

State of the Art of English Grammar Usage

I debated whether or not to comment on the state of the art of English grammar usage. Then, I thought, somebody ought to do it. So, here goes.

First of all, grammar is not an art, and currently, the state is chaos. It's not just the English teacher inside me that prompts me to do this; it's the fact that the abuse is all around me. This is the first layer of my concern which may rest on a single statement: "Me and my friend went to the show." Since when do I come first. Remove "my friend" from the sentence, and the result is enough to cause the speaker to reconsider what was said. There are other abuses which appear on signs, billboards, and in the press. Have we wandered that far from the basic tenets of our language?

The performance items associated with NYS spring ELA testing for students in grades 3 through 8 provides an important source which includes grammar expectations as part of a writing rubric. While student scores are not affected by grammar usage, as long as readability is apparent, many students display a limited understanding of grammar. The abuses include: subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and sentence sprawl. I don't dare to get into issues with punctuation.

I am so old that I remember when English as a course of study was clearly focused on the English language. How many of you recall using an English textbook, such a Tressler or Roberts? How many of your parents would have put you straight whenever you used "ain't" in your everyday conversation?

In attempting to ferret out the reason for the current status of English grammar in speech and writing, I'm not sure I can put a finger on it. I could put the blame on technology with its push for abbreviations, or schools are so overloaded with mandates that English has to take a backseat. But, my concern for our students, which may be misplaced, impacts their future in a society where credentials dominate. A future where communication skills may determine or limit opportunity.

I came to believe that education was and is the basis for opportunity in life. No one told me this; however, I think every student needs to learn early on that the command of the English/American language may be the key to open desirable doors.

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