

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: Simple Sentences teaches the concept of a sentence as a complete thought. Your students will differentiate statements, commands, exclamations, and questions and punctuate them correctly. Activities in this book also teach students to identify simple and complete subjects and predicates, direct objects, and indirect objects. Your students should master the elements of simple sentences in order to progress to reading and writing compound and complex sentences. Here are some additional activities that will help your students master simple sentences.

- Write a simple sentence on the board, such as *Carl reads*. Talk about the subject of this sentence and the verb or predicate. Then, ask your students to add more information to this sentence while keeping it a simple sentence (one independent clause, one main thought), e.g., *Carl reads mysteries*, *Carl often reads*, *Carl and Jim read magazines*, *Carl reads and enjoys comic books*, *Carl reads and rereads science fiction books on Saturdays*, etc.
- Use a magnetic word set or cards with single words on them to play modified Scrabble with your students. Instead of putting letters together to spell words, players put words together to make the longest simple sentences they can.
- Divide the class into even rows. Gather one member from each team out of earshot of the others. Say a simple sentence to this group. On your signal, these players return to their rows and whisper the sentence to the first person in line. Each person whispers the same sentence down the row. The last person goes to the board and writes the sentence. The first team to have the correct sentence on the board wins.
- Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Each group thinks of an object and writes simple sentence clues that describe the object. One group presents one sentence at a time while the rest of the students guess the object. Each person who guesses an object correctly earns one point. At the end of a set time period, the person with the most points wins.
- Construct a communal story composed of simple sentences. Write the simple-sentence story as it is created. If a student suggests a compound or complex sentence, explain how you know the sentence is compound or complex and ask the student to break it apart to create one simple sentence, even though some of the information will be lost. When everyone has contributed at least one sentence, collaborate to add a great ending for your simple-sentence story. Illustrate the story and post it on a bulletin board.

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

Carolyn and Kate