

Historical Foundations of English Grammar

English Linguistics History · Answer Key · 25 Questions

1. Which influential 1755 publication by Samuel Johnson helped standardize English spelling and grammar?

- A) A Dictionary of the English Language**
- B) The Elements of Grammar
- C) The King James Bible
- D) The Oxford English Dictionary

2. In Old English, the grammatical structure was highly inflectional. Which language's influence introduced the loss of many case endings during the Middle English period?

- A) Latin
- B) Old Norse**
- C) Arabic
- D) Greek

3. William Shakespeare coined thousands of words. What is the grammatical term for a word he created by changing a noun into a verb, such as 'friend' to 'friend' someone?

- A) Acronym
- B) Portmanteau
- C) Functional shift**
- D) Onomatopoeia

4. The 'Great Vowel Shift' occurred between 1400 and 1700. How did this event primarily affect the English language?

- A) Standardized verb conjugations
- B) Changed the pronunciation of long vowels**
- C) Eliminated double negatives
- D) Introduced silent letters

5. During the 18th century, prescriptive grammarians like Robert Lowth attempted to apply the rules of which language to English?

- A) French
- B) German
- C) Latin**
- D) Spanish

6. The word 'grammar' originates from the Ancient Greek 'grammatike'. What did this term originally refer to?

- A) The art of letters**
- B) The study of verbs
- C) The logic of speech
- D) The science of syntax

7. What grammatical structure did the King James Bible of 1611 help cement in English by utilizing 'thou' and 'thee'?

- A) Passive voice
- B) Second-person singular pronouns**
- C) Future perfect tense
- D) Subjunctive mood

8. Which English monarch's reign saw the official transition of English as the language of record-keeping in Parliament?

- A) Henry V**
- B) Elizabeth I
- C) Richard III
- D) Charles II

9. In the 14th century, which author's literary works were instrumental in establishing the East Midlands dialect as the basis for Standard English?

- A) John Milton
- B) Geoffrey Chaucer**
- C) William Langland
- D) Thomas Malory

10. What is the historical reason English lacks a gendered system for nouns, unlike French or German?

- A) Influence of the printing press
- B) Viking linguistic simplification**
- C) The Norman Conquest
- D) The rise of the British Empire

11. Which grammatical innovation was popularized by the introduction of the printing press by William Caxton in 1476?

- A) Standardized punctuation**
- B) The use of apostrophes for possession
- C) Verb-object-subject order
- D) The lowercase alphabet

12. Before the 17th century, the 'double negative' was common in English. Which historical figure famously used them in literature?

- A) Jane Austen
- B) Geoffrey Chaucer**
- C) Charles Dickens
- D) Oscar Wilde

13. The word 'alphabet' is derived from the names of the first two letters of which ancient script?

- A) Latin
- B) Phoenician
- C) Greek**
- D) Etruscan

14. Which major historical event resulted in a massive influx of French vocabulary into English, altering its grammatical lexicon?

- A) The Napoleonic Wars
- B) The Norman Conquest of 1066**
- C) The Crusades
- D) The Hundred Years' War

15. Historically, what grammatical function did the word 'shall' perform in formal English that has largely been replaced by 'will'?

- A) Indication of future tense
- B) Indication of obligation**
- C) Creation of the passive voice
- D) The formation of plurals

16. The term 'syntax' comes from the Greek 'syntaxis'. What does it historically denote?

- A) Word order and arrangement**
- B) The history of nouns
- C) The study of punctuation
- D) The evolution of verbs

17. Which 19th-century dictionary compiler is credited with the most extensive grammatical and etymological documentation of the English language?

- A) Noah Webster
- B) James Murray**
- C) Samuel Johnson
- D) Benjamin Franklin

18. What historical period is associated with the 'Golden Age' of English grammar, where strict rules were formalized?

A) The Renaissance

B) The Enlightenment

C) The Victorian Era

D) The Industrial Revolution

19. What did the 'Orthography' sections in early English grammar books primarily aim to standardize?

A) Sentence structure

B) Spelling

C) Verb tense

D) Punctuation

20. During the Middle English period, which grammatical feature began to disappear from the English language?

A) Grammatical gender

B) Verb-subject-object order

C) Punctuation

D) The use of articles

21. What historical role did the 'Chancery Standard' play in English grammar?

A) Prohibited French terms

B) Standardized official written English

C) Established poetry rules

D) Defined slang as illegal

22. The inclusion of silent letters in many English words, such as 'knight', is a remnant of which historical feature?

A) Old English pronunciation

B) French spelling habits

C) Latin etymology

D) Viking influence

23. Which grammatical mood was historically more prevalent in English before the 20th century, often used for hypothetical situations?

A) Imperative

B) Indicative

C) Subjunctive

D) Exclamatory

24. The suffix '-ing' for present participles has its roots in which linguistic era?

- A) Old English**
- B) Modern English
- C) Latin
- D) Proto-Indo-European

25. What was the primary focus of English grammar books in the American colonies during the 18th century?

- A) Teaching American pronunciation
- B) Standardizing the English language**
- C) Promoting Native American languages
- D) Simplifying spelling