


Do you sometimes feel you teach grammar in the same old way? This lesson will give you some ideas for new ways to deal with grammar in the classroom.

Task 1 – Jessica’s Lesson

Jessica spent a lot of time preparing a grammar lesson on how to use articles (definite, indefinite and zero) with her intermediate level students. She used a variety of sentences that provided examples of different rules and explained these to students. They then completed some gap-fill sentences, which they all got correct. A few days later, Jessica collected in some essays from her students. This work contained a lot of mistakes, particularly mistakes in the way her students used articles. Jessica felt a bit frustrated because her carefully prepared lesson hadn’t seemed to be of any use.



How could you help Jessica? What do you think was wrong with her lesson? Jot down your ideas on a note pad, then check the answer key. 



Task 1 Feedback

First of all, it should be noted that teaching the article system in English can be very complicated and Jessica’s expectations might be a little unrealistic. However, it is also worth noting that Jessica used sentence level examples when she taught the lesson, but then found that students had problems using articles correctly in continuous texts. This suggests that Jessica perhaps needed to use extended texts and not just sentences as her context for teaching articles. This context is a closer match to how she expects students to be able to use articles correctly.

Key Skill

There are many different ways of teaching grammar. No one individual method suits all grammar points and all students. It is good to vary your approach to teaching grammar as it gives your students more variety and is likely to cater for different learning styles.

Task 2 – What contexts can you teach grammar from?



Numbers 1 – 4 are descriptions of four different ways of giving students examples of grammar points. Letters a – d describe the benefits of these different sources, while numbers i – iv mention possible drawbacks. Match the benefits and the drawbacks to their sources.

Sources of Grammar	Benefits	Drawbacks
1. Using texts as a source for a grammar point.		
2. Using examples of (in)correct student language produced during a speaking activity.		
3. Using examples that arise from a context (e.g. a picture story) together with students.		
4. Using sentences that are examples of the grammar point.		

Benefits

- a. A freer practice activity will tell you how well students know the grammar point and provide you with many examples of their language that you can use to correct and clarify the grammar.
- b. These are easy to create and are often simple and clear for students.
- c. Often these situations can involve pictures and this helps students with a visual learning style. The stories you can create can also be entertaining.
- d. Using reading or listening as a basis for clarifying a grammar point should provide you with plenty of examples.

Drawbacks

- i. It can be hard finding a situation that generates the language naturally and easily.
- ii. You need to be sure that what you use is either authentic or close to natural authentic language.
- iii. This approach can mean that the context is not rich enough and the isolation of examples can make some grammar rules difficult to understand.
- iv. The context of the activity needs to be communicative to be sure that it allows students to speak and produce a lot of language examples.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

A key consideration for all approaches is that the examples come from a context that is as authentic and as communicative as possible. In other words, try and avoid examples and contexts that native speakers themselves would not use.

Task 3 – Which approach can you use?



Numbers 1 and 2 are two approaches to clarifying a grammar point: an inductive versus a deductive approach. Letters a and b are definitions of these approaches, while i to vi are examples of these approaches. Match the definitions and the examples to the correct approach.

Two Approaches	Definitions	Examples
1. Inductive approach.		
2. Deductive approach.		

Definitions

- a. The teacher gives the rules of the grammar point.
- b. The student works out the rules of the grammar point.

Examples

- i. The teacher asks oral questions that check students' understanding of the meaning of the grammar point and its form.
- ii. The teacher provides students with written examples of their errors together with some questions that get students to correct the errors and work out the meaning and the form of the grammar point.
- iii. The teacher provides a translation of the grammar point into the students' first language. This is only possible in a monolingual situation.
- iv. The teacher asks students to read some grammar reference materials in order to understand the meaning and form of the grammar point.
- v. The teacher provides the students with a written task that guides students to understanding the meaning and the form of the grammar point.
- vi. The teachers gives an oral explanation of the meaning and the form of the grammar point.

Check your ideas in the answer key.



Key Skill

Whether you use one approach or another will depend on your students' learning style, their needs, the nature of the language point itself and the need for variety in a language programme. Current methodology has a preference for a more inductive / guided discovery approach as it tends to be more student-centred.

Task 4 – Evaluating approaches



Below are a series of statements that highlight the strengths of both the inductive and the deductive approaches to clarifying a grammar point with students. Read the statements and decide which approach they are talking about. Write 'I' for inductive (student works out the rules) and 'D' for deductive (teacher gives the rules).

Strengths	I or D?
a. It can give students a sense of security.	
b. It encourages the students to refer more often to the context of the grammar point.	
c. Students can learn at their own rate, rather than that of the class.	
d. The teacher can get straight to the point.	
e. It is more student-centred.	
f. It allows the students to take a more gradual step-by-step approach to different aspects of the grammar point.	
g. It suits students who have a strongly accuracy-focused learning style.	
h. It gives students time to think about the grammar point.	
i. It can mean that students get extra speaking practice when they discuss the grammar with each other or with their teacher.	
j. It gives the teacher a clear sense of having taught something.	
k. It can help make students more independent in their learning.	
l. It means a bit more mental effort for students and this can have the result that they engage more fully with the language.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Over the next few weeks, make a note of different ways you use to teach a grammar point. After each lesson, think about how successful it was from the students' point of view. You could ask them to give you feedback on the approach.

Make a note of this record in your *Teaching Log* and decide whether you need to vary your approach to teaching grammar.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try experimenting with a new approach to teaching grammar with your students. If you need to read up on a different approach in more detail see *Want to find out more ...?* below. Aim to build up an extensive repertoire of approaches to teaching grammar.

Want to find out more ... ?

Chapters 3 and 4 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contain clear practical examples of different approaches to teaching grammar that you can try out.

See also section 6 of *Language Teaching Classroom Practice DVD & Workbook* by Heather Richards and Karen Wise (AUT University 2007).

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to the teaching of grammar:

- **Unit 4 e) Teaching Grammar 2: Grammar from texts**
(*outlines a procedure for a text-based approach to grammar lessons*)
- **Unit 4 f) Teaching Grammar 3: Using communicative activities**
(*looks at how to use communicative activities to focus on grammar*)
- **Unit 4 g) Teaching Grammar 4: Concept-checking grammar**
(*looks at how to check meaning of grammar with learners by using oral concept questions*)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) d and ii
- 2) a and iv
- 3) c and i
- 4) b and iii

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) b - i, ii and v
- 2) a - iii, iv and vi

Task 4 – Feedback

- a) D
- b) I
- c) I
- d) D
- e) I
- f) I
- g) D
- h) I
- i) I
- j) D
- k) I
- l) I