

WHAT WORKS IN
GRAMMAR
INSTRUCTION

An abstract graphic on a teal background consisting of several jagged, multi-colored lines (orange, blue, green, pink, purple) that flow from the top left towards the bottom right. Interspersed along these lines are various colored circles in shades of blue, orange, green, pink, and red, some of which are larger than others, creating a sense of movement and data flow.

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What Is Grammar?

Grammar is the skunk at the garden party of the language arts.

—*Brock Haussamen*

I collect old grammar books. An odd hobby, I know, but one that helps me get a sense of the history of grammar instruction beyond the summaries I can read in other publications. The preface in one grammar text from 1880 is interesting in how it reveals grammar teaching history and issues. The author, Albert Raub, asserts that “the principles underlying and regulating the use of the English language are best taught by an inductive process” (3). After contrasting his belief with that of what he perceives as the norm—deductive, scientific, and unsuccessful—Raub states that his “design is to teach first the idea, then the name, and lastly the definition” (3). Despite his intent, the book is a series of exercises focused on definitions (that students would have to know before they did the exercises)—nothing so dissimilar from other methods of that time, according to his own description, and certainly not so dissimilar from methods that persisted through most of the next century. Still, it’s interesting that, even in 1880, teachers like Raub were aware of the challenges of teaching grammar—and they were proposing solutions not so dissimilar from more recent ones. The book’s return in its practices to traditional methods shows how difficult effective instructional methods can be.

Despite pronouncements from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) as early as 1936 and concerns expressed by authors such as Raub, traditional grammar instruction—based on Latin and Greek models and involving memorization of definitions and identification of parts of a sentence—was central to modern education in the United States; that is, it was until the repercussions of *Research in Written Composition* (Braddock et al.) hit. That report contains the following passage, so often repeated as almost to have become a mantra:

In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing. (37–38)

Braddock and colleagues' report started a controversy that was argued in journals for the next two decades. In fact, in 1985, Hartwell made the observation that both sides argued from the same research but that "prior assumptions about the value of teaching grammar" colored the interpretation of that research (106): people saw what they wanted to see. Hillocks's 1986 findings, more than twenty years after the Braddock report, reinforced the earlier findings and contributed to spreading its perspective: "The study of traditional school grammar . . . has no effect on raising the quality of student writing. . . . Taught in certain ways, grammar and mechanics instruction has a deleterious effect on student writing" (248). Since the mid-1980s, this conclusion has largely been accepted as the final word in the controversy: teaching grammar in traditional ways does nothing to improve writing.

Hartwell's assertion about how teachers interpret research findings depending on their prior assumptions certainly seems apparent in the way teachers responded to the reports from Braddock and his colleagues and, later, Hillocks. Some teachers saw the reports as an excuse to throw out grammar instruction: at last, they could stop doing what they hated and what their students seemed to hate. Some teachers believed that, if grammar instruction didn't help students develop as writers, there was no value in teaching it. Others didn't want to give the impression that students' home languages weren't of value. For whatever reason, in many classes, students received no grammar instruction.

Teachers holding a grammarian perspective, believing in the effects of traditional grammar instruction despite the reports' findings, continued to teach grammar. Battistella suggests that along with this persistent belief in the academic value of teaching traditional grammar was a moral element, a feeling that good grammar was somehow reflective of good character and therefore ought to be taught. Teachers who persisted in teaching traditional grammar, though, were often seen as out of step with current theory and practice, so they withdrew from local discussions and sometimes hid what they taught in the classroom. According to Wallace, they were "driven underground" (2).

One (possibly unintended) consequence of the pronouncements from Braddock and colleagues and Hillocks is that grammar was linked almost solely with writing instruction. Both reports state that traditional grammar instruction does

not improve students' *writing*—thus effectively limiting any other application for language instruction. What developed from this narrowed perspective is an approach toward grammar instruction called “teaching grammar in context,” which is a response to an emphasis on the writing process and was popularized in the well-known book of the same name (Weaver). Lobeck comments on the consequence of this limited view of grammar's value: “The popular idea of teaching grammar only ‘in context’ perpetuates a narrow view of the applications of grammatical knowledge to other areas of study in the K–12 curriculum” (100). Grammar as helpful to reading, grammar as related to language attitudes, or grammar as anything other than punctuation and correction seemed to be ignored in the rush to contextualize grammar as part of writing process instruction.

With the new focus on grammar for writing, some teachers tried to do what seemed to be the logical outcome of the research—they tried to integrate grammar into writing instruction. But many teachers found this stance problematic in a number of ways. Because integrated grammar instruction necessitates individual application, there is little that can be given to teachers to use in class in the way of texts or planned lessons. Teachers have to develop mini-lessons that respond to students' needs. As a consequence, teachers need something that's in short supply in public schools: time. They need time to analyze students' needs and time to prepare materials that will help meet those needs.

As a result, I see teachers resort to such strategies as daily oral and written practice using sentences from a textbook or website that students correct as a class. These sentences generally contain a range of errors, from a lack of punctuation at the end of a sentence to the use of commas in restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. If a student is having trouble with sentence boundaries, I can't imagine that they would be ready to learn about the complexities of which clause is essential and which is not. Furthermore, the sentences reduce grammar to a hunt for errors—and in sentences that aren't even the students' own! How do they understand what the writer intended to communicate? In most classes I observe, teachers make no application beyond correcting the sentences with the students—and then consider their teaching of language—grammar—done! Dust off my hands.

Time isn't made any easier when researchers like Myhill et al. find that effective grammar instruction requires lots of talk:

Through this kind of exploratory talk, students are given ownership in making writerly decisions and are enabled to “make informed judgements about language,” questioning rather than compliantly accepting “socially defined notions of good grammar.” (107, citing Denham and Lobeck)

This talk about language takes time—another drain on what teachers have in little supply. But it has another complicating factor: it also requires a certain level of language knowledge on the teacher’s part. And many teachers I speak with find this almost threatening. What if they don’t know what the students are asking about? What if they don’t know how to explain the language constructions they are reading and writing?

And new textbooks aren’t always helpful either. An analysis of popular writing texts commonly found in schools shows that they include significantly more about writing than previous versions and that those sections are moved to the front of the texts, emphasizing writing. These texts include some grammar lessons in the writing chapters, in addition to the traditional grammar section that has been moved to the back of the book. Despite the appearance of integration of grammar instruction with writing, these texts “miss what is essential in real integration: connection with the concerns that are actually occurring in students’ writing” (Dean, “Underground” 31). Instead, the texts include a lesson on pronoun agreement with descriptive writing, for example, even though pronoun agreement may not be what is needed for students who are writing descriptions. The texts give the appearance of integration in what is really an almost impossible task for a text, because integration relies on the teacher’s recognition of individual students’ needs with specific pieces of writing or reading. For some teachers, all these challenges are just too much. The result? “The ‘right moment’ hardly ever arose and grammar was simply not taught at all” (Hudson 102).

The teaching of grammar has an interesting past, a complicated intertwining of conflicting goals and purposes. The issues of what research shows and what teachers should do about research findings seem to be—at least to some extent—resolved. In a 2001 themed issue of *Voices from the Middle*, the editor summarized the thinking of the time: “The question isn’t ‘Do we teach grammar?’ but instead ‘How do we teach grammar in context?’” (Beers 4). In the decades since, we have been trying to answer the question. Part of the answer might be in how we define the term: what does *grammar* mean?

Well, that depends on whom we ask.

Hartwell, in refining Francis’s classic “three meanings of grammar,” provides five meanings for the term:

1. *Grammar 1*—the patterns of language people all learn intuitively as they learn a language. Hartwell calls this the “grammar in our head” and describes its “internalized” and “abstract” nature, as well as its connection to “the acquisition of literacy” (111). He gives an example to show Grammar

Extending Your Knowledge

Michelle Devereaux and Darren Crovitz call grammar a *benighted* term and suggest using the term *language* instead. They make the case that shifting the terms can help shift the focus to the broader vision of what we can teach when we teach grammar in context:

Language isn't a matter of right and wrong; it's about getting things done by knowing the context and acting intentionally with that information. We have to be confident enough as teachers to face the holes in our own grammar knowledge and curious enough to pay attention to how language works in myriad ways around us. (24)

- 1 by listing a series of words and noting how native speakers always know the way to order the words to achieve meaning.
2. *Grammar 2*—the scientific aspect of language that analyzes and studies patterns of language. This grammar, Hartwell (and others) argues, is not of much value in schools because it is more concerned with theoretical factors than reality.
3. *Grammar 3*—what Francis termed “linguistic etiquette” (Hartwell 109) and what Hartwell calls “usage.” Grammar 3 deals with issues of language that may have social consequences. If a person breaks the rules of Grammar 3, they may be thought uneducated, probably unworthy, and, possibly, immoral.
4. *Grammar 4*—school grammar. Although scientific grammar and school grammar are linked, Hartwell calls Grammar 4 unscientific because of its “inadequate principle”: a concern with logic and a false connection to Latin (110). In his further discussions of Grammar 4, he refers to the rules teachers teach about language as “incantations.” He argues that these rules make sense only if a person already understands the concept—that the rules themselves cannot teach the concepts—and he provides examples of possessives and fragments to make his point.
5. *Grammar 5*—“stylistic grammar” or grammar as it relates to teaching writing, particularly at the sentence level (111). Today, Grammar 5 might even be broader and considered as *rhetorical grammar*, which moves beyond the sentence level in most cases. Hartwell anticipated this move somewhat by noting that “writers need to develop skill at two levels. One, broadly rhetorical, involves communication in meaningful contexts. The other, broadly metalinguistic rather than linguistic, involves active manipulation of language with conscious attention to surface form” (125). Today, references to grammar as style might refer to either level.

Since Hartwell’s article, others have presented alternate definitions of grammar in an attempt to ensure that, when teachers talk about what we are teaching, we are talking about the same thing—and not simply focusing on issues of correctness. The definition in *Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers* (Haussamen) condenses Hartwell’s five meanings into two, essentially Grammar 1 and Grammar 5. Although this categorization is simpler, it doesn’t address oral use of language in formal situations. Burke, citing Kress and van Leeuwen, provides an even broader definition: grammar as “patterns of experience, enabl[ing] human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them” (“Developing” 60). And Crovitz and Devereaux would agree: “Crazy as it may sound, grammar is really about understanding, not about ‘correctness’” (*Grammar* 2). So. We have lots of voices trying to establish what we mean when we say *grammar*.

For the purposes of this book, I use *grammar* and *language* interchangeably, but my use is intended to embrace several of the perspectives I’ve presented here: grammar involves learning about language from a variety of perspectives to help students read, write, and speak in meaningful ways in a variety of contexts.

Why Should We Teach Grammar?

Weaver (*Teaching Grammar* 3–6) cites several reasons often given for teaching grammar, including the following:

- to train the brain
- to aid in learning a second language
- to help students score well on large-scale tests
- to help them speak in socially prestigious ways
- to help them improve as writers and readers

After she discounts these reasons as invalid or ineffective because of research findings, she still suggests teaching grammar as a means of improving writing. Her recommendation to eliminate traditional grammar instruction in order to allow more time for writing seems to address the conflicting issues raised in research. This highly endorsed perspective—that we limit the focus of instruction to a few concepts and that we teach grammar primarily to improve writing—is dominant in published literature on grammar instruction.

Extending Your Knowledge

Mary Ehrenworth and Vicki Vinton affirm the position that the goal of grammar instruction should be “to teach knowledge of conventional usage . . . to increase power, opportunity, and voice: to teach habits of fluency, inquiry, and experimentation, and to engage students in such a way that this knowledge and these habits are sustaining and flexible” (15).

Neil Postman makes a different but no less compelling argument for other reasons to study grammar: “Language habits are at the core of how we imagine the world. . . . [T]o the degree that we are unaware of how our ways of talking put . . . ideas in our head, we are not in full control of our situation” (176).

Power and control: two good reasons to teach grammar.

However, other educators and researchers make different arguments for studying language. Penha says we don’t need a reason, that “by definition” that is what we do as English teachers (20). Donna echoes this point when she compares goals for studying history or math with those of teaching language: “In stark contrast to other disciplines, the formal study of language in our schools too often ignores these four goals, doing little to establish basics, inspire wonder, train useful skills, or support advanced study” (67). Her point makes a good case for incorporating language study into other aspects of a language arts course: to expose students to ideas about language and to generate interest in its issues. When I’ve approached grammar this way—as a way to inspire curiosity and interest in language—my experience has been that students are fascinated to learn more about something that is so integral to their daily lives. Noden’s response to the question of why teach grammar is poetic:

I teach grammar because it is the doorway to the human soul.

Its intricacies trigger our laughter, our tears, our dreams. Grammar is the secret muse of all expression, the portrait painter of life’s emotions. . . . Nothing in life is more essential, more sensitive, more intrinsic to the human soul. . . . How could we not teach grammar? (19)

I have to echo Noden: “How could we not?”

What Aspects of Grammar Should We Teach?

Many educators ask this question—and lots of educators try to answer it. Some of the answer depends on the purpose: if we teach grammar for writing, we

might teach different things than if we are teaching it for academic purposes (testing) or for reading. Whatever we teach, grammar gurus like Constance Weaver (e.g., in “Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing”) and Harry Noden suggest that we use only minimum terminology and don’t expect students to memorize definitions. In fact, Noden often uses descriptors to help students navigate grammar; for example, identifying a *participle* as “an *ing* verb tagged on the beginning or end of a sentence” (4). For me, this advice opens up a world of possibility, teaching grammar in ways that students can make their own and that can be meaningful for their purposes.

I will admit to the challenges of this approach. Once, I was teaching a writing class for students who had failed other English classes. After looking at several examples, students defined an *appositive* as a group of words that comes after a noun and says it another way. In Justine’s writing log, where she was expected to identify strategies authors used to enhance their writing, she annotated a sentence from her reading with this comment: “Its an example of a positive [*sic*].” I read her sentence several times wondering “a positive *what*?” I finally asked my husband to listen as I read her sentence aloud, assuming he might help me figure out the meaning. As soon as I read the words aloud, her meaning was clear. She was identifying appositives in her reading; because I had only named the structure and hadn’t stressed the spelling, she was doing the best she could. She could identify and use appositives—but she couldn’t spell or define them. That’s one possible consequence of this approach, one not entirely negative. Just something to be aware of.

If we look at the International Reading Association (IRA)/NCTE standards (particularly 4, 6, 9, and 12), we could say that we should teach language (grammar) for both oral and written communication and we should teach students that the use of language varies depending on the context and purpose for that communication—moving beyond simply oral and written styles to involve genre and audience considerations. Students should know something about language, its structure and conventions, so that they can use that knowledge to help them read and interpret language in a variety of texts. Students should learn about language diversity—and the history of the language as well as something about language change that is inherent in that knowledge—so that they might become respectful of variety in language use.

By considering these standards and the suggestions of knowledgeable voices in the field, I have developed my own list of what we should teach. I recognize that any list I develop will not address everything. I am guided by a sense of language and grammar as more than just an influence on writing; I see it as an aspect of living, both in and out of the classroom. I’m certain that readers may want to add or delete some items. However, in looking at traditional concerns

as well as linguistic concerns with language, in thinking about what we hope to achieve with language instruction in the classroom, and in considering what a language arts teacher could feasibly learn and address, I feel these areas are the most encompassing and pertinent. All are meant to be addressed in the context of the other activities in the classroom, not just with writing:

- traditional grammar
- editing
- usage
- language change
- rhetorical grammar

Traditional Grammar

Before anyone closes the book at this first item, I need to differentiate what I mean by this term from what is normally called *traditional grammar*, which is known for worksheets, memorizing definitions, diagramming, and so forth—all separated from anything else in the curriculum. There are many reasons to avoid teaching traditional school grammar (what Hartwell labeled as Grammar 4). Haussamen notes an important one: “Instead of helping students to focus on real literature or on the actual paper they are writing, traditional grammar pedagogy requires students to divert their attention to the isolated and often contrived sentences in a textbook” (xiii). Even more fundamental, however, is the fact that traditional grammar instruction involves defining terms—and the definitions don’t really work.

Schuster makes the same point central to his book *Breaking the Rules: Liberating Writers through Innovative Grammar Instruction*:

The thesis of this book is that traditional school grammar has left a heritage of definitions that do not define and rules that do not rule (in usage, writing, and punctuation). These inadequate definitions and mytherules hamper students rather than help them in their development as speakers and writers. (191)

He provides multiple examples in case anyone reading this book isn’t convinced. And our own experiences as teachers should add weight to these claims. I can’t say how many times I’ve been frustrated or have frustrated students who don’t understand some aspect of grammar by using a definition to help them learn. My experience supports Hillocks and Smith’s assertion: “Traditional school grammar presents definitions that cannot function with desired results unless

the person using them has more information about language than the definition provides” (723). That is certainly the case when I have tried to teach sentence boundaries to some students by using only the traditional “definition” of a sentence.

So, if we are all clear on the negative aspects of traditional grammar, why do I include it here? I do so primarily for the sake of concept and vocabulary. Students need to know the concepts of sentences and parts of speech. Respected writers on the subject, including Weaver, Noguchi (*Grammar*), and Noden, use grammatical terms such as *adjectives*, *subjects*, *verbs*, *clauses*, and *phrases* when they discuss language and writing. And, in Chapter 8 of *Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers* (Haussamen), which provides a great overview of linguistic grammar, some traditional terms are used along with other terms. Some words just are necessary for instruction, and the traditional terms are more universal. I am not saying we should teach these terms by definition and ask students to memorize them and identify them in sentences for a test (unless you have to practice that for state testing—but that’s in another chapter) or that students should know the parts of a sentence so that they can diagram them in exercises from textbooks. But being able to generalize about the terms we use so that students can connect them to their innate knowledge of language concepts and use them to improve their abilities with activities that involve language (reading, writing, speaking) is important for the other things students do in classes.

Going back to Grammar 1, I think students develop very early a sense of parts of speech. In other words, they sense that certain words name things and other words explain what those things do and other words describe either the thing or the action. Most students possess this kind of sense about words, and it’s evident even when we hear toddlers speaking that they comprehend the idea of how words function. What I’m suggesting is that we use that Grammar 1 knowledge as a foundation for a common vocabulary that will allow us to talk about language in the classroom. In the same way Noden describes an appositive as a “noun that adds a second image to a preceding noun” (7), we can use a few basic terms from traditional grammar to aid us in language discussions with students. I want to make clear that I am not advocating diagramming sentences (although I personally like the challenge of it) or memorizing definitions or testing students’ ability to identify parts of speech in sentences in textbooks. What I am advocating is that some of the terms—for want of anything better—can be useful to us as we talk to students about language and what it does.

And I don’t think we have to rely only on the traditional definitions when we talk about the few terms we want to use. Because they don’t work completely anyway and because students often have a sense of what the concepts are, let them help define the terms. Even if they don’t get a definition that will explain

Extending Your Knowledge

In *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wickedly Effective Prose*, Constance Hale describes verbs this way: “Verbs add drama to a random grouping of other words, producing an event, a happening, and exciting movement. They also kick-start sentences: without them, words should simply cluster together in suspended animation, waiting for something to click” (55). Students might not be as creative as this in their definitions, but allowing them to try to generalize about language will make a difference in their learning.

every instance, the generalization will stick with them. If I want to talk about the verbs in a text or in my students’ writing, I can have students decide what verbs are and what they do from students’ own experience and from investigation of the texts in front of us—not to identify every verb (a traditional grammar kind of thing to do) but to discover how verbs make the author’s intent clear or make the text more inviting to read. Then we could discuss how these ideas about verbs could be helpful to them as writers.

Other educators have written their suggestions for additional ways to explore some of the traditional aspects of grammar that teachers need to address without relying on the traditional definitions that don’t work. Noguchi offers suggestions for finding the subject of a sentence through questioning (“Rethinking”). Schuster recommends several ideas for investigating parts of speech, including test frames for prepositions and an activity that helps students understand the differing effects of coordinating and conjunctive conjunctions. Using terms from traditional grammar does not mean a return to memorization of definitions or worksheets or diagramming. We can talk about language with traditional terms, as needed, but teach them and use them in much more varied ways that have application to the rest of the work we do with students in our classes.

Editing

I remember my brother-in-law telling me about a job he’d interviewed for. The interviewer told him that more than two hundred applicants had applied for that one position. The first cut was made on the basis of editing: if an application had a punctuation or grammatical error, it was tossed. Because this was an engineering job, I was surprised. I guess I thought those things mattered mostly to English teachers—at least that’s what I hear all the time.

Writers haven’t always been concerned with punctuation. It wasn’t necessary in earliest written texts (at least in Western civilization) because the texts were read aloud anyway. Scribes who wrote the speeches were mostly concerned with accurately representing the words of the speaker. In fact, the words were

written without breaks between them, let alone markings to indicate any other pause. But, according to Parkes, since the sixth century, when reading silently started to be more of an expectation, conventions to aid the reader were developed and refined to address the changing needs of readers over time.

At first, since most of the texts were religious, scribes and monks were concerned that the markings to help readers should support orthodox interpretations (Parkes), showing even very early that writers understood how punctuation could affect meaning. Early punctuation marks were not standardized; the size was often in relation to previous words or letters, and changes occurred in what the punctuation represented over time. One example I find interesting is the use of the ivy leaf. In the 800s, it was only a printer's ornament. So it went from being functional to simply decorative. I'm sure some of our students wish commas or apostrophes would make the same switch.

From the twelfth century on, we are more likely to see punctuation similar to today's, and we can thank Irish and Anglo-Saxon scribes because they developed many of today's conventions as they worked with Latin (another language) and tried to create smaller texts. Even with similar marks, however, Schuster notes that "punctuation conventions are always in flux" (*Breaking* 151), and anyone who reads emails knows that is true. Schuster, in an analysis of a grammar book from 1762, notes that at that time "writers typically used about three times more punctuation than we do today" (151). Our students should be happy to know that fewer marks mean fewer chances for error.

Despite the popularity of Truss's book *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* and a sense that differing attitudes about punctuation are only modern, feelings about what punctuation should do for writers go back to attitudes and philosophies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time, John Locke's philosophy, represented in the view that language "ought to be subjected to a process of careful regulation with a view to achieving correctness and precision for the expression and communication of ideas" (qtd. in Parkes 91), countered a rhetorical view (supported by elocutionists like Thomas Sheridan) that written language should be more like speech, that punctuation should help reflect the speaker's emphasis and inclinations. That argument is still one we see today—the conflict between strict adherence to rules and a kind of flexibility that allows writers to shape meaning through punctuation marks.

Thinking about how punctuation can shape meaning reminds me of a note my grandson brought home from school. It was from his second-grade teacher. My daughter-in-law sent me a picture of it (see Figure 1.1) and asked me how she was meant to interpret it. The question of interpretation is all caused by punctuation. Is her son truly interesting? Or is the teacher suggesting some

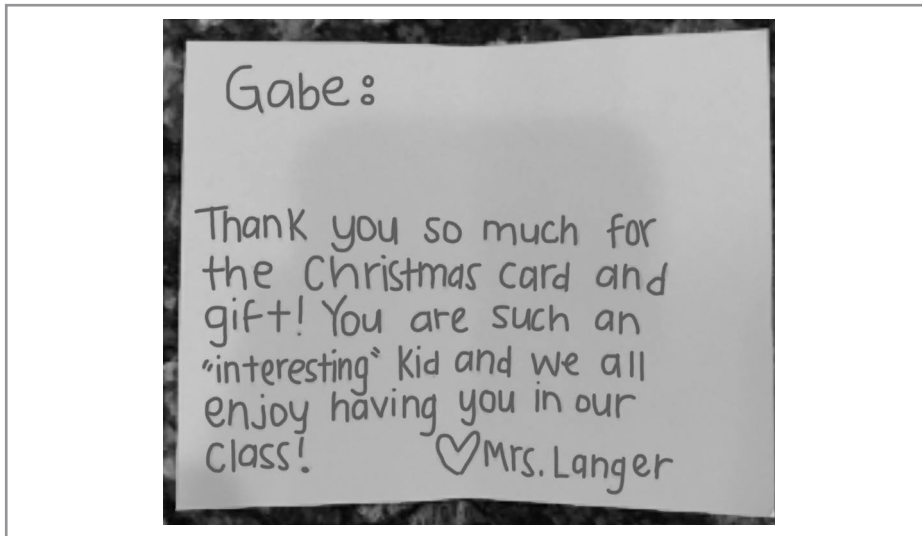


FIGURE 1.1. Teacher note uses “interesting” punctuation.

alternative way to understand how she sees Gabe? Is he interesting in a way that the teacher doesn’t appreciate? I don’t know, but the teacher’s use of a simple punctuation mark caused a lot of consternation in the family. Punctuation matters.

By the term *editing*, I mean gaining an understanding of the use of punctuation not only for correctness but also for meaning-making and style. I have taught punctuation both ways, and, although knowing the “rules” is sometimes useful, I really believe it isn’t as effective as learning punctuation by paying attention to how it affects meaning in texts—our own and others’:

With your comma here, I group these ideas together and separate them from this idea. Is that what you want me to do?

But students also need to have a sense of how others read punctuation—the rules—so that they can interpret texts effectively. Just as drivers “read” a red light as a signal to stop, readers know from the “rules” what different forms of punctuation signal. It’s a balancing act, to know how much “rule” and how much “sense” we should teach. Ehrenworth and Vinton describe the tension well: students “need to own the rules and grammar, not be enslaved to them” (88). How to accomplish both tasks is the hard part.

One way to accomplish the balance is recommended by Atwell, among others: *mini-lessons*, which are short, teacher-directed lessons focused on a specific

topic related to students' current writing. In responding to the concern that students don't pay attention to even mini-lessons on punctuation, Atwell asserts (and I agree) that "students will respond to punctuation lessons when the content is relevant—when they need the information to strengthen their writing" (238). She introduces punctuation concerns with an interesting lesson on the history of punctuation that provides an effective overview of the "why" of punctuation and allows students to apply the lesson by inventing their own punctuation. I've tried the same lesson and find it engages students and makes them more aware of punctuation as a way to guide readers; furthermore, it makes them more receptive to mini-lessons on punctuation.

Ehrenworth and Vinton describe how they read aloud—not only to show intonation but also as they reflect the punctuation—to show students the effect of punctuation choices in texts. They collect sentences and texts that provide strong examples for the discussions they have in class to showcase the punctuation they are learning. As they describe it:

To get students to engage in grammar this way, we need to make it seductive, something they can't resist. We need to make them want to play with it, to dig in and get their hands dirty. We need to stop imposing it on them and invite them to explore it with us, discovering for themselves why the rules are there and what meaningful purpose they serve. (89)

Editing is an important skill for students to learn. As teachers, we can help them learn through their writing, but we don't always need to wait until students are ready to polish a piece of writing to address editing concerns. We can address issues related to punctuation in our reading and in our talking, too. We can find examples for teaching punctuation all around us—in advertisements, in music, in memes and tweets. When students become sensitive to this aspect of language, they gain immeasurably in preparation for their lives outside of school as well as in their reading and writing.

Usage

We're all aware that usage is the aspect of grammar most people expect us to teach and to monitor. When strangers find out we're English teachers, they often respond, "I'd better watch my grammar around you." They don't mean their punctuation; they mean their usage. Usage issues evoke deep emotions about language. Out of respect for students' home languages, some teachers avoid addressing issues of usage, considering that what is taught under the category

of usage demeans the home language and perpetuates the power inherent in standardized forms of English.

But Ehrenworth and Vinton make a strong case for the opposite approach: “Teaching students the language of power does not necessarily mean asking them to conform to it. It means giving them the knowledge they will need to make informed and meaningful language choices” (6). In fact, they note that ignoring the issues of power inherent in language usage actually works against students’ agency: “We hearken to Delpit’s plea that ‘to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same’” (52).

As teachers, we can (and should) help students understand Standard English more from a position of what it is (regularized) and what it is not (inherently better). Wikipedia made this distinction clear in its definition of *Standard English* (this entry has been revised since I accessed it):

In an English-speaking country, Standard English (SE) is the variety of English that has undergone substantial regularization and is associated with formal schooling, language assessment, and official print publications, such as public service announcements and newspapers of record, etc. The term “Standard” refers to the regularization of the grammar, spelling, usages of the language, and not to minimal desirability or interchangeability (e.g., a standard measure). There are substantial differences among the language varieties that countries of the Anglosphere identify as “standard English.” . . . Sociologically, as the standard language of the nation, Standard English is generally associated with education and sociolinguistic prestige, but is not inherently superior to other dialects of English used by an Anglophone society. [sic]

As the Wikipedia article notes, even in different English-speaking countries, there are a variety of Englishes. Wheeler and Swords, referring to *The Stories of English* (Crystal), identify “nearly sixty popular varieties of international Standard Englishes” (127). And Birch notes that there are at least four “standard dialects within Standard American English,” including variations between spoken and written forms (4–5).

All of this strengthens the point that Joseph Williams makes: “We must reject the notion that observing the rules of Standard English makes anyone intellectually or morally superior. That belief is not just factually wrong; in a socially diverse democracy, it is destructive” (14). But it is not an uncommon belief—in schools and outside of them, too. Once, I wrote a thank-you note to a neighbor and gave it to him with a plate of cookies. Later, I was stunned when he expressed his surprise that as an English teacher I would have used a double negative in my note. I was surprised that as a magazine editor he couldn’t see

that I had used it to create an effect. But I learned a lesson about Standard English: audience matters even when the genre is informal. With even a limited exposure to these ideas, students can understand that the concepts related to usage are crucial for them as readers, speakers, and writers. Raising their awareness of these issues can help them make good choices in their own use of language, as well as become more flexible in their judgments about others' usage.

Tightly connected to usage issues is an understanding of language variety in all its forms: dialects, levels of formality, cultural differences. At the very least, teachers need to help students realize that language varies among people, among situations, and for different purposes. Even more, we should help students come to understand and appreciate this variety. I appreciate Schuster's introduction to dialects: "I speak a dialect, you speak a dialect, all God's children speak dialects, because, as linguist John McWhorter ["Power"] says, dialects are all there is/are/be" (*Breaking* 62). Schuster then relates a personal story of his own acquisition of standard dialect while retaining—and using it when effective—the dialect he learned growing up. Dialects, especially those that are not considered standard, arouse responses in listeners. We attach judgments because of those responses. Jamila Lyiscott's "3 Ways to Speak English" TED Talk about her dialects might be a good way to help students begin to consider attitudes toward dialects.



I will never forget what I learned as a new college student. I attended a talk by a guest lecturer who was to speak about his book on the origins of colloquial phrases. After a faculty member gave a laudatory introduction, the lecturer began to speak, but not in the dialect of academia I had expected. He used a rural Appalachian dialect instead. In the first place, I had trouble understanding some of what he said; in the second, the thought came into my mind wondering what he had to say that could be of value to me. I guess I had forgotten the credentials mentioned in the introduction and my own professed acceptance of dialects. Suddenly, he switched dialects and began speaking in the one I expected for the situation. In shock, I realized the trap I had fallen into, judging him based on his dialect. While we know it is unacceptable to discriminate on so many aspects of our individuality—race, gender, sexuality, and so on—we often still discriminate on the basis of language. Attitudes about language use, especially negative ones, persist.

Recognizing what dialects are is a start to moving past language discrimination. Students should understand that dialects have grammar, that they follow rules, and that they are simply a variety of language. Wheeler and Swords explain that "since any language variety is like a fully stocked kitchen, any dialect

Extending Your Knowledge

Barbara Birch describes four language attitudes that fall along a continuum from language equality to language prejudice:

1. *Language equality*: This perspective is almost “anything goes”; as Birch puts it, this attitude asserts that “people have a right to speak the way they want” (6).
2. *Language description*: This perspective tries to be objective and neutral, to see language as something that should be described, not prescribed. As Birch notes, this stance is “not totally satisfying because society holds teachers accountable for their learners’ knowledge” (7).
3. *Prescriptive*: This perspective, as the label implies, attempts to set rules for language use and is “based on the belief that dialectical variation is a changeable human characteristic (as opposed to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on) and therefore that people may choose to adapt their dialects if they can” (7).
4. *Language prejudice*: This perspective carries the prescriptive approach to another level and “permits and even encourages judgment of the individual or social group whose language or variety differs from the standard” (8).

Birch notes that most people do not have a single attitude toward language variation, that most of us have more tolerance for some varieties of English than others.

... has the wherewithal to express whatever speakers need” (13). In other areas of their lives outside of school, students appreciate variety and self-expression. Just ask them about the issue of wearing uniforms to school! Students always bring up self-expression as a primary reason against any policy that regulates their clothing. In a similar way, students can come to appreciate and understand the benefits that language diversity can add to their own lives as well as to the world. I overheard a ninth grader’s comment to a friend: “I speak three languages: Utah, Pig Latin, and English.” He, obviously, was aware that he used language differently in different situations. When students realize that they are multidialectal, they should consider how certain audiences might respond to some of their dialects as a way to begin thinking about attitudes toward dialects.

Another way students can come to appreciate a variety of dialects is through literature. Many of the novels and short stories students read in school show characters who speak in dialects; these pieces of literature allow us to address issues of language variety with our students as they explore the richness of language available to all of us through dialects. When we consider the characters, their lives, and their uses of language, we can begin to consider, too, our own lives and language—and our attitudes about them.

Extending Your Knowledge

In speaking about her mother's English, author Amy Tan makes this observation:

Like others, I have described it as "broken" or "fractured" English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than "broken," as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I've heard other terms used. "Limited English," for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perception of the limited English speaker. (114–15)

In this part of her essay, Tan is referring to her own abilities to shift dialects but also addresses how even the labels people attach to dialects reflect attitudes students need to be aware of.

Although some teachers use an approach to usage and dialect instruction called *code-switching*, more recent thinking about this issue finds that code-switching, even inadvertently, may actually still encourage the belief that one dialect is better than another, may still silence some of the voices in our classrooms. More current thinking suggests, instead, encouraging *code-meshing*. Code-meshing involves blending dialects more than switching between/among them. Barret explains the advantage of code-meshing as follows: "By extending the range of grammatical forms that students may use to express themselves, code-meshing recognize[s] the importance of *both* Standard and undervalued varieties in contexts beyond the classroom" (Young et al. 43). In many places, both print and public, we can see examples of code-meshing that can help students begin to see how it works to communicate in the world.

In fact, code-meshing isn't really new. As Young et al. acknowledge:

Contrary to popular beliefs about the so-called proper way that we should write and speak, few people, if any, exclusively adhere to the narrow rules of Standard English when communicating, even in professional, public, or formal settings. Really, most people are more profoundly affected by and interested in prose that brings together colorful language, local idioms, cultural vernaculars, the grammars of various ethnic groups, and now more than ever, techno-lingo—all of which represents code-meshing. (77)

Young and colleagues encourage teachers to ask students to consider their own uses of language and the language of others as a way to begin to notice how we are all shaped by and communicate with language unique to our lives; they also encourage teachers to help students see how often people use code-meshing in social media such as Twitter, but also in news articles, books, and other print

Extending Your Knowledge

Vershawn Young et al. point out that

[code-meshing] does not mean the end of Standard English as we know it, nor does it mean that anything goes, that instruction in English language arts is unnecessary. Quite the contrary. What it does mean is that Standard English is larger, more expansive than most understand and will grow even more through code-meshing. (82)

Instead, they note that the “goal of code-meshing is to maximize (not minimize) rhetorical effectiveness. And the focus is on excellent communication rather than on how well one adheres to prescribed grammar rules in one dialect” (81). That is certainly a worthy goal of English classes everywhere.

texts. Seeing how usage is fluid and much more than a duality—Standard and something else—can help all of our students find their voices in our classrooms and in the world, can help them consider the myriad ways they might use their language resources to communicate effectively.

Language Change

I find Winchester’s description of the changeable nature of English very compelling:

And though George Orwell might have longed for an Anglo-Saxon revival, though John Dryden loathed French loanwords, despite Joseph Addison’s campaigns against contractions such as *mayn’t* and *won’t*, and although Alexander Pope pleaded for retention of dignity and Daniel Defoe wrote of his hatred of the “inundation” of curse-words and Jonathan Swift mounted a life-long attempt to “fix our language forever”—no critic and advocate of immutability has ever once managed properly or even marginally to outwit the English language’s capacity for foxy and relentlessly slippery flexibility.

For English is a language that simply cannot be fixed, nor can its use ever be absolutely laid down. It changes constantly; it grows with an almost exponential joy. It evolves eternally; its words alter their senses and their meanings subtly, slowly, or speedily according to fashion and need. (29)

Even though students might find that first sentence challenging to understand—and may not understand the implications of the names Winchester lists—the sense of how many people have sought to stop changes to English should be clear. Understanding the changeable nature of language helps students make

John McWhorter explains how many of us think that language change is appropriate when we bring in new words for new ideas but may not be as happy about other kinds of language change. However, change is what language does:

Rather marvelous, then, is that precisely the kinds of things that sound so disorderly, so inattendant, so “wrong,” are precisely how Latin became French. The way people under a certain age use *totally* and the pronunciation of *nuclear* as “nucular” are not some alternate kind of language change sitting alongside the “real” kind. Language change like this is all there has ever been. (*Words* 3)

the transition to understanding language variation. In differentiating between change and variation, Denham says the old maxim of “majority rules” is the best judge: “When a substantial number of speakers have adopted the variation as their own accepted pronunciation or grammatical form, then we say that the language has changed” (150). To develop awareness of language change, students could identify words that are currently finding their way into the English language—or teachers could introduce them to the idea of language change by telling them which words have been adopted for dictionaries each year.

Change is a fascinating aspect of language, so, in addressing language change, it’s important for students to realize that change isn’t a bad thing, that it doesn’t mean that language is getting worse. Instead, it is an important indicator that language is alive and meeting the needs of its users. As an example, in the preface to the 1937 grammar book *An A.B.C. of English Usage*, Canby makes this observation after lamenting the inevitable acceptance of *contact* as a verb (as in *I contacted him*): “Nothing is more characteristic of the peculiar genius of English than the ease with which it has always expanded by using nouns as verbs, verbs as adjectives, and more rarely adjectives as nouns” (7). In Figure 1.2, Calvin addresses just such shifting. His comments can help students consider their own expansions of language: Have they adopted or created any new words in the last year? Have they moved a word from its traditional usage to a new one? Shakespeare was a master at such expansion, and students can be directed to some of the ways his innovative use of language contributed to how we use language today. Comparing words older people use to those students now use can provide useful insights on helping students recognize that language change does not diminish the language.

Denham addresses language death with her students, noting that scholars predict that “in this century, as many as 95 percent of the estimated 6,000 languages currently spoken in the world may become extinct” (154). This indicates the highest language death rate ever. Students might not care, thinking that their language isn’t dying. But helping them consider how identity and language are



FIGURE 1.2. Calvin and Hobbes cartoon: Verbing. (CALVIN AND HOBBS © 1993 Watterson. Reprinted with permission of ANDREWS MCMEEL SYNDICATION. All rights reserved.)

closely tied can help them understand their own language better as well as have concern for other languages. Raised in Alaska, I'd heard that the Natives had many more words for *snow* than we did; Bryson confirms it: "Fifty words . . . crunchy snow, soft snow, fresh snow, and old snow, but no word that just means snow" (14). Bryson also gives examples of words that other languages have that English doesn't, concluding that these words reveal something about the cultures that developed them. Helping students see how language is connected to identity by finding ways that their own language reflects their identity can help them appreciate language death as well as language change.

Even a brief introduction to the history of English can help students gain understanding about language change. A number of books—and a very interesting documentary series—on the history of English are available (see Figure 1.3 for some examples). Atwell has a good "brief history of the English language"

Extending Your Knowledge

In the introduction to her book *Lost in Translation*, Ella Sanders explains her interest in words that are found in some languages but not translated into others. Possibly because they represent an idea unique to the culture associated with the language?

Language wraps its understanding and punctuation around us all, tempting us to cross boundaries and helping us to comprehend the impossibly difficult questions that life relentlessly throws at us. ("Introduction")

Among the words she lists in the book are these two that I find fascinating:

Gurfa (Arabic)—"the amount of water that can be held in a hand"

Komorebi (Japanese)—"the sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees"

These words, and others in the book, encourage me to be more curious about finding words for concepts that we might not have a word for. That is something I wish for students, too.

Bragg, Melvin. <i>The Adventure of English: The Biography of a Language</i> . Arcade, 2011. ^a
Bryson, Bill. <i>The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way</i> . William Morrow, 1990.
Crystal, David. <i>The Cambridge Edition of the History of the English Language</i> . 3rd ed., Cambridge UP, 2019.
"The Story of English." Directed by William Cran, <i>Documentaries Plus</i> , 21 Sep. 2010, documentaries-plus.blogspot.com/2010/09/story-of-english.html.
^a This is a companion book to a British television series of the same name, presented by Bragg, first broadcast in November 2003 (<i>The Adventure of English</i>).

FIGURE 1.3. Sample titles that can provide background on the history of English.

that she uses in a mini-lesson (209–12). Bryson’s book *The Mother Tongue* has a fascinating first chapter that provides great examples about English as a way to engage students’ interest in their language. He provides examples for the aspects of English that set it apart: the richness of vocabulary, its flexibility, its conciseness, (arguably) its ease of spelling and pronunciation. He says its most notable trait, however, is “its deceptive complexity” (19). All of these aspects relate in some way to the history of the language; I know from experience that even a little background on that history can help students understand aspects of language that they might otherwise find confusing or miss altogether.

One aspect of language change that has immediacy for students is related to spelling and irregular verbs. An understanding of the history of English with its influences from other language can help students see why some words don’t follow the spelling rules we learn in elementary school.

- Irregular plurals are left over from Old English patterns (e.g., *oxen*, *mice*, *geese*), words that haven’t yet followed the tendency to regularize that other words did (Denham).
- Other spelling irregularities also derive from historical events. Because scribes originally used the Latin alphabet to write in English, we have twenty-six letters but more than forty sounds—so “we have letters doing ‘doubletime’” (Curzan, “Spelling” 143). That complicates spelling.
- Sometimes words have changed in pronunciation but not in spelling—so the spelling reflects the older way of speaking, as in words like *knight*.
- Because of interest in classical periods, “Renaissance scholars sometimes made efforts to change English spelling to conform to the Latin forms of the words” that English had borrowed from French, as in *debt* (Curzan, “Spelling” 144).
- Borrowing from other languages, something English does often, complicates spelling because those words don’t follow English spelling patterns

either. In some cases, there's even double borrowing, further complicating spelling issues; *colonel* is one example of this, borrowed from both French and Italian so that we have the French pronunciation and Italian spelling.

- Then, we should add, there is Noah Webster, who wanted to use American spellings as a way to reinforce independence from England—so we have some spelling changes (e.g., *theater* instead of *theatre*) from that period and some spellings that stayed the same as England's.

Still, Crystal estimates that “80 percent of the English lexicon is spelled according to regular patterns, and only 3 percent is so irregular that speakers must learn the spellings individually” (qtd. in Curzan, “Spelling” 142), so the problem with spelling isn't insurmountable. Knowing the history of the language at least makes it understandable (see Table 1.1).

As students address ideas of language change, it's only natural that they should confront ways that some users of language manipulate it to their advantage. Because many advertisements use language in persuasive ways that students might be unaware of, exploring connotation and denotation of words is an important aspect of being a critical reader and a critical viewer. Recognizing this aspect of language is an essential part of understanding language change, especially as it affects critical thinking among consumers and citizens in a democracy. As Alvarez reminds us:

Misusing the language is something that dictatorships and totalitarian governments know all about. One of the first things such a regime does is to seize control of the media, to censor the stories of the people, to silence dissenting opinions. I grew up where there was only one story—the official story. In the dictatorship of Rafael Leonida Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, 1930–1961, books were rewritten to tell his truth, and his truth only on pain of death. In a school not far away from where I attended classes, a young teacher corrected a student's essay on Trujillo by suggesting that there had been other “liberators” of the country. That night, the teacher, his wife, and two children disappeared. (39)

As teachers, we can help students understand this aspect of language change when we have them read and analyze political speeches (past and present) as well as advertisements and op-eds. When students are aware of the difference between denotation and connotation, when they understand how words can shape attitudes and feelings, they can show responsible use of that knowledge in their own reading and writing for public purposes.

Extending Your Knowledge

Darren Crovitz and Michelle Devereaux encourage teachers to help students understand how language is used in the public sphere, particularly how it can be manipulated to reflect “underlying stances and ideologies” (31). They provide several language experiences for teachers to use with their students to help develop students’ critical thinking. Helping students understand that the placement of noun phrases, the use of passive voice, or the use of participial phrases to shape meaning in subtle ways are all valuable in helping students see how grammar matters in their understanding of the world.

The idea that words have meanings that can be manipulated is only one part of language change. In his preface to the new translation of *Night*, Elie Wiesel addresses another aspect of language that students should understand: language changes when our words become inadequate to express human emotions or conditions. As he writes:

I had many things to say, I did not have the words to say them. Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. It became clear that it would be necessary to invent a new language. But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and perverted by the enemy? Hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else. Writing in my mother tongue—at that point close to extinction—I would pause at every sentence, and start over and over again. I would conjure up other verbs, other images, other silent cries. It still was not right. But what exactly was “it”? It was something elusive, darkly shrouded for fear of being usurped, profaned. All the dictionary had to offer seemed meager, pale, lifeless. (ix)

Helping our students appreciate this sensitive issue related to language change is important. There are always words that are changing meanings and words that are shifting in meaning that teachers can ask students to consider as aspects of language change. Some of this happens organically, but some is formalized. In August 2019, the board of supervisors of San Francisco moved to change words allowed in government. Noting that “language shapes the ideas, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals, societies, and governments,” the board moved to eliminate words like *felon* and *juvenile delinquent* from the criminal justice system (“San Francisco Pushes to Rebrand” par. 7).

Certainly that is a case of language change. When words don’t work for us, when they are restricted to certain groups, when they become inadequate because of our experiences, language changes—or society does—to accommo-



date the needs. If students understand that, they are really learning about grammar and language at its most sensitive levels.

Rhetorical Grammar

This aspect of grammar instruction is probably the most familiar to teachers; it is the grammar that relates to effective (not simply correct) writing, sometimes also called *stylistic grammar*. To me, rhetorical grammar is the way students apply what they know about language at all levels, not only at the level of correctness but also at the level of meaning and sense—abilities they will gain from a language program that treats grammar in all its forms: as parts of speech and editing, yes, but also as variation and usage and meaning. All aspects of language come into play in teaching rhetorical grammar.

Teachers and writers who work with rhetorical grammar (Ehrenworth and Vinton; Marchetti and O'Dell; Ray) promote the use of *mentor texts*, pieces of writing that students can read for ideas to implement in their own writing. I like the term *mentor* rather than *model*, an older term for the same concept, because of the implications. Mentors guide, advise, and support; models are a likeness, pattern, or copy. I want the texts that my students study to serve as possibilities, not constraints. Teaching students how to use them as such is important for their learning rhetorical grammar, so showing them how to question, consider, and choose when to use ideas from mentor texts is an important part of teacher work. Having students use and then reflect on the effects of their language choices in their writing is also the key to developing their rhetorical grammar.

Schuster relies heavily on professional texts as a way to learn which rules of writing really matter. In sampling published writing, students (and the teacher) investigate what constitutes effective writing. For example, in exploring the admonition to vary sentence beginnings, Schuster examined numerous classic and modern essays to conclude that “the advice to vary sentence openings is very bad advice indeed. Professional writers open sentences with their subjects approximately two thirds of the time” (*Breaking* 122). Tufte’s assessment is the same: two thirds of English sentences begin with the subject, and about one quarter begin with an adverbial construction. Not a lot of variety. Students can use mentor texts to investigate all aspects of language use: usage, conventions, dialects, genre, and more.

Sentence imitation and sentence combining are other ways to learn rhetorical grammar that also come from mentor texts. Students imitate the structure of mentor sentences with their own content. Usually this helps extend students’ repertoire of grammatical structures. Depending on the mentor sentences, students can learn how to use appositives, participial phrases, subordinate clauses,

or parallel structure (among many other possible structures) in their writing. They don't have to know the names of the structures—in fact, I started teaching imitation by naming the parts of the sentence (“The sentence starts with an infinitive phrase . . .”) and just about destroyed my students' interest before I learned that they could imitate without naming anything. Once they understood the idea of imitation, they became avid imitators, bringing in sentences for me to use with the class and sharing their imitations generously. Sometimes they didn't always use them effectively in their writing, failing to match the structure to the tone of the writing, as one girl did who wrote about skateboarding while imitating many sentences from former US President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. To me, that is part of the learning process, and she, like others, figured out what needed to be done to make sentences rhetorically as well as structurally effective.

Sentence combining can contribute to students' learning of rhetorical grammar in similar ways. Despite some resistance to it during the 1970s and 1980s, sentence combining is one of eleven instructional methods that has research supporting its effectiveness (Graham and Perin). Students combine short kernel sentences into longer sentences, either with cues or without. The combining activity should encourage students to consider a variety of ways to arrange the content of a sentence and the effects of different arrangements. The challenge with sentence combining is that many teachers fail to use it in the way that will actually benefit students. Instead, they often focus on correctness or on matching the original sentence that the kernels developed from. Instead, I ask students to combine the kernel sentences in at least two different ways so that they are pushed to consider more than the default option that comes first. Students choose the combination they like best and consider why they like it. When we share, I ask for responses from several students so that we can discuss the effects of combining one way over another: Why do they like one sentence more than another? What difference in meaning do the various combinations create? This work with sentences should *not* be about right and wrong; it's about rhetorical effectiveness and helping students understand how they might achieve it.

In addition to sentence combining and sentence imitation, Johnson advocates lessons on stylistic devices; lessons that, he argues, help students not only revise their writing but also generate new ideas about their topics. Johnson explains that “stylistic devices are not merely *fun*, not just toys for writers, but tools by which writers can create certain effects on readers, physical feelings of comprehension and power, knowledge and connection” (37). He uses mini-lessons and exercises to acquaint students with devices of rhythm and balance and sound (e.g., asyndeton, antithesis, alliteration), but, he explains, his purpose is not to get students to write “heavily stylized language” (40). Instead, Johnson wants

them to “practice these devices as a kind of interim measure toward listening to and thinking about their prose more carefully” (40). His ultimate goal is for students to feel a sort of pleasure from their writing and to become more confident thought “participant(s) in the world” (61). I’ve tried some of his methods, too, and found that my students gained a better awareness of what language can do and what they can do with it—just what we want from rhetorical grammar.

Well, that’s my list and my explanations. I’m well aware that there are problems inherent in presenting any type of schema for a subject as broad as this is. Some might disagree with my choices; that’s okay. At least that means we’re all thinking about teaching language and what it means and what students need. One limitation to the schema I’ve presented is how it plays out when I talk about it in this book. It’s hard to separate grammar integrated with reading completely from grammar for writing or speaking. It seems that, as we work with language during reading, students will gain knowledge that could—and should—find its way into their writing and speaking—and vice versa. So the chapter divisions I present artificially separate what wouldn’t be separated in the classroom. I hope readers can see that these chapters peer more deeply into what’s seen on the surface in the classroom dialogues that thread through the book. That’s how they were meant to be seen.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you had to decide which aspects of grammar would be taught, what would be on your list? How would it differ from the list presented in this chapter? What rationale do you have for your own list?
2. What are some ways you can already envision integrating these aspects into your own classroom? How do you see this integration benefiting your students?
3. What do you need to do to prepare to integrate the aspects you would like to use but don’t know enough about? Make a plan (a list of readings, a timeline, a suggestion for courses to take) for how you will accomplish your preparation.

As most teachers of English now know, research shows that teaching grammar in the traditional way—through worksheets, memorizing definitions, and diagramming sentences—doesn't work, and that teaching grammar in the context of reading and writing is a better approach.

In this friendly and practical book, veteran teacher educator Deborah Dean

- provides vignettes of classroom conversations to show what teaching in context can look like in action;
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Dean's straightforward approach uncomplicates the task of teaching grammar in context, allowing her—and us—to share the excitement and wonder to be found in the study of language.

As a former junior high and high school English teacher, **Deborah Dean** encouraged students' curiosity about language. She now does the same with preservice teachers at Brigham Young University, helping them develop interest in and curiosity about language and how it works.



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