (2) exemplifies ‘tails’ (in bold).

Start of Quote

* 1. **Paul** in this job that he's got now when he goes into the office **he's** never quite sure where he's going to be sent.
* 2. A: I'm going to have Mississippi Mud Pie **I am**.
* B: I'm going to have profiteroles. I can't resist them **I can't** … just too moreish.

(McCarthy, 1998, p. 78)

End of Quote

I think you will agree that it is highly unlikely that such utterances would occur in writing, with the exception perhaps of dialogue in novels. However, they have been found to occur frequently in speech. They must therefore serve a communicative purpose in speech that would not be necessary in writing. It has been suggested that heads play an important role in helping the listener to prepare for what is coming next. In (1), the word Paul is used as a signal by the speaker to the listener that a new topic of conversation is being introduced. It reflects the importance of helping the listener to process incoming information in the short time span typical of face-to-face interaction. In contrast, tails are often used in evaluative contexts where they reinforce a particular point, as in B's remarks which contrast with A's. These are examples of features that are only now being discovered through analysis of authentic, naturally occurring language, particularly in association with computational analysis.

To illustrate what I mean about not basing our study on how we think we use language, look at the transcripts below from a television news programme. Earlier, in Activity 4, we contrasted speech and writing, now you are looking at two different types of speech.

Start of Activity

**Activity 8**

0 hours 30 minutes

Start of Question

Below are two transcripts from a BBC news programme. In Text 3 you will read a short part of what the newsreader said when introducing a news item on rioting in Genoa during a summit conference of world leaders. In Text 4 you will read what a demonstrator at the conference had to say to a reporter. Read the texts and try to put in punctuation for both of them. Make a note of any differences in how the newsreader organises his speech and how the demonstrator organises his. Before you read the comment you may want to watch the video clip ‘Rioting in Genoa’ and see if you want to change your mind about the punctuation.

Click below to watch the video clip ‘Rioting in Genoa’ .

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Rioting in Genoa

[View transcript - Rioting in Genoa](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Transcript1)

End of Media Content

Start of Quote

**Text 3**

Newsreader: Good evening dozens of people have been hurt in fighting between police and protesters outside the G8 summit of world leaders in Genoa Italian riot police fired tear gas at demonstrators after an anti-globalisation rally erupted into violence

End of Quote

Start of Quote

**Text 4**

Man: A peaceful demonstration broke up round here you know with them mindless thugs that set fire to that bank for a start it's it's just devastating

End of Quote

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion5) **[Activity 8](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion5)**

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 9**

0 hours 40 minutes

Start of Question

Click below to watch the video clip ‘Face to Face’.

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Face to Face

End of Media Content

* Watch the video clip ‘Face to Face’ (a split screen of a man and woman talking). This is an unscripted conversation, though obviously the participants knew they were being filmed.

Try to write a transcript of the conversation. Look out for the features of spoken language that we have discussed in this course.

End of Question

[View discussion -](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion6) **[Activity 9](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Discussion6)**

End of Activity

## Conclusion

Once we start to look at naturally occurring language we see that there is systematic variation in the choices people make. These choices relate to both the meaning and the context of the communication. Specifically we have looked at differences in mode between grammar in speech, especially conversation, and in writing.

You may already be familiar with the idea of variation within a language. For example, there are different varieties of English used in different parts of the world. India, the USA and Australia, for example, all have different varieties of the language we refer to as English. But variety also occurs within countries where different lexical and grammatical choices may be associated with regional dialects. Often people have a choice over whether to use their dialect or to communicate using what has come to be called standard English. Exploring the grammar of English can help us look at a level of variation which is much more subtle – in this free course we have used a very crude distinction between written and spoken modes. Grammar is a tool for adapting our communications in ways which present us and our message in different lights and it is dependent on many contextual factors.

In [Activity 1](#act001) you were asked to note down what you thought grammar was about. Look back at what you wrote down. Have your views changed at all? We hope that in this course you have begun to see that grammar is not just about labelling parts of speech or judging whether something is right or wrong. Studying grammar opens doors into how we organise our world. Exploring grammar can allow you to see how language is intertwined with both describing a view of the world and interacting with others in it.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Solutions

## ****Activity 1****

#### Discussion

In thinking about answers to these questions I have to admit that, in helping to write this course, I have expanded my own knowledge of the variety of interpretations of grammar and the applications of grammatical analysis. I started off many years ago as a teacher of English in various countries around the world, using a form of grammatical description which highlighted ‘correct’ usage such as knowing when to say I have gone and when to say I went. More recently, in analysing academic writing, I have applied a different model of grammar, one which foregrounds the idea of grammar as choosing forms to express different types of meaning. Also, in working with my Open University colleagues, I have discovered other grammatical systems and applications. You might be surprised to realise how many different areas of life utilise an understanding of grammar. Computer scientists involved in creating voice-recognition software need to understand grammar and the frequency of the likely patterns of the language; police experts need to trace typical language patterns used by individuals if they are to detect lies and forged documents; doctors and specialists in language disorders in children or in patients with head injuries need to know the typical grammar associated with particular contexts in order to understand where disruption or dysfunction is taking place. Of course, knowing grammar is a basic part of language learning and teaching and is also necessary in professions such as translating and lexicography (compiling dictionaries).

[Back to - Activity 1](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session1_Activity1)

## ****Activity 2****

#### Discussion

There is clearly overlap in these uses, but I have grouped them into five meanings.

1. In 1 and 8, it refers to the way in which words are organised in a language in order to make correct sentences; here ‘grammar’ is the description of the way in which words combine into larger units, the largest being the sentence.
2. In 2 and 9, it refers to a book in which these organising principles are laid out. Sometimes these are given as a set of rules.
3. In 4 and 10, it refers to the study of these rules.
4. In 3 and 6, it refers to whether a person follows the ‘rules of grammar’.
5. In 5 and 7, it refers to a particular theory of language description.

[Back to - Activity 2](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Activity1)

## ****Activity 3****

#### Discussion

If we are using context in its broader sense then wider influences on my selection of grammar than simply textual context can be considered. My choices of language would reflect my evaluation of the social relations between myself as writer and you as reader. We are strangers, but I wish to create a feeling of friendliness and dialogue within the text. I am conscious that I am trying to achieve a purpose through writing – helping you to understand more about grammar. I therefore select words and put them together in sentences which I hope will convey the point I am trying to make. I can't refer to things in my immediate environment because you do not share it – we are not communicating face-to-face or even simultaneously. I must make myself clear just by the ordering of the words on the page. Such contextual factors can be described and accounted for in a comprehensive description of grammar and such a grammar can also help me to think about how I can make my meanings more clearly.

[Back to - Activity 3](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Activity2)

## ****Activity 4****

#### Discussion

There are many differences between these two texts that you might have noted. Let us look at just a few of them. To start with, Text 1 looks very different from language that you normally see written down and this is the first clue to the fact that it was originally spoken not written. It is a **transcript**, a written version of something that someone has said. This is a very simple transcript, partly because there is only one speaker and partly because of the way it has been transcribed. As you go through the course you will read lots of transcripts and will see that there are many different ways of representing spoken language on a page. In this transcription many of the features that we associate with written language are missing. There are no sentences or paragraphs, for instance. Three full stops (an ellipsis) are used to indicate gaps or pauses, not sentence endings. It is consequently difficult at first to make sense of what is said and to guess how it sounded. The speaker repeats parts of **utterances**, e.g. she'd better do the … do the … do the right thing and hesitates, e.g. er, erm and pauses. (The word ‘utterance’ is used in preference to ‘sentence’ because, as we shall see, the notion of a sentence does not fit neatly with describing spoken language.) The utterances often seem incomplete or to change direction as they proceed, e.g. anyway she asked her and the woman said … er … apparently she'd been sitting there waiting for her daughter to arrive, and there are changes in verb tenses, e.g. but she thought she'd better do the … do the … do the right thing …so she piles her in the car and they go off. The string of events in the story are linked predominately by and, e.g. …apparently she'd been sitting there waiting for her daughter to arrive *and* the daughter hadn't turned up *and* she was feeling a bit giddy and faint *and* so she went and sat in the car.

Many of the features of Text 1 are in direct contrast to Text 2 where the meanings are divided into sentences. Sentences and parts of sentences are linked together not predominately by and, but by other linking words such as but, yet and so which not only link bits of text but give us an idea of the logical unfolding of a text. One of the most significant differences between speech and writing is the amount of information that is packed into written texts in relation to the number of words used.

We can demonstrate this through looking at the following sentence from Text 2.

* 1 The overall improvement in health is more than countered by the much greater number of individuals reaching ages at which age-related health problems occur.
* Imagine how you might convey all that information in speech. If I were in a seminar discussing this I think I might say something like:
* 2 There's been an improvement in health generally but at the same time this has led to problems … more people are living into old age and this is when they start to have illness and diseases that are only associated with being old.
* But if I were talking to friends it might be more like:
* 3 Health's getting better yeah overall … more people are living longer … but but the problem is the problem is they're not as well … they've got lots of diseases and stuff … things that you get when you're old.
* In (2) I have used 42 words (I am counting contracted forms such as they're as one word) and in (3) 36 words to say what took 24 words in the written text. How we convey all this information in relatively few words is one of the main grammatical differences between speech and writing, especially between informal conversation and formal writing. Both formality and whether something is spoken or written can affect the choice of grammatical structures and also the choice of vocabulary. For example, the noun improvement in (1) is replaced by a verb and an adverb in (3):'s getting better. Vocabulary differences can also be seen: for example, the word individuals in (1) is replaced by people in (2) and (3).

[Back to - Activity 4](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity1)

## ****Activity 5****

#### Discussion

Some of the points that you might have noticed were:

Start of Quote

* Avoiding elaborations or specification of meaning, and the use of general nouns and of pronouns e.g. *something* new; the other *thing*.
* Interactiveness with questions: What do you got? (note the dysfluency – a term we introduce more fully later).
* Real-time production by add-on strategy: If you turn it on, it turns on here and that turns on the monitor, the speakers and the uh, printer so now <unclear> shut off my printer.
* Vernacular range of expressions such as contractions (I've), and informal and non-standard usage, e.g. so *like* when I go away; What do you got?
* Repetition and hesitation: I just put a, a plug strip in here.

(Based on Biber, 2002b, pp. 100–101)

End of Quote

[Back to - Activity 5](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity2)

## ****Activity 6****

#### Discussion

Ellipted material is enclosed in 〈 〉.

1. He and his mate both jumped out, he 〈jumped out〉 to go to the women, his mate 〈jumped out〉 to stop other traffic on the bridge.
2. Perhaps, as the review gathers steam, this can now change. It needs to 〈change〉.
3. A: Have you got an exam on Monday?
4. B: 〈I've got〉 two exams 〈on Monday〉.

[Back to - Activity 6](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity3)

## ****Activity 7****

#### Discussion

The repetition of to and he'll are not at major points in the utterance, rather they are like hesitators, they allow forward planning time and indicate that the speaker has not finished. They can also be used to indicate emphasis.

[Back to - Activity 7](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity4)

## ****Activity 8****

#### Discussion

My versions of the transcripts are as follows:

Start of Quote

## ****Text 3****

Newsreader: Good evening. Dozens of people have been hurt in fighting between police and protesters, outside the G8 summit of world leaders in Genoa. Italian riot police fired tear gas at demonstrators after an anti-globalisation rally erupted into violence.

End of Quote

Start of Quote

## ****Text 4****

Man: A peaceful demonstration broke up round here you know with them mindless thugs that set fire to that bank for a start. It's, it's just devastating.

End of Quote

Here we can observe yet more variation in how language is structured. The newsreader is reading from a script, so his words have been carefully worked out for him; his speech has a lot in common with written language and is therefore much easier to punctuate with conventional punctuation. The demonstrator, however, is thinking and formulating his thoughts into words almost simultaneously. We can see the result of this in the pauses, repetition, fillers such as you know and the lack of clear sentence boundaries – features you observed earlier in Activity 4 and other subsequent examples. What is interesting is that before the invention of the tape recorder, people were not consciously aware of many of these features of spoken language. In the same way, having access to lots of language data is also revealing new features of how we actually use language.

[Back to - Activity 8](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity5)

## ****Activity 9****

#### Discussion

## ****Video clip (‘face-to-face’) transcript****

I have not included punctuation in this transcript. However, there are many different ways of transcribing speech. If you have included punctuation that is acceptable.

Start of Quote

MAN but the second thing is I wondered about the characterisation of the lads whether the fact that men playing the girls was actually sharper because it was men or whether it actually missed a lot

WOMAN I'm at a disadvantage here because you know I've observed this these kids at a very much younger age I used to be a teacher and it was exactly the kind of thing that they would've done you know the girls oh the the scene in the hairdressing salon was absolutely beautiful they were all, they were all getting themselves prettified

MAN now there's the caricature with that hairdresser and the hair going 6 feet above the girls’ head

WOMAN yeah yes

MAN you know

WOMAN yes but its its not an anachronism is it I mean it wasn't a bee hive hair do it was a it was a

MAN no no

WOMAN but was it a punk either I I thought

MAN no no

WOMAN that was a little bit over the top

MAN it wasn't punk

WOMAN because he was he was doing all this kind of thing wasn't he behind her head

MAN yes but that's right there were several occasions on that when there were quite clearly where that they took something and just played it well beyond reality

End of Quote

[Back to - Activity 9](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_Activity6)

# Rioting in Genoa

## Transcript

Newsreader

Good evening dozens of people have been hurt in fighting between police and protesters outside the G8 summit of world leaders in Genoa Italian riot police fired tear gas at demonstrators after an anti-globalisation rally erupted into violence. Jon Sopel in Genoa on another day of riots

Correspondent

Saturday afternoon on Genoa seafront. The script was for this to be a peaceful march about 3rd world debt. anarchists and troublemakers had other ideas.

Man

A peaceful demonstration broke up round here you know with them mindless thugs that set fire to that bank for a start it's it's just devastating

The police met force with force firing volley after of volley of choking CS gas, in a bid first to contain the rioters and then drive them back. And inevitably there have been casualties. It's estimated that today alone there have been over 200 people injured.

[Back to - Rioting in Genoa](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session3_MediaContent1)