

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: Verbs presents basic information about verb tenses, types of verbs, and irregular verbs. Below are additional activities to supplement the content of this book.

- Help your students to list all the verbs/action words they can think of for a given topic, such as paper, school, or a current learning topic. For enrichment, talk about adverbs that could modify these verbs and nouns that could do the actions.
- Encourage your students to make new verbs for the actions of imagined machines or creatures. If all the objects in your classroom were animated at night, what verbs would your students use to describe the objects' actions?
- Point out that many nouns can become verbs and vice versa. Add *-or* or *-er* to an action verb to make a noun that does the action: *surfboard* + *-er* = *surfboarder*, *act* + *-or* = *actor*, etc. Likewise, add *-ing* to a verb and use it as a noun (gerund): *study* + *-ing* = *studying* as in *Studying exercises your brain*.
- Write 20 nouns on separate cards. Then write 20 verbs on separate cards, choosing actions that could be done by the nouns in the first set of cards. Give each student one card and ask the students to pair themselves as a noun and a verb that go together well.
- Ask small groups of students to travel across the same path in your room, one at a time. Each student must move differently. The other students must think of a verb or verbs to describe each student's movement across the room. No two students may move the same way; they must vary their body position, speed, gestures, etc. Allow your students to make up new verbs for this activity, explaining the reasoning that led to creating such a word.

English has a rich vocabulary, yet we restrict our vocabulary to common words. Each week, choose one common verb and challenge your students to list as many synonyms as they can. Here are some good candidates for this activity:

see	hurry	go	do	move
like	eat	hold	use	get
want	touch	write	take	find
walk	have	say	sit	know

We hope *Spotlight on Grammar: Verbs* enlivens grammar lessons for you and your students!

Carolyn and Kate