

# How to teach grammar (or not!)

Presented to  
ProjectRead  
tutors by

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*"What can I say? I was an English major."*

# Introductions!

Tell us

- Your name
- A bit about your student and your experience teaching him/her grammar
- What you hope to get out of this workshop

# Part 1: Overview

# What we'll discuss

- The need for grammar, or not.
- Ways of integrating grammar into your tutoring sessions.
- Using the language of grammar to make your teaching more effective.
- Helping students become better editors.
- Grammar resources.

# Approaches to teaching ESL

- The grammar translation method
- Audio-lingual method
- Communicative approach (And how it turned me into a grammar book writer!)

# Approaches to teaching ESL

- Where we are now...



# Why teach grammar?

- Improve students' spoken English.
- Improve students' written English.

# Disclaimer

- I have taught almost exclusively Spanish-speaking students.
- I have taught low level students.

# Should you teach grammar?

- Consider your student's needs
  - Why is she learning English?
  - Does she plan to continue her education in the US?
  - How much time can she devote to learning English outside of class?
  - Is grammar a major weakness?

# Why you're in a unique position to teach grammar effectively

- You can tailor the grammar program to your student's unique needs.
- You can make time in your sessions as needed; you're not tied to a curriculum.

# #1 Prerequisite to teaching grammar: Educate yourself!

- You already know more English grammar than you think you do.
- The best way to learn something is to teach it.
- Remember: The Internet is your friend!

# #1: Prerequisite to understanding English grammar: ability to identify parts of speech



# #1 Prerequisite to understanding English grammar: ability to identify parts of speech

- Start with the basics: nouns, verbs, adjectives.
- Help your students become sensitive to word families, for example, *drive/driver; confuse, confused, confusion*.
- Create a list of word families and review it periodically.

# #1 Prerequisite to understanding English grammar: ability to identify parts of speech

| <b>noun</b> | <b>Verb (based form)</b> | <b>adjective</b>        |
|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| driver      | drive                    |                         |
| interest    | interest                 | Interesting, interested |
| flood       | flood                    | flooded                 |

## #2 Prerequisite to understanding English grammar: knowing what constitutes a sentence

- What must every sentence include?
- A subject (noun or pronoun)
- A verb

# How to teach grammar

- Explicitly

OR

- In context (When it comes up in conversation or writing)

# Why teach grammar explicitly?

- You can track your student's progress.
- You leave no stone unturned.
- Many students like it!

# Why teach grammar in context?

- It's more natural.
- It's related to a real world situation.
- It means you have more time to focus on practical skills and conversation.

# The value of explicit instruction.

- Research confirms the value of teaching grammar explicitly.
- “There is no guarantee that the needs that happen to emerge over the length of a language course will correspond to the structures that the learners will need in their subsequent use of that language.”

# How to integrate grammar into tutoring sessions: Many options

1. Work sequentially through a grammar book. (explicit)
2. Choose topics in a grammar book based on student's spoken and written errors. (in context/explicit)
3. \*Correct students oral and written language with impromptu "teachable moments." (in context)

# **Part 2:**

# **Teachable moments**

# No matter what: Take advantage of teachable moments



# How to approach teachable moments:

- Inductively: Teach a rule and apply it to the student's error.
- Deductively: Show the student examples of correct and incorrect sentences and let them deduce the rule.

# **How to make teachable moments effective:**

Before students can correct their errors, they need to know the language of grammar.

# Handouts and practice

- Beginning
- More advanced

# How to leverage your teachable moment

- Extend the moment with practice
- Record the moment in the student's journal
- Review the moment at subsequent sessions

# Make teachable moments stick

Students keep a journal of their mistakes and how they corrected them. Then review at the beginning of the session.

| <b>Incorrect English</b>         | <b>Error</b>              | <b>Correction</b>               |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| My brother <u>have</u> two jobs. | Incorrect verb form, have | My brother <u>has</u> two jobs. |

# Ways to reinforce grammar structures (whether the instruction is explicit or in context)

- Ask students questions using the grammar structure: For example, Present perfect:
  - How long have you...?
  - Tell me three things in your life that you're proudest of?
  - What have you just done?

# Ways to reinforce grammar structures

- Ask students for examples:
  - Comparative adjectives: Use *good*, *better*, and *best* in sentences.
  - Complex sentences with *when*: Use *when* to tell me how you usually feel when you wake up in the morning, how you felt yesterday, and how you will feel tomorrow.

# Ways to reinforce grammar structures

- Scrambled sentences
  - Make word cards that students use to make sentences based on a specific grammar point.

|     |           |           |              |
|-----|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| am  | were      | Laura     | busy         |
| is  | yesterday | and       | The students |
| are | today     | exhausted | Max          |
| was | Luis      | sick      | busy         |

**Part 3:**

**Helping students become  
better editors**

# Helping students become better editors

- Resist the urge to correct all errors; make editing a collaborative process.
- Group errors by type (e.g. subject/verb agreement errors, verb tense errors, etc.).

# Helping students become better editors

- Give hints as opposed to providing outright corrections.
- Use examples: Show a student an incorrect sentence, similar to her incorrect sentence, and ask her to find the error.

# Helping students become better editors

- Ask your student to read their paragraph to you.
- Read the paragraph out loud to your student.

# Helping students with grammar assignments

- Check for understanding again and again. Students are pleasers; they often say they understand when they don't.

# **Part 4:**

# **Resources, etc.**

# Resources

- Grammar summary cards
- The Internet:  
<http://www.sassfoundation.net/tutors/>
- Azar: “The Red Book”
- *Writing in English: Step by Step*
- *Grammar Practice*

# Take aways

- Teaching grammar is easier than you might think.
- The Internet is the only resource you'll need.
- Repetition and student confirmation is key.
- Document what you've taught and review what your students has learned (every session, if possible.)

# A word about SASS (Sequoia Adult School Scholars)



**Questions?**