

# 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: Nouns* presents information about various types of nouns and the capitalization rules for them. Students need to understand *noun* in order to understand *pronoun* and then progress to identifying the subject of a sentence.

Here are additional activities to supplement the content of this book.

- Present part of a popular song or poem. Work with your students to highlight and replace each noun. Here is an example based on "Raindrops on Roses" from *The Sound of Music*, written by Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers:

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens

Sugar on cereal and catsup on hot dogs

Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens

Bright copper pennies and warm woolen slippers

Brown paper packages tied up with strings

Brown paper lunch bags tied up with yarn

These are a few of my favorite things.

These are a few of my favorite nouns.

- Have your students list as many nouns as they can that go with a given topic, such as the classroom, sports, or a current learning topic. For enrichment, talk about verbs or adjectives that go with these nouns.
- Encourage your students to make new nouns for imagined inventions, products, or school programs. Ask your students to explain the rationale for each new noun. If time allows, have them illustrate their new nouns before they present the reasoning behind their created names.
- You will encounter nouns within this book that can also function as verbs, such as *lie* or *promise*. Take advantage of natural teaching opportunities as you spot them to demonstrate the enormous flexibility (hence, complexity!) of the English language.
- What if English had genders for nouns, as many other languages do? Have your students work in small groups to create a gender for the same list of nouns and then present their labeling to the class, explaining their reasoning. This is a fun way to give your students extra practice with curriculum words. The more they think about, see, write, and hear these words, the more easily they will store them efficiently in their vocabulary banks.

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

Carolyn and Kate