

Lecture 3: English Grammar Essentials for Coaching (The Imperative)

While academic English values complexity, coaching English values economy. In a high-pressure environment, instructions must be delivered instantly and unambiguously. This lecture focuses on the **Imperative Mood**, the grammatical foundation of instruction.

3.1 The Syntax of the Imperative

The imperative is unique because the subject (you) is implied, not spoken. This reduces the cognitive load on the athlete, allowing them to focus purely on the action.¹¹

Forms of the Imperative:

1. **Affirmative Command:** + [Object/Adverb].
 - *Examples:* “Run!” “Pass the ball!” “Jump higher!”
 - *Analysis:* The 1er bis always in the bare infinitive form.
2. **Negative Command (Prohibition):** “Don’t” +.
 - *Examples:* “Don’t stop!” “Don’t look down!”.¹¹
 - *Psychological Note:* In sports psychology, negative commands are often discouraged because they plant the image of the error in the athlete’s mind (the “White Bear effect”). It is often better to rephrase a negative command into a positive one (e.g., change “Don’t look down” to “Look forward”).²⁴
3. **Polite Request:** “Please” +.
 - *Context:* Used in low-intensity situations, such as warm-ups or cool-downs, or when addressing senior athletes. “Please stretch your hamstrings.”.²³
4. **Inclusive Imperative:** “Let’s” +.
 - *Context:* Used to build team unity or when the coach is participating. “Let’s go!” “Let’s huddle up.”.¹¹

3.2 “Bossy Verbs” and Action Cues

In the context of motor learning, the choice of 1er bis critical. These are often called “Action Cues”.²⁴ A vague verb leads to vague movement; a precise verb leads to precise movement.

Table 2: Verb Selection for Athletic Performance

Vague Instruction	Precise “Action Cue”	Intended Result
“Run fast.”	“ Sprint through the line.”	Maximum velocity.
“Hit the ground.”	“ Attack the ground.”	Aggressive force application.

Vague Instruction	Precise "Action Cue"	Intended Result
"Jump up."	" Explode off the floor."	Power and speed.
"Catch the ball."	" Snatch the ball."	Speed and firm grip.
"Go past him."	" Drive past him."	Forward momentum and strength.

Internal vs. External Cues:

A major development in sports pedagogy is the shift from Internal Cues (focusing on body parts) to External Cues (focusing on the effect on the environment).

- *Internal*: "Extend your hip."
- *External*: "Push the ground away."

Research shows that External Cues lead to superior performance because they allow the body to self-organize the movement pattern without conscious interference.¹⁰

3.3 Modals of Obligation and Advice

Beyond direct commands, coaches use modal verbs to express varying degrees of necessity.

- **Must / Have to**: Strong obligation. Rules or safety.
 - "You **must** wear a mouthguard." (Rule)
 - **Should / Ought to**: Advice or technical correction.
 - "You **should** keep your head up." (Technical advice)
 - **Can / Could**: Ability or possibility.
 - "You **can** play in midfield today."
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