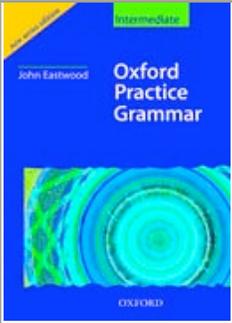


<i>Oxford Practice Grammar, Advanced</i>		
Author:	George Yule (2006)	
Publisher:	Oxford: Oxford University Press	
Pages	ISBN	Price
Pp. ix + 280	0-19-430916-9 (paper)	£14.50 GBP



Equipped with an easy-to-use answer key and a practice-plus CD-ROM, this grammar book is a great resource for students preparing for English examinations at the advanced level such as CAE (Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English), CPE (Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English), and the Michigan Test. Concise explanations of grammar points with examples on one page are followed by exercises conveniently accessed on the same and/or facing page. The exercises, chapter review tests, exit test, and additional tests on the CD-ROM are in formats such as multiple-choice, sentence-completion, and cloze. They offer plentiful practice in developing skills geared toward successful performance in tests targeting specific grammar points and idiomatic expressions. To that end, the book is best used as a reference guide for self-study or workbook to complement a grammar course.

The book contains seventeen chapters covering common grammar topics:

- sentences
- verb tenses
- modals
- negatives and questions
- the passive
- articles and nouns
- determiners and quantifiers
- pronouns, substitution and ellipsis
- adjectives and adverbs
- prepositions
- infinitives and gerunds
- reporting
- noun clauses

- relative clauses
- conditionals
- adverbial clauses
- connectors and focus structures.

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to the topic along with a passage containing the grammatical structure(s) identified and discussed in the chapter. Next, specific grammar points are explained in terms of form and/or use. In some chapters (e.g., Chapter 3 Modals), the discussion follows a notional approach by first presenting a notion and then identifying the grammar structures to express that notion (e.g., prediction: *will, would, be going to, shall*). In all cases, examples are provided for illustration. For each grammar topic, various exercises are provided in formats such as sentence completion, sentence rewrite, matching, cloze, and editing to help the learner better understand and use the structure(s) in question. Two types of exercises are especially worth mentioning. One integrates vocabulary learning in the exercises (an example is on p. 7) by requiring the learner to complete the definition of words and phrases using correct grammatical forms. The other, editing, requires the learner to find and correct grammatical errors in sentences or a paragraph. I used some of these editing exercises in my academic writing class and my students found them challenging and helpful.

After the seventeen chapters and answer key to the exercises and unit tests is an exit test consisting of 34 short paragraphs. Each paragraph has four spaces to be filled in with multiple-choice answers. The fill-in-the-blanks at the paragraph level should help students learn to write extended texts.

The book's chapter arrangement does not follow any specific order of difficulty. Therefore, users can choose to study the chapters in the order they like or study only the chapters or grammar points they need to.

The CD-ROM contains interactive exercises and tests in three parts: Listen and Speak, Read and Write, and Test and Review. Listen and Speak has two parts. The first, Listening Practice, has five sets of exercises with ten audio single-sentence questions or statements in each set. Each question or statement is matched with three multiple-choice answers to test listening comprehension. An example is as follows:

Listen to each question or statement and click on the best response:

Listen "I'll remind Dr Brown that you're waiting."

- Dr Brown knows that you're waiting.
- Dr Brown doesn't know that you're waiting.
- I want to remind Dr Brown that you're waiting.

The second part has twenty dialogues with blanks to be filled in to complete the sentences in the dialogues. Users can complete the sentences, check their answers on the screen, see correct answers, and audio-record their reading aloud of the dialogues and/or listen to pre-recorded readings. Here is an example:

Dialogue 13: Prepositions

Read the dialogue and then write in the parts that are missing. Sometimes different answers are possible. When you have finished, you can record yourself taking part in the conversation. (Then you can listen to yourself or the model dialogue.)

Information: You and a friend are chatting.

Friend Did you say you were going away soon?

You Yes, I'm going to Skye _____ Friday.

Friend Where's that?

You It's a small island _____ the west coast of Scotland.

Friend Where will you stay?

You I'm staying _____ some friends who've rented a house there.

Friend Are you going for long?

You No, I'm only going _____ a few days.

Friend Why?

You I've got an interview _____ the following Thursday.

Completing these dialogues is useful practice in preparing for listening comprehension tests similar to some found in the paper- or computer-based TOEFL.

Read and Write contains 34 paragraph-editing exercises, pairs of which correspond to each of the seventeen chapters of the book. One paragraph of each pair is shorter, with five mistakes; the other longer, with ten mistakes. Users need to find and try to correct each grammatical error before moving to the next. A right correction is confirmed instantly; otherwise, the right answer is provided. This section is claimed to be "the only grammar CD-ROM [available] with interactive 'find and correct the mistake' exercises" (back cover). Such editing exercises should help users improve grammatical accuracy in their writing.

Test and Review consists of four tests, each with 50 multiple-choice sentence-completion items on grammar points discussed in the chapters. The review part indicates the page number in the book where the grammar point tested is explained. Thus, users can refer to the book for explanations of why their answer is right or wrong.

What is noticeably missing in Yule's book are pair or group exercises to develop communicative skills. Such interactive tasks have been the focus of much grammar practice in North American classrooms for the past twenty-plus years. In this sense, the book is not ideal for teachers searching for a text to help students develop grammar skills for communication, spoken or written. To develop communicative skills, Azar (1999) might be a better choice.

Additionally, considering such a lack of communicative grammar practice, it is highly questionable that the book can best prepare students for success in communication-oriented tests such as the current iBT TOEFL (the Internet based next generation TOEFL), which tests integrated language skills, rather than discrete grammar points, using extended authentic discourse from North American

post-secondary classrooms, lecture halls, and campus life. In fact, the iBT TOEFL no longer has the grammatical structure section that appears in the paper- and computer-based TOEFL currently being phased out, but instead embeds the testing of grammar skills in all the sections. Thus, it is misleading to claim that the book "helps you prepare for standard exam questions asked in TOEFL" (back cover; see also pp. viii-ix).

Except for the illustrations to support some of the passages at the beginning of each chapter (e.g., pp. 28 and 68), Yule makes scarce use of graphs or graphics. Pictures illustrating some of the exercises (e.g., p. 131) are helpful but very limited. Such a shortage not only tends to make the explanations and exercises lifeless, monotonous, and boring, but may present difficulties for readers who are not abstract thinkers or whose reading comprehension is not highly proficient--"though to be fair, the book is designated as an advanced grammar. A chart summary of the modals, for example, would be very helpful for readers to compare and contrast the modals. This problem is even more serious with the CD-ROM since there is not a single graphic in the tests.

Furthermore, in the CD-ROM Listen and Speak section Dialogue 13 has these instructions: *Read the dialogue and then write in the parts that are missing. Sometimes different answers are possible.*

Friend Did you say you were going away soon?

You Yes, I'm going to Skye ____ Friday.

The program accepts "next" as correct but rejects "this" as wrong. The program should allow multiple correct answers; otherwise, it gives the misleading impression that "this" is wrong. (In fact, since the dialogue is labeled Prepositions, wouldn't "on" be a student's first choice?) In any case, just stating "different answers are possible" is inadequate for some learners who are not sure or aware that an answer rejected as wrong is not so. Surely a computer programmer could have rectified this easily enough. Lastly, the answer key at the back of the book makes it convenient for students to check their answers to the chapter exercises and tests. The key is helpful especially for self-study. But the same convenience can be misused by students who may want to copy the key's answers to the exercises in order to appear correct when going over the exercises in class. In this case the key helps those students cover up their lack of understanding or misunderstanding of the grammar points. Providing the answer key in a separate booklet could give the teacher control over its access if the book is used as a class textbook or workbook.

Reference

Azar, B. (1999). *Understanding and using English grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Longman.

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