

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: Compound and Complex Sentences begins with a brief review of simple and compound subjects and predicates as well as noun-verb agreement, both prerequisites for tackling compound and complex sentences. Students then learn about coordinating conjunctions that connect equal parts of sentences, followed by subordinating conjunctions that connect dependent clauses to independent clauses to form complex sentences. The intent of this book's activities is to alert students to the form and use of compound and complex sentences, not to master more sophisticated grammar skills that are generally taught in high school. Students in grades three through six should be able to easily identify simple, compound, and complex sentences after they complete these activities. These students should also be able to transform one type of sentence into another, a useful tool to make their writing more interesting for readers and to explain key relationships like sequencing, causes, or associations.

The following additional activities will enrich your students' compound and complex sentence skills.

- Write a simple sentence on the board, such as *Jenny writes*. Talk about the subject of this sentence and the verb or predicate. Then, ask your students to add more information to this sentence to change it into various compound sentences, e.g., *Jenny writes to her grandma and her grandma loves getting letters*, *Jenny writes slowly but she types fast*, etc. Next, have your students change *Jenny writes* into various complex sentences.
- Diagram sentences on the board and have your students copy the diagrams. A Web search for **diagram sentences** should give you and your students helpful information here.
- Your students need to differentiate independent and dependent clauses, but that terminology sometimes overwhelms students. To spotlight the difference, focus on which part of the sentence contains "more important information" to identify the independent or main sentence. Ask, "If we had to lose one part of this sentence, which one could we leave out and still get the important information? Why?" Even simple games that have your students repeat common subordinate conjunctions can improve their ability to spot a dependent clause. For example, try snapping/clapping a rhythm and having students name a subordinating conjunction that has not been said already.
- Use a short passage as a cloze exercise. Rewrite the passage and leave out coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Have your students supply appropriate words to complete the passage.

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Grammar: Compound and Complex Sentences*!

Carolyn and Kate