
Introduction

Every sentence you write for a university assignment, master's thesis, doctoral dissertation, or research paper is the result of many choices: past or present tense? active or passive voice? *I* or *the author*? coordination or subordination? *the* study or *a* study? Grammar is the system of choices that create meaning in a language. You might not think about all these choices all the time, but as a reader, you are influenced by the effects of these language choices. *Grammar Choices* is a guide to the choices available to you as an academic writer in English. Although there are certainly some *rules* governing acceptable and unacceptable grammar, there are far more *choices* to be made among grammatically acceptable forms that have different meanings. If you can control these meanings, you will communicate more effectively and efficiently in your graduate-level and professional academic writing.

Grammar Choices is a different kind of grammar book:

- It is written for graduate students, including master's, MBA, and doctoral candidates, as well as postdoctoral researchers and faculty.¹
- It describes the language of advanced academic writing with more than 300 real examples from successful graduate students and from published texts.
- Grammar is presented through a functional description of the resources used to create meaning clearly, communicate with the reader appropriately, and organize a message effectively (Halliday, 1994, p. xiii).
- Dozens of exercises provide practice in understanding, analyzing, and most importantly, using the grammar in practical written contexts.
- Examples and exercises are drawn from corpora,² published research, and student samples.
- Vocabulary building is integrated in the grammar presentations and practice activities; the companion website offers vocabulary lists and quizzes.
- Students are encouraged to investigate the language choices that are typical of their own academic disciplines or professional fields through structured reading and writing activities.
- The last two units go beyond the scope of traditional grammar books: Unit 7 teaches how to use corpora to find and use collocations, and Unit 8 presents the grammatical resources used to organize information beyond the sentence level.

Grammar Choices does not attempt to cover all the possible grammar choices in English—that would be a much longer book! The selection of structures is deliberately limited to those that are most useful to graduate and research writers, according to analyses of actual academic

¹ Throughout the book, I use the North American terminology of *undergraduate* (bachelor's) degrees and *graduate* (master's and doctoral) degrees. In other countries, graduate students are called post-graduates. MBA stands for Masters of Business Administration.

² A corpus (plural: corpora) is a large collection of digital texts that can be considered representative of a particular type of language. *Grammar Choices* primarily draws from two online corpora: the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP), which reveals many of the choices that successful graduate students make in their writing, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which collects published academic writing and allows for comparisons between it and spoken English, journalism, and fiction.

writing. Important differences from other forms of writing and spoken English are noted where they might help prevent ineffective choices. Although there are certainly differences in language use between fields (disciplines) and genres (text types), the grammar and vocabulary targeted in *Grammar Choices* will help you be more aware of academic language as you read and are more deliberate in your choices as you write.

Grammar Choices can be used as a stand-alone textbook, for self-study, or as a companion to *Academic Writing for Graduate Students, 3rd Edition* (Swales and Feak, 2012), or the volumes in the *English in Today's Research World* series (also by Swales and Feak), all published by the University of Michigan Press (www.press.umich.edu/elt). Cross-references to these books are provided in the Commentary for teachers.

Unit Walk-Through

Each of the eight units in *Grammar Choices* contains:

1. an **overview** of the grammar topic
2. a **preview** that allows students to assess their control of the target grammar and instructors to diagnose areas of difficulty
3. an **authentic example** of academic writing showing the unit grammar in use
4. **clear descriptions** of essential grammar structures using the framework of functional grammar, cutting-edge research in applied linguistics, and corpus studies
5. **authentic examples** for every grammar point from corpora and published texts (including original in-text citations)
6. **vocabulary** relevant to the grammar point—for example, common verbs in the passive voice, summary nouns used with *this/these*, and irregular plural nouns
7. **exercises** for every grammar point to help writers develop grammatical awareness and use grammar effectively, including completing sentences, writing, revising, paraphrasing, and editing; most exercises use authentic items from the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP) or the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA); published books, articles, and websites; or samples of strong graduate-student writing
8. **grammar in your discipline**, a section inviting writers to investigate discipline-specific language use and apply it to an academic genre.

Grammar Terminology

Every grammar book needs a **metalanguage**, words to describe the grammar. Although most of the terms used in *Grammar Choices* should be familiar, some need a word of explanation.

- Clauses are described as **finite** or **non-finite** (Unit 1). A finite clause contains at least a subject and a finite verb. Non-finite clauses include all *-ing* clauses and *to* infinitive clauses as well as reduced relative clauses (for example, *the article published in Science*), which are called adjective phrases in some grammar books. It is important to use the term **non-finite clause** because it helps explain the structure of *-ing* and *to* infinitive clauses: like their finite counterparts, non-finite verbs can be transitive or intransitive. For example, *using* is transitive and requires an object. Therefore, *using a computer* is grammatical, but just *using* is not.

- The elements of a clause that are controlled by the verb are called its **complements** (Unit 1). Complements include direct objects, indirect objects, noun clauses, and non-finite clauses. A key distinction is that a complement cannot usually change its position in a clause, unlike an adverbial (a prepositional phrase or adverb). For example, it would be unusual to write *In the glass water remained* instead of *Water remained in the glass* because *in the glass* is a complement of the verb *remain*. However, both *In the morning, the glass was empty* and *The glass was empty in the morning* are acceptable because *in the morning* is a prepositional phrase that expresses time and modifies the whole clause.
- In describing clause combination, I have distinguished between two different techniques: Unit 2 teaches patterns for combining clauses into longer sentences, which I have called **equal clauses** (compound sentences) and **unequal clauses** (independent clause plus one or more dependent clauses). Unit 3 teaches clauses that are **embedded** inside a main clause: restrictive relative clauses (which become part of a noun phrase) and noun clauses (which function as the complement of a verb, noun, or adjective). I have generally avoided the term **complex sentence** since it covers sentences with all types of subordinate clauses (adverb clauses, restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, and noun clauses) and hides the important difference in structure and meaning between unequal clauses and embedded clauses.
- There is little agreement on the naming of **verb tenses**. *Grammar Choices* uses the convention *time + aspect*, for example, present simple, present perfect, and past simple (Unit 4). This produces a completely regular system, which should be clearer for learners. In some grammar books, all tenses follow this convention except simple ones (*present perfect* but *simple present*), which seems unnecessarily confusing.

Since *Grammar Choices* includes only the grammar relevant for academic written English, instructors looking for a description of structures that are beyond the scope of this book should refer to Keith S. Folse's *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook, Second Edition* (University of Michigan Press, 2016).

Grammar Choices is based on the description of language known as systemic functional linguistics, or functional grammar (Halliday, 1994). Functional grammar describes how speakers and writers make choices within grammatical systems to control meaning at three levels: experiential, interpersonal, and textual (1.8). The first five units are mostly concerned with the experiential level (What happened?). Unit 6 focuses on ways to create interpersonal meaning with evaluative language (What is the relationship between the reader and writer?), and Unit 8 teaches paragraph structure through the textual function of grammar (How is the message organized through the text?).

Functional grammar was chosen because it illuminates how choices between equally “correct” alternatives are rarely arbitrary or insignificant. For example, the choice of passive over active voice might hide the agent of the verb (changing the experiential and interpersonal meanings) or move old information into the subject position, thus better highlighting new information (changing the textual meaning). Verb tenses also demonstrate this effect: *the results were influential* and *the results have been influential* describe the same experience with the same textual organization, but they vary in *interpersonal meaning*: the present perfect makes the results still influential today, while the past simple suggests that the writer no longer sees the results as so influential.

One obstacle for newcomers to functional grammar is its metalanguage, which is very different from the structural grammar that is better known to many instructors and students. For example, in functional grammar a clause is described in terms of its participants (subjects and complements), processes (verbs), and adjuncts (prepositional phrases and adverbs). This can create a regrettable barrier to seeing the profound implications of functional grammar. Consequently, I have chosen to use a more familiar metalanguage while still retaining a focus on the use—rather than the “rules”—of grammar. Excellent introductions to systemic functional linguistics can be found in Eggins (2004), de Oliveira and Schleppegrell (2015), and Coffin, Donohue, and North (2009). I hope that readers see the value of a functional approach to grammar, while functional grammarians excuse the liberties I have taken to make this powerful system of grammar accessible and useful for graduate and professional writers.

What’s New in the Second Edition?

The Second Edition of *Grammar Choices for Graduate and Professional Writers* maintains the same structure and approach to graduate writing as that of the first edition, but we’ve made improvements based on classroom experience and users’ feedback.

- New sections have been added on parallel form (2.8) and possessives (5.9).
- Explanations have been revised and expanded with additional information about form, meaning, and use, particularly in Unit 1 (verb complementation), Unit 3 (complement noun clauses), Unit 4 (passive voice), and Unit 6 (stance and engagement).
- Unit 2 has been restructured in order to introduce the punctuation of combined clauses earlier.
- Unit 7 has been updated to reflect recent developments in online corpus tools.
- Nearly 30 exercises have been added or revised, and many others have been updated.
- The Grammar Awareness tasks in Units 3, 5, and 6 are new in this edition.
- Dozens of example sentences have been added or revised to better demonstrate the grammar structures in real use and to bring the content up to date.
- Common errors made by learners of English are highlighted throughout the book.
- Self-editing checklists have been added to the Grammar in Your Discipline writing task at the end of each unit.
- More academic disciplines are represented in the examples, texts, and exercises, including sociology, engineering, and management.
- Although *Grammar Choices* continues to use American English as its standard, references to U.S. history and culture have been reduced, and more differences with British English are discussed.

A revised Commentary is available for instructors.

Your feedback, questions, and suggestions are always welcome! You can reach me via the University of Michigan Press (esladmin@umich.edu) or my website (www.nigelcaplan.com). I hope this book continues to help you make better choices in your grammar.