



13th edition

The Least You Should Know **about English: Writing Skills**

Paige Wilson
Teresa Ferster Glazier

The Least You Should Know THIRTEENTH
Edition
about English

WRITING SKILLS

Paige Wilson

Pasadena City College

Teresa Ferster Glazier

Late, Western Illinois University



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***The Least You Should Know about English:
Writing Skills, 13e***

Paige Wilson, Teresa Ferster Glazier

Product Director: Lauren Murphy

Associate Content Developer: Julie Bizzotto

Product Assistant: Chip Moreland

Senior Content Project Manager: Margaret
Park Bridges

Art Director: Heather Marshall,
Lumina Datamatics, Ltd.

Manufacturing Planner: Betsy Donaghey

IP Analyst: Ann Hoffman

Senior IP Project Manager: Kathryn Kucharek

Production Service: Lumina Datamatics, Ltd.

Compositor: Lumina Datamatics

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PREFACE

Welcome to the thirteenth edition of *The Least You Should Know about English*, a text devoted to providing brief, essential explanations and deep practice with over 200 exercises to help students improve their English writing skills for the past thirty-five years.

- With a revised introduction titled “Getting the Most from *The Least You Should Know about English*,” the thirteenth edition highlights key concepts of the “least you should know” approach and demonstrates their value in a world where we communicate more in writing than ever before.
- All sections in this edition are now numbered for easy reference, navigation, and syllabus preparation.
- Beginning with this edition, a Preview Test and Progress Test frame each of the first three Parts on “Word Use,” “Sentence Structure,” and “Punctuation.” Extended answers to these tests provide full explanations with section references to help students self-manage the improvement of their sentence-level skills.
- To Part One on “Word Use,” we have added a “Consulting a Dictionary” section that offers brief explanations and a full set of exercises covering eleven different uses of this often overlooked resource for writers.
- In Part Two on “Sentence Structure,” we have switched the order of two existing sections so that “Locating Prepositional Phrases” precedes the related skill of “Finding Subjects and Verbs.”
- Two new charts in Part Two follow the section on “Understanding Dependent Clauses” to illustrate the kinds of clauses and patterns of punctuation used to create simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.
- Continuing its thirty-five-year tradition, *The Least 13e*’s clear explanations, abundant exercises, diverse topics, and complete answers encourage flexible coursework, cross-discipline reading, and self-directed learning.
- *The Least* helps student writers receive “just-in-time support” in any area, in any type of course (traditional, accelerated, stretch, or pathways), and through any delivery method (face-to-face, hybrid, or online).

In line with core standards, the updated exercises in the thirteenth edition continue to include globally relevant content from a variety of academic areas: science, art, history, film, literature, social studies, business, and the media. Students learn new, complex vocabulary as they read about both timely and timeless subjects—anything from the evolutionary reasons for our interest in video games to America’s historical relationship with the number 13. Such thematic, cross-discipline exercises reinforce breadth of understanding and the need for cohesive details in students’ own writing.

The Least You Should Know about English functions equally well on the go as a self-tutoring text and in the classroom (in person or online). It provides students

with everything they need to progress on their own. Students who have previously felt overwhelmed by the complexities of English should, by practicing essential skills and through writing and rewriting their papers, gain the ability and confidence to fulfill all of their future writing needs.

A **Test Booklet** by Paige Wilson is available to instructors only. This supplemental booklet corresponds directly to the numbered sections of the thirteenth edition and includes both sentence-format and paragraph-format “tests” that can also act as additional exercises.

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As always, I am indebted to my publishing team for their expertise and hard work, especially the tireless efforts of Jacob Schott and Julie Bizzotto. And for the ongoing support and encouragement of my family, friends, students, and colleagues, I am forever grateful.

Paige Wilson
Pasadena City College

This book is dedicated to Teresa Ferster Glazier (1907–2004). In creating *The Least You Should Know about English*, she discovered a way to teach grammar and writing that students and teachers have actually enjoyed for over thirty-five years. Her original explanations and approaches have been constant sources of inspiration for this and all previous coauthored editions, as they will be for all future editions of her text.

Getting the most from *The Least You Should Know* *about English*

Most English textbooks cover more than you need to know. This book will present the *least you should know* in order to write with clarity and confidence. Improving your writing skills doesn't require memorizing complex grammatical terms like *gerund*, *auxiliary verb*, or *demonstrative pronoun*. You can write well without knowing such technical labels if you understand certain key concepts—what we call “the least you should know about English.” The concepts covered in the four parts of this book progress from smaller structures to larger ones but can be approached in any order.

Part One on “**Word Use**” demonstrates how words work alone and together in predictable ways to express meaning. **Part Two** on “**Sentence Structure**” explains how subjects and verbs create clauses and join other structures to form sentences. Part Two also illustrates how knowing the patterns of English can help writers avoid and correct common errors. **Part Three** on “**Punctuation**” shows how punctuation marks act as a written code to aid understanding. **Part Four** on “**Writing**” explains how paragraphs and essays present ideas and evidence on a larger scale and in a variety of ways through the process of composition. To reinforce these concepts, all four parts focus less on “rules” and more on the skills and structures that successful writers use to communicate.

The English you'll learn in this book is sometimes called Standard Written English, and it may differ slightly or greatly from the English you use when speaking. Standard Written English is the form of writing accepted in business and the professions, both online and in print. So no matter how you speak, you will communicate better in writing when you use Standard Written English. You might *say*, “That's a whole nother problem,” but you would probably want to *write*, “That's a completely different problem.” Knowing the difference between spoken English and Standard Written English is essential in college, in business, and in life. For example, the following sentence contains a commonly misused or misspelled word. Can you spot it?

I hope that my favorite university will except my application for admission.

The writer probably relied on the sound, not the meaning, of the word *except* to choose it. *Except* means “to exclude or leave out.” The two words *except* and *accept* sound similar but have opposite meanings (see Section 1). The writer should have used the word *accept*, which means “to receive or agree to take” the application:

I hope that my favorite university will *accept* my application for admission.

Here’s another example, this time missing a comma to separate two statements joined by *and*:

The manager fired Kevin and Chloe and I received a promotion.

Adding a comma after Chloe means that the manager fired two people:

The manager fired Kevin and Chloe, and I received a promotion.

But perhaps Chloe received a promotion with me; then the comma should follow Kevin:

The manager fired Kevin, and Chloe and I received a promotion.

Punctuation changes the meaning—and Chloe’s life—dramatically. With the help of this text, we hope that your writing becomes so clear that no one will misunderstand it.

As you progress through the book, it’s important to hold on to information because the concepts and structures of English form patterns that develop and sharpen with use. For example, knowing how subjects and verbs work will help you avoid fragments, proofread for subject-verb agreement, and use effective punctuation.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

- 1) Read the explanations within each section carefully; they’re brief and full of helpful hints.
- 2) Do the first exercise and compare your responses with the answers. If they don’t match or make sense, look at the explanations and examples again to find out why.
- 3) Do the second exercise and check it. If you’re puzzled by even one answer, return to the explanation. You must have missed something. Be tough on yourself. Don’t just think, “Maybe I’ll get it next time.” Review the examples, and *then* try again.
- 4) You may be tempted to quit after doing well on one or two exercises. Instead, encourage yourself to finish another. *Understanding* a concept or structure is just the first step; with *practice*, understanding becomes second nature.

- 5) Once you've explored a concept or structure fully, move on to the proofreading and writing exercises to help you apply that knowledge to sentences, paragraphs, and essays of your own.

Learning the basics of any important skill takes time. Generally, college students spend a couple of hours outside of class for each hour in class. You may want to spend more. Undoubtedly, the more you consciously explore and reinforce “the least you should know” concepts through practice, the stronger your writing skills will become.

P A R T O N E

Word Use

WHAT IS THE LEAST YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WORD USE?

Words are very much like people. They mean different things and work in different ways in different locations, but these meanings and jobs are *not* random. A doctor in a white lab coat and stethoscope checking heart rates would be out of place at a pool party. But the same person, if swimming around in a bathing suit, could be a guest at a pool party. The difference is in how the person acts in different settings. Words are just the same. In the same way that we can recognize doctors when they check our heart rates and pool party guests when they paddle around in swimsuits, we can recognize nouns when they name people, places, or things and verbs when they show actions.

Just as the same person can be either a doctor or a guest at a pool party, a word can be either a noun or a verb, depending on its use in a particular sentence. For example, as a word in the sentence “Your smile brightens my day,” *smile* is a noun subject that names the thing that brightens my day. But in the sentence “I smile whenever I see that video,” the word *smile* is a verb, telling the action that happens when I see the video. Some words are more versatile than others. The word *back*, for instance, can be a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, depending on how it participates with the words around it: “The *back* of my car *backed* into our *back* fence, so I have to go *back* to the body shop.” Our newly added section on “Consulting a Dictionary” (Section 7) helps to explain how even a common word like *back* has more than one identity and purpose. To preview the ways in which words, like people, work alone and together to create meaning, take the Word Use Preview Test.

Word Use Preview Test

Think of this preview test as an opportunity to discover how much you already know about word use, rather than as a test to be graded. You can check your answers, but first try your best. Read each of the following sentences carefully, and choose the word or term that successfully completes its meaning:

1. The height of a vehicle (affects, effects) its potential to roll over.
2. My art teacher (complemented, complimented) me on my shading skills.
3. An ambulance sped (passed, past) us and honked loudly at the intersection.
4. Allergies to nuts, especially peanuts, can be (quiet, quite) dangerous.
5. In the sentence “She left her keys *on* the dashboard,” *on* is (an adverb, a preposition).
6. In the sentence “Our guests were tired, *so* the party ended early,” *so* is a (pronoun, conjunction).
7. In the sentence “The twins look *identical*,” *identical* is an (adjective, adverb).
8. They did not do as (good, well) as they expected on their group projects.
9. We all felt (bad, badly) about the missing backpack.
10. (Its, It’s) been raining since last Saturday.
11. (Whose, Who’s) the creator of Sherlock Holmes?
12. A surprise (party’s, parties’) success depends on secrecy.
13. The new theme park exceeded all of the (teenager’s, teenagers’) expectations.
14. An (eye-catching, eye catching) cover can increase book sales.
15. Last semester, we studied the history of the (internet, Internet).

1. Words Often Confused (Set 1)

To help you learn the difference between words often confused, we've divided the most commonly confused words into two sets that contain examples and helpful memory tips. Study the pairs of words in Set 1 before trying the exercises. Then move on to Set 2. If you practice each set thoroughly and check your answers along the way, your word choice skills will improve.

a, an

Use *an* before a word that begins with a vowel sound (*a, e, i, and o*, plus *u* when it sounds like *ub*) or silent *b*. Note that it's not the letter but the *sound* of the letter that matters.

an apple, *an* essay, *an* inch, *an* onion

an umpire, *an* ugly design (The *u*'s sound like *ub*.)

an hour, *an* honest person (The *b*'s are silent.)

Use *a* before a word that begins with a consonant sound (all the sounds except the vowels, plus *u* or *eu* when they sound like *you*).

a chart, *a* pie, *a* hat (The *b* is not silent in *bat*.)

a union, *a* uniform, *a* unit (The *u*'s sound like *you*.)

a European vacation, *a* euphemism (*Eu* sounds like *you*.)

accept, except

Accept means "to receive or agree to take." Think of the two *c*'s in *accept* as two hands curling up to receive something.

I *accept* this award on my mother's behalf.

Except means "excluding" or "but." Think of the *x* in *except* as two arms crossed to block something or someone.

The airline upgraded everyone *except* Stanley.

advise, advice

Advise is a verb. (Remember, "*Wise* people *advise*." Note the *s* sounds like *z* in both *wise* and *advise*.)

I *advise* you to apply for a seasonal job.

Advice is a noun. (Another rhyme helps here. You can give or take *advice* like a bowl of *rice*.)

My math tutor gave me the best *advice*.

affect, effect

Affect is almost always a *verb* that means “to alter or influence someone or something.” Try substituting another *verb* that starts with *a*—like *alter* or *amaze* or *astound*—to see if it works. If it does, then use this verb that starts with *a*: *affect*.

All quizzes will *affect* the final grade. (All quizzes will *alter* the final grade.)

That story *affected* everyone who heard it. (That story *amazed* everyone who heard it.)

Effect is most commonly used as a *noun* and means “a result.” Focus on the *e* sound in *effect* and *result*, and try substituting *result* for *effect* as a test.

The strong coffee had a powerful *effect*. (The strong coffee had a powerful *result*.)

We studied the *effects* of sleep deprivation in my psychology class. (We studied the *results* . . .)

all ready, already

If you can leave out the *all* and the sentence still makes sense, then *all ready* is the form to use.

That box is *all ready* to go. (“That box is *ready* to go” makes sense.)

But if you *can’t* leave out the *all*, use *already*.

That box is *already* full. (“That box is *ready* full” does not make sense, so use *already*.)

are, our

Are is a present form of the verb “to be.”

We *are* going to Colorado Springs.

Our is a possessive pronoun that works as an adjective. It shows that we possess something.

We painted *our* fence to match the house.

brake, break

Brake used as a verb means “to slow or stop motion.” It’s also the device that slows or stops motion in a *car*. Remember that both *car* and *brake* have an *a* in the middle.

I had to *brake* quickly to avoid an accident.

Luckily I just had the *brakes* on my car fixed.

Break used as a verb means “to shatter” or “to split.” It’s also the name of an interruption, as in “a coffee break.”

She never thought she would *break* a world record.

Enjoy your spring *break*.

choose, chose The difference here is one of time. Use *choose* for present and future; use *chose* for past.

I will *choose* a new major this semester.

They *chose* the wrong time of year to travel to India.

clothes, cloths *Clothes* are garments people wear; *cloths* are pieces of material you might clean or polish something with.

I love the *clothes* that characters wear in old movies.

Workers at car washes use special *cloths* to dry the cars.

coarse, course *Coarse* describes a rough texture or quality.

I used *coarse* sandpaper to smooth the surface of the board.

Course is used for all other meanings.

Of *course* we visited the golf *course* at Pebble Beach.

complement, compliment *Complement*, spelled with an *e* in the middle, means “to complete something as a perfect pair.”

Use a color wheel to find a *complement* for purple.

Juliet’s personality *complements* Romeo’s: she is practical, and he’s a dreamer.

Compliment, spelled with an *i* in the middle, has to do with nice comments or feedback. Remember the *i* in *nice* and *compliment*.

I received a *compliment* from my new boss.

We *complimented* them on their new home.

conscious, *Conscious* means “awake” or “aware.”

conscience I wasn’t *conscious* during my surgery.

Conscience means “that inner voice of right and wrong.” The extra *n* in *conscience* should remind you of “No,” which is what your conscience often says to you.

My *conscience* told me not to keep the money I found.

dessert, desert *Dessert* is the sweet one, the one people like two helpings of. So give it two helpings of *s*. Remember also that “stressed” spelled backwards is *desserts*.

When I'm stressed, I can eat two *desserts* in a row.

The other one, *desert*, is used for all other meanings and has two pronunciations (see "Consulting a Dictionary," Section 7).

The snake slithered slowly across the *desert*.

I promise that I won't *desert* you after graduation.

do, due

Do is a verb, an action. You *do* something.

I *do* most of my homework on the weekends.

But a payment or a paper is *due*; it is scheduled for a certain time.

Our first essay is *due* tomorrow.

Due also comes before *to* in a phrase that means *because of*.

The outdoor concert was canceled *due to* rain.

feel, fill

Feel describes *feelings*.

Whenever I stay up late, I *feel* sleepy in class.

Fill is the action of pouring into or packing something fully.

I want to *fill* my essay with memorable details.

fourth, forth

The word *fourth* has *four* in it, but *forty* does not. Remember the word *forty-fourth* to help you spell both of these words related to numbers.

This is our *fourth* quiz in *forty-eight* hours.

My grandparents celebrated their *forty-fourth* anniversary.

If you don't mean a number, use *forth*.

The ship's passengers walked back and *forth* on deck.

have, of

Have is a verb. Sometimes, in a contraction, it sounds like *of*. When you say *could've*, the *have* may sound like *of*, but it is not written that way. Always write *could have*, *would have*, *should have*, *might have*.

We should *have* planned our vacation sooner.

Then we could *have* used our coupon for a free ticket.

Use *of* in prepositional phrases. (See Section 8.)

She sent me a box *of* chocolates for my birthday.