

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EDITION

Second Edition

TOP 20

**Great Grammar
for Great Writing**

Keith S. Folse / Elena Vestri Solomon / Barbara Smith-Palinkas



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**Keith S. Folse
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Overview

Top 20 reviews twenty grammar areas that are essential for good English writing at the intermediate to advanced level. In the review in *Top 20*, however, emphasis is placed on helping students to notice the gap between their own language and correct English. Therefore, the focus of *Top 20* is for students to produce and edit original pieces of writing as they learn how to find and correct common grammatical errors.

New to this Edition

Based on user feedback, the second edition of *Top 20* has been modified in the following ways:

- Inclusion of new chapters on conditionals and on editing essays.
- Revision and reordering of chapters to reflect a progression from nouns to pronouns to verbs.
- Streamlined chapter on confusing words to deal with the most commonly mistaken word pairs.
- Clearer grammar explanations.
- Inclusion of authentic grammar examples from actual academic textbooks. These examples represent seven academic disciplines most common to our students: law, history, psychology, humanities, communication, study skills, and physical science.

Course and Students

Depending on the class level and the amount of writing and work that is done outside of class, there is enough material in *Top 20* for seventy to ninety classroom hours. However, if time limitations exist, the material could be covered in as few as forty-five hours with an advanced-level group, provided that many of the exercises are done as homework.

This book is designed for intermediate to advanced students. However, the passages in many of the exercises are from real textbooks that were written for native speakers. Thus, students will have to understand the grammar points well to be able to apply them in the exercises.

For many students, a major obstacle to future educational plans is not being able to write effectively and easily in English, so the quality of any written work they do is very

important. Poor grammar is often what keeps students from producing a solid piece of original writing. Because grammar is such an integral part of good student writing, the exercises in *Top 20* focus exclusively on grammar problems.

The title *Top 20* refers to the twenty chapters in the book. Each chapter focuses on a common area of difficulty in English grammar, including verb tenses, articles, gerunds and infinitives, noun clauses, modals, pronouns, subject-verb agreement, word forms, and parallel structure. We selected the topics in the chapters of *Top 20* after surveying many experienced teachers, student writers, textbooks, and course curricula.

You, the teacher, are always the best judge of which chapters should be covered and in which order and to what extent. No one knows the language needs of your students better than you do. It is up to you to gauge the needs of your students and then match those needs with the material presented in the chapters of *Top 20*.

Text Organization

As we have said, each of the twenty chapters focuses on one grammatical question that affects the quality of student writing. To facilitate customized instruction, each chapter is independent of all other chapters and can be taught in any order. In addition to the twenty chapters, with their specific grammatical focus, at the back of the book are four appendixes: Appendix 1 reviews the parts of speech; Appendix 2 briefly reviews how to construct comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs; Appendix 3 lists irregular verb forms; and Appendix 4 lists conjunctions and transitions and their functions.

Contents of a Chapter

Following is a description of the common features of each chapter and the types of exercises found in them.



Opening Discussion: Check Your Grammar

Each chapter opens with a Check Your Grammar exercise designed to test students' knowledge of the grammar point to be examined, using subject matter drawn from one of seven academic areas familiar to the majority of students. After the students have done the exercise and discussed their findings with a partner, it is up to the teacher to go over the exercise with the students to help them understand the nature of the grammar problem they will be studying.

Grammar Reviews and Explanations

The grammar reviews and explanations cover problems that characterize student *writing*, not speaking. *Top 20* is not meant to be a complete grammar book; instead, it reviews common problem areas and helps students focus their attention on the gap between what they are writing and what they should be writing. For this reason, certain grammar points have been given special emphasis, others very little. For example, we have not focused much on the future perfect tense because our analysis of student writing needs indicates that attention to other areas such as the present perfect and consistent verb tense usage is the more prudent approach.

Exercise Types

Second-language acquisition (SLA) research shows the importance of awareness in the second-language learning process. Students using this text have had basic grammar instruction, but many continue to make errors. The exercises in *Top 20* are designed to raise students' consciousness of the types of errors they make in their writing. Studies have also demonstrated that the number of exercises—frequency of practice—is as important as the nature of the exercises themselves (Folse 2006, Fotos 2002, and Laufer and Hulstijn 1998).

Original Sentences Some exercises ask students to write original sentences to illustrate a very specific aspect of a given grammar point. We recommend that you have students discuss their answers in groups and possibly write some of their sentences on the board for general class discussion about what is correct, what is not correct, and why a gap between the two exists.

Selecting the Correct Form Some exercises present students with two to three answer options, and students must underline or circle the correct answer. The incorrect answer options are almost always forms that students with various first languages would use. Thus, this kind of exercise is harder than it might appear.

Editing

Exercise

Editing of Sentences Because a paragraph is only as good as the sentences in it, the exercises on editing sentences present students with sentences one at a time. The sentences are often about a single topic and are related to each other. Students are asked to focus on one specific grammar issue—for example, verb tenses—and check for that specific grammar point in each of the sentences.

Editing of Paragraphs In the exercises on editing paragraphs, students are given a paragraph written for native speakers. Common sources for the exercise text are business books, history books, education texts, speech books, sociology texts, the Internet, and newspapers. Students are not told where the errors are, but they are always told how many errors to look for or what type of errors there are.

These two points are important in helping students practice looking for, finding, and correcting *specific* errors that they are likely to be making. Since the teaching goal is to enable students to edit for specific kinds of errors, it makes sense to tell them what errors to look for. For example, if we want students to check for subject-verb agreement and word endings, then teachers and materials should train students to look for these particular mistakes. Instead of the more typical directions that ask students to find “the errors” in a given piece of writing, the most effective exercises direct students to find, for example, five errors: two subject-verb errors and three pronoun errors. In this way, student writers are actually editing for the types of errors that teachers want them to focus on.

Multiple Choice Multiple-choice exercises follow the traditional format. Four choices are usually offered with only one choice being correct. The Chapter Quiz in each chapter follows this format as well.

Locating the Error In error identification exercises, students read single sentences in which four words or phrases have been underlined. Students must circle the letter labeling the word or phrase that contains a grammatical error and then write their edited answer above the error. Error identification exercises are helpful in the overall SLA process because they can raise learners' consciousness of a linguistic feature by requiring learners to focus their attention on the difference, or gap, between the incorrect form and the correct form (Schmidt, 2001).

Original Writing To achieve the goal of connecting grammar instruction and focused review, each chapter of *Top 20* ends with an exercise called Original Writing. Students are given a prompt to which they are asked to respond by writing a paragraph, two paragraphs, or an essay. (It is up to each teacher to establish the writing length parameters of any exercise.) We believe that students should not be writing extensively but rather intensively when the goal is to improve writing accuracy. Thus, this activity asks students to write a short piece, but the demands on grammar proficiency are high. Students are told to practice certain aspects of the grammar covered in the chapter, to underline their original examples, and to check their correctness with a partner. Underlining key linguistic features has been shown to enhance noticing and learning of new material.

More About the Exercises in Top 20

Teachers have long noticed that students may do well in a grammar class where the focus is on one grammatical form in one type of exercise, but these same students may experience writing problems when trying to transfer or apply this knowledge to original writing. For some reason, students do not transfer the material they have just been taught to their writing. As a result, the majority of the exercises in *Top 20* deal with language in context—that is, language in a series of related sentences, in a whole paragraph, or in a short essay. Our experience has shown that students can improve their editing for a specific kind of grammatical error when they review the grammar issue and then practice their editing skills in written exercises of various lengths (sentences, paragraphs, or essays). The 239 exercises in *Top 20* and the additional web activities offer more than enough material to satisfy most students' written-grammar needs.

Though a wide array of exercise types is included (see the previous section, Contents of a Chapter), the three exercises most commonly used are fill-in-the-blank, error correction (editing), and original student writing of paragraphs. The most important objectives of *Top 20* are to enable students to feel more comfortable with ESL grammar and to improve their writing by honing their editing skills. Consequently, the number and variety of exercises that students tackle are crucial to the success of *Top 20*.

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Nouns

In this chapter, you will review the forms and characteristics of nouns and the words that go with them. Two important categories of nouns are count nouns and noncount nouns. Briefly, count nouns name things that can be counted, such as *car* and *computer*. Noncount nouns name things that cannot be counted, such as *freedom* and *happiness*.



CHECK YOUR GRAMMAR

Three of the five underlined words contain an error related to nouns. Can you explain why each of these underlined words is (or is not) wrong? Discuss with a partner.

The Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agent (EPA) was created by Congress in 1970 to replace the fifteen federal agencies that previously were responsibility for enforcing the legals that regulate environmental pollution.

From: Frank A. Schubert (2004). Introduction to Law and the Legal System. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 665.

1.1 Count Nouns

Nouns that can be counted are called count nouns. They can be singular or plural in form.

Singular: one subject a problem one reason a child

Plural: five subjects two problems three reasons eight children

1.1.1 *Singular Count Nouns*

Singular count nouns, together with any descriptive adjectives, have an article (*a, an, the*) or another determiner before them (*my, your, this, one, every, each*).

an exam, a long exam, my brother, my oldest brother,

each chapter, each new chapter