



Video 1 – An introduction to Real Grammar

Hello, I am Michael Rundell, and I am the Editor in Chief of the Macmillan Dictionary. Welcome to this series videos about Real Grammar.

Grammar is important, whether English is your first language, or a language you are learning, knowing how the grammar works is essential for effective communication. The rules of grammar describe the structure of a language, and explain how words fit together to create meanings. So you need to know the rules, but which ones?

It's important to distinguish genuine rules from 'rules' which some people insist on, but which in reality, have no value. Some people always believe that in questions of grammar, there is always a simple 'right or wrong' answer. We call people like this 'prescriptivists' because they want to prescribe what is correct and what isn't. But in reality, language is much more complex, and more subtle than this. Some of the rules favoured by prescriptivists are simply invented, and obey them doesn't contribute anything to successful communication. Others may be appropriate in some contexts, for example in very formal situations, but not in others. And some of these rules may have been true once, but have changed over the course of time.

This is what we'll be discussing, in this series of videos. At the Macmillan Dictionary, we don't follow a prescriptive approach, but a descriptive one. We aim to describe the language, and the grammar, as it is really used. The best way of understanding how grammar works is to study the way people use language when they are communicating with one another.

Thanks to computer technology, we have access to massive databases of language in use and we can analyse this data to discover how language can vary over time, or according to context. These collections of language are called 'corpora'. 'Corpora' is the plural form of the word 'corpus', and analysing corpora is the only reliable way of learning what the real rules of grammar are.

So, the information we provide about grammar at the Macmillan dictionary is always evidence-based. We don't make statements about grammar unless they can be backed up by the evidence of usage. That's what we mean by 'Real Grammar'.

So thanks for watching, I hope you enjoy this series of videos and I hope you find them useful.