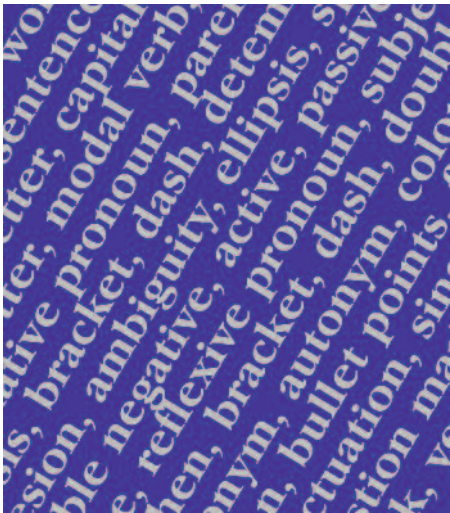




Grammar

Grammar is about how people make sense in speaking or writing.

- Grammar is an important strand of language study, both in its own right and as part of making meaning.
- There is no evidence that teaching grammar by rules results in improved reading or writing.
- Children have implicit knowledge of grammar which is best developed by helping them make sense of what they want to write and say.
- Recent research shows significant positive effects from teaching that gives explicit attention to relevant grammatical constructions within the context of pupils' writing.
- Talking about language (metalinguage) develops greater understanding of how language works.

UKLA maintains that language study is a vitally important aspect of learning in English, and that grammar is an important strand of language study, for its own intrinsic interest and for its contribution to communication and the making of meaning. However, if grammatical knowledge, spelling and punctuation are to make positive contributions to children's writing, they need to be taught and assessed in the context of writing meaningful texts, not as sets of 'facts' or 'rules'. Learning to write is about much more than grammar and the conventions of transcription. Grammatical knowledge should be neither taught nor tested outside the context of purposeful writing.

Children come to school with an extensive implicit knowledge of grammar – shown in the range of structures they use in their speech. This implicit knowledge will continue to develop, throughout their school education and beyond, as they engage in making sense of what others say and write and give form to complex meanings of their own. The function of teaching grammar in school is to transform some of this implicit knowledge to conscious awareness and thereby make it more subject to conscious control. Yet repeated studies show no evidence that formal teaching of grammar out of context has any beneficial effect on either reading or writing (Hillocks, 1986; Andrews *et al.*, 2006). However, more recent studies have involved integrating the study of relevant grammatical knowledge into the act of writing (Hunt, 2001; Myhill *et al.*, 2012, 2013 and 2017), finding significant positive effects from teaching that included explicit attention to relevant grammatical constructions within the context of pupils' writing of particular genres. Discussion is fundamental in encouraging critical conversations about aspects of language and their effects and ensuring that pupils retain knowledge about the language features being identified. Thus a combination of reading writing, speaking and listening consolidates the learning of grammar, spelling and punctuation in a way that makes it more fully understood and retained.

Sources

Andrews, R.C., Torgerson, S., Bevertson, A., Freeman, T., Lock, G., Low, G., Robinson, A. & Zhu, D. (2006) The effect of grammar teaching on writing development. *British Education Research Journal* 32 (1) pp. 39-55.

Hillocks, G. (1986) *Research on Written Composition: New directions for teaching*. Urbana IL: National of Teachers of English

Hunt, G. (2001) Raising awareness of grammar through shared writing. In J. Evans (ed.) *The Writing Classroom: Aspects of writing and the primary child 3-11*. London David Fulton.

Myhill, D., Jones, S., Lines, H. & Watson, A. (2012) Re-thinking grammar: the impact of embedded grammar teaching on students' writing and students' metalinguistic understanding. *Research Papers in Education* 27 (2) pp. 139-166

Myhill, D., Jones, S., Watson, A. and Lines, H. (2013) Playful explicitness with grammar: a pedagogy for writing, *Literacy* 47 (2) pp.103-11.

Myhill, D., Jones, J., and Helen Lines, H. (2017) *Writing Conversations: Development in Grammatical Understanding about Writing*. Presentation at the conference Development in Grammatical Understanding about Writing, The Royal Society, December 2017 (downloaded from <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/centres/centreforresearchinwriting/grammar-teacher-resources/> (Accessed, 17th July, 2018)

Classroom example

The present perfect verb tense

Ben Reave had found it difficult to find an authentic text to teach the present perfect tense to his class of 7 and 8 year olds, so he decided to adapt the fable *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, re-telling it in the present and the present perfect. He explains:

I thought it would fit well with the science unit of work on nutrition, and would be a good introduction to finding out how animals cope with different climatic conditions to get their food.

I loaded the story on to the whiteboard but before I showed them the written version, I told it to the class:

It is the summer and one evening, in a grassy field, a grasshopper has been happy, singing to itself. Some ants trudge by, carrying kernels of barley on their backs.

"Where are you going with those heavy loads?" asks the grasshopper.

As they struggle by, one of the ants replies, "To our ant hill."

"Really? You have wasted a lovely day like this in hard work? Why don't you sit down and have a sing-song with me?"

"We have worked hard to get ready for the winter," replies the ant. "We have saved food so that we have enough to eat when the summer is over and the winter days grow dark."

"Well, I haven't wasted my time worrying about the winter," chirps the grasshopper, "The sun is so glorious and I have enjoyed myself playing about here."

The ants go on their way, carrying their loads of barley back and forth to the ant hill.

Soon the weather changes. All the fields are covered in a thick blanket of snow and the grasshopper just can't dig through it. Soon he feels weak and very hungry. He will die of starvation if he cannot get food.

He crawls to the ant hill and sees that they have handed out food to other ants from the stores they have collected. The grasshopper begs the ants for something to eat.

"What!" cry the ants in surprise, "Didn't you store some food for the winter? What on earth were you doing all summer?"

"I didn't have time to store any food," whines the grasshopper; "I have sung and I have danced and the summer passed before I noticed."

The ants are shocked at such laziness. They turn away from the grasshopper and carry on handing out food to the ants who had contributed to the stores.

I asked the class what they thought about the ending of the story, about whether they thought that ants ought to have shared their food with the grasshopper – and of course there were differing opinions!

I pointed out to the children that the story is told in the present tense, asking them to identify the verbs. As they revisited the story, I highlighted the simple present verbs in one colour and the present perfect in another. They found the present tense verbs *trudge*, *asks*, *struggle*, which I highlighted in blue but they also began to notice verbs like: *has been*, *have wasted*, *have worked*, *have saved*, *haven't wasted*, which I highlighted in red. I asked the class what they noticed about these verbs and they identified the formation of 'have + a past tense verb' so I just referred to the 'ed' version as the past participle but didn't say any more about it then.

To make the point about choosing the right kind of verb to get the meaning right, I wrote the present tense verbs in one column in a chart on the board and asked the class to change these to the same form as the other verbs, which I just mentioned as 'present perfect':

Present	Present perfect
feels	has felt
crawls	has crawled
sees	has seen
begs	has begged
cry	have cried
whines	has whined

I re-told the part of the story with these verbs in:

Soon he *has felt* weak and very hungry. He will die of starvation if he cannot get food.

He *has crawled* to the ant hill and *has seen* that they have handed out food to other ants from the stores they have collected. The grasshopper *has begged* the ants for something to eat.

"What!" *have cried* the ants in surprise, "Didn't you store some food for the winter? What on earth were you doing all summer?"

"I didn't have time to store any food," *has whined* the grasshopper; "I have sung and I have danced and the summer passed before I noticed."

Then I asked the class what they thought about this version and some said that it ‘sounded wrong’, so I pushed them to work out in pairs why it was better to use the present tense for some verbs and the present perfect for others. Some pairs suggested that the present was used for when something is being done once and the present perfect for when it has been done often over a period of time. I could see which children had grasped the idea and who was still a little uncertain so I didn’t labour it any further but decided to revisit the story and its verbs in guided group work in English to help them to grasp that the present perfect is used to show that an action has taken place once or several times before now.

The class then went on to research how different animals store food for the winter as part of their science unit on nutrition and we made a great display which was also an opportunity to consolidate the use of the present and present perfect tenses.

Eve Bearne and David Reedy on behalf of UKLA

See also

UKLA bookshop www.ukla.org/shop

Teaching Grammar Effectively at Key Stage 1

by Eve Bearne, Rebecca Kennedy and David Reedy

Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools

by David Reedy and Eve Bearne

Making an Impact 5: Teaching Grammar in Context

by Rebecca Kennedy and Eve Bearne: professional development materials to accompany *Teaching Grammar Effectively in Primary Schools*

English Language and Literacy 3-19:

Grammar and Knowledge About Language

by John Richmond

UKLA website www.ukla.org/resources

Website resource *Grammar in its place*: <https://ukla.org/resources>