

Daily Grammar Practice

Research Base

Students need a working knowledge of grammar concepts and sentence structure in order to improve as writers. Teachers expect students to be able to edit their writing for grammatical and mechanical errors, but students can't apply concepts that they don't understand. In order to speak intelligently about and make revisions in writing, it is necessary for teachers and students to share a common grammar vocabulary. Writing lessons are more productive when students have a strong background in grammar.

Studies show that more than forty percent of college freshmen take a remedial writing course each year. In its National Curriculum Survey, the ACT found that college instructors view grammar and usage skills as the most important writing skills for entering college freshmen to possess. However, only 69 percent of the high school English teachers who participated in the survey teach grammar concepts at all. ACT vice president for development, Cynthia Schmeiser, recommends that teachers reinforce grammar and usage skills continually at all grade levels (Ezarik, 2003). Once students understand concepts, it is important for them to continue practicing them (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Daily Grammar Practice provides this reinforcement and practice.

George Hillocks and Michael Smith (1991) argue that “the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students” and that grammar instruction wastes valuable time that could be better spent on writing instruction. However, they base their studies on ineffective methods of teaching grammar and provide no evidence that the students involved in the study understood the concepts in question. Daily Grammar Practice is a method that enables students to understand concepts more thoroughly and in less time than traditional methods of grammar instruction. Rei Noguchi (1991) states that teachers should “make more time available for other writing activities by making less grammar do more.” Daily Grammar Practice streamlines grammar instruction so that it takes only a few minutes each day. Instead of utilizing traditional grammar exercises, it accomplishes more in less time. Daily Grammar Practice is effective at all grade levels and ability levels and for English Language Learners. Research on the teaching of grammar to students learning a second language suggests that grammar “provides rules and general guidance that facilitate better understanding of the structures of the target language” (Gao, 2001).

In order to apply skills that they have learned, students need to know the skills on a subconscious level. To achieve this understanding, they “must engage in practice that gradually becomes *distributed*, as opposed to *massed*” (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Daily Grammar Practice provides instruction that is distributed over the course of the year. Rather than learning about each aspect of grammar in isolation, students study concepts in relation to each other and review them on a daily basis. This method is particularly helpful for students who “struggle to understand concepts in isolation, to learn parts without seeing wholes” (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Daily Grammar Practice utilizes sentence diagramming in grades 5-12 to help students see the connection between parts and wholes. Diagrams are graphic organizers that act as “maps that make abstract ideas more visible and concrete” (Burke, 1999).

Through daily review of concepts, Daily Grammar Practice enables students to retain what they learn. Studies have shown that “students need more than ‘drill and kill’” for concepts to move to long-term memory (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). *DGP Plus: Building Stronger Writers* is a resource that provides strategies and activities for applying and reinforcing grammar concepts through writing. These strategies are valuable because once students understand concepts, they

“should apply them frequently and in a variety of situations” (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). *DGP Plus* allows students to utilize the information in long-term memory, which “if not used . . . will become hard to retrieve over time” (Pinker, 1998).

Across the country, pretest and posttest results for Daily Grammar Practice have shown significant increase in students’ understanding of grammar concepts. In one study in Fayette County, Georgia, 38 high school freshmen received no additional grammar instruction beyond Daily Grammar Practice for an entire school year. Their average grammar pretest score was 74.4. Their average posttest score was 89.1, an improvement of 14.7 points. The same students were tested again at the beginning of their sophomore year to determine how much of the knowledge they had retained. Their average score at the beginning of the sophomore year was 87.7, only a 1.4 point decrease over the summer months. In another Georgia study, a group of 41 eighth grade students showed an 11.5 point increase in scores at the end of their first year of Daily Grammar Practice instruction. For charts showing these studies as well as two other elementary grades studies, please see the next page of this document. Other studies are currently ongoing for a variety of grade levels from elementary through college.

Resources

Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Burke, K. (1999). *The mindful school: How to assess authentic learning*. Arlington Heights, IL: SkyLight Professional Development.

Ezarik, M. (2003). Survey: K-12, higher ed grammar disconnect. (CurriculumUpdate: The latest developments in math, science, language arts and social studies). *DistrictAdministration*, 39(7), 46.

Gao, C. Z. (2001). Second language learning and the teaching of grammar. *Education*, 122(2), 326-336.

Gregory, G. H. & Chapman, C. (2002). *Differentiated instructional strategies: One size doesn't fit all*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hillocks, G., Jr., & Smith, M. W. (1991). Grammar and usage. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (591-603). New York: Macmillan.

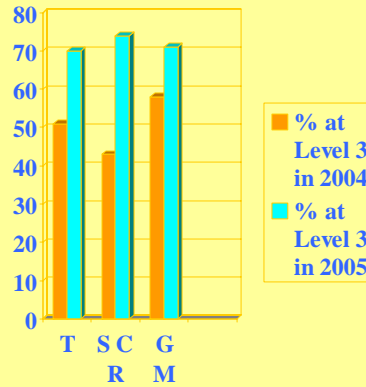
Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Noguchi, R. R. (1991). *Grammar and the teaching of writing: Limits and possibilities*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Pinker, S. (1998). *How the mind works*. New York: Norton.

Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test

- Kedron Elementary School third-graders
- T=Total language arts
- SCR=Sentence construction and revision
- GM=Grammar and mechanics



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