

What is wrong with the old way of teaching Grammar?

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For the purposes of this answer, we will assume that the “old way” of teaching grammar is through the use of more traditional methods (i.e. worksheets, diagramming sentences, parts of speech identification, etc.). To the point, nothing is “wrong” with teaching grammar in “the old way.” Where this type of instruction becomes questionable is when the materials, examples, and method of instruction become antiquated.

As with any subject matter, we must make efforts to adjust our instruction to the changing needs of our student population. The students occupying our classrooms are coming to us from a decidedly modern culture. As products of the “MTV Generation,” our students have become accustomed to information immediacy: the facts they seek are readily and immediately available via the Internet and other sources. The immediate gratification nature of their lifestyles and abilities to more effectively multi-task than their parents, present us with many challenges in the teaching of grammar. Students view rote memorization, part of speech labeling, and fill in the blank activities as antiquated, unstimulating and “boring.” These students have needs which are not being met by most “traditional” instructional techniques. They must see an immediate and meaningful improvement in their own writing for grammar instruction to become effective.

This is not to say that knowledge of terminology, usage “rules” and proper writing conventions are unimportant. These skills are vital to building a proper base for further instruction. However, as students develop into young writers who are exploring language, grammar should be treated as something which broadens their horizons and abilities. This is where more traditional methods of instruction fall short, they fail to recognize the student’s place in the writing process. They tend to make grammar something which is either “right” or “wrong.” This translates into “your writing is either good” or “it isn’t” in a student’s mind.

Current best practice in grammar instruction attempts to address the adversarial relationship between teacher and student fostered by traditional methods. By changing our methods, we can become less the “holder of knowledge,” and more “the facilitator of improvement and learning.” By building on this relationship, we can better serve our students, both in their writing and in their lives.