

QUESTION

What is the value of traditional grammar study-nouns, verbs, sentences, etc. I know that our main goal is to help students become better writers, but shouldn't we also focus on helping students learn the ins-and-outs of our language? When? How much?

Many linguists and grammarians agree that traditional grammar is important. However, classrooms need not continue to teach grammar only by rote memorization and worksheets. Using only the traditional approach, grammar will continue to cause students to groan and fail to see its authenticity. Traditional grammar instruction is indeed crucial, yet it is important not to have complete emphasis on this type.

The changing diversity in today's classroom calls for a change in the way we teach grammar. The following is a list of changes in today's students:

- Children today have shorter attention spans and we must work towards keeping them occupied and interested. Teaching the traditional way does not accomplish this.
- The tension that is present by teaching grammar as a "right and wrong way" of speaking English. Today's students have many dialects and by stating that your way of speaking is the right way is offensive.
- Children must obtain confidence in their writing in a world that uses writing to communicate in multiple ways (e-mail, instant messaging, etc.). Teaching grammar to improve writing is key.

Teachers must do the following to integrate the traditional grammar study with a new study.

- We must integrate the traditional approach with the expansionist view of teaching grammar in order to make teaching grammar truly meaningful for today's students. The traditional approach includes worksheets, memorization, and word/sentence study. The expansionist view increases students' knowledge about all languages in order to learn about their own and the grammatical rules.
- Teachers must also keep in mind that traditional grammar is important in order to teach students to analyze their own writing and improve their work.
- Teaching grammar in context includes suggestions that we teach a minimum of grammar for maximum benefits (Weaver 1996b). This is what I call a "scope-not-sequence" chart, covering relevant concepts that might be taught sometime between kindergarten and graduate school. The chart includes five categories
 - *teaching concepts of subject, verb, sentence, clause, phrase, and related concepts for editing;
 - * teaching style through sentence combining and sentence generating;
 - * teaching sentence sense and style through the manipulation of syntactic elements;

*teaching the power of dialects and dialects of power;

* teaching punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style.

(Weaver)

- Teaching grammar will not automatically mean that once taught, the concepts will be learned and applied forever. On the contrary, grammatical concepts must often be taught and re-taught, to individuals as well as to groups or classes, and students may long afterwards continue to need guidance in actually applying what they have, in some sense or to some degree, already learned. (Weaver)
- As Harry R. Noden emphasizes, integrate grammatical lessons with writing! Have students prepare a piece of writing and then have them improve their writing by integrating a lesson they learned on action verbs. Noden basically sees writing and grammar as an art, in which the students can create a picture using different techniques (grammar).