University of South Carolina

Monday, April 22, 2013

Effective Writing-Oriented Grammar Teaching

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| **What Usually Doesn’t Work** | **Why it Doesn’t Work** |
| * Decontextualized grammar lessons by the teacher on random topics * Decontextualized grammar presentations by the students on random topics * Unfocused peer editing activities * Unstructured “outsourcing” or “self-study” | * Not enough connection to students’ own writing * Not well integrated with other class activities * Not targeted to class/individual needs * Students don’t know what to look for |

**What Does Work**

1. Narrowly focused minilessons based on student needs/common errors (see pp. 2-3)

2. Teaching self-editing and proofreading strategies (see pp. 4-6)

3. Peer- and self-editing workshops (see p. 7)

4. 1:1 error conferences

5. Teaching students to analyze vocabulary and style in texts they read (see samples, p. 8)

**Sample “Common Errors” Minilesson: Punctuation**

**Part A: Error Identification & Correction.** Each of the sentences below has an error in punctuation—missing, unnecessary, or incorrect. Working individually, find it and suggest a correction.

1. At this point there is no need for unnecessary information that will most likely cloud voter’s thoughts.

2. The public needs to hear the truth, not senseless ad’s.

3. The fact is that if one runs a smear campaign ad about someone, its only natural that the opposite side will run one against them.

4. Only one of them will become the next president of the United States and in order for the United States to continue towards prosperity, Obama must win.

5. America’s economy is falling right now, however, Obama has several reform policies that will help the U.S.

6. One of his immediate plans to help families is to “enact a windfall profits tax on excessive oil company profits to give American families an immediate $1,000 emergency energy rebate”, which will help families’ overdue bills ([Obama, 2008](http://www.barackobama.com/issues/economy/)).

7. The media should not have to focus on presidential candidate’s personalities and background.

8. That’s the key in this election, the situation is different.

9. Senator Obama was able to make a difference in Chicago, imagine the possibilities that Obama would be capable of on a national scale.

10. To hold a presidential candidate accountable for everything people they know have done in the past is irresponsible for they are not the ones who did anything wrong.

11. Little was known about her and instead of focusing on her future as a politician, most of the attention has been focused on her personal problems.

12. Herbert was referring to each candidates plans for the future.

**Part B: Generating Rules.** Working in groups of 2-3, compare your answers for Part A. See if you can describe the rules that were broken and generate rules for using the punctuation correctly. There may be more than one example of a specific broken rule in Part A, so combine examples to create the rules as needed.

**List your rules and the sentence(s) which exemplify them:**

**Part C: Finding Errors in Context.** It is fairly easy to find errors in isolated sentences but harder to find them in a “natural” text. The paragraph below includes a number of examples of the punctuation errors and rules we just looked at. Working individually, see if you can find them. Compare answers with your group members.

This issue of the media affecting voter’s perception of the candidates has a large impact on the outcome of the election. There are many different things that play a role in an election but two factors are the most prominent and those are current issues and candidate backgrounds and personalities. The way candidates handle current issues is important but it is far more important to have a candidate with a luminous personality and strong leadership characteristics. The image and character the candidate projects upon the general public is very vital as it provokes a very personal reaction from the voters. These qualities help judge “if a candidate is perceived to be calm and collected [and] predict how he is going to perform when in office” (Glaser, 2008). It is hard to expect the candidate to perform one hundred percent of the promised tasks but it is the candidate’s personality that can fully assure us of what is going to happen next, despite the fact that it is challenging to judge who the candidate truly is with the influence of today’s media.

**Part D: Personal Reflection:** Do you tend to make any of the errors we have just looked at? What are some strategies you could try to (a) avoid making the errors; (b) catch and correct the errors in a paper you are working on? (If you don’t make these errors yourself, imagine you are tutoring or helping someone who does.) Write some notes below, and we will share ideas in a class discussion.

**Editing Strategies Workshop**

**Part A: Correcting & Classifying Language Errors.** The paragraph below has a wide variety of language errors. They are marked for you in **bold**. Examine the errors. Then (a) suggest a possible correction for each and (b) complete the error analysis chart which follows the paragraph.

First, students at the university are **an adult** and they should **be their own responsibility**. In the State Hornet article, "Students, faculty battle over attendance" by Jason Casillas, senior communications studies major Laura Henningsen said, "Students are responsible adults who can determine themselves how to best utilize their academic careers." All students know that college/university is to prepare them for **the** real life in the future. **It provides student best knowledge** and good careers. If students **does good** in college, they will have **bright life** in their future. In addition, most students have to pay their own tuition. If they didn't do well in their classes, then they **have** to retake **it again**. **As** in the State Hornet**'s** article, **Carson** said, "Since we're paying for our education, it should be our choice **whether attend** and pass." I agree with Carson's **idea.** We have to pay a lot of money for our tuition. **We also spending** a lot of **times** to study for tests and to do assignments. When we are taking some classes, our goal is studying and passing that course. Attending class regularly is not important as **students do well** in the class. For example, four years ago, I took one of my programming **class** and my professor didn't **required** his students to attend class regularly. **Unexpected**, I missed more than three **absences**. However, I did very well in the class, and I got **"A"** in the class. Therefore, **professor** should not require their students to attend class regularly because students at college/university are responsible **adults, they** should be on their own.

**Error Analysis Chart**

Now that you have examined and corrected the highlighted errors in the sample paragraph, complete an error analysis by following the steps and filling in the chart below.

1. Number each of the highlighted errors in order.
2. For each error, identify what type of language error it is:
   * Verbs (errors in tense or form)
   * Nouns (missing, unnecessary, or incorrect endings on nouns or articles before nouns)
   * Word choice (wrong or unclear word or word form)
   * Sentence structure (wrong word order, missing words, unnecessary words, run-on, fragment, or comma splice)

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| **Error #** | **Verbs** | **Nouns** | **Word Choice** | **Sentence Structure** |
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| **Totals** |  |  |  |  |

**Part B: Finding and Correcting Errors.** The paragraph below is the same essay. Go through it and highlight any errors you find in the categories of verbs, nouns, word choice, and sentence structure. Then suggest possible corrections for each error.

Secondly, students may get sick and they could not attend in the class regularly. For example, one of my friend, Lan, she is very smart, but she is not in healthy. She often get sick. She told me that some of her classes required attendance regularly, but she didn't went to class regularly because of sickness. Her teachers oftenly gave pop quiz to students. all quizzes in her class is 20% of total grade and she missed most of her quizzes. Even though she got 95% and above on all her tests, she did all her assignments. At the end, she could not got "A" in her class. She got "B" on most of her classes. At the result, she was not accepted into the medical school because her GPA was lower than 3.5. Lan missed her opportunity to become a doctor; eventhough she was very intelligent. Her goal is to become a doctor so she will know how to take care herself. Because she missed attendance from her classes, her grades dropped "radically," so she could not accomplish her goal. Therefore, professor should not require their students to attend class regularly.

**Compare your analysis of this paragraph with the previous one. Taking the two together, what are the most serious and frequent errors made by this student writer in this essay?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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**Sample Exercise for Electronic Peer Editing**

**Instructions:** Exchange papers with another member of your writing group.

1. Read the paper carefully for any problems with:

* Missing or “extra” words
* Typos or spelling errors
* Word/phrase choice that is incorrect (or not exactly correct)
* Errors with commas
* Errors with apostrophes
* Errors with citations (APA format, punctuation)
* Grammar errors such as subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences or comma splices, verb tense/form errors

**2. Do not** “rewrite” words, phrases, or sentences simply to improve “style.” Focus on actual errors.

3. If you find errors, mark them as follows:

* Use ~~strikethrough~~ for unnecessary words or word endings
* Use yellow highlight for unnecessary punctuation
* Use red font to insert a word or word ending or punctuation that is missing
* Use “Comments” to add any comments in the margins about word choice or grammar.

**Final Draft Self-Editing Exercise**

1. Carefully examine your paper for specific language/editing issues (at least one and no more than three) that you are know you struggle with. Make any changes that seem necessary. Write a 1-2 sentence analysis that specifies what you looked for, what you found, and what you changed.
2. Divide your paper into sections (whatever division seems reasonable to you). Read each section aloud. Take notes on any changes you make while reading aloud (notes can either be on a hard copy or on screen, as you prefer). Take at least a five-minute break between reading each section aloud. Write 1-2 sentences about what you learned from doing this and the types of things you changed, if any.
3. Finally, do you have any specific questions about either language that you want to raise in class or ask me individually? List them here. If not, say “None.”

Sample Entry

Vocabulary Journal Sample Entry

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| Word | **Muster** |
| Source | Write or Die by Stephen King (p. 29) |
| Sentence | “Now that I was away from the administrative offices of Lisbon High, I felt able to muster a little honesty.” |
| General meaning | Muster means to assemble things together, as in armies or courage. |
| Specific meaning | Muster was used to mean gathering the quality of honesty. |
| Grammatical info | Verb (transitive) |
| Sample sentence | Former presidents and world leaders have all tried to muster the sympathies of a global population in order to fight human rights violations. |

Style Journal Sample Entry

“Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott (pp. 321-322)

Passage:

**“First there’s the vinegar-lipped Reader Lady, who says primly, ‘Well, *That’s* not very interesting, is it?’ And there’s the emaciated German male who writes these Orwellian memos detailing your thought crimes. And there are your parents, agonizing over your lack of loyalty and discretion; and there’s William Burroughs, dozing off or shooting up because he finds you as bold and articulate as a houseplant; and so on.”**

Analysis:

The word choice and tone of this passage all intrigued me.

For instance, Lamott carefully chose her words to make her feelings easier to understand. She used *vinegar-lipped*, *emaciated German male*, and *Orwellian memos*, all of which carry unique images. So that made her writing memorable. I was surprised, though, by her pronoun usage. Lamott starts off by describing what she herself feels, but in the third sentence, she changes the pronoun to *your* in order to suggest that we all feel the same kinds of voices. The switch in pronoun was a little surprising. Switching pronouns is something I try not to do, so I was surprised that Lamott did it.