

English Grammar through Stories

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1. Present simple tense or «It never gets you anywhere»

In this story you will find many examples of how the Present Simple Tense can be used. As you know we use the present simple for things that are true in general, or for things that happen sometimes or all the time:

- She *likes* black tea.
- I start *work* at 9 o'clock and finish at 5:30.
- Water *boils* at 100 degrees Celsius.
- We usually *visit* our friends on the weekend.

You probably remember that after *he/she/it* an «s» is added to the verb as in these examples:

- She *speaks* excellent French.
- He sometimes calls her «my darling».
- It makes perfect sense to me.

When we want to make a negative sentence we use the following structure:

subject (*I/you/we/they*) + auxiliary verb (*don't*) + main verb (*infinitive*)

subject (*he/she/it*) + auxiliary verb (*doesn't*) + main verb (*infinitive*)

Examples:

- I *don't speak* Chinese.
- You *don't work* very hard
- She *doesn't call* me every day.

When we want to make a question we also use *don't* after *I/you/we/they* and *doesn't* after *he/she/it*:

- *Do* you speak Chinese?
- *Does* she work here?
- What *do* you do for a living?
- How *do* you usually get to work?

Now enjoy the following story and find the present simple in *italics*.

«It never gets you anywhere»

Andrew Smodley *is* a natural worrier. It *is* something he has inherited from his father — the king of all worriers. But then there are those who are never happy unless they *have* a problem to solve. Andrew worried about the weather, the state of the pound, his health, the cost of living and once he even worried because he thought he wasn't worrying enough. But that was in the past. Things have changed because something happened to him exactly two years ago.

It was in the spring when leaves *appear* on trees and nature *prepares* herself for renewal. Other things *happen* too — people often *fall* in love. Now Andrew *doesn't have* a romantic disposition. He never *looks* up at the leaves starting to grow, *sighs* and *says*: «Ah here *comes* the spring!» He simply *thinks* to himself: «I *live* in a small village by a little stream and around this time of year lots of creatures *start* to wake up and *make* a lot of noise.» In London, which *stands* on the River Thames, people *make* a lot of noise all the time.»

I *apologize* for the simplicity of these statements but I *want* to illustrate the unimaginative nature which Andrew possesses. Towards the end of this story I *give* examples to show the extent of the change that he underwent.

The other character in this anecdote *is* a young woman called Sally Fairweather. She too *lives* in this tiny and remote village where Andrew *has* his cottage. Now Sally *is* an entirely different kettle of fish. Her philosophy *runs* as follows: «Worrying never *gets* you anywhere and life *is* too short to waste time imagining the worst.»

In a word she *is* the complete opposite in temperament of Andrew. Here *comes* another cliché: Opposites attract. But you *must remember* that two years ago the two main characters hadn't met, which was surprising when you *consider* the proximity of Andrew's cottage and Sally's flat. If you *take* the first left after the post office, you *come* to Sally's place and if you *take* the second turning to the right after that you *come* to the cottage where Andrew *lives*.

The next participant in this village drama *is* the weather, which *plays* a very significant part in English life. It was late April and the sun had disappeared behind dark heavy rain clouds but Andrew had already set off for the local pub. Naturally he had his umbrella with him and a heavy coat following that aphorism his mother always used: «Never cast a clout (remove an article of clothing) before May *is out*.»

Fortunately he made it to the pub before the storm broke. The moment he crossed the doorstep an old schoolfriend *comes* up to Andrew, *offers* to buy him a drink and *tells* him not to look so worried. Andrew showed him the newspaper headlines: «Petrol prices *rise* again.» — «But you *haven't got* a car» said his friend. — «I *know*», retorted Andrew, «still it *means* everything else will go up in price, too.»

Everyone in the pub *looks* suitably depressed at this remark and begins to think of all the price increases that will follow. The gloom *is* palpable. Then suddenly the door *bursts* open and in *walks* our heroine, Sally looking like a drowned rat. Most people in the pub *think* to themselves: «What a pretty girl!» Andrew *sees* her as someone who *is drenched* and needs help. He *walks* over to her and *asks* if she is all right. For probably the first time in his life Andrew actually transferred his worry from himself to someone else and he *mixes* her a special drink to protect her from a possible cold. The conversation went as follows: «I *hear* you *live* in this village, too» — «How *do* you *know*?» asked Andrew.

But Sally changed the subject. «This drink *tastes* delicious. How did you make it?» — «I *put* a drop of ginger ale and a piece of lemon in the alcohol and then *stir* thoroughly. I always *keep* those two ingredients with me when I *go out* at night.» Suddenly Sally looked at her watch: «I *must fly*. My train *leaves* in ten minutes.» — «*Don't forget* to take those tablets I suggested and *let* me know how you *are*.» — «I'll let you know as soon as I *come back* from London.» And then she went.

Immediately Andrew started to worry. He didn't know her name, he didn't know her address and he felt strange. He *checks* his pulse. He *tests* his mental faculties: «Two and two *make* four.» It was a different sort of worry that was almost a concern. He *wants* to see her again. Within seconds he rushed out of the pub leaving his coat behind, ran into the pouring rain with no umbrella. What was happening to him? He saw Sally standing on the platform getting into the train and the train leaving the station. He *jumps* down from the platform onto the track and *waves* at the train driver to stop. The train *stops* and Andrew *gets* onto it.

Six weeks after this extraordinary episode Sally got married. Andrew *doesn't worry* any more now. He *stays* calm. The obvious time when people expected him to start worrying was during the wedding ceremony in the village church just over two years ago. As he *says*, «I *know* what everyone was thinking. They thought I would I go to pieces. But I was perfectly relaxed and I *owe* it all to Sally. She *is* certainly a wonderful wife. She smiled at me when we were standing at the altar and I stopped worrying from that moment on. You *can* see me looking relaxed in the newspaper pictures especially that one with the caption:

ANDREW SMODLEY *HANDS* THE RING TO SALLY FAIRWEATHER'S FUTURE HUSBAND.»