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ENGLISH  
USAGE

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*Dedication*

To John Eckersley, who first encouraged my interest in this kind of thing.

# Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all the people who have helped me with the preparation of this third edition. A large number of teachers in different countries were kind enough to respond to an enquiry asking how they felt *Practical English Usage* could be improved: their feedback was extremely helpful, and I am very much in their debt. I am also greatly indebted to David Baker, whose comments and suggestions have added very significantly to the accuracy and clarity of the book, and to Hideo Hibino and Kenji Kashino, who have contributed valuable advice on specific problems. Many other teachers and students – too many to name – have taken the trouble to suggest ways in which particular entries could be improved; their input has benefited the book considerably. My use of the internet as a source of instances of authentic usage has been greatly facilitated by the kind assistance of Hiroaki Sato, of Senshu University, Japan, who made available his excellent software tool KwiconGugle. I must also reacknowledge my debt to Jonathan Blundell, Norman Coe, Michio Kawakami, Michael Macfarlane, Nigel Middlemiss, Keith Mitchell, Catherine Walter, Gareth Watkins, and the many other consultants and correspondents whose help and advice with the preparation of the first and second editions continue as an important contribution to the third.

Any pedagogic grammarian owes an enormous debt to the academic linguists on whose research he or she is parasitic. There is not enough space to mention all the scholars of the last hundred years or so on whose work I have drawn directly or indirectly, even if I had a complete record of my borrowings. But I must at least pay homage to two monumental reference works of the present generation: the *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (Longman 1985), and the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, by Huddleston, Pullum and others (Cambridge University Press 2002). Their authoritative accounts of the facts of English structure and usage constitute an essential source of information for anyone writing pedagogic grammar materials today.

Finally, it is with particular pleasure that I express my gratitude, once again, to the editorial, design and production team at Oxford University Press, whose professional expertise is matched only by their concern to make an author's task as trouble-free as possible.

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# Introduction

## The purpose of this book

English, like all languages, is full of problems for the foreign learner. Some of these points are easy to explain – for instance, the formation of questions, the difference between *since* and *for*, the meaning of *after all*. Other problems are more tricky, and cause difficulty even for advanced students and teachers. How exactly is the present perfect used? When do we use past tenses to be polite? What are the differences between *at*, *on* and *in* with expressions of place? We can say *a chair leg* – why not *\*a cat leg*? When can we use the expression *do so*? When is *the* used with superlatives? Is *unless* the same as *if not*? What are the differences between *come* and *go*, between *each* and *every*, between *big*, *large* and *great*, between *fairly*, *quite*, *rather* and *pretty*? Is it correct to say *There's three more bottles in the fridge*? How do you actually say  $3 \times 4 = 12$ ? And so on, and so on.

*Practical English Usage* is a guide to problems of this kind. It deals with over 600 points which regularly cause difficulty to foreign students of English. It will be useful, for example, to a learner who is not sure how to use a particular structure, or who has made a mistake and wants to find out why it is wrong. It will also be helpful to a teacher who is looking for a clear explanation of a difficult language point. There is very full coverage of grammar, as well as explanations of a large number of common vocabulary problems. There are also some entries designed to clarify more general questions (e.g. formality, slang, the nature of standard English and dialects) which students and teachers may find themselves concerned with.

## Level

The book is intended for higher level students of English and for teachers. Being a reference book, it contains information at various levels, ranging from relatively simple points to quite advanced problems.

## Organisation

Problems are mostly explained in short separate entries: the book is more like a dictionary than a grammar in form. This makes it possible to give a clear complete treatment of each point, and enables the user to concentrate just on the question that he or she needs information about. Entries that deal with related topics (e.g. different uses of a tense) are grouped where this is useful, but can be read separately. In longer entries, basic information is generally given first, followed by more detailed explanations and discussions of less important points. Entries are arranged alphabetically by title and numbered in sequence. A comprehensive Index (pages 624–658) shows where each point can be found (see 'How to find things', page x).

## Approach and style

I have tried to make the presentation as practical as possible. Each entry contains an explanation of a problem, examples of correct usage, and (when this is useful) examples of typical mistakes. In some cases, an explanation may be somewhat different from that found in many learners' grammars; this is because