

Introduction

By itself, “grammar” is not an engaging topic for students. You won’t hear them spontaneously discuss the function of an adjective vs. an adverb. Students don’t get excited about linking verbs. Most adults outside the academic arena even shy away from grammar, especially now that our computers can check our grammar for reports or other writings. Even so, effective speakers and writers need to understand and use grammar as a sharp tool to express their thoughts. Grammar rules help us modify a message for a target audience. We even break some rules on purpose to be more casual.

Some say the most practical reason to teach grammar in school is to help students score well on tests. That practice, while pragmatic, ignores the lifelong benefits of solid grammar skills. We make snap judgments when we meet people. These impressions are based on communication style as much as appearance and background knowledge. When all we know about someone is what that person has written, as in many e-mails, grammar and writing style are even more important.

How, then, do we entice students to master basic grammar well enough to apply it in their conversation and their writing?

- First, teach the grammar concept or rule. Highlight a specific grammar point.
- Then, give your students practice, practice, practice.
- Incorporate the grammar concept in both oral and written activities.
- Spotlight the concept as your students encounter it in textbooks, Internet articles, school announcements, and classroom interaction.
- Demonstrate both correct and incorrect use of the grammar concept. Talk about the impact of the concept on a message’s listener or reader. Often a message is clearer when it is grammatically correct. Incorrect grammar can also distract from the meaning or desired effect of a message.

The goals of *Spotlight on Grammar* are below.

- To help students recognize and utilize correct grammar in their speaking and writing
- To boost students’ reading comprehension by understanding the role of grammar

All six books in *Spotlight on Grammar* concentrate on basic grammar concepts typically mastered by students in fifth grade. Use the Pretest/Posttest on page 6 to determine your students' specific strengths and weaknesses. The activities within each book are sequenced by general complexity. Sentence structure, vocabulary, and readability are kept simple to keep students' energies focused on the grammar concept vs. reading comprehension.

Spotlight on Grammar: Pronouns presents information about various types of pronouns and the ways they are used. Here are additional activities to supplement the worksheets in this book:

- The more students hear and read correct grammar, the more their ears and brains will tune in to correct vs. incorrect grammar, including pronoun usage. Have your students raise their hands when they hear pronouns in songs, poems, or short passages to spotlight correct pronoun usage. When your students aren't sure which of two pronouns to use in a sentence, teach them to say the sentence out loud (or whispered) with each pronoun choice. This strategy also affords a natural opportunity to address local/non-standard English vs. standard English and to talk about code switching as necessary for taking tests or other situations in which standard English is expected.
- Number sticks or cards and give one to each student. Call out random groups of numbers and have those students stand together. Then ask a volunteer to refer to the entire group with a correct pronoun, using the pronoun in a complete sentence. Where appropriate, have your students think of other pronouns that could also refer to each group and use these pronouns in sentences.
- Type a short story (fables work well here) and leave out several pronouns. Display the story on a board or an overhead. Have your students decide which pronouns to fill in the blanks, explaining the clues that helped them select an appropriate pronoun for each instance.
- Arrange your students in groups of two or three. Have the groups identify something each member has in common, such as a favorite food or leisure activity. Next, as a whole class, have each student take a turn using pronouns (no names) to share what the members of his small group have in common, e.g., "She and I both like skating." (Remind students as necessary to refer to themselves last in constructions such as *He and I* or *to her and me*.)
- Have your students nominate and vote for their favorite new pronoun to take the place of *he* or *she* and for *him* or *her* in sentences such as *Each student should eat what ____ wants or what tastes good to ____*. This activity pinpoints the traditional usage as well as the current trend to ignore it in conversation — one of many examples of how language changes over time.
- To practice relative pronouns, have your students give definitions telling the functions of objects or the jobs of workers, e.g., *A microwave is an appliance that heats food, A pianist is someone who plays the piano.*

We hope *Spotlight on Grammar: Pronouns* is a big hit with you and your students!

Carolyn and Kate