

Do you sometimes feel that you are teaching students grammar they already know? This lesson looks at how you can use communication activities as a springboard to focusing on grammar. It examines the aims and stages of such a lesson and looks at issues and options surrounding this approach to teaching grammar.

#### Task 1 – What your students say and do



**Below are five statements about what students sometimes say and do. Are any true for you?**

1. Students often complain that they know all the grammar, but they are still incorrect when they speak.
2. Students often don't see the relevance of learning grammar.
3. Students say they want more feedback on the language they produce.
4. Students say they want to do more speaking in your classes.
5. Students can often do very controlled oral practice activities correctly. However, when they are given a freer practice activity, they will often get the target grammar wrong.

**Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below.** 



#### Task 1 Feedback

If only one of these statements is true for your current teaching situation, then using communication activities for teaching grammar could be a useful skill to learn. If none of the statements are true, then your students must be extremely happy – well done! The following lesson may still be of use to you all the same.

#### Key Skill

Using communication activities to teach grammar can offer variety to your students and cater to the needs of learners who are keen to develop their ability to use English. It also provides opportunities for teachers to give systematic feedback on students' errors.

### Task 2 – What are the different steps?



Letters a to e outline key stages in a lesson that teaches grammar by means of a communicative activity. Numbers i to v are aims that match each stage. Put the steps in their correct order in the table below, then match the correct aim to each step.

#### Stages

- a. Teacher-led error correction of student language.
- b. Students do a second communication activity.
- c. Teacher evaluation of student language.
- d. Students do a communication activity that requires use of a specific grammar point.
- e. Checking of meaning and form by teacher.

#### Aims

- i. To determine whether students are able to use the target language point and to listen for their accuracy with other language.
- ii. To clarify how the target language point is used and made.
- iii. To provide an initial opportunity for students to use the target grammar point and to provide speaking practice.
- iv. To provide students with an opportunity to further practise and consolidate the target language point.
- v. To give students feedback on the language they produced and to focus on the target grammar point.

Stages	Aims
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

**Key Skill**

The point of departure of this lesson is a communication task that involves speaking. This gives teachers an opportunity to hear if students can use the target grammar point. If students are using the language perfectly well, the teacher should give feedback on other errors and not worry about checking the meaning and form of the target grammar point. If students can use this language, they clearly don't need any more work on it.

Task 3 – How to achieve the aims



**Numbers 1 to 5 below repeat the stages of a lesson that teaches grammar by means of a communication activity. However, this time they are in the correct order. Letters a to e describe activities for each stage. They are in a different order. Match the activities to the stages.**

Stages	Activities
1. Students do a communication activity that requires use of a specific grammar point.	
2. Teacher evaluation of student language.	
3. Teacher-led error correction of student language.	
4. Checking of meaning and form by teacher.	
5. Students do a second communication activity.	

#### Activities

- a. The teacher writes up the collected errors on the white board. Corrections can either be elicited from learners, or students can be put in pairs or small groups to correct the language and conduct feedback.
- b. The teacher gives students another communication activity that practises the target language point and asks them to do this activity and concentrate on using the target grammar point correctly. Alternatively, students could re-do the original activity.
- c. Having elicited corrections of student language, the teacher uses oral concept questions to check the meaning of the target grammar point, afterwards checking the form by eliciting it and then writing it up on the white board.
- d. The teacher monitors and listens carefully to the language that students are producing, particularly for the target grammar point, or its absence and finds out what incorrect forms students are using in its place. The teacher also notes other examples of incorrect language, noting these down on a piece of paper.
- e. The teacher sets up the communication activity, but makes a point of not mentioning the target grammar point nor asking that students use it.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

#### Key Skill

In terms of the focus on grammar, stages 3 and 4 are key in this approach. They may not always be completely separate stages. When eliciting the correct version of the white board language, the teacher might check meaning and form at the same time. A variation for the third stage is to put up a mixture of correct and incorrect examples of the target language and get students to decide which versions are the correct ones.

### Task 4 – Strengths and challenges



The following statements are about different aspects of lessons that teach grammar from a communicative activity. Some of them indicate strengths of this approach, while others describe challenges. Sort them into the appropriate categories below.

Strengths				Challenges			

#### Statements

1. This approach heightens the relevance of the target grammar point during the meaning and form stages. If students have had problems with the point, they can see the need to clarify it. They are less likely to complain about having studied the point already.
2. It creates a very natural connection between speaking and communication and grammar, rather than viewing these as separate entities.
3. The teacher needs to listen very carefully when monitoring. This may be a little difficult because of the noise level in the classroom and quietly spoken students may be harder to hear.
4. The teacher needs to be able to respond to unexpected language issues that can arise. These issues may not be connected with the target language point.
5. There is the opportunity to cover more grammar in a lesson. Apart from the target grammar point, the teacher can also deal with other points that arise during the correction stage.
6. If the students do the first activity well and produce the target language, the teacher needs to have an alternative activity ready to use in place of the meaning and form stages.
7. Because the lesson involves a lot of speaking, some students may not feel they are learning grammar in a concrete and tangible way. The teacher may need to point out to them that the error feedback and meaning and form stages do involve an explicit focus on grammar.
8. This approach means that students are getting consistent feedback on the language that they produce. This is likely to appeal to learners who want more error correction from their teacher.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

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

Think about this approach to teaching grammar from the students' point of view. Imagine you are learning a second language and being taught grammar using this approach. What aspects of the approach would you find frustrating, what other aspects would you enjoy? Make a list and then work out whether you would experiment with slight alterations to the approach described above.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

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

Often this approach does not match published teaching materials. The grammar clarification materials might use texts or examples. However, these books often include communication activities that aim to practise grammar points. These are often placed towards the end of a lesson, or at the back of the book. Teachers can use these as their point of departure for teaching grammar, in line with the approach outlined in this lesson.

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

Chapter 7 of *How To Teach Grammar* by Scott Thornbury (Longman Pearson 1999) contains further ideas on using students' errors to teach grammar.

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

**Task 2 – Feedback**

- 1) d, iii
- 2) c, i
- 3) a, v
- 4) e, ii
- 5) b, iv

**Task 3 – Feedback**

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

**Task 4 – Feedback**

**Strengths = 1, 2, 5, 8**  
**Challenges = 3, 4, 6, 7**