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
Ms. Chamika Dahanayake

Ms. Chamika Dahanayake is affiliated to the University of Colombo as a Consultant/Visiting Lecturer in the Department of English, Extension Courses of English. She was also the Course Director of the Diploma in English for Teachers of English (DETE) conducted by the department. In addition, Ms. Dahanayake also works as a faculty member and trainer at the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka. She has extensive experience in guiding professionals and students of accountancy in developing effective corporate and business communication skills.
CONTENTS

1. GRAMMAR

1. Word Classes
   - Other Word Classes 06
   - Phrase Classes 07

2. Sentence Structures
   - Types of Sentences 09

2. WRITING

1. Paragraphs 09
2. Essays 10

3. READING

1. Comprehension: The goal of Reading 11
2. General strategies for reading comprehension 12
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nouns</th>
<th>verbs</th>
<th>adjectives</th>
<th>adverbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>station</td>
<td>soften</td>
<td>drinkable</td>
<td>carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government</td>
<td>identify</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cruelty</td>
<td>industrialise</td>
<td>useless</td>
<td>sadly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adverb</th>
<th>example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>time</strong></td>
<td>I never get up <strong>early</strong> at the weekends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>manner</strong></td>
<td>Walk across the road <strong>carefully</strong>!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>place</strong></td>
<td>When we got <strong>there</strong>, the tickets had sold out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>degree</strong></td>
<td>It’s <strong>rather</strong> cold, isn’t it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>frequency</strong></td>
<td>I’m <strong>always</strong> losing my keys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**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:

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td>[S] [V]I finished [X]the book last night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>[AUX][S]Did you [V]study [X]Latin at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>[V]Leave [X]it on the chair, thanks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclamative</td>
<td>What [S]a gorgeous dress [V]she’s wearing!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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/
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).
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.

On this side, 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 tea,
All afternoon, and nobody drank tea,
And much to her wonder, the tea turned brown,
And much to her great surprise, the milk went 'pop!'"

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

On this side, 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 tea,
All afternoon, and nobody drank tea,
And much to her wonder, the tea turned brown,
And much to her great surprise, the milk went 'pop!'"

"Consider your verdict," the King said to the Jury.
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-q8lUg