



# Effective Grammar Teaching in the English Classroom to Support Progress

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## Introduction and Rationale

- In the UK National Curriculum for English (2014), there is an emphasis on students' acquiring a "wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language" (DFE, 2014). Furthermore, grammar is noted as an important factor in spoken language, reading and writing as specified on the National Curriculum for both KS3 and KS4 (DFE, 2014).
- Academics writing on English teaching also suggest that grammar is linked to an "ever-growing need to develop the verbal, oral and written skills of students" (Fontich & Camps, 2013, pp.1) and has been cited as an important part of English teaching – both as a core subject and a second-language.

*Grammar is what turns words into language. (Berry, 2018, pp.4)*

- Whilst grammar is an important part of English teaching, it has been noted that it is not something that teachers and students enjoy doing (Jean & Simard, 2011, pp. 467). The teaching of grammar comes with the stigma of being boring and confusing with students often reluctant to engage with lessons that cover the extensive prescriptivist rules of grammar such as spelling, vocabulary, syntax, and semantics.
- This research seeks to put forward a simple alternative way of teaching grammar and addressing grammatical misconceptions in the secondary English classroom. This is through the form of adaptable and simple starter activities to promote progress in line with TS2 (DFE, 2013).

## Classroom Application

- Each of my lessons includes a short grammar starter (example in fig. 1). Each week will explore a different grammar focus. A topic which could be one lesson is chunked into four manageable starters.
- Year 7 and apostrophes. Each starter had a different format e.g. true/false, correct the sentences, fill in the gaps. The starter was completed in the first five minutes of the lesson. Answers were shared as a class and misconceptions were addressed by myself. Based on students' responses to the task, I could then adapt the starter for the next day to either recover an apostrophes rule or move onto another.
- By the end of the week on apostrophes, all students were confident in using apostrophes and their extended writing showed a much higher use of correct punctuation.

## Research and Theory

- Effective starter activities are those which do not outlast the concentration span of pupils. They are immediately accessible and do not involve complex instructions (DFEAS, 2004).
- Prescriptivist grammar rules can often make grammar seem confusing and overwhelming for students (Chin, 2000). Therefore, delivering short activities to students with a clear learning purpose is effective. As Natalie Packer has suggested, chunking activities to "deliver small amounts of information at a time" (Packer, 2021) is the most effective way to maintain engagement.
- The teaching of "formal grammar" has a negligible benefit to students' understanding of grammar and can often have a harmful effect on improving students writing. (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, 1963).
- However, more effective grammar teaching can take place within short activities that do not explicitly teach rules but rather allow students to practice writing within context. (Calkins, 1980)

Circle whether the apostrophes have been used correctly.

1. I love stroking it's hair.	T	F
2. Marys' wig fell off in assembly.	T	F
3. The cat has lost it's mouse.	T	F
4. Miss Butler's outfit was smart.	T	F

Fig. 1 Example of an apostrophes starter activity (Katherine Irwin, 2021)

## Benefits for Students

- Teaching concepts on verb, sentence, clause, phrase, and related concepts for editing
- Teaching style through sentence combining and sentence generating
- Teaching sentence sense through the manipulation of syntactic elements
- Teaching both the power of dialects and the dialects of power
- Teaching punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style

Weaver, Constance. (1998)

1. Draw an apostrophe.		
2. 'This apostrophe is used when words are missing.' Circle the correct answer.	Omission	Possession
3. 'This apostrophe is used to show possession.' Circle the correct answer.	Omission	Possession
4. 'Mia's bag was overflowing.' This is an example of an apostrophe used for possession. Circle the correct answer.	True	False

Example of punctuation and grammar starting activities (Katherine Irwin, 2021)

## Reflection Brookfield's Lenses (1995)

**Autobiographical:** Students were engaged with the starters although going forward I will include an extra challenge activity eg. Write your own sentence using an apostrophe to show possession.

**Student:** Students were engaged with the starter activity. When going through answers as a class, students were eager to answer and ask questions. Students liked the apostrophe activity being tied into the book we are studying which links back to Calkins' (1980) idea that effective grammar teaching takes place within context.

**Peer:** As noted in my mentor's observation for this lesson, students were engaged with the starter activity. This was established through both good routine and the structure of the starter.

**Academic:** The starter activity adhered to the success criteria for a good starter as put forward by the DFEAS. All students showed excellent progress from the first lesson of the week to the final proving that repetitive, simple and contextually linked starters are most effective in teaching grammar (Packer, 2021) rather than explicit teaching (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, 1963).

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