

Ways Grammar Should Be Taught

Grammar should be taught to students as a tool that they will be able to use to improve their writing skills. The old methods of teaching grammar through dittos and sentence diagramming are ineffective, so instructors must find new ways to reach their students. Constance Weaver suggests teaching grammar with writing instead of a separate subject, so we will examine several alternatives for introducing and re-enforcing grammar through writing.

A common mistake that instructors make is the amount of grammar that is suitable. Too much grammar in one day will make the students bored with the lesson. However, if the students do not learn enough grammar, they may find that their writing skills become stagnant. When the instructor observes that the students are struggling with a particular concept, or the instructor observes that the students have reached a writing plateau, the instructor should teach a grammar lesson. According to Weaver, students may make errors because they are trying a new style in their writing. Weaver goes on to say that instructors should praise students for trying new concepts, but instructors also need to show the students how to eliminate the error. A lesson should not last for more than fifteen minutes per day.

The old method of using dittos does not work effectively. Dittos are boring, and they do not allow the students to actually apply the grammar lesson to their writing. “The practice exercises in grammar books are carefully crafted to be relatively easy; they do not give students the opportunity to grasp the critical features of a concept” (Weaver). Dittos may still be used; however, dittos that have a bunch of easy exercises that are more of an exercise on finding a pattern than learning a skill are not effective. Instead, a

lesson should include a definition, example sentences, and tips for recognizing how to use the skill. This brief lesson is all that the students need for one day, so practice and reinforcement must come on the next day. Ditto sentences are not usually very exciting, so magazine articles are a better alternative. The students will work in pairs to identify the skill in the magazine as well as re-write some sentences to include the skill. Using a book that the students are reading is another way to replace sentences on dittos. By working together, students will “notice grammatical patterns and see generalizations” (Weaver). Students do not need dittos to make these patterns overly apparent; instead, using real literature will help the students to see the grammatical structure in a natural flow of text.

Sentence diagrams are exercises that focus terms rather than practical use. This teaching technique is ineffective because it is confusing; the English Language is complicated and hard to wrap in a neat package of a diagram. Also, being able to identify the basics of language is less important than being able to use and manipulate sentences. Rather, grammar terms should be used casually (Weaver). An alternative method is to have the students pull out a paper that they had previously written. The students should modify the sentences in their paper to demonstrate the skill or skills that they have learned. Next, the students should identify what skill they used and why; technical terms are not as important as the student’s ability to justify his or her reasoning.

Works Cited

Weaver, Constance. "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing" EJ English Journal,
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