GOLDEN GRAMMAR RULES

BY MICHAEL SWAN

- *Another* is one word.
  Can I have another cup of coffee? (NOT another cup)
  Ann's going to look for another job.

- 2. *After* would rather, use an infinitive (without to) or a past tense, not a present tense.
  I'd rather stay at home this evening. (NOT I'd rather to stay at home)
  I would rather you paid me in cash. (NOT I would rather you pay me in cash)

- 3. Use an -ing form after *be/get used to*.
  I'm used to driving in London now, but it was hard at the beginning. (NOT I'm used to drive)
  I'll never get used to living in this place.

- 4. *How long are you here for?* asks about the future.
  'How long are you here for?' *Till Easter.* (NOT 'Since Christmas.*)

- 5. Don't use *could* to talk about something that you succeeded in doing.
  I managed to run 10 km yesterday in under an hour. (NOT I could run 10 km yesterday)
  How many eggs were you able to get? (NOT could you get?)

- 6. Indirect questions usually have the same construction as statements.
  I asked where her parents were. (NOT USUALLY I asked where were her parents.)
  The policeman wanted to know where I lived. (NOT ...where did I live?)

- 7. To say that something is not necessary, use *needn't* or *don't have to*, not *mustn't*.
  You needn't pay now; tomorrow will be OK. (NOT You mustn't pay now; tomorrow will be OK)
  I don't have to wear a tie at work. (NOT I mustn't wear a tie at work)

- 8. *Everything* is a singular word.
  Everything was broken. (NOT Everything were broken.)
  Is everything ready?

- 9. Use *because* or *so*, but not both together.
  Because the train was late I missed the meeting. OR The train was late, so I missed the meeting. (BUT NOT Because the train was late, so I missed the meeting)

- 10. We *say something* to a person.
  She never says 'Hello' to me. (NOT She never says me 'Hello'.)
  Andrew has said nothing to Peter. (NOT Andrew has said Peter nothing)

- 11. *Tell* normally needs a personal object.
  He told us that he was going home. (NOT He told that he was going home.
  I've told you everything I know.

- 12. Don't use *every* to talk about two people or things.
  You can park on each side of the street. (NOT on every side of the street)
  He was holding a glass in each hand.

- 13. *Far* is unusual in affirmative sentences, except in a very formal style.
  We live a long way from here. (NOT USUALLY We live far from here.)
  It's a long way to Tipperary.

- 14. We *don't usually use before to mean 'in front of'.*
  You can park in front of the station. (NOT ...before the station)
  There's a big tree just in front of our house.

- 15. *After look, we use at with an object.*
  Look at the moon! (NOT Look the moon)
  What are you looking at?

- 16. *We use when, not as or while, to talk about ages and periods of life.*
  When I was 14 I first got interested in archaeology. (NOT As/While I was 14)
  We lived in London when I was a child. (NOT ...as/while I was a child)
17. *After as long as*, use a present tense to refer to the future.
I'll remember this holiday as long as I live. (NOT ... as long as I will live.)
You can have my bike as long as you bring it back tomorrow.

18. *We say as usual, not as-usually.*
Let's meet tomorrow at 10.00, as usual.
John's late as usual.

19. *As well as (with a similar meaning to 'not only... but also') is normally followed by an -ing form.*
As well as breaking his leg, he hurt his arm. (NOT As well as he broke his leg...)
He works full time as well as bringing up three children.

20. Expressions like *in three hours’ time* refer to the future.
We'll need the report in two weeks’ time. (BUT NOT He wrote the report in four hours’ time.)
I'll see you again in a month’s time.

21. We don’t normally use *to* after *arrive.*
What time do we arrive in Bedford? (NOT … arrive to Bedford?)
The train arrived at our station half an hour late.

22. *Because* is a conjunction; *because of* is a preposition.
We cancelled the match because it rained. (NOT … because of it rained.)
We cancelled the match because of the rain. (NOT … because the rain.)

23. After the verb *lack*, no preposition is necessary.
The soup lacks salt. (NOT … lacks of salt.)
It's a good novel, but it lacks structure.

24. *Before* (meaning 'before that') follows an expression of time.
Last summer, I decided to go and visit the town that I had left eight years before. (NOT … before eight years.)
I had already met her once, about three years before.

25. *News* is singular.
All the news is bad. (NOT All the news are bad.)
BBC Radio 4. Here is the news.

26. *You borrow something from somebody.*
I borrowed the money from my mother. (NOT I borrowed my mother the money.)
Can we borrow some glasses from you?

27. *We prefer closed, not shut, before a noun.*
When I talk to you, I feel as if I'm standing in front of a closed door. (NOT ... a shut door.)
He's got a closed mind. You can't tell him anything.

28. *We say come from (present) to give our town, country etc of origin.*
Sarah comes from Texas. (NOT Sarah came from Texas.)
Where do you come from?

29. *Comparatives are made with more or -er, but not both.*
The weather is getting colder. (NOT ... more colder.)
Please try to be more polite. (NOT ... more politer.)

30. *We don’t use on the contrary to give another side of a question.*
It's hard work. On the other hand, it's interesting. (NOT on the contrary, it's interesting.)
She's very bad-tempered. On the other hand, she's generous.

31. *In affirmative sentences we generally use a long time, not long, except in a very formal style.*
We waited a long time, but she didn’t come. (NOT We waited long, but ...)
It will be a long time before we invite her again.

32. *Use superlatives to compare people and things with the groups that they belong to.*
Sandra is the tallest of the five girls. (NOT Sandra is the taller of the five girls.)
I think I'm the oldest person in the class.
33. We usually use *in* after dressed.
She was dressed in yellow from head to foot. She looked like a daffodil.
The bride was dressed in white silk.

34. We don't use *it* + infinitive with *allow*.
Smoking is not allowed. (NOT *It is not allowed to smoke.*)
We weren't allowed to use calculators in the exam. (NOT *It wasn't allowed to use ...*)

35. *Who's* means 'who is' or 'who has'; *whose* is a possessive.
Who's that? (NOT *Whose that?*)
Who's taken my keys? (NOT *Whose taken my keys?*)
Whose coat is that? (NOT *Who's coat is that?*)

36. We don't usually use *other* with uncountable nouns.
Can I have *more* rice? (NOT *...other rice?*)
Perhaps we should use *different* oil. (NOT *...other oil.*)

37. We use *either*, not *any*, to talk about two people or things.
I can write with *either* hand. (NOT *...with any hand.*)
'Do you prefer Monday or Tuesday? *Either* day will do.'

38. Don't put articles and possessives together before nouns.
She's a friend of mine. OR She's *my* friend. (BUT NOT *She's a my friend.*)
Peter's lost *his* keys. (NOT *...the his keys.*)

39. We say that somebody is *good, bad, clever* etc at something.
My sister is very *good* at maths. (NOT *...in maths.*)
I'm not very *clever* at languages.

40. Don't leave out *a/an* in negative expressions.
Don't go out without *a* coat. (NOT *...without coat.*)
It's difficult to get there if you haven't got *a* car. (NOT *...if you haven't got car.*)

41. We use *any*, not *every*, to say 'one or another'.
'Which newspaper would you like?' *It doesn't matter. Any one.* (NOT *...every one.*)
'When would you like to come to dinner?' *Any day is OK.*

42. *Advice* is uncountable.
Can you give me *some* advice? (NOT *... an advice?*)
My father gave me three *pieces of* advice. (NOT *... three advices.*)

43. We don't use *some* if we know the exact number.
You've got beautiful fingers. (NOT *... some beautiful fingers.*)
A mountain bike needs to have strong wheels. (NOT *... some strong wheels.*)

44. We drop articles in some common expressions with *school* and *bed*.
Why isn't Angela at school today? (NOT *... at the school today?)
I want to spend a day in bed.

45. When *which? what? or who?* are subjects, we make questions without *do*.
*Which* costs more – the blue one or the grey one? (NOT *Which does cost more ...?*)
*What* happened to your car? (NOT *What did happen to your car?*)
*Who* phoned? (NOT *Who did phone?*)

46. We drop articles after the *amount/number of*.
I was surprised by *the amount of money* that was collected. (NOT *... the amount of the money ...*)
The number of unemployed rose sharply last month. (NOT *The number of the unemployed ...*)

47. We use *because*, not *as or since*, if the reason is the most important part of the sentence.
Why am I leaving? I'm leaving *because* I'm fed up. (NOT *I'm leaving as/since I'm fed up.*)
They're laughing *because* they think your hat's funny.

48. *Travel* is normally uncountable.
I like travel.
We went on a *trip/journey* to the Antarctic last spring. (NOT *We went on a travel ...*)
49. Can has no infinitive. We use be able to instead.
I'd like to be able to sing. (NOT ... to can sing)
When will you be able to meet us?

50. With abbreviations, the difference between a and an depends on pronunciation, not spelling.
She's a US citizen. (NOT ... she's an US citizen)
Would you like to be an MP? (NOT ... a MP?)

51. Weather is uncountable.
We had terrible weather last week. (NOT ... a terrible weather ...)
I hope we get good weather at the weekend

52. Words like President, King, Doctor in titles have no article.
President Nixon resigned over the Watergate scandal. (NOT The President Nixon ...)
I'd like to see Dr Franklin. (NOT ... the Dr Franklin)

53. We usually use over, not across, to mean 'on/to the other side of something high'.
Why are you climbing over that wall? (NOT ... across that wall?)
I threw his keys over the fence, where he couldn't get them.

54. Actually means 'really' or 'in fact', not 'now'.
She said she was 18, but actually she was 15.
In 1900 the population of London was higher than it is now. (NOT ... than it actually is.)

55. Asleep and afraid are not normally used before nouns.
He had the innocent expression of a sleeping baby. (NOT ... of an asleep baby)
In the house, we found a frightened child hiding in the kitchen. (NOT ... an afraid child)

56. We don't usually put an adverb and its complement together before a noun.
We're looking for people who are skilled in design. (NOT ... skilled in design people)
He has a difficult accent to understand. (NOT ... a difficult to understand accent)

57. Eventually means 'finally', not 'possibly' or 'perhaps'.
It took a long time, but eventually he finished his studies.
I'm not sure what I'll do next year. Perhaps I'll go to university if I can get a place. (NOT Eventually I'll go to university ...)

58. We don't usually use too before adjective + noun.
The problem was too difficult. (BUT NOT It was a too difficult problem.)
I put down the bag because it was too heavy. (BUT NOT I put down the too heavy bag)

59. We usually put descriptive adjectives before classifying adjectives.
An old political idea (NOT A political old idea)
The latest educational reform (NOT The educational latest reform)

60. Nouns referring to nationality are often different from the corresponding adjectives.
Ellis considers himself a typical Welshman. (NOT ... a typical Welsh)
She's married to a Spaniard. (NOT ... a Spanish)

61. Adjectives that express opinions usually come before other descriptive adjectives.
a lovely cool drink (NOT a cool lovely drink)
their wonderful old house (NOT their old wonderful house)

62. Pronoun objects come before adverb particles.
Can you switch it on, please? (NOT ... switch on it ...)
I'm going to throw them all out. (NOT ... throw out them all)

63. Adverbs can't usually be used instead of adjectives.
She danced happily into the room. (NOT She danced happy ...)
I'm terribly sorry. (NOT I'm terrible sorry.)

64. After all doesn't mean 'finally'. It means 'all things considered' or 'in spite of what was expected'.
It took a long time, but finally we found our dream house. (NOT ... but after all we found our dream house.)
She can make her own bed. After all, she's not a baby any more.
I expected to fail the exam, but I passed after all.
65. *Ago* comes after an expression of time.
Ann phoned two hours ago. (NOT … ago two hours.)
I should have finished this work six weeks ago.

66. We don’t normally use all without a noun to mean ‘everybody’.
Everybody was quiet. (NOT All were quiet.)
I’ve written to everybody. (NOT I’ve written to all.)

67. In exclamations with *how*, the adjective or adverb comes immediately after *how*.
How cold it is! (NOT How it is cold!)
How well she sings! (NOT How she sings well!)

68. We don’t use every with uncountable nouns.
I like all music. (NOT Every music)
I can do every kind of work. (NOT … every work.)

69. After *either*, we use a singular noun.
I can come on Wednesday or Thursday - either day is OK. (NOT … either days …)
She can write with either hand.

70. We usually ask ‘What colour …?’ without a preposition.
What colour is your new car? (NOT Of what colour …?)
What colour is her hair this week?

71. We don’t usually drop nouns after adjectives.
*Poor little boy!* (NOT Poor little!)
The most important thing is to be happy. (NOT The most important is to be happy.)

72. *All day* doesn’t mean the same as *every day*.
I worked all day yesterday, from 8.00 till bedtime.
I worked every day except Sunday last week. (NOT … all day except Sunday …)

73. Don’t drop *a/an* after what in exclamations.
*What a rude man!* (NOT What rude man!)
*What an awful film!* (NOT What awful film!)

74. *Experience* and *experiment* don’t mean the same.
We did an experiment in the chemistry lesson to see if you could get chlorine gas from salt. (NOT We did an experience …)
I’m experimenting with a new perfume.
I had a lot of interesting experiences during my year in Africa. (NOT I had a lot of interesting experiments …)
Have you ever experienced the feeling that you were going mad? (NOT Have you ever experimented the feeling …?)

75. We don’t usually use reflexive pronouns after *feel*.
I feel really energetic today. (NOT I feel myself really …)
Andrew often feels depressed. (NOT … feels himself depressed.)

76. We use *half* without *of* in expressions of measurement and amount.
They live about half a mile from here. (NOT … half of a mile …)
I only need half a pint.

77. *Hear*, not *listen to*, to say that something ‘comes to our ears’.
Suddenly I heard a strange noise. (NOT Suddenly I listened to a strange noise.)
Did you hear that?
78. After help, we can use object + infinitive (with or without to).
Can you help me (to) find my ring? (NOT help me finding my ring)
Let me help you (to) wash up.

79. We usually say hope ... not, rather than do not hope.
I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow. (NOT I don’t hope it rains tomorrow.)
‘Is Peter coming this evening?’ ‘I hope not.’

80. We say that you crash into something.
Granny crashed into a tree yesterday. (NOT Granny crashed against a tree yesterday.)
The plane crashed into a mountain.

81. Singular forms are used before nouns in plural measuring expressions.
I found a ten-euro note on the pavement. (NOT ... a ten-euros note...)
He goes for a five-mile walk every morning.

82. It's means ‘it is’ or ‘it has’; its is a possessive.
It’s late. (NOT Its late.)
It’s stopped raining. (NOT Its stopped raining.)
The dog hasn’t eaten its food. (NOT ... it’s food.)

83. We don’t usually use also in short answers.
‘I like this place.’ ‘Me too.’ (NOT I also.)
‘I’ve got a headache.’ ‘So have I.’ (NOT I have also.)

84. We don’t usually put a comma before that (conjunction or relative pronoun).
I knew that I had seen him somewhere before. (NOT ... the paper, that had ...)
She couldn’t find the paper that had his address on. (NOT ... the paper, that had ...)

85. Rest (meaning ‘things left over’) is uncountable.
I’ll take these grapes and you can have the rest. (NOT ... the rests.)
We’re having leftovers for supper. (NOT We’re having rests...)

86. Same is normally used with the, and followed by as.
Give me the same again, please. (NOT Give me same again, please.)
She has the same birthday as me. (NOT She has my same birthday. OR She has same birthday like me.)

87. After would like, we normally use a -to infinitive.
Would you like to dance? (NOT Would you like dancing?)
I’d like to go to Australia. (NOT I’d like going to Australia.)

88. We use remind (of) to mean ‘make somebody remember’.
Remind me to pay the milkman. (NOT Remember me to pay...) The smell of hay reminds me of my childhood. (NOT ... reminds me my childhood.)

89. After accuse, we normally use of, not for.
She accused me of reading her letters. (NOT ... for reading her letters.) Both the young men are accused of attempted murder.

90. We don’t normally use an infinitive after why.
I know how to do it, and I know when to do it, but I don’t know why I should do it. (NOT ... I don’t know why to do it.)

91. Demonstratives replace articles.
I can hear the sea. (NOT I am hearing the sea.)
I think I can hear Peter coming up the stairs.

92. We don’t normally use progressive forms of hear.
I (can) hear the sea. (NOT I am hearing the sea.)

93. After discuss, no preposition is necessary.
We spent half an hour discussing the weather. (NOT ... discussing about the weather.)
Let’s discuss your plans.

94. We usually drop at in questions beginning What time ...?
What time would you like to eat? (NOT USUALLY At what time ...?)
I’m not sure what time the film starts.

95. We say on holiday (singular).
I’ll be on holiday next week. (NOT ... on holidays ...)
We met John and Virginia when we were on holiday in Greece.
96. Don’t drop a before hundred.
Our family has lived here for a hundred years. (NOT … for hundred years.)
The factory is about a hundred miles west of London.

97. If you can’t see or find somebody, they are nowhere to be seen/found.
When I went back to the car park, my car was nowhere to be seen. (NOT … my car was nowhere to see.)
The children were nowhere to be found. (NOT … nowhere to find.)

98. We don’t normally use might to talk about past possibility.
I felt very hot and thirsty. Perhaps I was ill. (NOT … I might be ill.)
I saw a girl going into Peter’s house. Maybe it was Jeanne. (NOT … It might be Jeanne.)

99. We use beat, not win, to say that one person defeats another in a game, fight etc.
My girlfriend beat me at poker last night. (NOT My girlfriend won me at poker last night.)
Aberdeen beat Bristol 3-0.

100. We use even, not also, to add surprising information.
They were all asleep, even the guard dog. (NOT … also the guard dog.)
Everybody was in time, even Granny. (NOT … also Granny.)