



Why Grammar is Important

Grammar is like a handshake and is often your first impression for potential advisors, contacts, and employers. Poor grammar could allow someone to dismiss you, regardless of the quality of your ideas or your reasoning.

Incorrect grammar can cause confusion in your writing.

Take this as an entertaining example, dealing with adverb placement:

- *Only* he said he loved her (Although she is dating several other men, *only* he said he loved her)
- He *only* said he loved her (She's in for a heartbreak; he didn't really mean it)
- He said *only* he loved her (He knows about the other men and wants to make clear that he is the only sincere one)
- He said he *only* loved her (He only loves; he has no plans for a long-term commitment because love is the extent of his capabilities)
- He said he loved *only* her (He is dating several other women, but insists that she is the only one he loves)
- He said he loved her *only* (Because "only" ends the sentence, placing it either before or after the final words makes no difference in the meaning)

However, grammar rules are also like traffic laws. It is important to know and obey traffic laws, since they are generally good guidance in staying safe and secure on the road. Traffic laws and grammar rules can be broken, but only with a very good reason.

The Draconian laws of grammar are also largely mythic. Some grammar rules that are not actually true:

- Never end a sentence in preposition (only because doing so makes the sentence redundant).
- Never start a sentence with "and" or "because" (only because doing so often leads to fragments instead of complete sentences).
- Always use active voice, instead of passive voice (this is often impossible and is not preferred in objective scientific writing).
- Never use "I" in a paper (this is the obverse side of objective scientific writing. "I" is appropriate in some forms of writing [personal narrative] but inappropriate in others [lab report])

Grammar can also be thought of as a social convention. This is where grammar rules and good rhetoric meet. Bad grammar can be good rhetoric, but there must be a good reason for it. Ultimately, you must have the same considerations (writer, audience, topic) when you are choosing the best rhetorical grammar. Knowing the essential rules of grammar is the first step to knowing when you can break those rules to serve your rhetorical purposes.

Need more help? Schedule an appointment with the Writing Studio in 2420, 25 Park Place at <http://gsu.mywconline.net/>