


How easy do you find it to teach grammar from texts? Do you feel that your lessons sometimes get bogged down by the course book material? This lesson outlines a procedure that may help motivate your students in text-based grammar lessons.

#### Task 1 – Andy’s frustration

**Andy:** “I was teaching the past perfect the other day. I found this really good reading text full of lots of examples. I pointed out the examples and then explained the use of the past perfect. I asked students if they had understood my explanation and they all said they did. However, when I gave them a practice activity to do, very few of them could use the past perfect correctly. It was very frustrating. I felt like I’d been wasting my time.”



**Can you help Andy? Think of possible reasons why Andy’s students didn’t understand. Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below.** 

#### Task 1 Feedback

It is possible that Andy’s approach to teaching his grammar point didn’t motivate his students. His explanation could have been quite long-winded and perhaps students didn’t understand. When he asked students if they understood the grammar, they may have said “yes” to save face, when in fact they didn’t really understand.

#### Key Skill

When teaching grammar from text, it is a good idea to engage learners as much as possible by getting them to discover the language and think about what it *means*, how it is *used* and how it is *formed*. Teacher explanations can often be ineffective at doing this because the teacher talks too much and the learners switch off.

### Task 2 – Steps in a text-based grammar lesson



Letters a to f outline key steps in a text-based grammar lesson. Numbers i to vi are aims that match each stage. Put the steps in their correct order into the table below, then find the aim that matches each step.

Steps
a. Students check the form of the target grammar.
b. Students highlight the target grammar in the text.
c. The teacher provides controlled to freer practice of the target grammar.
d. Students read (or listen to) the text that contains the target grammar.
e. The teacher highlights the pronunciation of the target grammar (if it is typically used for oral communication).
f. Students check the meaning of the target grammar .

Aims
i. To focus students on the grammar that is to be clarified.
ii. To provide opportunities for the students to use the new language in a variety of contexts.
iii. To check students' understanding of the context that the target grammar comes from.
iv. To give very controlled oral practice of phonological features of the grammar.
v. To ensure students understand concepts associated with the grammar (e.g. time reference, intention etc.) and the way it is used in native speaker language.
vi. To ensure students understand the component parts of the grammar and how it is put together.

Steps	Aims
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

**Key Skill**

It is important that students understand the context of the target grammar because this will help them understand the meaning. It is better to study the *meaning* of the grammar before looking at the *form* because examining how something is made without understanding what it means can be frustrating.

Task 3 – How to achieve the aims



Numbers 1 to 6 below repeat the stages in a text-based grammar lesson. However, this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to f describe activities for each stage. They are in a different order. Match the activities to the stages.

Stages	Activities
1. Students read (or listen to) the text that contain the target grammar.	
2. Students highlight the target grammar in the text.	
3. Students check the meaning of the target grammar.	
4. Students check the form of the target grammar.	
5. The teacher highlights the pronunciation of the target grammar (if it is typically used for oral communication).	
6. The teacher provides controlled to freer practice of the target grammar.	

#### Activities

- a.** The teacher provides an oral model of the target grammar point and then drills students chorally and individually.
- b.** The teacher gives comprehension questions that check the information in the text.
- c.** The teacher elicits information about how the target grammar is made using the white board. Alternatively, students can work on a student-centred task.
- d.** The teacher sets up a variety of activities, both spoken and written, that allow students to use the target grammar.
- e.** Students are asked to underline examples of the target grammar or the teacher might point them out. If using a listening text, you can isolate examples of the target grammar on the tape.
- f.** The teacher gives learners a student-centred task that guides them towards an understanding of the use of the target grammar. The task might include questions, or clines, or grids. An alternative is for the teacher to ask oral concept questions about the target grammar.

**Check your ideas in the answer key.** 

#### Key Skill

Whenever possible, it is worth considering providing a student-centred task to clarify key aspects of grammar: meaning and form. These tasks should guide students to an understanding of the target grammar and should mean the teacher does not need to use long-winded explanation.

Task 4 – Evaluating text-based grammar lessons



Decide if the following statements are a correct or an incorrect evaluation of text-based grammar lessons. Write 'C' for correct and 'I' for incorrect in the right-hand column of the table.

Statements	C or I?
1. Text-based grammar lessons allow you to focus on all uses of a particular grammar point.	
2. Text-based grammar lessons follow a guided discovery approach and students are able to find out about the language themselves.	
3. The use of texts means that students can see examples of target grammar points in context.	
4. When planning text-based grammar lessons, teachers should create as many of their own texts as possible.	
5. Text-based grammar lessons are likely to appeal to students who like a clearly structured approach to learning grammar.	
6. Student-centred meaning and form tasks give students useful thinking time and allow them to process information about the language.	
7. The lack of teacher explanation might mean that some students switch off or get distracted.	
8. The approach is suited to working with course books as they often present new language in texts.	
9. The fact that the language is presented in a reading text means you shouldn't drill it.	
10. A text-based approach may help some students to think about texts they find outside the classroom as a source of grammar.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

#### **Thinking about your teaching ...**

How does a text-based approach to teaching grammar compare with other approaches you have used? Consider the pluses and minuses of this approach from the teacher's point view.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

#### **Taking it to the classroom ...**

An alternative approach to feedback is to let learners know that you will only confirm the answers to 2 or 3 questions in a task. In groups they have to negotiate and decide which answers they feel certain they have got right and which they are most unsure of. This strategy makes them think harder and it also generates a lot of group discussion as they negotiate.

#### **Want to find out more ... ?**

Chapter 5 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contains further ideas on how to teach grammar by using texts.

#### **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 d) Teaching Grammar 1: Different approaches**  
(looks at a variety of approaches to teaching grammar)
- **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 iii
- 2) b and i
- 3) f and v
- 4) a and vi
- 5) e and iv
- 6) c and ii

#### Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) b
- 2) e
- 3) f
- 4) c
- 5) a
- 6) d

#### Task 4 – Feedback

**1. Incorrect**

**Comment:** Usually texts will focus on only one use of a grammar point. Texts that try to include a large variety of uses can seem contrived and unnatural.

**2. Correct**

**Comment:** It is the design of the tasks that 'guides' students to an understanding of the target grammar point.

**3. Correct**

**Comment:** This is a key strength of this approach.

**4. Incorrect**

**Comment:** It is far easier to use texts in published materials or authentic texts.

**5. Correct**

**Comment:** It gives students the feeling that they are working through a step-by-step process. Other more communicative learners might get frustrated by too much of this.

**6. Correct**

**Comment:** As a result of this thinking time, students often have questions. The teacher can deal with these questions during monitoring, when students are working on the meaning and form tasks.

**7. Incorrect**

**Comment:** The reverse is more likely to be true.

**8. Correct**

**Comment:** Some course books will also provide meaning and form tasks that you can use.

**9. Incorrect**

**Comment:** Whether you drill or not should depend on whether the target language is typically used in oral communication by native speakers.

**10. Correct**

**Comment:** But the teacher may need to point this out to students.