Not again?

The fourth edition of Practical English Usage

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Practical English Usage

Fully Revised | Fourth Edition

- complete topic-by-topic grammar
- guide to over 250 vocabulary problems
175 singular *they*

1 *Somebody left their umbrella.*

*They/ them/ their* is often used to refer to a singular indefinite person. This is common after *a person, anybody/one, somebody/one, nobody/one, whoever, each, every, either, neither and no.* *They* has a plural verb in this case.

*If a person doesn’t want to go on living, they are often very difficult to help.*

*If anybody calls, take their name and ask them to call again later.*

*Somebody left their umbrella in the office. Would they please collect it?*  
*Nobody was late, were they? Whoever comes, tell them I’m not in.*

*Tell each person to help themselves to what they want.*
Discourse markers are words and expressions which help to structure spoken exchanges and written text (e.g. *first of all, on the other hand, in any case, to sum up*). English has a very large number of these. Some are used in all kinds of discourse, some mostly in formal writing, and others mainly in informal speech. Those that are most common in writing are discussed here; for discourse markers in speech, ▶301. Most discourse markers are adverbs or adverbial expressions; some are conjunctions. For differences in punctuation and other points, ▶283.

Discourse markers can communicate several things:

- 'What am I talking about?' Discourse markers can introduce or clarify a
580 *small* and *little*

*Small* simply refers to size. It is the opposite of *big* or *large* (► 404).

*Could I have a small brandy, please?*
*You’re too small to be a police officer.*

The adjective *little* usually expresses some kind of emotion.

*Poor little thing – come here and let me look after you.*
*‘What’s he like?’ ‘Oh, he’s a funny little man.’*
*What’s that nasty little boy doing in our garden?*
*They’ve bought a pretty little house in the country.*

In a few fixed expressions, *little* is used in the same way as *small* or *short.*

*Little finger*                        *a little while*
351 spelling and pronunciation

In many English words, the spelling is different from the pronunciation. This is mainly because our pronunciation has changed a good deal over the last few hundred years, while our spelling system has stayed more or less the same. Here is a list of some difficult common words with their pronunciations.

1 usually two syllables, not three

The letters in brackets are usually not pronounced.

- *asp(i)*rin
- *bus(i)*ness
- *choc(o)*late
- *ev(e)*ry
- *ev(e)*ning
- *morr(i)*ge
- *om(e)*lette
- *rest(au)*rant
- *sev(e)*r

- *rest(au)*rant
333 formal and informal vocabulary

Some words and expressions are used mainly in formal situations; in neutral or informal situations other words or expressions are used. And some words and expressions are only used in informal situations. Some examples:

- **FORMAL:** commence
  **NEUTRAL/INFORMAL:** begin, start
- **FORMAL:** alight (from a bus or train)
  **NEUTRAL/INFORMAL:** get off
- **FORMAL:** I beg your pardon?
  **NEUTRAL/INFORMAL:** Pardon? Sorry? (AmE Excuse me? Pardon me?)
  **INFORMAL:** What?
2 fronting and topicalisation: Your friend Alex, now he speaks German.

Spoken sentences may be built up quite differently from written sentences, not necessarily with the order subject-verb-object. Fronting (▶ 272) is common in speech: objects, adverbials or other elements may be moved to the front to give them more importance.

*People like that I just can’t stand.*
*Only this morning she was saying she had a problem.*
*What I’m going to do next I really don’t know.*

Often, a word or group of words may be moved right out of the sentence structure and announced at the beginning as the topic, with a more or less complete sentence following. These topicalisation structures are common in
American and British English

Standard American English (‘General American’) and standard British English are very similar. There are a few differences in the use of structures and in spelling rules, and rather more differences of vocabulary and idiom. Modern British English is heavily influenced by American English, so some contrasts are disappearing. Pronunciation is sometimes very different, but most American and British speakers can understand each other easily. An excellent, very detailed guide to grammatical differences, particularly differences in the grammar of individual words, is John Algeo’s *British or American English?* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). Note that the term ‘American English’ is used here for the standard English.
317 correctness

When people say that somebody’s language is ‘not correct’, they may mean several different things.

1 slips and mistakes: He works in wildlife conversation.

People sometimes make slips of the tongue when they are talking.

*He works in Wildlife Conversation – I mean Conservation.*

Somebody can use a word wrongly because he or she is unsure of its meaning, or confuses it with another word.

*You’re being very authoritative.* (mistake for ‘authoritarian’)

And many people have trouble with spelling and punctuation.
318 changes in English

Languages change over time. Younger people adopt newer forms of expression, while older people often resist change; so even people who speak the same standard language do not speak it in exactly the same way. There are several reasons for change.

1 communicative need

Several centuries ago, standard English had two second-person pronouns: *thou* (singular) and *ye* (plural). Standard modern English uses *you* for both. But people still feel the need to distinguish singular and plural, and so expressions like *you guys* (used for both men and women) are beginning to...
288 academic writing

The writing found in academic journals and similar contexts (for example research reports, theoretical discussion and debate, historical accounts) is normally formal in tone, and follows the conventions of formal writing discussed in other parts of this Section. In particular:

1 vocabulary

Informal wording is usually avoided. Contractions are not used, and ‘general-purpose’ words like do, have and get are replaced by more specific terminology.

*Further research will be carried out.* (better than . . . will be done)

*The team experienced a number of problems.*
3 notes on some varieties

a Australian and New Zealand English

These varieties are similar in many ways to British English, but each naturally has a good deal of regional vocabulary. Australian English has taken many words for natural features from the Aboriginal languages of Australia: for example kangaroo, billabong (a pool or a tributary of a river), dingo (a wild dog), mulga (a tree, wilderness). Similarly, New Zealand English has incorporated words from the indigenous language Maori: for example pukeku and takahe (names of birds), mana (power, honour). Both Australian and New Zealand English have a rich store of informal and slang words and expressions, many of them shared between the two varieties – for instance bludger (a lazy person), dinkum
Indian English

English is an associate official language in India, alongside Hindi, the official language. As a lingua franca in a country with over 700 different languages, English has enormous administrative, political and cultural importance and very many speakers. Command of the language ranges from basic to native-speaker-like. Standard British English with an RP accent has traditionally enjoyed high prestige, and is fostered by private English-medium schools. However, very many varieties of English co-exist in India, with differences arising from regional, social, linguistic and other factors. Common features of pronunciation and grammar which are regarded by some educated Indians as mistakes are seen by others as characteristics of an emerging Indian standard. Grammatical differences from British and American English include tense use and the use o
335 discriminatory and offensive language, taboo words and swear words

The words and expressions described in this entry are generally offensive: their use can upset or insult people. They are included here because they are elements of English, and it is not the job of a usage guide to conceal aspects of the language. However, students should realise that if they use language of this kind, they are liable to offend and upset the people they are talking to. They are also likely to give their listeners or readers the impression that they are
come and go 424; come...ing 476.2; come and 99.2; come for a walk, swim, etc 475; come from 424.5; come to (= arrive at) 424.5; come to realise, etc 394.5; come true/right 394.5
comic and comical 425
command + object + infinitive 98
commando plural 116.3
commas 296; after subordinate clauses 229.2; in numbers 322.9; in relative clauses 234.2; with adjectives 184.6
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committed to +...ing or infinitive 105.11
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common + for...to 113.4
1 Verbs
2 *Be, have* and *do*
3 Present Tenses
4 Talking about the Future
5 Past and Perfect Tenses
6 Passives
7 Modal Auxiliary Verbs
8 Infinitives, *-ing* forms and Past Participles
9 Infinitives, *-ing* forms and Past Participles after Nouns, Verbs, etc
10 Infinitives, *-ing* forms and Past Participles: Other Uses
11 Nouns and Noun Phrases; Agreement
12 Determiners: *a/an* and *the; my, your*, etc; *this, that*, etc
Section 21 Relative Clauses

INTRODUCTION

What are relative clauses?

Clauses beginning with question words (e.g. who, which, where) are often used to modify nouns and some pronouns – to identify people and things, or to give more information about them. These are called ‘relative clauses’.

*Do you know the people who live next door?*
*There’s a programme tonight which you might like.*
*He lives in a village where there are no shops.*
*Leslie, who works with me, often babysits for us.*

When who, which, where, etc are used in this way, they are called ‘relative pronouns’. *That* can also be used as a relative pronoun.

There are two kinds of relative clause (►234): those that typically say who or what we are talking about (‘identifying clauses’), and those that typically just give extra information (‘non-identifying clauses’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you know what’s wrong with these, and why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗ What’s the name of the tall man which just came in? ► 233.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ Is that all which is left? ► 233.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ All what you say is true. ► 233.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ I’ve found the keys that you were looking for them. ► 233.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ I saw a girl whose her hair came down to her waist. ► 233.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗ He got married again, what surprised everybody. ► 233.8, 236.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
between and among
big, large and great
birthday and date of birth
(a) bit
born and borne
borrow and lend
bring and take
bring up and educate
Britain, the United Kingdom, the British Isles and England
broad and wide
35 **going to**

1 **a present tense**

This structure is really a present tense (the present progressive of *get*). We use it to talk about future actions and events that have some present reality. If we say that something in the future is going to happen, it is usually already planned or decided, or it is starting to happen, or we can see it coming now. The structure is very common in an informal style, especially in speech (because conversation is often about future actions and events of this kind).

2 **plans:** We’re going to get a new car.

We use *be going to* + infinitive to talk about plans, especially in an informal style. This structure often emphasises the idea of intention, or a decision that has already been made.

*We’re going to get a new car soon.*

*Jack says he’s going to phone this evening.*

*When are you going to get your hair cut?*

*I’m going to keep asking her out until she says ‘Yes’.*

*I’m going to stop him reading my emails if it’s the last thing I do.*

3 **things that are on the way:** She’s going to have a baby.

Another use of the going to structure is to predict the future on the basis of present evidence — to say that a future action or event is on the way, or starting to happen.

*Sandra’s going to have another baby in June.*

*Look at the sky. It’s going to rain.*

*Look out! We’re going to crash!*
List of tests

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<th>Upper Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Expert</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verbs</td>
<td>Try again</td>
<td>Try again</td>
<td>Try</td>
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<tr>
<td>be, have and do</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
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<tr>
<td>present and future</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try again</td>
<td>Try</td>
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<tr>
<td>past and perfect</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
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<tr>
<td>passives</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try again</td>
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<tr>
<td>modals (1): certainty, probability, etc</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modals (2): obligation, permission, ability, etc</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Try</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
present and future

1. Do the continuations make correct sentences: yes (Y) or no (N)?

   House prices go up ...

   A. ... every year.
   B. ... again.
   C. ... by 2% this year.
   D. ... when there are not enough new houses.

Where to go in Practical English Usage
- 31.1-2
- 32.4

Diagnostic Tests
- Practical English Usage
Thank you for listening.

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