



# LANGUAGE ARTS

STUDENT BOOK

▶ **11th Grade | Unit 1**

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# LANGUAGE ARTS 1101

## LEARNING AND USING STANDARD ENGLISH

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# Learning and Using Standard English

## Introduction

Students spend their days in language arts classrooms learning what has traditionally been called “correct English.” Few understand the big picture behind such instruction, to move students beyond their natural, native language in order to acquire an artificial one that serves as the communication “glue” of society, locally and globally. For those in whose homes Standard English is spoken, the journey isn’t long, but it is challenging; for others, it is akin to learning a second language.

This unit seeks to equip you with a broader understanding of why you must learn what you may feel you already know—English. Section 1 asks you to consider how you learned language in the first place as well as how region and social groups influenced your development. Natural language learning is briefly contrasted with formal instruction in Standard English, the shift in emphasis moving from speaking to reading and writing.

Section 2 considers the role of dictionaries in setting and preserving Standard English. This section will provide a brief history of dictionaries to trace their purpose across centuries, looking at the shift from prescriptive standard (locking the language down) to descriptive catalog. Included will be a brief review of the major components of a dictionary entry. Emphasis is placed on using the dictionary as a practical tool to guide you in using Standard English.

Section 3 is a survey of the kinds of written Standard English you will need to negotiate as a young adult and beyond, together with the situations calling for their use. Technical, informational, and literary texts serve to illustrate the “forms” you must know and use.

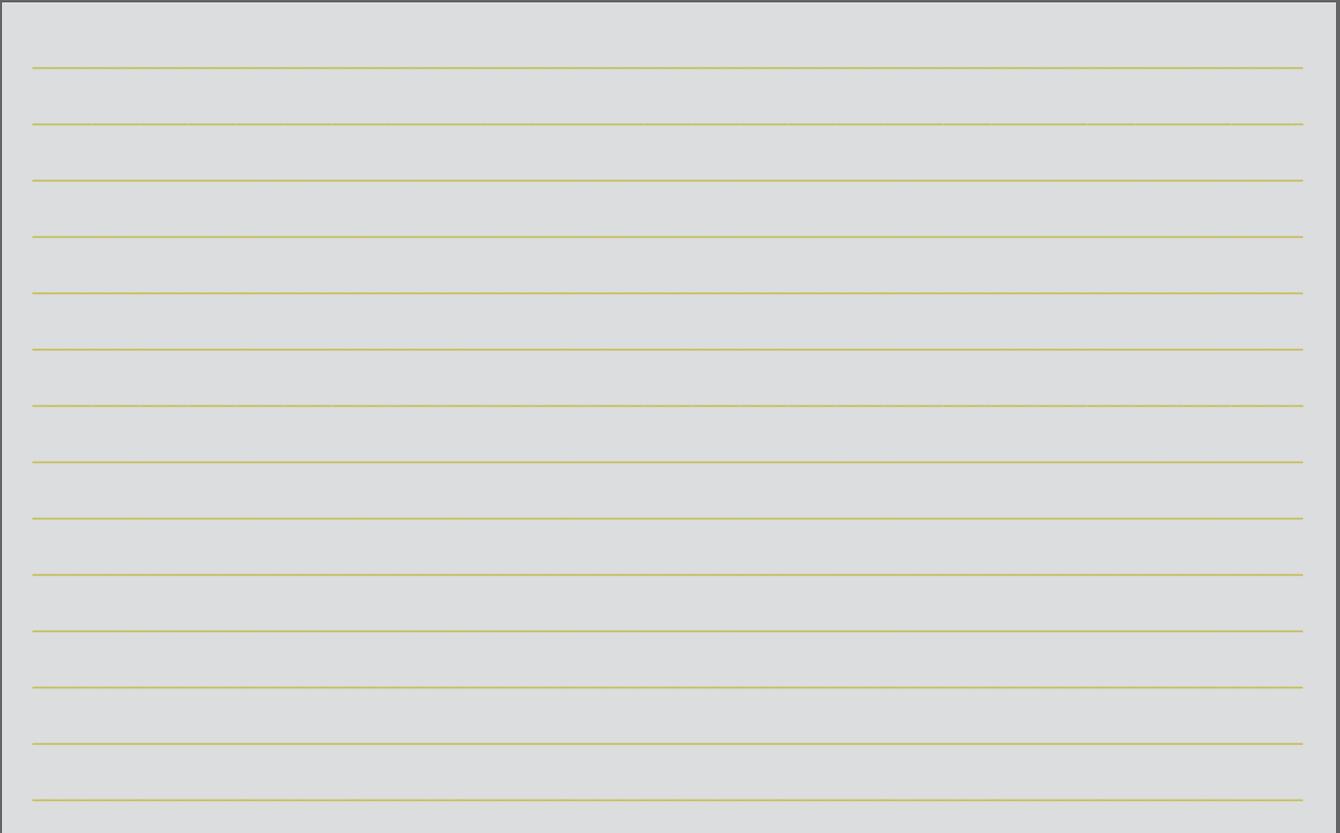
## Objectives

**Read these objectives.** The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAAC®. When you have finished this LIFEPAAC, you will be able to:

1. Recognize differences between natural acquisition of language and formal instruction in a language standard.
2. Explain what a standard language is (in light of language as a phenomenon) and why a standard is important.
3. Identify ways in which one’s level of ability to use Standard English can help or hinder interaction in society.
4. Identify standard and nonstandard varieties in language samples.
5. Determine appropriate language usage based on real-life scenarios.
6. Explain how and why dictionaries were first compiled and how they’ve changed across centuries.
7. Describe the structure of a typical dictionary.
8. Identify and use the elements of a dictionary entry.
9. Use the dictionary to solve problems (e.g., multiple spellings, ambiguous definitions, answer questions about usage).

10. Identify characteristics and types of technical, informational, and literary texts.
11. Identify the overall purpose of a text based on its structure and vocabulary.
12. Describe three types of language that shape written Standard English texts.
13. Read and write Standard English texts for a variety of real-life situations.
14. List major types of dictionaries.

Survey the LIFEPAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study and write your questions here.

A large rectangular area with horizontal yellow lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the box, providing a template for handwritten notes or questions.

# 1. WHY STANDARD ENGLISH?

Have you ever wondered, “Why have I been learning English in school if I grew up speaking it?” It’s a question that crops up in most English language arts classes at some point. What’s your answer?

Here are a few typical ones you might hear.

- You need to speak, read, and write correct English in order to be successful in society.
- People will think you’re uneducated if you don’t know how to use English properly.
- Using language effectively is an important part of using the gifts God has given you.

No doubt, these answers get at important reasons for English classes. It *is* true that you should take every opportunity to glorify God by making wise use of His gifts, including language. It is also true that you need to read, write, speak, and listen well in order to enjoy career success in the twenty-first century.

A hundred years ago, most people needed strong bodies along with capable minds and hands to handle tasks requiring interaction with things, not people (farming, factory assembly line, etc.) Over time, machines have taken over many of these tasks.

Today, while farming, manufacturing, and the trades remain important, most jobs reflect a global shift into the information age. Humans spend much more of their time interacting with people and ideas, not things. English has become a world trade language, and communication skills are now among the most important “assets” a person can possess regardless of field.

Still doesn’t really answer the question, does it? After all, you *know* English, so why are you *learning* it?

This section tries to answer this question by comparing the *kind* of English you grew up using with the *kind* of English you’re taught in school. In doing so, the section seeks to help you:

- Understand the purpose and importance of learning Standard English.
- Develop increased awareness of varieties of English and how you use language.
- Connect effective language use to successful interaction in society.

## Section Objectives

**Review these objectives.** When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Recognize differences between natural acquisition of language and formal instruction in a language standard.
2. Explain what Standard English is (in light of language as a phenomenon) and why a standard is important.
3. Identify ways in which one’s level of ability to use Standard English can help or hinder interaction in society.
4. Identify standard and nonstandard varieties in language samples.
5. Determine appropriate language usage based on real-life scenarios.

## Vocabulary

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

colloquial language

idiom

nonstandard English

slang

jargon

dialect

overgeneralization

Standard English

holophrastic stage

natural language acquisition

second language acquisition

telegraphic stage

**Note:** All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are not sure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

Unless you were born into a family that spoke a different first language, no one really taught you English. You *acquired* it naturally—just sort of soaked it up like a plant soaks up sunlight and makes food out of it. Hearing the language of your parents, siblings, and schoolmates was enough to give you what you needed to get started. How did you do this?

## ACQUIRING A LANGUAGE

Many linguists (language experts) believe that human beings are simply “pre-wired” for language. This means that, given normal, healthy development (i.e., a loving, nurturing environment with lots of interaction with parents and other caregivers), a person simply picks up language because he was designed to do so—no English classes necessary. In fact, by age five, the average person has reached close to *adult* capacity in certain aspects of spoken language—the sound system (phonology) and sentence structure (syntax). Other aspects, such as vocabulary development and a more sophisticated understanding of language in context, continue to develop into adulthood.

Here’s a glimpse at the *stages* of **natural language acquisition**. Don’t forget that *you* did this too!

**0–6 months.** *Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh!!!* An infant’s best defense against hunger, cold, sleepiness, and dirty diapers is a healthy cry that pierces the ears. If you ask your mother, you’ll find you used it for just about everything and kept her busy coming up with ways to make it stop. When she did, you made “happy” noises like gurgling and cooing. You used no real language during this “silent” period, but you were certainly communicating.



**6–12 months.** *Ba ba da da ma ma!* At some point, you entered the so-called “babbling” stage. Here, you “played” with a huge variety of sounds, many of which you repeated as you started warming up to use language. Cries, grunts, and a few gestures (e.g., hands reaching up to be held) served as “speech.” Your first words might have included *mama*, *da da*. (Your parents might debate about which you said first.)

**1–2 years.** According to linguists, you entered the **holophrastic stage** when you began to use one-word sentences. Here are a few you might have used:

*Mo?* I want *more* ... (usually cookies or milk)

*Go!* Let’s *go!* Go away!

*Bie!* Give me a *bite* of food.

Sometimes that one word meant more than one thing:

*Wawa?* I want water (milk, juice, etc.) I’m thirsty. I’d like a drink.

*Mama!* I want Mama! I want Daddy!

*Dow!* I want to get down (lap, high chair, the top shelf, etc.) Pick me up!

The word-sentences you learned were the important ones in life—naming words (nouns) and verbs signaling desire for food, sleep, comfort, action, and independence. Your sound system was still developing at this stage. Amazingly enough, you always picked the easiest sounds to say—*m*, *b*, *d*, *ah*, *oh*, *oo*. You stayed away from more difficult sounds like *k*, *r*, and *l*. If you learned words with consonant clusters like the *-wn* in *down*, you dropped one of the consonants to make the word easier to say (*dow\_!*).

**2–3 years.** You graduated from the one-word stage to the two- and three-word stages when you began to say things like:

*All done!* I’m all done (eating, playing, etc.)

*Uh oh! Mess!* Uh oh! I made a mess! (or) Look! There’s a mess!

*Dad! Nana!* Dad! Get me a banana (please)!

*Go home now.* I want to go home now.

In this **telegraphic stage**, you spoke in sentences, but you dropped all the “unnecessary” words, just like people used to when sending a (very expensive) telegram before telephones came into regular use.



**3–5 and beyond.** At some point you stopped sending telegrams and decided to add all those “unnecessary” words, like pronouns, prepositions, and articles. Sentences may have been simple, but they were full-fledged English (eventually complete with *r*’s and *l*’s). Your vocabulary expanded rapidly. Sentence structure became more complex—adult-like by around age five. Interesting errors started popping up.



*I taked the book to school.*

I took the book to school.

*We goed to get pizza.*

We went to get pizza.

You were making **overgeneralizations**, errors resulting from always following a particular rule in English grammar without adjusting for exceptions to that rule. In the first two examples, you formed the past tense for *take* and *go* by adding *-ed*. After all, other important words at this time of life—*walk*, *talk*, *play*, *jump*—all did that. Knowing which verbs were regular and irregular would come in time. Some you would never pick up without an English class.

Here are other interesting errors of overgeneralization you might have made as you grew older, each reflecting an increasingly sophisticated use of language.

<i>I drink dozens of water.</i>	I drink <i>a lot</i> of water.
<i>I saw two deers in the forest.</i>	I saw two <i>deer</i> in the forest.
<i>The ground was really dry that it soaked up all the water.</i>	The ground was so dry that it soaked up all the water.

You can’t “count” water, can you?

As a four-year-old you didn’t know that, so you’re perfectly happy to use *dozens* interchangeably with *a lot*. A seven-year-old might still use a plural form *deers* for an irregular noun plural *deer*. A nine-year-old or beyond might still struggle with idiomatic phrases like *so ... that*.

It’s astounding to think that a child moves from no language to basically adult language in just five years with no formal teaching. It happens all the time. You did it too.

### A Note on Second Language Acquisition

If you’ve begun to learn a second language, you’ll understand that what children do easily in learning their first language is extremely difficult for adults. Linguists argue that a critical age for language learning exists (somewhere between ages 6 and 12) beyond which a person will never be able to achieve “nativity” (i.e., speak like a native).

Interestingly enough, learners of second languages do similar things to those described above for first language learners. Consider the example below, which roughly represents what a person from East Asia (China, Japan, etc.) might say early on in learning English. The errors or missing elements are highlighted in the **Standard English** equivalent.

*I sleep wer. Bed vely comefetabow.*

I **slept** well. The bed **is (was)** very comfortable.

The example shows that the speaker left out function words like articles (“the”) and auxiliaries (“is/was”). He overgeneralized the verb form (*sleep* instead of *slept*). The example also shows a struggle with more difficult sounds like consonant clusters and *r*’s and *l*’s.

Part of the second language learner’s struggle is because the learner’s first language competes with the second one. Ways of pronouncing words and ordering them in sentences are ingrained and often get in the way of learning the second language.

**Complete these activities.**

- 1.1 As a baby and young child, you went through stages of \_\_\_\_\_ that allowed you to learn English.
- 1.2 In the \_\_\_\_\_ stage, you used two- or three-word sentences to say everything you needed to say. You left out articles, pronouns, and prepositions.
- 1.3 In the \_\_\_\_\_ stage, you used one-word sentences.
- 1.4 Sometimes, you applied a rule everywhere, even places where it didn't apply. This tendency is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.5 A person learning a new language as an adult goes through a process called \_\_\_\_\_.

**Answer true or false.**

- 1.6 \_\_\_\_\_ No one taught you your native language.
- 1.7 \_\_\_\_\_ Human beings are pre-wired for language.
- 1.8 \_\_\_\_\_ It takes a person about twelve years to master the sound system of his/her native language.
- 1.9 \_\_\_\_\_ It is more difficult to learn a second language than a first language.
- 1.10 \_\_\_\_\_ Humans learn sounds in their order of difficulty.

**Match the stage of natural language acquisition to its description.**

- |      |       |                    |                   |
|------|-------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1.11 | _____ | holophrastic stage | <b>a.</b> Stage 1 |
| 1.12 | _____ | silent period      | <b>b.</b> Stage 2 |
| 1.13 | _____ | adult capacity     | <b>c.</b> Stage 3 |
| 1.14 | _____ | babbling stage     | <b>d.</b> Stage 4 |
| 1.15 | _____ | telegraphic stage  | <b>e.</b> Stage 5 |

**Match the language sample to the stage of natural language acquisition.**

- |      |       |                                       |                                         |
|------|-------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1.16 | _____ | I putted the toys on the shelf.       | <b>a.</b> babbling stage                |
| 1.17 | _____ | Gurgle! Coo. Waaaaaah!                | <b>b.</b> telegraphic stage             |
| 1.18 | _____ | Sand shoe! (I have sand in my shoes!) | <b>c.</b> adult-like overgeneralization |
| 1.19 | _____ | ba ba, da da, ma ma!                  | <b>d.</b> holophrastic stage            |
| 1.20 | _____ | Mo? (I want more!)                    | <b>e.</b> silent period                 |



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LAN1101 – Apr '18 Printing

ISBN 978-0-7403-1489-6



9 780740 314896