

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #7: Teaching Grammar

What is the most effective method to teach grammar? This rhetorical question is a frequently debated subject with veteran language arts teachers. I do not know the answer; however, I can give you my opinion. Teach grammar in the context of student writing instead of teaching isolated grammar units. This means infuse it into the curriculum into meaningful chunks when kids need it. Student writing should drive your grammar instruction along with the standards, of course. When a large percentage of students are having difficulty with consistency of verb tense, then it is time for some drill and practice on that skill. You might consider keeping a reminder wall of grammar/editing skills taught for student reference. Adding on to it throughout the year will visually show the students how much grammar knowledge they "own."

Sentence types

Michelle Barton at Hanshew is teaching the different sentence types: simple, compound, complex. In her classroom, I saw hanging butcher paper with examples of these kinds of sentences taken from a young adult novel. Each of the sentences were coded using colored Xerox paper. She assigned students a certain part of the sentence to be written on the paper. Students physically got up and placed it in the right spot on the butcher paper. Imagine your power if you are the coordinate conjunction (BOY FANS: but, or, yet, for, and, nor, so) and are separating the

two independent clauses already up on the butcher paper! Or perhaps you are the final student to go up and you must separate the independent clauses with a comma. Will you be able to remember to place it before the coordinating conjunction?

Michelle Barton is using many modalities of learning, and more of her students will be reached this way. (compound sentence)

Some other suggestions:

- Daily Oral Language is a warm-up activity that does address grammar skills (in isolation). The weekly content theme is a good attempt to motivate students and to put it into context.
- The Write Source 2000 Language Program and student handbook have sections devoted to grammar. (I am still working on trying to get this program into all of your buildings with grant money.)
- Grammar Rock is still around and makes for a good springboard - [check it out](#).
- Consider some of these [grammar games](#) to play for transitions during your instruction.



Grammar Games

(First Steps Writing Resource Book, Education Department of Western Australia, Heinemann, 1994)

1. Controlled Cloze

Eliminate a particular word from a demonstration sentence. Ask students to suggest words that might fit teaching mini-lessons on parts of speech.

Example: The strawberries ____ ripe when they turn a bright red color.

2. Crazy Cloze

This is patterned after the idea of Mad Libs. Find a selection delete all the adjectives (or any other part of speech). Ask the students on notebook paper to generate the same number of adjectives on their own. display the selection on the overhead with the adjectives missing and let partners read through the selection substituting in order the adjectives that have been generated. This should create a humorous and silly selection.

The next obvious step is to now let the student pairs create sensible adjectives that would fit into the selection based on the passage's meaning.

3. Coffee Pot

Send one member of the class out to the hallway while the class selects a verb. For example, the nominated verb could be "laugh." When the student returns to the classroom, he/she must ask questions to identify the verb; they do this by substituting "coffee pot" for the unknown verb.

Example: "Do dogs coffee pot?"

The reply would be no because dogs do not laugh.

4. Name Game

Introduce the sentence pattern proper noun - verb - adverb. Carol creeps carefully is an example. Have player one say a proper noun like "Dan." Player two would have to add on the verb which also begins with "d." Perhaps player two says "drives." Player three must now provide an adverb like "dangerously." If player three cannot figure out a word, then he/she is eliminated. Go on to the next player to provide that word.

Will the class accept "Frank photographs furiously?"

Does the sentence have to make sense?
Is it possible to have a verb that can't be followed by an adverb?

5. Alphabet Loop

An adaptation of the Name Game is to allow any sentence structure as long as the words of the sentence follow each letter of the alphabet.

Example: **A**ll **b**lack **c**ats **d**rink **e**gg **f**lips.

This game will make students consider alternatives for sentence beginnings and will get them discussing what constitutes a sentence.

6. Semantic Grid

Use this organizer to review the parts of speech on any piece of literature. This activity will also be an effective comprehension strategy. For example, if the students read an expository piece of text dealing with health, have them complete the grid finding nouns, adjectives, and verbs from the text or their own background knowledge. They must fill in every square.

(See example on next page.)

	H	E	A	L	T	H
Noun	<i>heart</i>				<i>lungs</i>	
Verb		<i>eat</i>				
Adjective			<i>active</i>			