

Engaging Grammar Lessons to Give Generation 1.5 Writers a Voice

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GENERATION 1.5 LEARNERS AND TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT

Many Generation 1.5 students speak English and a different home language fluently but do not read widely or easily in either language. Nor have they been sufficiently taught the basics of grammar. As a result, they are unfamiliar with the formal language structures required of college essays and struggle with finding the appropriate academic language. Many of these students can be frustrated with and disengaged from their writing and benefit from additional support in English grammar-for-writing. Teaching grammar in context can help students build a foundation in grammar, which can improve their essay writing skills, and give them the confidence that they need to be successful college writers.

Teaching grammar in context can...

- improve clarity in students' writing.
 - contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills.
 - help students build confidence as writers.
- give students an academic voice and their own writing style.

In university composition classes, grammar can be integrated into regular lessons by presenting structures and rules in the context of students' writing. This practice can teach Generation 1.5 students strategies to improve their writing while engaging them in creative lessons that make academic English more accessible. The approach discussed in this presentation follows five principles of teaching grammar in context to Generation 1.5 learners:

- 1. Encourage interaction.**
- 2. Appeal to different learning styles.**
- 3. Make grammar accessible.**
- 4. Focus each lesson on one grammar point.**
- 5. Break up activities into steps.**

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT

Student Writing as “Text”

Students’ writing can be a valuable tool in teaching grammar in context, and an especially useful way to introduce new grammar points. Within student essays, drafts, response writing, and in-class writing are abundant examples of both correct and incorrect grammar usage. These texts can be a jumping-off point for teaching grammar rules inductively and may engage students more than traditional grammar books or isolated exercises. (For samples of adapted student writing see pp 3-4)

Why

- creates context
- shows relevant and level-appropriate grammar
- validates Ss as writers

How

- use examples of discourse
- find examples of correct and incorrect usage
- adapt text to focus on one specific grammar point

What

- paragraphs from current drafts or recent essays
- in-class writing or homework
- group or pair writing

When

- before teaching a new grammar point: to show Ss examples and teach patterns inductively
- after teaching a new grammar point: to let Ss practice manipulating text

Grammar Reference Cards

After the class articulates, analyzes, and understands a certain grammar point or a new editing rule, students can make a card that includes explanations and examples of this grammar point. They can use this card as a reference tool when they write and proofread their essays. (For samples of grammar reference cards see p 5)

Why

- focuses Ss on a particular grammar point
- encourages self-editing
- creates easy, accessible reference and gives Ss a sense of ownership

How

- decide on terminology together
- use examples from Ss writing or come up with examples together
- make cards simple to read and understand

What

- cards that define grammar terms and explain proper usage
- cards that give tips for avoiding & fixing mistakes
- cards with checklists for editing

When

- while teaching a new grammar point: to get Ss involved in defining and explaining the grammar
- while Ss are writing or editing: to give Ss a reference tool

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTED STUDENT WRITING

This paragraph was taken from a student's essay and used in class to present the idea of using hedge words with generalizations to make arguments stronger.

Without hedging

Observation between females and males in a same-sex and mixed gender group conversation showed that males are the more dominant one. In the same-sex group of females, they all took turns in talking about what was on their minds and what they thought about the topic that they were discussing. Whereas, in a same-sex group of all males, they were trying to compete in who was the more dominant one in the group. It's important for men to be dominant because by obtaining the spot light, they feel that it will give them more respect from others. They always disagree on the topic and try to argue over who was right and wrong. They just interrupt each other while one is talking. They don't see it as a big deal when they have a disagreement or when interruption occurs in the conversation, whereas women take it as a big deal, because they think that men interrupt them on purpose. Observing a mixed gender group, I saw that females are more passive than men. Women are afraid to say something because they're scared of criticism. When trying to put their point out there, they are usually interrupted, and it is usually the males that do the interruptions. Women ask permission to speak whereas men just blurt out whatever's on their minds. Even though males don't interrupt others on purpose, it usually comes down to a conflict or disagreement. If both genders would just take turns in talking in both same-sex and mixed gender groups then there wouldn't be much problems or conflicts determining who is more dominant.

With hedging

Observation between females and males in a same-sex and mixed gender group conversation showed that males are **usually** the more dominant one. In the same-sex group of females, they **generally** all took turns in talking about what was on their minds and what they thought about the topic that they were discussing. Whereas, in a same-sex group of all males, they were **often** trying to compete in who was the more dominant one in the group. **It seems** important for men to be dominant because by obtaining the spot light, they **may** feel that it will give them more respect from others. They **appear to** always disagree on the topic and try to argue over who was right and wrong. **Most** men just interrupt each other while one is talking. They **probably** don't see it as a big deal when they have a disagreement or when interruption occurs in the conversation, whereas women **might** take it as a big deal, because they think that men interrupt them on purpose. Observing a mixed gender group, I saw that **many** females are more passive than men. Women **might be** afraid to say something because they're scared of criticism. When trying to put their point out there, they are **often** interrupted, and it is **usually** the males that do the interruptions. Women **tend to** ask permission to speak whereas **most** men just blurt out whatever's on their minds. Even though **it is likely** that males don't interrupt others on purpose, it **seems to** come down to a conflict or disagreement. **If** both genders would just take turns in talking in both same-sex and mixed gender groups, **then** there **may not** be as many problems or conflicts determining who is more dominant.

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This paragraph was taken from a student's essay and used in class to practice using the past perfect, past and present tenses.

Original student text (bold type added to show student's usage of verb tense)

I **had seen** American schools on TV and on movies but when I **went** in them I **perceive** many variations, in comparison to Pakistani schools. The major one **is** that I **receive** free education in America which **is** impossible in Pakistan. In Pakistan, I **studied** for ten years but for further education I **would have to go** to college or university, but I **came** here and **had to experienced** high school. I **got** my first shock on the first day of high school when after first period a girl **came to took** me to the other class; we never **change** class in Pakistan! I **had never used** binders there, always **use** notebooks. I **had never done** any assignment on computer in Pakistan; we always **have to write down** the stuff, but in America most of the assignments **have to be** on computer. I **didn't even knew** how to print out a paper when I newly **went** to an American high school. Now I **am** a college student and the biggest advantage that I **have** of studying in America is that I **get** financial aid.

Adapted student text (teacher's changes and additions in italics)

Back in Pakistan I **had seen** American schools on TV and on movies but when I **went** in them I **perceived** many variations, in comparison to Pakistani schools. The major one **is** that *now* I **receive** free education in America which **is** impossible in Pakistan. *Before I left* Pakistan, I **had studied** for ten years but for further education I **would have had to go** to college or university, but *when I was 15* I **came** here and **had to experienced** high school. I **got** my first shock on the first day of high school when after first period a girl **came to take** me to the other class; we **had never changed** class in Pakistan! I **had never used** binders there; *I had always used* notebooks. I **had never done** any assignment on computer in Pakistan; we **had always written down** the stuff, but in America most of the assignments **have to be** on computer. I **didn't even know** how to print out a paper when I newly **went** to an American high school. Now I **am** a college student and the biggest advantage that I **have** of studying in America is that I **get** financial aid.

Student text to use in class

*Directions- Highlight according to tense: past perfect=yellow, past= blue, present tense= pink
Time expressions are underlined to give you clues.*

Back in Pakistan I **had seen** American schools on TV and on movies but when I went in them I **perceived** many variations, in comparison to Pakistani schools. The major one **is** that now I **receive** free education in America which **is** impossible in Pakistan. Before I left Pakistan, I **had studied** for ten years but for further education I **would have had to go** to college or university, but when I was 15 I **came** here and **experienced** high school. I **got** my first shock on the first day of high school when after first period a girl **came to take** me to the other class; we **had never changed** class in Pakistan! I **had never used** binders there; I **had always used** notebooks. I **had never done** any assignment on computer in Pakistan; we **had always written down** the stuff, but in America most of the assignments **have to be** on computer. I **didn't even know** how to print out a paper when I newly went to an American high school. Now I **am** a college student and the biggest advantage that I **have** of studying in America is that I **get** financial aid.

EXAMPLES OF GRAMMAR REFERENCE CARDS

SOURCES CONSULTED

- Azar, B. (2007). Grammar-Based teaching: A practitioner's perspective. *TESL-EJ*, 11 (2). Retrieved April 6, 2009, from <http://tesl-ej.org/ej48/toc.html>
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This handout and the PowerPoint slides that were used during this presentation will be available at:

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~lac/lacfacstaff.html>

Below is a paragraph from a student essay. The student is a generation 1.5 learner at San Francisco State University and wrote this essay for her first-year English class.

Observation between females and males in a same-sex and mixed gender group conversation showed that males tend to be the more dominant one. In the same-sex group of females, they all took turns in talking about what was on their minds and what they thought about the topic that they were discussing. Whereas, in a same-sex group of all males, they were more trying to compete in who was the more dominant one in the group. It's important for men to be dominant because by obtaining the spot light, they feel that it will give them more respect from others. They always seemed to disagree on the topic and tried to argue over who was right and wrong. They usually just interrupt each other while one is talking. They don't usually see it as a big deal when they have a disagreement or when interruption occurs in the conversation, whereas women take it as a big deal, they think that men interrupt them on purpose. Observing a mixed gender group, I saw that females tend to be more passive than men. Women are afraid to say something because they're scared of criticism. When trying to put their point out there, they are usually interrupted, and it is usually the males that do the interruptions. Women usually ask permission to speak whereas men just blurt out whatever's on their minds. Even though males don't interrupt others on purpose, it usually comes down to a conflict or disagreement. If both genders would just take turns in talking in both same-sex and mixed gender groups then there probably wouldn't be much problems or conflicts determining who is more dominant.