

Project Gutenberg's How to Speak and Write Correctly, by Joseph Devlin

Copyright laws are changing all over the world. Be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before downloading or redistributing this or any other Project Gutenberg eBook.

This header should be the first thing seen when viewing this Project Gutenberg file. Please do not remove it. Do not change or edit the header without written permission.

Please read the "legal small print," and other information about the eBook and Project Gutenberg at the bottom of this file. Included is important information about your specific rights and restrictions in how the file may be used. You can also find out about how to make a donation to Project Gutenberg, and how to get involved.

**\*\*Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts\*\***

**\*\*eBooks Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971\*\***

**\*\*\*\*\*These eBooks Were Prepared By Thousands of Volunteers!\*\*\*\*\***

Title: How to Speak and Write Correctly

Author: Joseph Devlin

Release Date: September, 2004 [EBook #6409]  
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]  
[This file was first posted on December 8, 2002]  
[Date last updated: May 2, 2006]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

**\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOW TO SPEAK AND  
WRITE \*\*\***

Produced by Tom Allen, Charles Franks  
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

HOW TO  
SPEAK AND WRITE  
CORRECTLY

By  
JOSEPH DEVLIN, M.A.

Edited by  
THEODORE WATERS

THE CHRISTIAN HERALD  
BIBLE HOUSE  
NEW YORK

Copyright, 1910, by  
THE CHRISTIAN HERALD  
NEW YORK

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I  
REQUIREMENTS OF SPEECH  
Vocabulary. Parts of speech. Requisites.

CHAPTER II  
ESSENTIALS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR  
Divisions of grammar. Definitions. Etymology.

CHAPTER III  
THE SENTENCE  
Different kinds. Arrangement of words. Paragraph.

CHAPTER IV  
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE  
Figures of speech. Definitions and examples. Use of figures.

CHAPTER V  
PUNCTUATION  
Principal points. Illustrations. Capital letters.

CHAPTER VI  
LETTER WRITING

Principles of letter writing. Forms. Notes.

CHAPTER VII  
ERRORS

Mistakes. Slips of authors. Examples and corrections. Errors of redundancy.

CHAPTER VIII  
PITFALLS TO AVOID

Common stumbling blocks. Peculiar constructions. Misused forms.

CHAPTER IX  
STYLE

Diction. Purity. Propriety. Precision.

CHAPTER X  
SUGGESTIONS

How to write. What to write. Correct speaking and speakers.

CHAPTER XI  
SLANG

Origin. American slang. Foreign slang.

CHAPTER XII  
WRITING FOR NEWSPAPERS

Qualification. Appropriate subjects. Directions.

CHAPTER XIII  
CHOICE OF WORDS

Small words. Their importance. The Anglo-Saxon element.

CHAPTER XIV  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Beginning. Different Sources. The present.

CHAPTER XV  
MASTERS AND MASTERPIECES OF LITERATURE

Great authors. Classification. The world's best books.

INTRODUCTION

In the preparation of this little work the writer has kept one end in view, viz.: To make it serviceable for those for whom it is intended, that is, for those who have neither the time nor the opportunity, the learning nor the inclination, to peruse elaborate and abstruse treatises on Rhetoric, Grammar, and Composition. To them such works are as gold enclosed in chests of steel and locked beyond power of opening. This book

has no pretension about it whatever,--it is neither a Manual of Rhetoric, expatiating on the dogmas of style, nor a Grammar full of arbitrary rules and exceptions. It is merely an effort to help ordinary, everyday people to express themselves in ordinary, everyday language, in a proper manner. Some broad rules are laid down, the observance of which will enable the reader to keep within the pale of propriety in oral and written language. Many idiomatic words and expressions, peculiar to the language, have been given, besides which a number of the common mistakes and pitfalls have been placed before the reader so that he may know and avoid them.

The writer has to acknowledge his indebtedness to no one in \_particular\_, but to all in \_general\_ who have ever written on the subject.

The little book goes forth--a finger-post on the road of language pointing in the right direction. It is hoped that they who go according to its index will arrive at the goal of correct speaking and writing.

## CHAPTER I

### REQUIREMENTS OF SPEECH

#### Vocabulary--Parts of Speech--Requisites

It is very easy to learn how to speak and write correctly, as for all purposes of ordinary conversation and communication, only about 2,000 different words are required. The mastery of just twenty hundred words, the knowing where to place them, will make us not masters of the English language, but masters of correct speaking and writing. Small number, you will say, compared with what is in the dictionary! But nobody ever uses all the words in the dictionary or could use them did he live to be the age of Methuselah, and there is no necessity for using them.

There are upwards of 200,000 words in the recent editions of the large dictionaries, but the one-hundredth part of this number will suffice for all your wants. Of course you may think not, and you may not be content to call things by their common names; you may be ambitious to show superiority over others and display your learning or, rather, your pedantry and lack of learning. For instance, you may not want to call a spade a spade. You may prefer to call it a spatulous device for abrading the surface of the soil. Better, however, to stick to the old familiar, simple name that your grandfather called it. It has stood the test of time, and old friends are always good friends.

To use a big word or a foreign word when a small one and a familiar one will answer the same purpose, is a sign of ignorance. Great scholars and writers and polite speakers use simple words.

To go back to the number necessary for all purposes of conversation correspondence and writing, 2,000, we find that a great many people who pass in society as being polished, refined and educated use less, for they know less. The greatest scholar alive hasn't more than four thousand different words at his command, and he never has occasion to use half the number.

In the works of Shakespeare, the most wonderful genius the world has ever known, there is the enormous number of 15,000 different words, but almost 10,000 of them are obsolete or meaningless today.

Every person of intelligence should be able to use his mother tongue correctly. It only requires a little pains, a little care, a little study to enable one to do so, and the recompense is great.

Consider the contrast between the well-bred, polite man who knows how to choose and use his words correctly and the underbred, vulgar boor, whose language grates upon the ear and jars the sensitiveness of the finer feelings. The blunders of the latter, his infringement of all the canons of grammar, his absurdities and monstrosities of language, make his very presence a pain, and one is glad to escape from his company.

The proper grammatical formation of the English language, so that one may acquit himself as a correct conversationalist in the best society or be able to write and express his thoughts and ideas upon paper in the right manner, may be acquired in a few lessons.

It is the purpose of this book, as briefly and concisely as possible, to direct the reader along a straight course, pointing out the mistakes he must avoid and giving him such assistance as will enable him to reach the goal of a correct knowledge of the English language. It is not a Grammar in any sense, but a guide, a silent signal-post pointing the way in the right direction.

## THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN A NUTSHELL

All the words in the English language are divided into nine great classes. These classes are called the Parts of Speech. They are Article, Noun, Adjective, Pronoun, Verb, Adverb, Preposition, Conjunction and Interjection. Of these, the Noun is the most important, as all the others are more or less dependent upon it. A Noun signifies the name of any person, place or thing, in fact, anything of which we can have either thought or idea. There are two kinds of Nouns, Proper and Common. Common Nouns are names which belong in common to a race or class, as \_man\_, \_city\_. Proper Nouns distinguish individual members of a race or class as \_John\_, \_Philadelphia\_. In the former case \_man\_ is a name which belongs in common to the whole race of mankind, and \_city\_ is also a name which is common to all large centres of population, but \_John\_ signifies a

particular individual of the race, while Philadelphia denotes a particular one from among the cities of the world.

Nouns are varied by Person, Number, Gender, and Case. Person is that relation existing between the speaker, those addressed and the subject under consideration, whether by discourse or correspondence. The Persons are First, Second and Third and they represent respectively the speaker, the person addressed and the person or thing mentioned or under consideration.

Number is the distinction of one from more than one. There are two numbers, singular and plural; the singular denotes one, the plural two or more. The plural is generally formed from the singular by the addition of s or es.

Gender has the same relation to nouns that sex has to individuals, but while there are only two sexes, there are four genders, viz., masculine, feminine, neuter and common. The masculine gender denotes all those of the male kind, the feminine gender all those of the female kind, the neuter gender denotes inanimate things or whatever is without life, and common gender is applied to animate beings, the sex of which for the time being is indeterminable, such as fish, mouse, bird, etc. Sometimes things which are without life as we conceive it and which, properly speaking, belong to the neuter gender, are, by a figure of speech called Personification, changed into either the masculine or feminine gender, as, for instance, we say of the sun, He is rising; of the moon, She is setting.

Case is the relation one noun bears to another or to a verb or to a preposition. There are three cases, the Nominative, the Possessive and the Objective. The nominative is the subject of which we are speaking or the agent which directs the action of the verb; the possessive case denotes possession, while the objective indicates the person or thing which is affected by the action of the verb.

An Article is a word placed before a noun to show whether the latter is used in a particular or general sense. There are but two articles, a or an and the.

An Adjective is a word which qualifies a noun, that is, which shows some distinguishing mark or characteristic belonging to the noun.

## DEFINITIONS

A Pronoun is a word used for or instead of a noun to keep us from repeating the same noun too often. Pronouns, like nouns, have case, number, gender and person. There are three kinds of pronouns, personal, relative and adjective.

A verb is a word which signifies action or the doing of something. A verb is inflected by tense and mood and by number and person, though the latter two belong strictly to the subject of the verb.

An adverb is a word which modifies a verb, an adjective and sometimes another adverb.

A preposition serves to connect words and to show the relation between the objects which the words express.

A conjunction is a word which joins words, phrases, clauses and sentences together.

An interjection is a word which expresses surprise or some sudden emotion of the mind.

### THREE ESSENTIALS

The three essentials of the English language are: Purity, Perspicuity and Precision.

By Purity is signified the use of good English. It precludes the use of all slang words, vulgar phrases, obsolete terms, foreign idioms, ambiguous expressions or any ungrammatical language whatsoever. Neither does it sanction the use of any newly coined word until such word is adopted by the best writers and speakers.

Perspicuity demands the clearest expression of thought conveyed in unequivocal language, so that there may be no misunderstanding whatever of the thought or idea the speaker or writer wishes to convey. All ambiguous words, words of double meaning and words that might possibly be construed in a sense different from that intended, are strictly forbidden. Perspicuity requires a style at once clear and comprehensive and entirely free from pomp and pedantry and affectation or any straining after effect.

Precision requires concise and exact expression, free from redundancy and tautology, a style terse and clear and simple enough to enable the hearer or reader to comprehend immediately the meaning of the speaker or writer. It forbids, on the one hand, all long and involved sentences, and, on the other, those that are too short and abrupt. Its object is to strike the golden mean in such a way as to rivet the attention of the hearer or reader on the words uttered or written.

### CHAPTER II

## ESSENTIALS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Divisions of Grammar--Definitions--Etymology.

In order to speak and write the English language correctly, it is imperative that the fundamental principles of the Grammar be mastered, for no matter how much we may read of the best authors, no matter how much we may associate with and imitate the best speakers, if we do not know the underlying principles of the correct formation of sentences and the relation of words to one another, we will be to a great extent like the parrot, that merely repeats what it hears without understanding the import of what is said. Of course the parrot, being a creature without reason, cannot comprehend; it can simply repeat what is said to it, and as it utters phrases and sentences of profanity with as much facility as those of virtue, so by like analogy, when we do not understand the grammar of the language, we may be making egregious blunders while thinking we are speaking with the utmost accuracy.

### DIVISIONS OF GRAMMAR

There are four great divisions of Grammar, viz.:

\_Orthography\_, \_Etymology\_, \_Syntax\_, and \_Prosody\_.

\_Orthography\_ treats of letters and the mode of combining them into words.

\_Etymology\_ treats of the various classes of words and the changes they undergo.

\_Syntax\_ treats of the connection and arrangement of words in sentences.

\_Prosody\_ treats of the manner of speaking and reading and the different kinds of verse.

The three first mentioned concern us most.

### LETTERS

A \_letter\_ is a mark or character used to represent an articulate sound. Letters are divided into \_vowels\_ and \_consonants\_. A vowel is a letter which makes a distinct sound by itself. Consonants cannot be sounded without the aid of vowels. The vowels are \_a\_, \_e\_, \_i\_, \_o\_, \_u\_, and sometimes \_w\_ and \_y\_ when they do not begin a word or syllable.

### SYLLABLES AND WORDS



A syllable is a distinct sound produced by a single effort of [Transcriber's note: 1-2 words illegible] shall, pig, dog. In every syllable there must be at least one vowel.

A word consists of one syllable or a combination of syllables.

Many rules are given for the dividing of words into syllables, but the best is to follow as closely as possible the divisions made by the organs of speech in properly pronouncing them.

## THE PARTS OF SPEECH

### ARTICLE

An Article is a word placed before a noun to show whether the noun is used in a particular or general sense.

There are two articles, a or an and the. A or an is called the indefinite article because it does not point out any particular person or thing but indicates the noun in its widest sense; thus, a man means any man whatsoever of the species or race.

The is called the definite article because it points out some particular person or thing; thus, the man means some particular individual.

### NOUN

A noun is the name of any person, place or thing as John, London, book. Nouns are proper and common.

Proper nouns are names applied to particular persons or places.

Common nouns are names applied to a whole kind or species.

Nouns are inflected by number, gender and case.

Number is that inflection of the noun by which we indicate whether it represents one or more than one.

Gender is that inflection by which we signify whether the noun is the name of a male, a female, of an inanimate object or something which has no distinction of sex.

Case is that inflection of the noun which denotes the state of the person, place or thing represented, as the subject of an affirmation or question, the owner or possessor of something mentioned, or the object of an action or of a relation.

Thus in the example, "John tore the leaves of Sarah's book," the distinction between \_book\_ which represents only one object and \_leaves\_ which represent two or more objects of the same kind is called \_Number\_; the distinction of sex between \_John\_, a male, and \_Sarah\_, a female, and \_book\_ and \_leaves\_, things which are inanimate and neither male nor female, is called \_Gender\_; and the distinction of state between \_John\_, the person who tore the book, and the subject of the affirmation, \_Mary\_, the owner of the book, \_leaves\_ the objects torn, and \_book\_ the object related to leaves, as the whole of which they were a part, is called \_Case\_.

## ADJECTIVE

An \_adjective\_ is a word which qualifies a noun, that is, shows or points out some distinguishing mark or feature of the noun; as, A \_black\_ dog.

Adjectives have three forms called degrees of comparison, the \_positive\_, the \_comparative\_ and the \_superlative\_.

The \_positive\_ is the simple form of the adjective without expressing increase or diminution of the original quality: \_nice\_.

The \_comparative\_ is that form of the adjective which expresses increase or diminution of the quality: \_nicer\_.

The \_superlative\_ is that form which expresses the greatest increase or diminution of the quality: \_nicest\_.

\_or\_

An adjective is in the positive form when it does not express comparison; as, "A \_rich\_ man."

An adjective is in the comparative form when it expresses comparison between two or between one and a number taken collectively, as, "John is \_richer\_ than James"; "he is \_richer\_ than all the men in Boston."

An adjective is in the superlative form when it expresses a comparison between one and a number of individuals taken separately; as, "John is the \_richest\_ man in Boston."

Adjectives expressive of properties or circumstances which cannot be increased have only the positive form; as, A \_circular\_ road; the \_chief\_ end; an \_extreme\_ measure.

Adjectives are compared in two ways, either by adding \_er\_ to the positive to form the comparative and \_est\_ to the positive to form the superlative, or by prefixing \_more\_ to the positive for the comparative and \_most\_ to

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

