



A GUIDE TO A/L GENERAL ENGLISH

ISSUE OCTOBER 2021

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

– Abraham Lincoln

An easy-to-follow guide on how to improve your Advanced Level
General English Knowledge.

BY THE ADVANCED ENGLISH SKILLS IMPROVEMENT UNIT

Details of the Writer



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GRAMMAR

1. Word classes

MAJOR WORD CLASSES

English has four major word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. They have many thousands of members, and new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are often created. Nouns are the most common type of word, followed by verbs. Adjectives are less common and adverbs are even less common.

Many words belong to more than one word class. For example, **book** can be used as a **noun** or as a **verb**; **fast** can be used as an adjective or an adverb:

- It's an interesting book. (noun)
- We ought to book a holiday soon. (verb)
- He loves fast cars. (adjective)
- Don't drive so fast! (adverb)

Typical word-class suffixes

A suffix can often, but not always, tell us if a word is a noun, verb, adjective or adverb:

nouns	verbs	adjectives	adverbs
<i>station</i>	<i>soften</i>	<i>drinkable</i>	<i>carefully</i>
<i>government</i>	<i>identify</i>	<i>Japanese</i>	<i>easily</i>
<i>cruelty</i>	<i>industrialise</i>	<i>useless</i>	<i>sadly</i>

Adapted from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/word-classes-and-phrase-classes>.

1.1 Nouns

A noun refers to a person, animal or thing.

Different types of nouns:

- *Most nouns are common nouns, referring to classes or categories of people, animals and things.*
- *Proper nouns are the names of specific people, animals and things. They are written with a capital letter at the start.*
- *Concrete nouns refer to material objects which we can see or touch.*
- *Abstract nouns refer to things which are not material objects, such as ideas, feelings and situations.*

1.2 Verbs

Verbs are one of the four major word classes, along with nouns, adjectives and adverbs. A verb refers to an action, event or state.

1.3 Adjectives

Adjectives are one of the four major word classes, along with nouns, verbs and adverbs. Examples of adjectives are: big, small, blue, old, rich and nice. They give us more information about people, animals or things represented by nouns and pronouns:

- That's a **big** house.
- Look at the **grey** horse.
- Some dogs have **long** tails.
- She is **tall**.

1.4 Adverbs

Adverbs are one of the four major word classes, along with nouns, verbs and adjectives. We use adverbs to add more information about a verb, an adjective, another adverb, a clause or a whole sentence and, less commonly, about a noun phrase.

- Can you move it **carefully**? It's fragile.
- **Quickly!** We're late.
- She swims **really** well.
- Don't go so **fast**.
- You have to turn it **clockwise**.
- Come over **here**.
- **Actually**, I don't know her.
- I haven't seen them **recently**.
- The bathroom's **upstairs** on the left.

Adverbs: meanings and functions

Adverbs have many different meanings and functions. They are especially important for indicating the time, manner, place, degree and frequency of something.

time	<i>I never get up early at the weekends.</i>
manner	<i>Walk across the road carefully!</i>
place	<i>When we got there, the tickets had sold out.</i>
degree	<i>It's rather cold, isn't it?</i>
frequency	<i>I'm always losing my keys.</i>

OTHER WORD CLASSES

The other word classes include prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions and interjections.

Prepositions

Prepositions describe the relationship between words from the major word classes. They include words such as at, in, on, across, behind, for:

- We went **to** the top **of** the mountain. (to describes the relationship between went and top; of describes the relationship between top and mountain)
- Are you ready **for** lunch yet? (for describes the relationship between ready and lunch)

Pronouns

Pronouns are words which substitute for noun phrases, so that we do not need to say the whole noun phrase or repeat it unnecessarily. Pronouns include words such as you, it, we, mine, ours, theirs, someone, anyone, one, this, those:

- **That's** Gerry in the photo. **He** lives in Barcelona.
- This jacket's **mine**. **That** must be Linda's.

Determiners

Determiners come before nouns. They show what type of reference the noun is making. They include words such as a/an, the, my, his, some, this, both:

- Have you got **a** ruler I can borrow?
- I need **some** paper for **my** printer.
- **This** phone isn't easy to use.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions show a link between one word, phrase or clause and another word, phrase or clause. They include and, but, when, if, because:

- Joe **and** Dan are brothers.
- It was okay, **but** I wouldn't recommend it as a restaurant.
- We'll ring you **when** we get to London.

Interjections

Interjections are mostly exclamation words (e.g. gosh! wow! oh!), which show people's reactions to events and situations:

A:

I'm giving up my job.

B:

Oh.

Yippee! I don't have to go to work tomorrow!

Gosh! What an awful smell!

PHRASE CLASSES

The different word classes can form the basis of phrases. When they do this, they operate as the head of the phrase. So, a noun operates as the head of a noun phrase, a verb as the head of a verb phrase, and so on. Heads of phrases (H) can have words before them (e.g. determiners (det), adjectives (adj), adverbs (adv)) or after them (e.g. postmodifiers (pm) or complements (c)):

Noun phrase (underlined)

[DET] That [ADJ] [H] old box [PM (clause)] you left in the kitchen has got a hole in it.

Adverb phrase (underlined)

It all happened [ADJ]very [H] suddenly.

Prepositional phrase (underlined)

[H]The President [C] of the United States arrives tomorrow.

Further reading:

- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/word-classes-and-phrase-classes>.

Video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hY5OWnCg1XA>

Quiz:

- <https://quizizz.com/join/quiz/61443bdefbb332001d10c245/start>

2. Sentence Structures

A sentence is a unit of grammar. Typically, in writing, it begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.

There are three types of sentence structures: simple, compound and complex.

SIMPLE SENTENCES

- Simple sentences have only one main clause:
 - **We're going on holiday tomorrow.** (one main clause)
 - **I'm not keen on musicals.**

COMPOUND SENTENCES

- Compound sentences have two or more main clauses, joined by a coordinating conjunction:
 - **I phoned her but she wasn't there.**
 - **Are you coming or are you staying at home or will you go and see Mum?**

COMPLEX SENTENCES

- Complex sentences have a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses, introduced by a subordinating conjunction (The main clause is in bold; the subordinate clause is underlined.):
 - **You can call me** if you have any problems.
 - **I got up earlier than usual** because I had to get the 6.30 train.
 - Although it hurt when she bent her wrist, **she could still move her fingers.**

2.1 Types of Sentences

There are four main types of clause or sentence.

(s = subject; v = verb; aux = auxiliary verb; x = objects, complements or adjuncts)

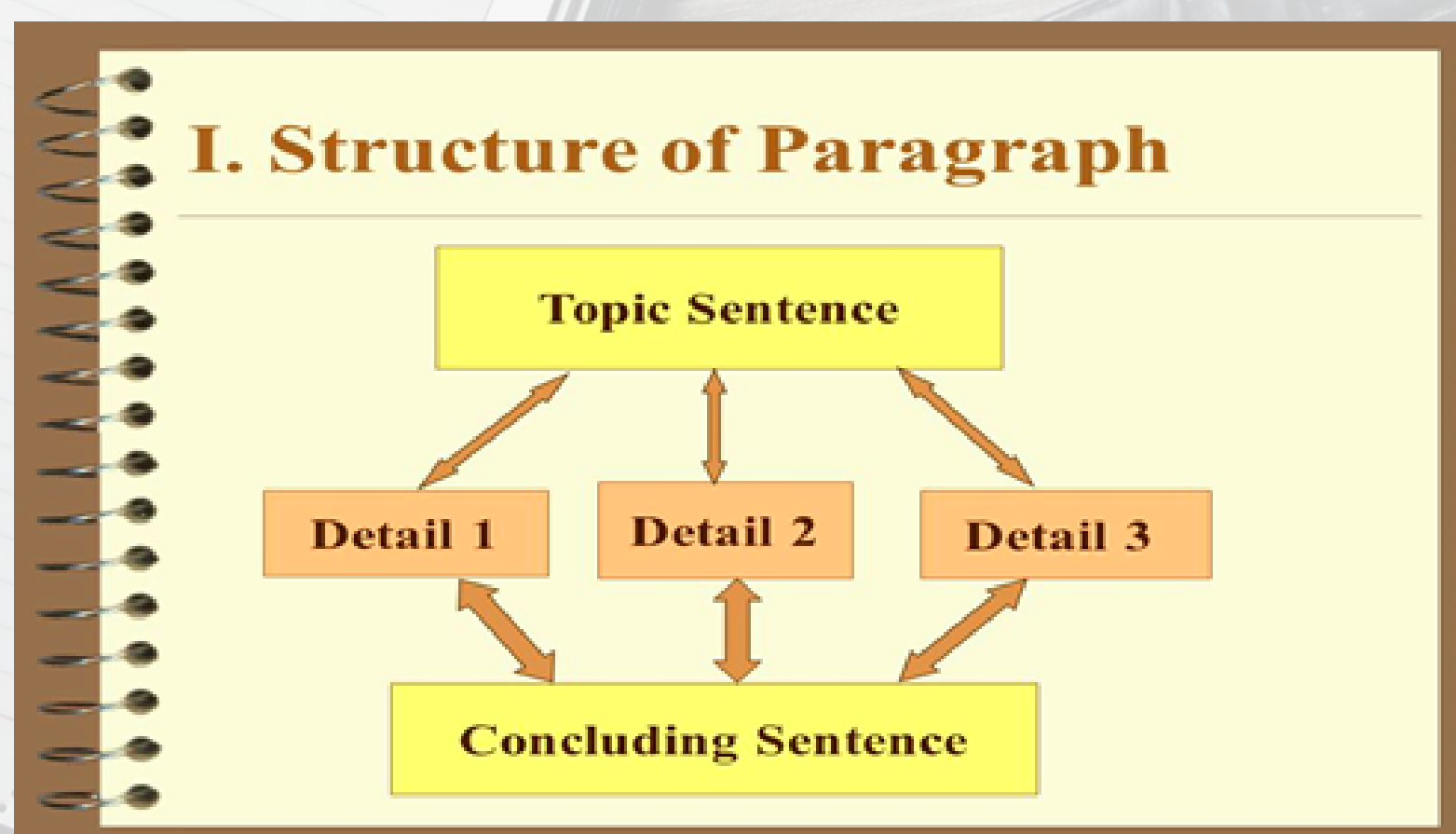
Declarative (statements)	[S] [V] <i>I finished</i> [X] <i>the book last night.</i>
Interrogative (questions)	[AUX][S] <i>Did you</i> [V] <i>study</i> [X] <i>Latin at school?</i>
Imperative (orders, instructions)	[V] <i>Leave</i> [X] <i>it on the chair, thanks.</i>
Exclamative (expressing strong opinion or surprise)	<i>What</i> [S] <i>a gorgeous dress</i> [V] <i>she's wearing!</i>

WRITING

1. Paragraphs

We organize what we write into sentences and paragraphs. A paragraph begins on a new line within the text and there is often a blank line between paragraphs. A paragraph usually contains more than one sentence and it is usually about one topic.

The first sentence in a paragraph is sometimes called the key or topic sentence because it gives us the key to what the paragraph will be about. The other sentences usually relate to the key sentence. There is usually a conclusion in the final sentence of a paragraph and sometimes there is a link to the next paragraph.



References

Image source: <https://slideplayer.com/slide/3794488/>
<https://slideplayer.com/slide/3794488/>

There are a number of ways for us to keep fit. First, no matter how busy we are, we should have exercise every day to strengthen our muscles. **Second**, it is important to keep good hours. **For example**, if we are in the habit of going to bed early and getting up early, we can avoid overworking ourselves and get enough sleep. **Finally**, entertainment is also necessary so that we may have some moments of relaxation. **If we follow those instructions, we will certainly be in good health.**

2. Essays

An academic essay is a focused piece of writing that develops an idea or argument using evidence, analysis and interpretation.

There are many types of essays you might write as a student. The content and length of an essay depends on your level, subject of study, and course requirements. However, most essays in advance level are argumentative: they aim to persuade the reader of a particular position or perspective on a topic.

The essay writing process consists of three main stages:

1. **Preparation:** Decide on your topic, do your research, and create an essay outline.
2. **Writing:** Set out your argument in the introduction, develop it with evidence in the main body, and wrap it up with a conclusion.
3. **Revision:** Check the content, organization, grammar, spelling, and formatting of your essay.

Essay writing process

The writing process of preparation, writing, and revisions applies to every essay or paper, but the time and effort spent on each stage depends on the type of essay.

For example, if you've been assigned a five-paragraph expository essay for a high school class, you'll probably spend the most time on the writing stage; for a college-level argumentative essay, on the other hand, you'll need to spend more time researching your topic and developing an original argument before you start writing.

Adapted from: <https://www.scribbr.com/category/academic-essay/>

1. Preparation

- ✓ Define your essay topic
- ✓ Do your research and gather sources
- ✓ Come up with a thesis
- ✓ Create an essay outline

2. Writing

- ✓ Write the introduction
- ✓ Write the main body, organized into paragraphs
- ✓ Write the conclusion

3. Revision

- ✓ Evaluate the overall organization
- ✓ Revise the content of each paragraph
- ✓ Proofread for language errors
- ✓ Check for plagiarism

Further reading:

<https://www.scribbr.com/category/academic-essay/>

More exercises:

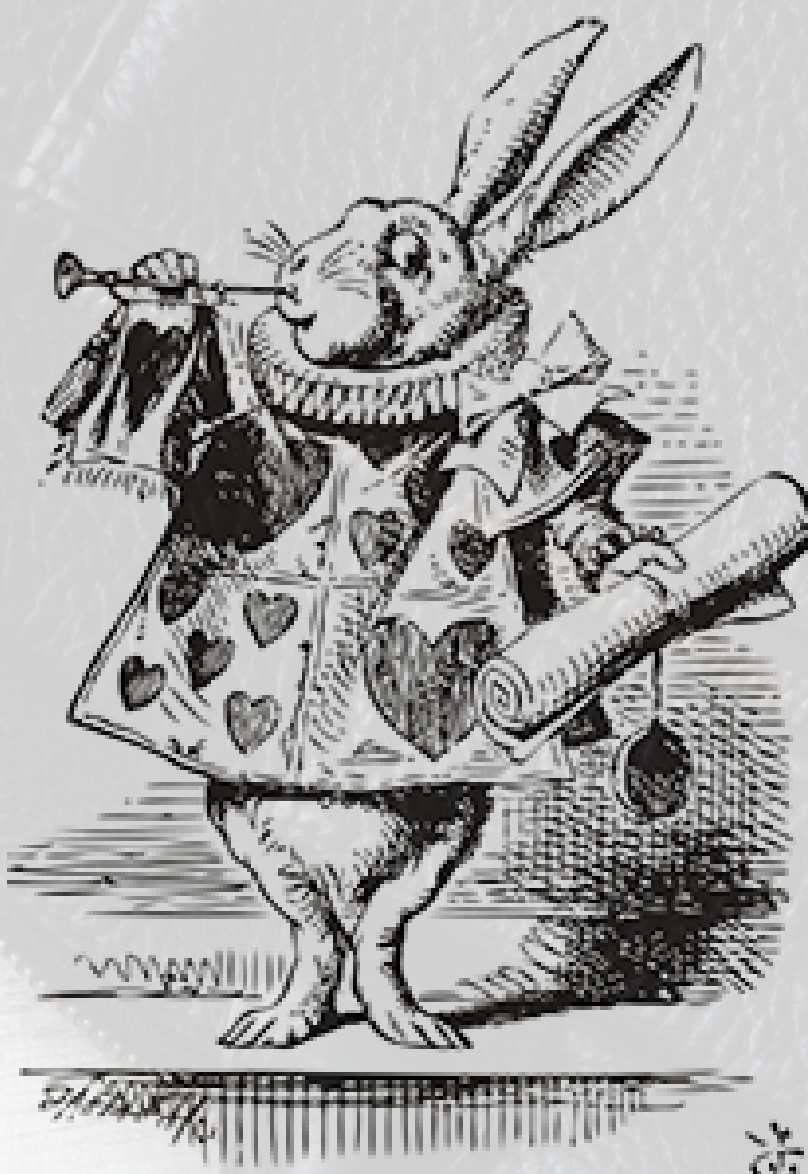
<http://www.blairenglish.com/exercises/emails/exercises/structure-an-essay/structure-an-essay.html>

READING

Comprehension: The Goal of Reading

Comprehension, or extracting meaning from what you read, is the ultimate goal of reading. Experienced readers take this for granted and may not appreciate the reading comprehension skills required. The process of comprehension is both interactive and strategic. Rather than passively reading text, readers must analyze it, internalize it and make it their own.

In order to read with comprehension, developing readers must be able to read with some proficiency and then receive explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies (Tierney, 1982).



On this the White Rabbit blew three blasts on the trumpet, and then unrolled the parchment scroll, and read as follows:

*"The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts,
All on a summer day;
The Knave of Hearts, he stole those tarts,
And took them quite away!"*

"Consider your verdict," the King said to the jury.

GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR READING COMPREHENSION

The process of comprehending text begins before children can read, when someone reads a picture book to them. They listen to the words, see the pictures in the book, and may start to associate the words on the page with the words they are hearing and the ideas they represent.

In order to learn comprehension strategies, students need modeling, practice, and feedback. The key comprehension strategies are described below.

Using Prior Knowledge/Previewing

When students preview text, they tap into what they already know that will help them to understand the text they are about to read. This provides a framework for any new information they read.

Skimming & Scanning

Skimming and scanning are reading techniques that use rapid eye movement and keywords to move quickly through text for slightly different purposes. Skimming is reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the material. Scanning is reading rapidly in order to find specific facts. While skimming tells you what general information is within a section, scanning helps you locate a particular fact.

Predicting

When students make predictions about the text they are about to read, it sets up expectations based on their prior knowledge about similar topics. As they read, they may mentally revise their prediction as they gain more information.

Identifying the Main Idea and Summarization

Identifying the main idea and summarizing requires that students determine what is important and then put it in their own words. Implicit in this process is trying to understand the author's purpose in writing the text.

Questioning

Asking and answering questions about text is another strategy that helps students focus on the meaning of text. Teachers can help by modeling both the process of asking good questions and strategies for finding the answers in the text.

Making Inferences

In order to make inferences about something that is not explicitly stated in the text, students must learn to draw on prior knowledge and recognize clues in the text itself.

Visualizing

Studies have shown that students who visualize while reading have better recall than those who do not (Pressley, 1977). Readers can take advantage of illustrations that are embedded in the text or create their own mental images or drawings when reading text without illustrations.

Further reading:

- <https://www.readnaturally.com/research/5-components-of-reading/comprehension>

Video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1wPYHa5nUg>

More exercises:

- <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/reading/pre-intermediate-a2>

The Advanced English Skills Improvement Unit of Royal College



<https://www.facebook.com/AESIU/>



<https://www.instagram.com/aesiu.rc/>



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV4ZD6F2RSdRtrPy5-q8IUg>