

# Oneida Teaching Grammar

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This work is intended to help those learning and teaching the Oneida language. Oneida is a complex language quite different from English and learning it requires several resources. This work is meant to be one of those resources but by no means should it be the only one. It has been my experience that the people most successful in learning Oneida have two qualities. One is a long-term commitment to learning that allows them to deal with short term frustrations and plateaus. They recognize the job is hard and slow with spurts of progress as well as setbacks. The other is a realization that individuals need different resources at different times. Sometimes it pays to memorize and sometimes conversation is better; sometimes listening is more worthwhile and sometimes analyzing word patterns leads to progress; sometimes it makes sense to practice sounds and sometimes to practice writing. The successful learners seem to know which mix of resources works best for them at any one time and how the mix should change over time.

This guide focuses on providing grammatical terms to talk about how Oneida words contain patterns of meaning. Recognizing these patterns should help learners make sense of new words by comparing them to familiar ones and so make learning overall more efficient.

The guide is also designed to present information in a particular order that starts simply and builds to more complexity. In order to do that some material is presented in an oversimplified approach early on and then presented again in a more comprehensive fashion later on. There are also reference sections and summaries that may be useful after a learner has gone through the sequences of grammatical patterns.

The vocabulary is not intended to be comprehensive, of course. Although there is quite a bit of vocabulary in the grammatical sections, the intention is to present the many grammatical patterns with as small and thus as familiar a set of vocabulary as possible.

Even though there are conversational sections and learning hints along the way, this guide is not intended to provide the resources to internalize all the information presented. The learner will need additional resources - conversations, listening opportunities, perhaps pattern drills, speaking situations, patient feedback - to transform knowledge about the language into the ability to use the language. The lessons here also do not contain very much on the social contexts in which the language is used. There are stylistic and dialectal differences and conventions about using the language in various formal and informal situations that are only hinted at in this work. The learner will need additional resources in this area as well.

Just as language is a very communal activity, so also has been the process of assembling this work. It is based on my interactions over the last two decades with a community of scholars (principally Iroquoianists), a community of speakers (tribal elders largely from Oneida, Wisconsin), and many learners (both Oneidas and non-Oneida students at the University of Wisconsin - Green Bay). I am grateful for all they have taught me but there are undoubtedly errors in this work and in true Iroquoian fashion I confess that I am still learning and ask you to forgive my errors and omissions.

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