

SAMUEL JOHNSON

A GRAMMAR OF THE
ENGLISH TONGUE

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A GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH TONGUE

Grammar, which is the *art of using words properly*, comprises four parts: Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody.

In this division and order of the parts of grammar I follow the common grammarians, without inquiring whether a fitter distribution might not be found. Experience has long shown this method to be so distinct as to obviate confusion, and so comprehensive as to prevent any inconvenient omissions. I likewise use the terms already received, and already understood, though perhaps others more proper might sometimes be invented. Sylburgius, and other innovators, whose new terms have sunk their learning into neglect, have left sufficient warning against the trifling ambition of teaching arts in a new language.

Orthography is *the art of combining letters into syllables, and syllables into words*. It therefore teaches previously the form and sound of letters.

The letters of the English language are,

Roman.	Italick.	Name.
A a	<i>A a</i>	<i>a</i>
B b	<i>B b</i>	<i>be</i>
C c	<i>C c</i>	<i>see</i>
D d	<i>D d</i>	<i>dee</i>
E e	<i>E e</i>	<i>e</i>
F f	<i>F f</i>	<i>eff</i>
G g	<i>G g</i>	<i>jee</i>
H h	<i>H h</i>	<i>aitch</i>
I i	<i>I i</i>	<i>i (or ja)</i>
J j	<i>J j</i>	<i>j conson.</i>
K k	<i>K k</i>	<i>ka</i>
L l	<i>L l</i>	<i>el</i>
M m	<i>M m</i>	<i>em</i>
N n	<i>N n</i>	<i>en</i>
O o	<i>O o</i>	<i>o</i>
P p	<i>P p</i>	<i>pee</i>
Q q	<i>Q q</i>	<i>cue</i>
R r	<i>R r</i>	<i>ar</i>
S s	<i>S s</i>	<i>ess</i>
T t	<i>T t</i>	<i>tee</i>
U u	<i>U u</i>	<i>u (or va)</i>
V v	<i>V v</i>	<i>v conson.</i>
W w	<i>W w</i>	<i>double u</i>
X x	<i>X x</i>	<i>ex</i>
Y y	<i>Y y</i>	<i>wy</i>
Z z	<i>Z z</i>	<i>zed</i>

To these may be added certain combinations of letters universally used in printing; as, *fl*, *ff*, *fi*, *ffi*, *ffl*, and *&*, or *and per se*, *and*.

Our letters are commonly reckoned twenty-four, because anciently *i* and *j* as well as *u* and *v* were expressed by the same character; but as those letters, which had always different powers, have now different forms, our alphabet may be properly said to consist of twenty-six letters

Vowels are five, *a, e, i, o, u*.

Such is the number generally received; but for *i* it is the practice to write *y* in the end of words, as *thy, holy*; before *i*, as from *die, dying*; from *beautify, beautifying*; in the words *says, days, eyes*; and in words derived from the Greek, and written originally with *υ*, as *sympathy, συμπαθεια, system, συστημα*.

For *u* we often write *w* after a vowel, to make a diphthong; as, *raw, grew, view, vow, flowing; lowness*.

The sounds of all the letters are various.

In treating on the letters, I shall not, like some other grammarians, inquire into the original of their form, as an antiquarian; nor into their formation and prolation by the organs of speech, as a mechanick, anatomist, or physiologist; nor into the properties and gradation of sounds, or the elegance or harshness of particular combinations, as a writer of universal and transcendental grammar. I consider the English alphabet only as it is English; and even in this narrow disquisition I follow the example of former grammarians, perhaps with more reverence than judgment, because by writing in English I suppose my reader already acquainted with the English language, and consequently able to pronounce the letters of which I teach the pronunciation; and because of sounds in general it may be observed, that words are unable to describe them. An account, therefore, of the primitive and simple letters, is useless, almost alike to those who know their sound, and those who know it not.

OF VOWELS

A

A has three sounds, the slender, open, and broad.

A slender is found in most words, as *face, mane*, and in words ending in *ation*, as *creation, salvation, generation*.

The *a* slender is the proper English *a*, called very justly by Erpenius, in his Arabick Grammar, *a Anglicum cum e mistum*, as having a middle sound between the open *a* and the *e*. The French have a similar sound in the word *pais*, and in their *e* masculine.

A open is the *a* of the Italian, or nearly resembles it; as *father, rather, congratulate, fancy, glass*. A broad resembles the *a* of the German; as *all, wall, call*.

Many words pronounced with *a* broad were anciently written with *au*; as *sault, mault*; and we still say, *fault, vault*. This was probably the Saxon sound, for it is yet retained in the northern dialects, and in the rustick pronunciation; as *maun* for *man*, *haund* for *hand*.

The short *a* approaches to the *a* open, as *grass*.

The long *a*, if prolonged by *e* at the end of the word, is always slender, as *graze, fame*.

A forms a diphthong only with *i* or *y*, and *u* or *w*. *Ai* or *ay*, as in *plain, wain, gay, clay*, has only the sound of the long and slender *a*, and differs not in the pronunciation from *plane, wane*.

Au or *aw* has the sound of the German *a*, as *raw, naughty*.

Ae is sometimes found in Latin words not completely naturalized or assimilated, but is no English diphthong; and is more properly expressed by single *e*, as *Cesar, Eneas*.

E

E is the letter which occurs most frequently in the English language.

E is long, as in *scēne*; or short, as in *cēllar, sēparate, cēlebrate, mēn, thēn*.

It is always short before a double consonant, or two consonants, as in *vēx, pērplexity, relēnt, mēdlar, rēptile, sērpent, cēllar, cēssation, blēssing, fēll, fēlling, dēbt*.

E is always mute at the end of a word, except in monosyllables that have no other vowel, as *the*; or proper names, as *Penelope, Phebe, Derbe*; being used to modify the foregoing consonants, as *since, once, hedge, oblige*; or to lengthen the preceding vowel, as *bān, bāne; cān, cāne; pīn, pīne; tūn, tūne; rūb, rūbe; pōp, pōpe; fīr, fīre; cūr, cūre; tūb, tūbe*.

Almost all words which now terminate in consonants ended anciently in *e*, as *year, yeare; wildness, wildnesse*; which *e* probably had the force of the French *e* feminine, and constituted a syllable with its associate consonant; for in old editions words are sometimes divided thus, *clea-re, fel-le, knowled-ge*. This *e* was perhaps for a time vocal or silent in poetry as convenience required; but it has been long wholly mute. Camden in his *Remains* calls it the silent *e*.

It does not always lengthen the foregoing vowel, as *glōve, live, gīve*.

It has sometimes in the end of words a sound obscure, and scarcely perceptible, as *open, shapen, shotten, thistle, participle, metre, lucre*.

This faintness of sound is found when *e* separates a mute from a liquid, as in *rotten*, or follows a mute and liquid, as in *cattle*.

E forms a diphthong with *a*, as *near*; with *i*, as *deign, receive*; and with *u* or *w*, as *new, stew*.

Ea sounds like *e* long, as *mean*; or like *ee*, as *dear, clear, near*.

Ei is sounded like *e* long, as *seize, perceiving*.

Eu sounds as *u* long and soft.

E, a, u, are combined in *beauty* and its derivatives, but have only the sound of *u*.

E may be said to form a diphthong by reduplication, as *agree, sleeping*.

Eo is found in *yeoman*, where it is sounded as *o* short; and in *people*, where it is pronounced like *ee*.

I

I has a sound long, as *fīne*; and short as *fīn*.

That is eminently observable in *i*, which may be likewise remarkable in other letters, that the short sound is not the long sound contracted, but a sound wholly different.

The long sound in monosyllables is always marked by the *e* final, as *thīn, thīne*.

I is often sounded before *r*, as a short *u*; as *flirt, first, shirt*.

It forms a diphthong only with *e*, as *field, shield*, which is sounded as the double *ee*; except *friend*, which is sounded as *frēnd*.

I is joined with *eu* in *lieu*, and *ew* in *view*; which triphthongs are sounded as the open *u*.

O

O is long, as *bōne, obedient, corrōding*; or short, as *blōck, knōck, oblique, löll*.

Women is pronounced *wimen*.

The short *o* has sometimes the sound of close *u*, as *son, come*.

O coalesces into a diphthong with *a*, as *moan, groan, approach*: *oa* has the sound of *o* long.

O is united to *e* in some words derived from Greek, as *æconomy*; but as being not an English diphthong, they are better written as they are sounded, with only *e*, *economy*.

With *i*, as *oil, soil, moil, noisome*.

This coalition of letters seems to unite the sounds of the two letters, as far as two sounds can be united without being destroyed, and therefore approaches more nearly than any combination in our tongue to the notion of a diphthong.

With *o*, as *boot, hoot, cooler*; *oo* has the sound of the Italian *u*.

With *u* or *w*, as *our, power, flower*; but in some words has only the sound of *o* long, as in *soul, bowl, sow, grow*. These different sounds are used to distinguish different significations: as *bow* an instrument for shooting; *bow*, a depression of the head; *sow*, the she of a boar; *sow*, to scatter seed; *bowl*, an orbicular body; *bowl*, a wooden vessel.

Ou is sometimes pronounced like *o* soft, as *court*; sometimes like *o* short, as *cough*; sometimes like *u* close, as *could*; or *u* open, as *rough*, *tough*, which use only can teach.

Ou is frequently used in the last syllable of words which in Latin end in *or* and are made English, as *honour*, *labour*, *favour*, from *honor*, *labor*, *favor*.

Some late innovators have ejected the *u*, without considering that the last syllable gives the sound neither of *or* nor *ur*, but a sound between them, if not compounded of both; besides that they are probably derived to us from the French nouns in *eur*, as *honeur*, *faveur*.

U

U is long in *ūse*, *confūtion*; or short, as *ŭs*, *conciŭssion*.

It coalesces with *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*; but has rather in these combinations the force of the *w* consonant, as *quaff*, *quest*, *quit*, *quite*, *languish*; sometimes in *ui* the *i* loses its sound, as in *juice*. It is sometimes mute before *a*, *e*, *i*, *y*, as *guard*, *guest*, *guise*, *buy*.

U is followed by *e* in *virtue*, but the *e* has no sound.

Ue is sometimes mute at the end of a word, in imitation of the French, as *prorogue*, *synagogue*, *plague*, *vague*, *harangue*.

Y

Y is a vowel, which, as Quintilian observes of one of the Roman letters, we might want without inconvenience, but that we have it. It supplies the place of *i* at the end of words, as *thy*, before an *i*, as *dying*; and is commonly retained in derivative words where it was part of a diphthong, in the primitive; as, *destroy*, *destroyer*; *betray*, *betrayed*, *betrayed*; *pray*, *prayer*; *say*, *sayer*; *day*, *days*.

Y being the Saxon vowel *y*, which was commonly used where *i* is now put, occurs very frequently in all old books.

GENERAL RULES

A vowel in the beginning or middle syllable, before two consonants, is commonly short, as *ōppōrtunity*.

In monosyllables a single vowel before a single consonant is short; as *stag*, *frog*.

Many is pronounced as if it were written *manny*.

OF CONSONANTS

B

B has one unvaried sound, such as it obtains in other languages.

It is mute in *debt, debtor, subtle, doubt, lamb, limb, dumb, thumb, climb, comb, womb*.

It is used before *l* and *r*, as *black, brown*.

C

C has before *e* and *i* the sound of *s*; as *sincerely, centrick, century, circular, cistern, city, siccity*: before *a, o,* and *u,* it sounds like *k*, as *calm, concavity, copper, incorporate, curiosity, concupiscence*.

C might be omitted in the language without loss, since one of its sounds might be supplied by, *s*, and the other by *k*, but that it preserves to the eye the etymology of words, as *face* from *facies, captive* from *captivus*.

Ch has a sound which is analyzed into *tsh*, as *church, chin, crutch*. It is the same sound which the Italians give to the *c* simple before *i* and *e*, as *citta, cerro*.

Ch is sounded like *k* in words derived from the Greek, as *chymist, scheme, choler*. *Arch* is commonly sounded *ark* before a vowel, as *archangel*, and with the English sound of *ch* before a consonant, as *archbishop*.

Ch, in some French words not yet assimilated, sounds like *sh*, as *machine, chaise*.

C, according to English orthography, never ends a word; therefore we write *stick, block*, which were originally, *sticke, blocke*. In such words *c* is now mute.

It is used before *l* and *r*, as *clock, cross*.

D

Is uniform in its sound, as *death, diligent*.

It is used before *r*, as *draw, dross*; and *w* as *dwelt*.

F

F, though having a name beginning with a vowel, is numbered by the grammarians among the semivowels, yet has this quality of a mute, that it is commodiously sounded before a liquid, as *flask, fry, freckle*. It has an unvariable sound, except that *of* is sometimes spoken nearly as *ov*.

G

G has two sounds; one hard, as in *gay, go, gun*; the other soft, as in *gem, giant*.

At the end of a word it is always hard, as *ring, snug, song, frog*.

Before *e* and *i* the sound is uncertain.

G before *e* is soft, as *gem*, *generation*, except in *gear*, *geld*, *geese*, *get*, *gewgaw*, and derivatives from words ending in *g*, as *singing*, *stronger*, and generally before *er* at the ends of words, as *finger*.

G is mute before *n*, as *gnash*, *sign*, *foreign*.

G before *i* is hard, as *give*, except in *giant*, *gigantick*, *gibbet*, *gibe*, *giblets*, *Giles*, *gill*, *gilliflower*, *gin*, *ginger*, *gingle*, to which may be added *Egypt* and *gypsy*.

Gh in the beginning of a word has the sound of the hard *g*, as *ghostly*; in the middle, and sometimes at the end, it is quite silent, as *though*, *right*, *sought*, spoken *tho'*, *rite*, *soute*.

It has often at the end the sound of *f*, as *laugh*; whence laughter retains the same sound in the middle; *cough*, *trough*, *sough*, *tough*, *enough*, *slough*.

It is not to be doubted, but that in the original pronunciation *gh* has the force of a consonant deeply guttural, which is still continued among the Scotch.

G is used before *h*, *l*, and *r*.

H

H is a note of aspiration, and shows that the following vowel must be pronounced with a strong emission of breath, as *hat*, *horse*.

It seldom begins any but the first syllable, in which it is always sounded with a full breath, except in *heir*, *herb*, *hostler*, *honour*, *humble*, *honest*, *humour* and their derivatives.

It sometimes begins middle or final syllables in words compounded, as *blockhead*; or derived from the Latin, as *comprehend*.

J

J consonant sounds uniformly like the soft *g*, and is therefore a letter useless, except in etymology, as *ejaculation*, *jester*, *jocund*, *juice*.

K

K has the sound of hard *c*, and is used before *e* and *i*, where, according to English analogy, *c* would be soft, as *kept*, *king*, *skirt*, *skeptick*, for so it should be written, not *sceptick*, because *sc* is sounded like *s*, as in *scene*.

It is used before *n*, as *knell*, *knot*, but totally loses its sound in modern pronunciation.

K is never doubled; but *c* is used before it to shorten the vowel by a double consonant, as *cockle*, *pickle*.

L

L has in English the same liquid sound as in other languages.

The custom is to double the *l* at the end of monosyllables, as *kill*, *will*, *full*. These words were originally written *kille*, *wille*, *fulle*; and when the *e* first grew silent, and was afterward omitted, the *ll* was retained, to give force, according to the analogy of our language, to the foregoing vowel.

L, is sometimes mute, as in *calf, half, halves, calves, could, would, should, psalm, talk, salmon, falcon*.

The Saxons, who delighted in guttural sounds, sometimes aspirated the *l* at the beginning of words, as *hlaf, a loaf, or bread; hlaford, a lord*; but this pronunciation is now disused.

Le at the end of words is pronounced like a weak *el*, in which the *e* is almost mute, as *table, shuttle*.

M

M has always the same sound, as *murmur, monumental*.

N

N has always, the same sound, as *noble, manners*.

N is sometimes mute after *m*, as *damn, condemn, hymn*.

P

P has always the same sound which the Welsh and Germans confound with *b*.

P is sometimes mute, as in *psalm*, and between *m* and *t*, as *tempt*.

Ph is used for *f* in words derived from the Greek, as *philosopher, philanthropy, Philip*.

Q

Q, as in other languages, is always followed by *u*, and has a sound which our Saxon ancestors well expressed by *cw*, as *quadrant, queen, equestrian, quilt, inquiry, quire, quotidian*. *Qu* is never followed by *u*.

Qu is sometimes sounded, in words derived from the French, like *k*, as *conquer, liquor, risque, chequer*.

R

R has the same rough snarling sound as in the other tongues.

The Saxons used often to put *h* before it, as before *l* at the beginning of words.

Rh is used in words derived from the Greek, as *myrrh, myrrhine, catarrhous, rheum, rheumatick, rhyme*.

Re, at the end of some words derived from the Latin or French, is pronounced like a weak *er*, as *theatre, sepulchre*.

S

S has a hissing sound, as *sibilation, sister*.

A single *s* seldom ends any word, except in the third person of verbs, as *loves, grows*; and the plurals of nouns, as *trees, bushes, distresses*; the pronouns *this, his, ours, yours, us*; the adverb *thus*; and words derived from Latin, as *rebus, surplus*; the

close being always either in *se*, as *house, horse*, or in *ss*, as *grass, dress, bliss, less*, anciently *grasse, dresse*.

S, single at the end of words, has a grosser sound, like that of *z*, as *trees, eyes*, except *this, thus, us, rebus, surplus*.

It sounds like *z* before *ion*, if a vowel goes before it, as *intrusion*; and like *s*, if it follows a consonant, as *conversion*.

It sounds like *z* before *e* mute, as *refuse*, and before *y* final, as *rosy*; and in those words, *bosom, desire, wisdom, prison, prisoner, present, present, damsel, casement*.

It is the peculiar quality of *s*, that it may be sounded before all consonants, except *x* and *z*, in which *s* is comprised, *x* being only *ks*, and *z* a hard or gross *s*. This *s* is therefore termed by grammarians *sue potestatis litera*; the reason of which the learned Dr. Clarke erroneously supposed to be, that in some words it might be doubled at pleasure. Thus we find in several languages.

Σβεννυμι, *scatter, sdegno, sdrucchiolo, sfavellare, σφινξ, sgombrare, sgranare, shake, slumber, smell, snipe, space, splendour, spring, squeeze, shrew, step, strength, stramen, stripe, sventura, swell.*

S is mute in *isle, island, demesne, viscount*.

T

T has its customary sound; as *take, temptation*.

Ti before a vowel has the sound of *si* as *salvation*, except an *s* goes before, as *question*; excepting likewise derivatives from words ending in *ty*, as *mighty, mightier*.

Th has two sounds; the one soft, as *thus, whether*; the other hard, as *thing, think*. The sound is soft in these words, *then, thence, and there*, with their derivatives and compounds, and in *that, these, thou, thee, thy, thine, their, they, this, those, them, though, thus*; and in all words between two vowels, as, *father, whether*; and between *r* and a vowel, as *burthen*.

In other words it is hard, as *thick, thunder, faith, faithful*. Where it is softened at the end of a word, an *e* silent must be added, as *breath, breathe; cloth, clothe*.

V

V has a sound of near affinity to that of *f*, as *vain, vanity*.

From *f* in the Islandick alphabet, *v* is only distinguished by a diacritical point.

W

Of *w*, which in diphthongs is often an undoubted vowel, some grammarians have doubted whether it ever be a consonant; and not rather as it is called a double *u*, or *ou*, as *water* may be resolved into *ouater*; but letters of the same sound are always reckoned consonants in other alphabets: and it may be observed, that *w* follows a vowel without any hiatus or difficulty of utterance, as *frosty winter*.

Wh has a sound accounted peculiar to the English, which the Saxons better expressed by *hw*, as, *what, whence, whiting*; in *whore* only, and sometimes in *wholesome*, *wh* is sounded like a simple *h*.

X

X begins no English word: it has the sound of *ks*, as *axle, extraneous*.

Y

Y, when it follows a consonant, is a vowel; when it precedes either a vowel or a diphthong, is a consonant, as *ye, young*. It is thought by some to be in all cases a vowel. But it may be observed of y as of w, that it follows a vowel without any hiatus, as *rosy youth*.

The chief argument by which w and y appear to be always vowels is, that the sounds which they are supposed to have as consonants, cannot be uttered after a vowel, like that of all other consonants; thus we say *tu, ut; do, odd*; but in *wed, dew*; the two sounds of w have no resemblance to each other.

Z

Z begins no word originally English; it has the sound, as its name *izzard* or *s hard* expresses, of an s uttered with a closer compression of the palate by the tongue, as *freeze, froze*.

In orthography I have supposed *orthoepy*, or *just utterance of words*, to be included; orthography being only the art of expressing certain sounds by proper characters. I have therefore observed in what words any of the letters are mute.

Most of the writers of English grammar have given long tables of words pronounced otherwise than they are written, and seem not sufficiently to have considered, that of English, as of all living tongues, there is a double pronunciation, one cursory and colloquial, the other regular and solemn. The cursory pronunciation is always vague and uncertain, being made different in different mouths by negligence, unskilfulness, or affectation. The solemn pronunciation, though by no means immutable and permanent, is yet always less remote from the orthography, and less liable to capricious innovation. They have however generally formed their tables according to the cursory speech of those with whom they happened to converse; and concluding that the whole nation combines to vitiate language in one manner, have often established the jargon of the lowest of the people as the model of speech.

For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words.

There have been many schemes offered for the emendation and settlement of our orthography, which, like that of other nations, being formed by chance, or according to the fancy of the earliest writers in rude ages, was at first very various and uncertain, and is yet sufficiently irregular. Of these reformers some have endeavoured to accommodate orthography better to the pronunciation, without considering that this is to measure by a shadow, to take that for a model or standard which is changing while they apply it. Others, less absurdly indeed, but with equal unlikelihood of success, have endeavoured to proportion the number of letters to that of sounds, that every sound may have its own character, and every character a single sound. Such would be the orthography of a new language, to be formed by a synod of grammarians upon principles of science. But who can hope to prevail on nations to change their practice, and make all their old books useless? or what advantage would a new orthography procure equivalent to the confusion and perplexity of such an alteration?

Some ingenious men, indeed, have endeavoured to deserve well of their country, by writing *honor* and *labor* for *honour* and *labour*, *red* for *read* in the preter-

tense, *sais* for *says*, *repete* for *repeat*, *explane* for *explain*, or *declame* for *declaim*. Of these it may be said, that as they have done no good they have done little harm; both because they have innovated little, and because few have followed them.

The English language has properly no dialects; the style of writers has no professed diversity in the use of words, or of their flexions and terminations, nor differs but by different degrees of skill or care. The oral diction is uniform in no spacious country, but has less variation in England than in most other nations of equal extent. The language of the northern counties retains many words now out of use, but which are commonly of the genuine Teutonic race, and is uttered with a pronunciation which now seems harsh and rough, but was probably used by our ancestors. The northern speech is therefore not barbarous, but obsolete. The speech in the western provinces seems to differ from the general diction rather by a depraved pronunciation, than by any real difference which letters would express.

ETYMOLOGY

Etymology teaches the deduction of one word from another, and the various modifications by which the sense of the same word is diversified; as *horse, horses; I love, I loved.*

Of the ARTICLE

The English have two articles, *an* or *a*, and *the*.

AN, A

A has an indefinite signification, and means *one*, with some reference to more; as *This is a good book*; that is, *one among the books that are good*; *He was killed by a sword*; that is, *some sword*; *This is a better book for a man than a boy*; that is, *for one of those that are men than one of those that are boys*; *An army might enter without resistance*; that is, *any army*.

In the senses in which we use *a* or *an* in the singular, we speak in the plural without an article; as *these are good books*.

I have made *an* the original article, because it is only the Saxon *an*, or *æn*, one, applied to a new use, as the German *ein*

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