

# GOLDEN GRAMMAR RULES

## By Michael Swan



### 1. Don't use **an** with **own**.

Sue needs **her own** room. (NOT ~~Sue needs an own room.~~)

I'd like **a** phone line **of my own**. (NOT ... ~~an own phone line.~~)

### 2. Use **or rather** to correct yourself.

She's German – **or rather**, Austrian. (NOT ~~She's German – or better, Austrian.~~)

I'll see you on Friday – **or rather**, Saturday.

### 3. Use the simple present – **play(s)**, **rain(s)** etc – to talk about habits and repeated actions.

I **play** tennis every Saturday. (NOT ~~I am playing tennis every Saturday.~~)

It usually **rains** a lot in November.

### 4. Use **will** ..., not the present, for offers and promises.

I'll **cook** you supper this evening. (NOT ~~I cook you supper this evening.~~)

I promise I'll **phone** you tomorrow. (NOT ~~I promise I phone you tomorrow.~~)

### 5. Don't drop prepositions with passive verbs.

I don't like to be shouted **at**. (NOT ~~I don't like to be shouted.~~)

This needs to be thought **about** some more. (NOT ~~This needs to be thought some more.~~)

### 6. Don't use a present tense after **It's time**.

It's time you **went** home. (NOT ~~It's time you go home.~~)

It's time we **invited** Bill and Sonia. (NOT ~~It's time we invite Bill and Sonia.~~)

### 7. Use **was/were born** to give dates of birth.

I **was born** in 1975. (NOT ~~I am born in 1975.~~)

Shakespeare **was born** in 1564.

### 8. **Police** is a plural noun.

The police **are** looking for him. (NOT ~~The police is looking for him.~~)

I called the police, but **they were** too busy to come.

### 9. Don't use **the** to talk about things in general.

**Books** are expensive. (NOT ~~The books are expensive.~~)

I love **music**. (NOT ~~I love the music.~~)

### 10. Use **had better**, not **have better**.

I think you'd **better** see the doctor. (NOT ~~I think you have better see the doctor.~~)

We'd **better** ask John to help us.

### 11. Use the present progressive – **am playing**, **is raining** etc – to talk about things that are continuing at the time of speaking.

I'm **playing** very badly today. (NOT ~~I play very badly today.~~)

Look! It's **raining!** (NOT ~~Look! It rains!~~)

## 12. Use **for** with a period of time. Use **since** with the beginning of the period.

for the last two hours = since 9 o'clock

for three days = since Monday

for five years = since I left school

I've been learning English **for** five years. (NOT ~~I've been learning English since three years.~~)

We've been waiting **for** ages, since eight o'clock.

## 13. Don't separate the verb from the object.

VERB    OBJECT

She **speaks English** very well. (NOT ~~She speaks very well English.~~)

Andy **likes skiing** very much. (NOT ~~Andy likes very much skiing.~~)

## 14. Don't use the present perfect - **have/has seen, have/has gone etc** - with words that name a finished time.

I **saw** him **yesterday**. (NOT ~~I have seen him yesterday.~~)

They **went** to Greece **last summer**. (NOT ~~They have gone ... last summer.~~)

## 15. English (the language) normally has no article.

You speak **very good English**. (NOT ~~You speak a very good English.~~)

## 16. After **look forward to**, we use **-ing**, not an infinitive.

I look forward to **seeing** you. (NOT ~~I look forward to see you.~~)

We're looking forward to **going** on holiday. (NOT ~~... to go on holiday.~~)

## 17. **Information** is an uncountable noun.

Can you give me **some** information? (NOT ~~Can you give me an information?~~)

I got a lot of **information** from the Internet. (NOT ~~I got a lot of informations from the Internet.~~)

## 18. Use **-ing** forms after prepositions.

I drove there without **stopping**. (NOT ~~I drove there without to stop.~~)

Wash your hands before **eating**. (NOT ~~Wash your hands before to eat.~~)

## 19. Use **this**, not **that**, for things that are close.

Come here and look at **this** paper. (NOT ~~Come here and look at that paper.~~)

How long have you been in **this** country? (NOT ~~How long have you been in that country?~~)

## 20. Use a plural noun after **one and a half**.

We waited one and a half **hours**. (NOT ~~We waited one and a half hour.~~)

A mile is about one and a half **kilometres**. (NOT ~~A mile is about one and a half~~)

## 21. Use the present perfect, not the present, to say how long things have been going on.

I've been waiting since 10 o'clock. (NOT ~~I'm waiting since 10 o'clock.~~)

We've lived here for nine years. (NOT ~~We live here for nine years.~~)

## 22. The **majority** is normally plural.

Some people are interested, but the **majority** **don't care**. (NOT ... ~~but the majority doesn't care.~~)

The **majority** of these people **are** very poor. (NOT ~~The majority of these people is very poor.~~)

## 23. Use **too much/many** before (adjective +) noun; use **too** before an adjective with no noun.

There's **too much** noise.

I bought **too much** red paint.

Those shoes are **too expensive**. (NOT ~~These shoes are too much expensive.~~)

## 24. Use **that**, not **what**, after **all**.

I've told you **all that** I know. (NOT I've told you all what I know.)

He gave her **all that** he had.

## 25. Don't say **according to me** to give your opinion.

I **think** it's a good film. (NOT According to me, it's a good film.)

**In my opinion**, you're making a serious mistake. (NOT According to me, you're making a serious mistake.)

## 26. Don't ask about possibilities with **May you ...?** etc.

**Do you think** you'll go camping this summer? (NOT May you go camping this summer?)

**Is Joan likely** to be here tomorrow? (NOT May Joan be here tomorrow?)

## 27. Use **who**, not **which**, for people in relative structures.

The woman **who** lives upstairs is from Thailand. (NOT The woman which lives upstairs is from Thailand.)

I don't like people **who** shout all the time. (NOT I don't like people which shout all the time.)

## 28. Use **for**, not **during**, to say 'how long'.

We waited **for** six hours. (NOT We waited during six hours.)

He was ill **for** three weeks. (NOT He was ill during three weeks.)

## 29. Use **to ...**, not **for ...**, to say why you do something.

I came here **to** study English. (NOT I came here for study English.)

She telephoned me **to** explain the problem. (NOT She telephoned me for explain the problem.)

## 30. Use reflexives (**myself** etc) when the object is the same as the subject.

I looked at **myself** in the mirror. (NOT I looked at me in the mirror.)

Why are you talking to **yourself**? (NOT Why are you talking to you?)

## 31. Use a present tense to talk about the future after **when**, **until**, **as soon as**, **after**, **before** etc.

I'll phone you when I **arrive**. (NOT I'll phone you when I will arrive.)

Let's wait until it **gets** dark. (NOT Let's wait until it will get dark.)

We'll start as soon as Mary **arrives**. (NOT We'll start as soon as Mary will arrive.)

## 32. Before most abstract nouns, we use **great**, not **big**.

I have **great** respect for her ideas. (NOT I have **big** respect for her ideas.)

We had **great** difficulty in understanding him. (NOT We had **big** difficulty in understanding him.)

## 33. Don't use **the** with a superlative when you are not comparing one person or thing with another.

Compare:

- She's **the nicest** of the three teachers.
- She's **nicest** when she's working with small children.
- This is **the best** wine I've got.
- This wine is **best** when it's three or four years old.

## 34. Put **enough** after, not before, adjectives.

This soup isn't hot **enough**. (NOT This soup isn't enough hot.)

She's old **enough** to walk to school by herself.

## 35. Don't use a structure with **that ... after want or would like**.

My parents want **me to go** to university. (NOT My parents want that I go to university.)

I'd like **everybody to leave**. (NOT I'd like that everybody leaves.)

## **36. After link verbs like *be, seem, feel, look, smell, sound, taste*, we use adjectives, not adverbs.**

I feel **happy** today. (NOT ~~I feel happily today.~~)

This soup tastes **strange**. (NOT ~~This soup tastes strangely.~~)

## **37. Use *than* after comparatives.**

My mother is three years older **than** my father. (NOT ~~My mother is three years older than/as my father.~~)

Petrol is more expensive **than** diesel.

## **38. In questions, put the subject immediately after the auxiliary verb.**

Where **are the President and his family** staying? (NOT ~~Where are staying the President and his family?~~)

**Have all the guests** arrived? (NOT ~~Have arrived all the guests?~~)

## **39. *Used to* has no present.**

I **play** tennis at weekends. (NOT ~~I use to play tennis at weekends.~~)

Where **do** you usually **have** lunch? (NOT ~~Where do you use to have lunch?~~)

## **40. Use *through*, not *along*, for periods of time.**

All **through** the centuries, there ~~have been wars.~~ (NOT All ~~along~~ the centuries, there ~~have been wars.~~)

## **41. Use *can't*, not *mustn't*, to say that something is logically impossible.**

It **can't** be the postman at the door. It's only 7 o'clock. (NOT ~~It mustn't be the postman at the door. It's only 7 o'clock.~~)

If A is bigger than B, and B is bigger than C, then C **can't** be bigger than A. (NOT ~~... then C mustn't be bigger than A.~~)

## **42. Use the present perfect with *This is the first time ... etc.***

This is the first time **I've been** here. (NOT ~~This is the first time I'm here.~~)

This is the fifth cup of coffee **I've drunk** today. (NOT ~~This is the fifth cup of coffee I drink today.~~)

## **43. Use *be*, not *have*, to give people's ages.**

My sister **is** 15 (years old). (NOT ~~My sister has 15 years.~~)

## **44. Use *between*, not *among*, to talk about position in relation to several clearly separate people or things.**

Switzerland is **between** France, Austria, Germany and Italy. (NOT ~~Switzerland is among France, Austria, Germany and Italy.~~)

The bottle rolled **between** the wheels of the car.

## **45. We don't normally use *the* before abbreviations that are pronounced like words ('acronyms').**

My cousin works for **NATO**. (NOT ~~My cousin works for the NATO.~~)

The money was given by **UNESCO**. (NOT ~~... by the UNESCO.~~)

## **46. *Everybody* is a singular word.**

Everybody **was** late. (NOT ~~Everybody were late.~~)

**Is** everybody ready? (NOT ~~Are everybody ready?~~)

## **47. Use *any*, not *some*, in negative sentences.**

She hasn't got **any** money. (NOT She hasn't got ~~some~~ money.)

I didn't see **anybody**. (NOT I didn't see ~~somebody~~.)

## **48. Use *interested* for feelings; use *interesting* for the things that interest people. The same goes for *bored/boring*, *excited/exciting* etc.**

I'm **interested** in history. (NOT I'm ~~interesting~~ in history.)

History is **interesting**.

I'm **bored** in the maths lessons. (NOT I'm ~~boring~~ in the maths lessons.)

I think maths is **boring**.

## **49. Use *by*, not *until/till*, to mean 'not later than'.**

Can you mend this **by** Tuesday? (NOT Can you mend this ~~until~~ Tuesday?)

I'll finish the book **by** tonight. (NOT I'll finish the book ~~till~~ tonight.)

## **50. Use *like*, not *as*, to give examples.**

I prefer warm countries, **like** Spain. (NOT I prefer warm countries, ~~as~~ Spain.)

I eat a lot of meat, **like** beef or lamb.

## **51. Use *whether*, not *if*, after prepositions.**

We talked about whether it was ready. (NOT We talked about if it was ready.)

It's a question of whether we have enough time. (NOT It's a question of if we have enough time.)

## **52. Use the present progressive passive, not the simple present passive, to talk about things that are going on just around now.**

Our flat is being decorated this week. (NOT Our flat is decorated this week.)

Your bill is just being prepared, sir. (NOT Your bill is just prepared, sir.)

## **53. We don't normally use *must* to talk about the past.**

I had to see the dentist yesterday. (NOT I ~~must~~ see the dentist yesterday.)

When I left school, young men had to do military service. (NOT When I left school, young men ~~must~~ do military service.)

## **54. When you put two nouns together, be careful to get the right order.**

I like eating milk chocolate. (NOT I like eating chocolate milk.)

What's your phone number? (NOT What's your number phone?)

## **55. Use the *whole of*, not *whole*, before the name of a place.**

The **whole of** Paris was celebrating. (NOT Whole Paris was celebrating.)

He knows the **whole of** South America very well. (NOT He knows ~~whole~~ South America very well.)

## **56. We don't normally use progressive forms of *believe*.**

I don't believe him. (NOT I'm not believing him.)

Do you believe what she says? (NOT Are you believing what she says?)

## **57. Don't use *in front of* to mean 'facing' or 'opposite'.**

She sat down facing me and looked into my eyes. (NOT She sat down ~~in front of~~ me and looked into my eyes.)

There's a hotel opposite our house. (NOT There's a hotel ~~in front of~~ our house.)

## **58. Use *it*, not *I*, *he*, *she* etc to identify people.**

(on the phone): Hello. It's Alan Williams speaking. (NOT Hello. I'm Alan Williams.)

'Who's that?' 'It's John.' (NOT Who's that? 'He's John.')

## **59. People (meaning 'persons') is a plural word.**

The people in this town are very friendly. (NOT The people in this town is very friendly.)

Who are those people? (NOT Who is that people?)

## **60. Use *although* or *but*, but not both together.**

Although it was late, she went out.

It was late, but she went out.

(BUT NOT Although it was late, but she went out.)

## **61. With *if*, we normally use the present to talk about the future.**

If I **have** time, I'll phone you. (NOT If I'll have time, I'll phone you.)

I'll be surprised if she **answers** my letter. (NOT I'll be surprised if she'll answer my letter.)

## **62. Use *almost*, not *nearly*, to say that one thing is very like another.**

She is **almost** a sister to me. (NOT She is nearly a sister to me.)

I **almost** wish I had stayed at home. (NOT I nearly wish I had stayed at home.)

## **63. If you don't do something any more, you *stop doing* it.**

The doctor told me to **stop smoking**. (NOT The doctor told me to stop to smoke.)

I'm going to **stop working** so hard. (NOT I'm going to stop to work so hard.)

## **64. A singular countable noun must normally have a determiner (e.g. *a/an, the, my, that*).**

She broke **a/the/that/my** window. (NOT She broke window.)

Where is **the** station? (NOT Where is station?)

## **65. We don't often use *would* in subordinate clauses; instead, we use past tenses.**

Would you follow me wherever I **went**? (NOT Would you follow me wherever I would go?)

I would tell you if I **knew**. (NOT I would tell you if I would know.)

## **66. With *when*, use the past perfect to make it clear that one thing finished before another started.**

When I **had written** my letters, I did some gardening. (NOT When I wrote my letters, I did some gardening.)

When he **had cleaned** the windows, he stopped for a cup of tea. (NOT When he cleaned the windows, he stopped for a cup of tea.)

## **67. Don't use *can* to talk about the chance that something will happen.**

It **may/might/could** rain this evening. (NOT It can rain this evening.)

I think Jane **may/might/could** come tomorrow. (NOT I think Jane can come tomorrow.)

## **68. Don't use an infinitive after *think*.**

I'm thinking **of changing** my job. (NOT I'm thinking to change my job.)

Are you thinking **of going** home this weekend? (NOT Are you thinking to go home this weekend?)

## 69. Use a singular noun after **every**.

I play tennis every **Wednesday**. (NOT ~~I play tennis every Wednesdays.~~)

He wrote to every **child** in the village. (NOT ~~He wrote to every children...~~)

## 70. When you say what **somebody's job is**, use **a/an**.

My sister is **a** photographer. (NOT ~~My sister is photographer.~~)

I'm studying to be **an** engineer. (NOT ~~I'm studying to be engineer.~~)

## 71. Use **at last**, not **finally**, as an exclamation.

**At last!** Where have you been? (NOT ~~Finally! Where have you been?~~)

She's written to me. **At last!**

## 72. **Get** can mean 'become', but not before nouns.

It's getting **cold**.

It's getting **to be** winter.

(BUT NOT ~~It's getting winter.~~)

## 73. Don't use negative questions in polite requests or enquiries.

**Could** you help me, please? (NOT ~~Couldn't you help me, please?~~)

**You haven't** seen John, have you? (NOT ~~Haven't you seen John?~~)

## 74. One negative word is usually enough.

She looked, but she **didn't** see **anything**. (NOT ~~She looked, but she didn't see nothing.~~)

**I have** never heard of him. (NOT ~~I haven't never heard of him.~~)

## 75. **Much** and **many** are unusual in affirmative sentences (except in a very formal style).

He has **a lot** / **plenty** of money. (NOT ~~He has much money.~~)

My father has travelled to lots of countries. (More natural than ~~My father has travelled to many countries.~~)

## 76. Don't use **since** to talk about the future.

I'll be home **from** three o'clock. (NOT ~~I'll be home since three o'clock.~~)

The shop will be closed for two weeks **from** Monday. (NOT ~~The shop will be closed for two weeks since Monday.~~)

## 77. Singular fraction + plural noun: use a plural verb.

A third of the students **are** from abroad. (NOT ~~A third of the students is from abroad.~~)

A quarter of the trees **have** been cut down.

## 78. You **listen to** something.

She never **listens to** me. (NOT ~~She never listens me.~~)

Listen **to** this! (NOT ~~Listen this!~~)

## 79. Don't use the past progressive for past habits.

When I was 20 I **smoked** / I **used to smoke**. (NOT ~~When I was 20 I was smoking.~~)

I **played** / I **used to play** a lot of football at school. (NOT ~~I was playing a lot of football at school.~~)

## 80. Don't use **most of** directly before a noun.

**Most of** these people agree with me.

**Most** people agree with me.

(BUT NOT ~~Most of people agree with me.~~)

## **81. In 'unreal' conditions with *if*, use *would*, not *will*.**

If I knew the price, I *would* tell you. (NOT ~~If I knew the price, I will tell you.~~)

It *would* be better if he told the truth. (NOT ~~It will be better if he told the truth.~~)

## **82. Don't use *later* with an expression of time to talk about the future.**

I'll see you *later*.

I'll see you *in a few days*.

(BUT NOT ~~I'll see you a few days later.~~)

## **83. Don't use *in case* to mean 'if'.**

Compare:

I'll take an umbrella *in case* it rains. (= '... because it might rain.')

I'll open the umbrella *if* it rains. (NOT ~~I'll open the umbrella in case it rains.~~)

## **84. Use *so* before an adjective, but not before adjective + noun.**

I love this country – it's *so beautiful*. (NOT ~~I love this so beautiful country.~~)

Thanks for your help. That was *so kind* of you. (NOT ~~Thanks for your so kind help.~~)

## **85. Only use *unless* to mean 'except if'.**

Compare:

I'll see you tomorrow *unless* I have to work.

I'll be really upset *if* I don't pass the exam. (NOT ~~I'll be really upset unless I pass the exam.~~)

## **86. Use *be* with adjectives, not *have* with nouns, to talk about physical sensations like cold, hunger, thirst etc.**

I *am* thirsty. (NOT ~~I have thirst.~~)

We *are* cold in this house. (NOT ~~We have cold in this house.~~)

## **87. Don't use *to-infinitives* after *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should* or *must*.**

I *can swim*. (NOT ~~I can to swim.~~)

Must you *make* so much noise? (NOT ~~Must you to make~~ so much noise?)

## **88. Use *not*, not *no*, to make sentences negative.**

I'm *not* asleep. (NOT ~~I'm no asleep.~~)

We are open on Saturdays, but *not* on Sundays. (NOT ~~... but no on Sundays.~~)

## **89. We don't usually use present tenses after past reporting verbs.**

She told me she *had* a headache. (NOT ~~She told me she has a headache.~~)

I asked him what he *wanted*. (NOT ~~I asked him what he wants.~~)

## **90. Use *to* after *married*, *engaged*.**

He's married *to* a doctor. (NOT ~~He's married with a doctor.~~)

My sister is engaged *to* a computer engineer. (NOT ~~My sister is engaged with a computer engineer.~~)

## **91. Use *which*, not *what*, to refer back to a whole sentence.**

She passed her exam, *which* surprised everybody. (NOT ~~She passed her exam, what surprised everybody.~~)

My father has just climbed Mont Blanc, *which* is pretty good for a man of 75. (NOT ~~... what is pretty good for a man of 75.~~)

## **92. Don't use *the* with *society* when it has a general meaning.**

We all have to live in *society*. (NOT We all have to live in ~~the~~ *society*.)

Rousseau said that *society* makes people evil. (NOT Rousseau said that ~~the~~ *society* makes people evil.)

## **93. Use a *to-infinitive* after *want*.**

I want to go home. (NOT I want go home.)

The children want to stay up late. (NOT The children want stay up late.)

## **94. Use *make*, not *do*, with *mistake*.**

I have made a mistake. (NOT I have done a mistake.)

You can't speak a language without making mistakes. (NOT ... without doing mistakes.)

## **95. Don't repeat a relative pronoun with another pronoun.**

There's the man *that* I work for. (NOT There's the man ~~that~~ I work for *him*.)

She saw a doctor *who* sent her to hospital. (NOT She saw a doctor ~~who~~ he sent her to *hospital*.)

## **96. After a superlative, use *in* with a place expression.**

Which is the biggest city *in* the world? (NOT Which is the biggest city ~~of~~ the world?)

This is the best restaurant *in* the city. (NOT This is the best restaurant ~~of~~ the city.)

## **97. You *explain* and *suggest* something to somebody.**

Please explain *to* me what you want. (NOT Please explain ~~me~~ what you want.)

Can you suggest a good restaurant *to* us? (NOT Can you suggest ~~us~~ a good restaurant?)

## **98. *Work* is an uncountable noun.**

I'm looking for *work*. (NOT I'm looking for a *work*.)

My brother has found a *new job*. (NOT My brother has found a *new work*.)

## **99. Be careful of the word order in negative infinitives.**

It's important *not to work* too hard. (NOT It's important ~~to~~ *not work* too hard.)

I asked her *not to make* so much noise.

## **100. Possessives replace articles.**

We stayed in *John's* house at the weekend. (NOT We stayed in ~~the~~ *John's* house at the weekend.)

She's been studying *Britain's* foreign policy since 1980. (NOT She's been studying ~~the~~ *Britain's* foreign policy since 1980.)



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