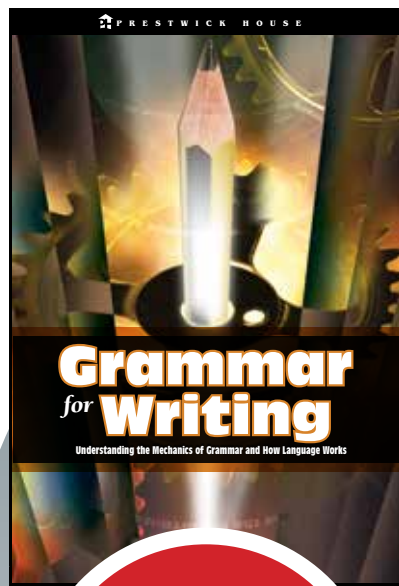




Grammar for Writing

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# **Grammar** *for* **Writing**



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**Senior Editor:**

*Paul Moliken*

**Writer:**

*Douglas Grudzina*

**Cover and Text Design:**

*Larry Knox*

**Layout and Production:**

*Jeremy Clark*

**Reviewing Teachers:**

*Sharon M. Ammon, Houston, TX*

*Kathleen Carr, New Castle, PA*



# Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658

Clayton • Delaware 19938

Tel: 1.888.932.4593

Fax: 1.888.718.9333

Web: [www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)

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# Grammar *for* Writing

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**Grammar** *for* Writing

# Introduction

**F**or those who use this book, *Grammar for Writing* will prove to be an exciting and different approach to the notions of correctness and clarity in writing. Using language is one of the few things that children come to school *already doing*. Children just starting school might have learned how to count, and they might have a sense of adding and subtracting, but their mathematics teachers tend to find them blank slates on which to write correct mathematical knowledge and procedures.

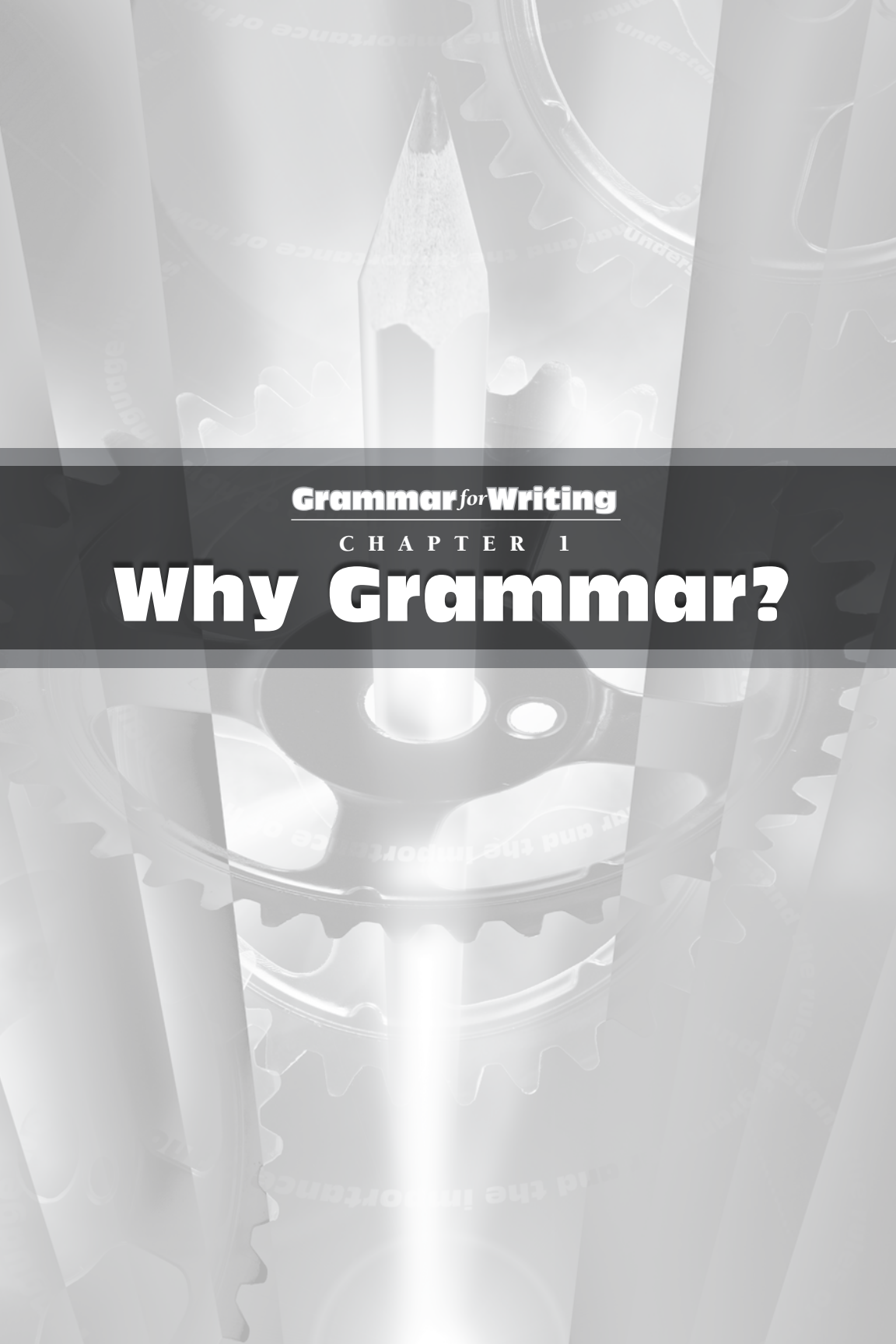
Language, however, is different. Students come to school having already been using language for years. Language has surrounded them from birth. They hear, speak, think, and reason in words. Language has already helped them to understand and interact with their environments, other people, and themselves. They have a sense of “what sounds right” and “what sounds wrong.” They’ve already developed some good language habits. But some of their language habits are not so good, and these can actually hinder effective communication or hamper their success in school.

*Grammar for Writing*, therefore, does not assume that the student is a linguistic *tabula rasa* on which all the “rules” can be written. This book does not even presume that there are hard and fast rules.

Instead, *Grammar for Writing* invites students to look closely at their own understanding and use of language and, from that understanding, examine the agreed-upon *conventions* that make communication possible. *Grammar for Writing* invites the student to examine *how and why* these conventions exist, and, thus, to remember and apply them more effectively.

The focus of *Grammar for Writing* is not on “correct” English or “proper” English, but on *Standard Edited American English*, the language necessary for success in the American school, workplace, and marketplace.

Whether your students are Advanced Placement Scholars, challenged learners, or English Language Learners whose primary language is not English, the explanations, examples, and exercises in *Grammar for Writing* are designed to establish habits of effective communication that are based on *understanding*, not on a rote application of rules.

The background of the entire page is a grayscale illustration. It features a large, sharp pencil pointing upwards from the bottom center. Behind the pencil and across the entire page are several interlocking gears of different sizes. Some of the gears have faint, repeating text on them, such as "the importance of grammar" and "understanding the importance of grammar".

**Grammar** *for* **Writing**

CHAPTER 1

# Why Grammar?

**H**ere you are at the beginning of a book entitled *Grammar for Writing*, and you're probably looking forward to studying grammar about as much as you'd look forward to listening to someone read to you from the dictionary.

You probably don't see much point in studying grammar anyway, do you? After all, there are more exceptions than rules, right? You think that no one really follows the rules. Breaking the rules is called "style."

So what's the big deal?

The big deal is that...

grammar signposts readers listeners writer's speaker's message understand provides  
look intended for to the the and or

The words above *represent* a sentence, and it is a very appropriate sentence for this chapter.

Perhaps you didn't understand it because the writer was more interested in "style" than in being grammatically correct, and using correct grammar is quite often the same thing as being clear.

### **The Role of Word Order in English Grammar:**

Much of English grammar depends on the placement of the word in the sentence, so maybe if we rearrange the words in the above sentence and punctuate it properly, you'll understand it better:

Grammar provides the signposts readers and listeners look for to understand the writer's or speaker's intended message.

There are, of course, a few other grammatical conventions at work in the sentence above, and we will deal with them in later chapters, but the sentence should give you an idea that English is a language that does depend on the order of the words in sentences.

Look at the following "sentence":

an alien general would explain to you what a electric microwave does how

You might get the meaning that a creature from another planet can explain microwaves, but some grammatical and word placement issues are confusing within the sentence. Let's look at it differently, using the exact same words as before, but in a different order:

general how would you explain what a microwave does to an electric alien

This version makes a bit more sense, and it seems to mean that a general can

detail the effects of a microwave on an alien. But, again, some grammatical problems alert you to the fact that it still is incorrect. Another version might be slightly better:

how you would explain what an alien electric microwave does to a general

That one implies that a microwave will do something to the general. However, with the words in the proper order and a little punctuation and capitalization, the writer's meaning suddenly becomes clear:

How would you explain to an alien what a General Electric microwave does?

### **The Role of Word Form in English Grammar:**

The sample sentence about the alien is short and easy, and it does not communicate a very challenging idea.

Now, take a look at the following sets of words:

| I.                  | II.                | III.                             |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| corrupt, corruption | simple, simply     | perform, performing, performance |
| deny, deniability   | ride, rode, riding | real, reality, really            |

All of the words in each set above are related, but the different *form* of the words in the set gives them a slightly different meaning. You can easily understand the differences between these various forms, but when used incorrectly in sentences, their meaning is confusing and bothersome.

The paragraph that follows is only three sentences long, but it expresses a much more complicated idea, which needs to be explained using correct word *form*. Can you make it sensible?

Good is not simple the absent of evil. Just as evil implied the perform of some intention deed of corrupt or destruction, the notion of good suggest the intention perform of some positive act, what Wordsworth might have call those little, nameless, unre-membered act of kindness and of love. Good, then, might be as simply as hold the door open for another person or left a penny at the cash register. The merely absent of evil is more like neutral, not good.

Chances are, you could understand the passage, despite the incorrect word forms—after all, the words are all in their correct order, and the conventions of capitalization and punctuation have been followed—but you also know it's not *right*. If

the passage appeared on an employment application for a company you ran, you would probably be hesitant to give the writer the position. If you heard it in a campaign speech, you would probably not vote for the speaker. However, if you wrote it as the essay on your college application, there is no way that you'd be accepted for admission.

### **The Role of Capitalization and Punctuation in English Grammar:**

Let's look at a different passage; this one is about the famous children's book author, Dr. Seuss, so it *should* be very easy to understand. This time, though, we've taken out all of the punctuation and capitalization. What impact does removing these grammatical conventions have on your ability to understand the writer's point? How is the speed of understanding the paragraph affected? How high does your frustration level go?

after world war II dr seuss and his wife moved to california and he happily returned to childrens books he wrote many of his most famous works during these post war years including if i ran the zoo if i ran the circus and how the grinch stole christmas a coincidental event that would change the direction of seuss's career forever occurred in 1954 when life magazine published a report saying that children were not learning to read because their books were boring as a result seuss's publisher made up a list of 400 words he felt were important he asked seuss to cut the list to 250 words and then write a book using only those words nine months later seuss completed the cat in the hat using only 220 of the allotted 250 words because of the book's simplified vocabulary it could be read even by beginning readers but the wordplay fanciful rhymes and rhythm and typical seuss like illustrations made it a fun book for beginners to read a popular myth alleges that in 1960 the publisher bet him fifty dollars that he couldn't write an entire book using only fifty words the result that supposedly won the bet for seuss was green eggs and ham it is further rumored that the publisher never paid seuss the fifty dollars but there is no evidence to support this claim seuss's widow has said that the publisher often jokingly bet seuss that he would not be able to keep his next book under a certain word count and that seuss always won

You probably can understand what the writer tried to say, but it is not as easy to interpret as it would have been if capitals and punctuation had been included.

As you can see, take away the capital letters and punctuation marks, and you have no idea where one thought ends and where another begins. Take away word order, and you will not be able to grasp the relationship between the words. Take away the appropriate word form, and you have even less chance of understanding the writer's thought.

Clearly then, *some* knowledge of grammar is essential if one hopes to speak or write in such a way as to be understood by others. The writer of the above has paid no attention to the rules and conventions that we all agree are necessary in order for one person to communicate a thought or idea to another. The result is a complete failure to be understood.

**Exercise 1:** Below are a few passages that are difficult to understand—or might actually be *misunderstood*—because the writer has not taken into consideration those rules and conventions of grammar that help us to understand each other. In the spaces provided, explain what the problems are and how the writer could fix them. Then rewrite the passage. The first one has been done for you.

1. Medical science is. One of the most rapid advance sciences of the twenty-first century every day. New and wonderful Developments are announced.

ERRORS:

*These sentences contain errors in capitalization, punctuation, and word form. The writer needs to capitalize the first word of every sentence and place periods only at the ends of complete sentences. The passage also should read "rapidly advancing," not "rapid advance."*

REWRITE:

*Medical science is one of the most rapidly advancing sciences of the twenty-first century. Every day, new and wonderful developments are announced.*

2. yet, again we read about a miracle drug this time. it is aspirin that 100 year old drug. which in the 1920s was touted as safe by maker. bayer corporation do not affect the heart, state the ads now we learn. that in fact aspirin do affect the heart. beneficial

ERRORS:

REWRITE:

3. as it turns out aspirin is, useful, for only them which have already experiencing. that whom we all wish to avoid. aspirin provided no benefit for the health of individuals. Who presently exhibits low risk for heart attack? or stroke. for example a 30-year-old woman. Is typical. at low risk for heart attack. therefore consumption of aspirin is considered a great risk. for her

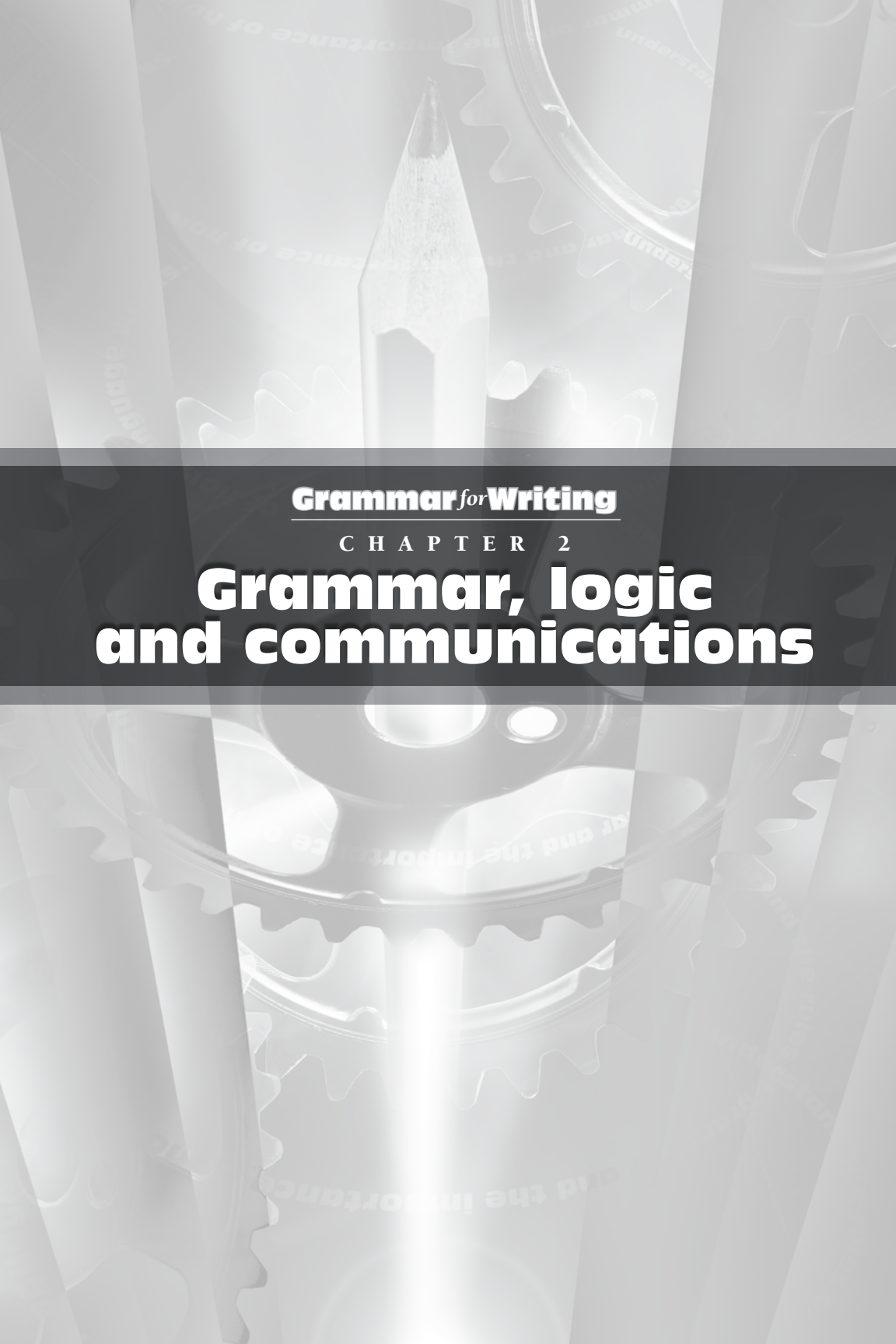
ERRORS:

REWRITE:

4. the medical even establishment admit's that aspirin not's being a cure-all not aspirin should replace a healthily life. Style, states a member of the FDA, only in a culture. seeking a cure-all, would that truth need even stated. Aspirin not's a miracle drug any more. then, any other is, it just so happens. That it is readily available. and inexpensive for some patients. being prescribed, that kind of drug is the miracle

ERRORS:

REWRITE:

The background of the entire page is a grayscale image. It features a large, sharp pencil pointing upwards, positioned centrally. Behind the pencil and across the entire page are several interlocking gears of different sizes, creating a mechanical or industrial aesthetic. The text is overlaid on a dark horizontal band that spans the width of the page.

**Grammar***for***Writing**

CHAPTER 2

# **Grammar, logic and communications**

**D**o you know what the following sentences mean? The first sentence does not mean the same thing as the second sentence, does it?

*Sienna threw the ball.*  
*The ball threw Sienna.*

But what's the difference between the two sentences? They have *exactly the same* words yet they mean exactly the opposite of each other.

Now, consider these two sentences whose meanings change simply by the placement of commas:

*Woman, without her man, is nothing.*  
*Woman, without her, man is nothing.*

If you understand the difference between those two statements, then you must admit that there is a certain logic to how words are arranged (word order) and how groups of words are joined, separated, or marked (punctuation) in order to make communication clear.

**Exercise 1:** Examine the two examples above (repeated here); explain what each sentence means and *how* the sentence conveys that meaning to an average reader. The first one has been done for you.

*Sienna threw the ball.*

MEANING:

*In this first sentence, "Sienna" is performing the action. The action is "throwing," and "the ball" is receiving the action. It is the thing being thrown.*

HOW CONVEYED:

*The first part of the sentence usually tells us who or what is performing the action of the sentence. The last part of the sentence usually tells us who or what is receiving the action, and the name of the action usually comes between the two.*

*The ball threw Sienna.*

MEANING:

*This sentence means that "the ball" is performing the action and that "Sienna" is being thrown.*

HOW CONVEYED:

*The performer of the action usually comes first and the receiver of the action usually comes toward the end.*

*Woman, without her man, is nothing.*

MEANING:

HOW CONVEYED:

*Woman, without her, man is nothing.*

MEANING:

HOW CONVEYED:

## The Prescriptive Approach versus the Descriptive Approach to Grammar:

There are two popular approaches to the study and teaching of grammar, the **prescriptive** and the **descriptive** approaches. Both are useful, and neither is “more right” than the other, but they are not useful in the same way.

The **prescriptive** approach looks at the rule first and then examines the rule in practice, which is essentially a **deductive** approach. Certainly you’ve been taught rules like:

Do **not** begin a sentence with a coordinating conjunction.

**Never** end a sentence with a preposition.

The biggest problem with prescriptive rules is that there are many exceptions to the rule. These do not invalidate the rule, but they do make effective language use difficult if you have to learn each rule and its exception(s).

The **descriptive** approach to grammar looks at how the language is used by educated, native speakers and writers, and then formulates a rule from that usage—a more **inductive** approach. Descriptive rules would be stated as follows:

Whatever follows a coordinating conjunction in a sentence will be linked (in the reader’s or listener’s mind) to whatever *immediately preceded* it.

The time or space relationship conveyed by the preposition can be lost or misdirected if the preposition comes *after* its object.

**Exercise 2:** Examine the following groups of sentences. Briefly explain what each sentence means and then develop a rule that describes how word order communicates that meaning. The first one has been done for you.

1. *Bob liked Mary.*  
*Mary liked Bob.*

MEANING, SENTENCE ONE:

*Bob had a feeling of regard and affection for Mary.*

MEANING, SENTENCE TWO:

*Mary reciprocated Bob’s feeling.*

RULE:

*The noun that comes first in the sentence is the performer of the action. The noun that comes last in the sentence is the receiver of the action.*