**Six Student-Centered Grammar Lessons**

6 Options:  Choose your starter

Think: How can students use this structure to communicate successfully immediately?  Starters should get your students using the structure in a stress-free, confidence-building context.  If you are building on a structure they have already learned, use a starter to activate their existing knowledge. At the end of a starter, be sure to elicit the form from your students.

* **Ask questions that elicit the structure.** Focus on helping students to produce the target structure.   Follow up by eliciting several examples of the structure that they used correctly during the activity; from this, it is easy to draw their attention to the form of the structure. This works well when you are building on language that they already know.
* **Do a communicative survey** in the class. Possible prompts for lists of survey questions include "Have you ever..." (present perfect), "What did you do during vacation?" (provide a list of possibilities; past tense forms), and "How often do you...?" You can also have each student write an interesting fact about him or herself and then compile them to do a class survey. For example, "Who has been to France?" Write all of the questions on the board and have the students transcribe them before finding out the answers through discussion with their classmates.  Follow up by eliciting several examples of the structure that they used correctly during the activity; from this, it is easy to draw their attention to the form of the structure.
* **Do a running dictation** (pairs).  Post sentences or a paragraph outside the classroom. One student runs and reads the sentences or paragraph, then reports back to the other student. The second student writes. Halfway through, have the readers and writers switch roles. The first team to have every sentence written exactly as it is on the posted model wins. This activity gets students familiar with the form of the structure very quickly in a motivating setting.
* **Do a matching activity with flash cards** (pairs or groups). Follow up by eliciting the forms from the students.
  + Pictures to sentences
  + Questions to answers
  + Active to passive or old tense to new tense
  + First and second halves of sentences
* **Compose riddles** that use the structure, and have students figure them out in pairs or groups. Ex: "If you drop me, I will break. If you have a dinner party, you will put me next to each plate on the table." (a glass) Make sure to accept answers that you may not have intended if they are logical. Concept check and/or circulate to answer meaning-related questions while students are figuring out the riddles. Check answers as a class, then follow up by eliciting the form from the students.
* **Play a song** that uses the structure in the refrain. Give the students a copy of the lyrics with blanks in place of the target structure. Have them work with a partner to fill in the words that are missing as they listen. Make sure there is very little variation in the way the structure is used so that even students with lower listening ability are successful and become familiar with the structure in the context. Follow up by eliciting the form from your students and concept checking for meaning.

6 Options:  Choose your lesson focus

Think: Now that your students are confident giving this new structure a try, focus them on the form, meaning and use of the structure -- level appropriate, of course; you want them to be successful with this, too. Remember that every activity in your lesson should feature your students as the USERS of the language as a tool for communication. Follow these steps to cover your bases, and make sure to spend extra time on the area that is most challenging for your students.

**Step 1: Focus on form and use**

Use rich data to get your students exposed to the structure in context. How is the structure formed? When and why is it used? Through using the directed discovery method, students learn the form and use of the structure using their own critical thinking skills. Using this approach makes them more independent language learners while also making the rules they derive with your help more memorable for them. Show students charts in the book AFTER they have worked through this step. Two possible options for this step:

* **Use a reading.** Have students underline the structure in a short reading. How many uses do they see? What comes before? What comes after? What is the rule for the form of this structure? Get the students to figure it out. Make sure that you choose a reading that has many uses of the structure.
* **Use listening.** Have students listen to a dialogue that uses the structure in several different contexts; give students the dialogue in writing so that they can follow along. Use blanks in place of the target structures and have students write the missing words as they hear them. Review the missing structures as a class; then have students figure out the rule for the form of the structure on the basis of the data. Most appropriate for beginning/intermediate students.

**Step 2: Focus on meaning**

Ask questions about the meaning to concept check. This step is especially important when introducing new tenses in contrast with learned tenses, adverbs vs. adjectives (and other word order related structures), articles, and clauses. This step usually overlaps with step one. Two possible options for this step:

* **Ask orally.** Use concept check questions to ensure that the class understands the meaning of the structure in context. Draw structures from the reading or dialogue that you used in the first step. Ex: If she goes to France, she will need to learn some French. Concept check questions: Does she know French now? Has she been to France yet? Will she definitely go to France?
* **Ask in writing.** Use true/false statements about the uses of the structure to get your students thinking about the meaning. Give students a list of these questions, and have them work through these in pairs or small groups.

**Step 3: Beginning to use the structure**

Now it’s time for your students to try using the structure in a controlled activity. Give students scaffolding so that they can practice using the structure they have just learned, focusing on meaningful use. The book often has good exercises like this, though you need to be selective. Take care to give your students a limited number of exercises, have them work with others, and have them report the answers to the class. Circulate and give help where needed. Be sure to extend faster workers by giving them more to do so that all students stay engaged. Completing exercises from the book is also a good homework assignment to give students extra practice with the structure in context. Two possible options for this step:

* **Completing sentences in context.** Possible activities include filling in blanks in a dialogue or paragraph and completing the second halves of sentences.
* **Eliciting sentences in context.** Prompts for this sentence level work could include questions, simply stated facts, pictures with or without scrambled words of target sentences, etc.

6 Options:  Choose your application activity

Think: What topic will get my students naturally using the structure I just taught? Here are a few ideas.

If you just taught modals, have students write a letter to a friend giving advice about how to live in the USA. If you just taught past continuous tense, have students write about what they did last night. If you just taught present perfect, have them write a letter to a potential employer about why they are qualified for a job.

For beginning/intermediate students, be sure to give your students practice producing sentences that use the form correctly before you ask them to do longer writing.

Get creative! This is your opportunity to show your students how this structure can be used to communicate in writing. This also presents an opportunity to teach other writing skills while reinforcing learned grammar. If you need more inspiration for prompts to use with specific grammar structures, grammar textbooks usually provide some sample topics for writing application.

Provide students with a completed writing sample to make sure they are clear on what you are looking for. When you provide written feedback on their use of grammar, only consider the structure or structures that you intended them to apply with the writing activity. Look at their unique writing challenges when you deal with essay-level writing; not short grammar application activities like these.

* Get students writing a **silent conversation** with a partner about a topic you choose. This works well for reviewing question formation.
* Have students write about a situation depicted in a **picture**. This works well for comparatives and superlatives, adjectives and adverbs, present tense forms, etc.
* Get students writing about their own **personal interests or experiences** (levels 0-3).  This works particularly well with building fluency with simple tenses. A writing assignment like this can be extended into simple essay-level work.
* Get students started with an **academic writing assignment** (levels 4-6).  Use an academic reading that relates to the topic for their essay as content for the lesson focus; this creates an easy transition to working on the writing assignment. Reported speech, conditionals, and complex clauses are ideal topics for this kind of writing.
* Get students writing a **letter or email** (all levels). This kind of assignment can be used for just about any topic.
* Have students write a **journal or blog** (all levels). The possibilities for structure focus are endless with this kind of activity.

The next day…

6 Options:  Choose your review activity

Think: What do they need to remember when using this structure?  Focus on the challenging material from the day before.

* **Editing activity.**  For early morning work, post sentences around the room or write one on the board; have students work in pairs or groups. Focus the learners on the structure they have just learned so that they improve their ability to notice the structure in meaningful contexts. When you make editing activities cumulative, they become good consolidation activities for multiple learned concepts.
* **Send a question around in a circle.**  Ex: What did you do yesterday? Tell students that no one can repeat an answer; if one is repeated, move to “What did you do two days ago?” and so on.  This works well with questions that require students to choose from possible tenses, remember a past tense irregular form, use gerunds or infinitives, etc.
* **Jeopardy or Tic-tac-toe** activity on the board; elicit the structure for each answer. You can use pictures or words and elicit sentences. Make sure that you focus on the meaning rather than arbitrary parroting of the form; the form can be elicited with pictures or other contextual information that requires the form you are teaching. Remember, though, that there is almost always more than one way to communicate a concept in English; accept answers that are given in grammatical English, whether or not they are exactly what you intended to elicit.
* **Multiple-choice fill in the blank around the room**; students answer questions on separate answer sheets. Give students one minute per question, and have them work individually. This gets them up and moving; it is also an excellent Accuplacer review, which is always a good selling point for EPI students.
* **Do a memory activity with simple uses of the structure**.  This helps students to make structures automatic. When learners' native language does not have morphology that is found in the target language, it takes a lot of focused practice before students can use the new morphology automatically. Ex:  Use this activity to practice automatizing third person ‘s’.  The first person says something they like; the second person adds on.  The second student says, “Ann likes chocolate.  I like apples.”  Keep going until someone forgets one; then start over.  This works well when you are teaching a structure that has a form that takes a while to acquire.
* **Build a monster sentence; then break it down.** This activity works well when students are beginning to learn how to use prepositional phrases, adjectives or clauses.  This is a good way to help students to notice constituents in longer sentences, and is also a good way to help students to write sentences of manageable length once they know enough about complex sentences "to be dangerous." Here are a few options:
  + Build it orally by starting with a simple sentence and having each student add a word and repeat the entire sentence. Continue to build on the sentence as long as students are able to remember the entire sentence. When the sentence is at its longest point, either elicit the sentence from the students or have a student write it on the board with the other students' help.
  + Begin with a simple sentence on the board. Students come to board one at a time and add an element. Once the sentence is a monster, work as a class to break it into sentences of appropriate length.
  + Begin with several simple sentences. Break students into pairs. Each pair adds a prepositional phrase, clause, etc., depending on what you are reviewing. Pass the cards around the class so that every pair has a chance to add to every sentence but one. When the sentences reach the last pair, have the final pair make sure that a sentence is grammatical. Have the pairs write the sentences on the board one at a time; then have the students break them down into multiple sentences, retaining the meaning of the original one.  This works best with advanced students, and can take up to 30 minutes if clauses are added.

Tips for student-centered homework checking:

* Combine homework checking with student communication by providing one answer sheet among groups of two or three students.
* Pair two weaker students with a stronger one to make mixed ability groups more effective (be sure to alternate this grouping with strong-strong groupings so that the stronger students do not get annoyed at having to constantly tutor their peers).  When using this kind of grouping, let students know that when you teach something, you learn it much better yourself.
* Encourage students to discuss questions with their partner before asking you; this helps students to gain confidence with the language and forces them not to rely on you as the sole user of the language in the classroom.

**Actually, that was 1,728 student-centered lessons.…**

and with a full syllabus of grammar structures, the possibilities are endless.  Have fun!

Top six mistakes NOT to make...

* DON'T try to teach everything about a grammar structure in one class. Plan to reinforce the grammar you teach multiple times after you introduce it, and plan to build on the basics multiple times. After teaching the structure, reinforce it by focusing on contrasts with other structures, different uses, and different contexts.
* DON'T expect students to learn a grammar structure and use it perfectly the first time they try. Set up activities so that your most motivated students (not your most talented language learners) are challenged but successful.
* DON'T run out of class time; have multiple short add-on activities available to reinforce learning if you have extra time. Start the longer, complex activities early in the class and make sure that the goals for the activities are achievable within the time that you have. Students’ attention will be very limited after class time has finished.
* DON'T use meta-language. There are some words that are needed to talk about grammar form, but it is easy to get carried away with grammar terminology. Remember that your students are not linguists; they want to be able to use the language successfully. Make sure that you stay focused on the use and explain the grammar in terms that make sense to your students.
* DON'T tell your students it is hard. Be encouraging and tell them that they will get it. Resist the temptation to tell your students that English is arbitrary and makes no sense. There are usually meaning-based reasons for structures within the discourse if not in the sentence. On the same note, if you are surprised that your students are getting it right and praise them constantly, they will grow to think that language learning is something out of the ordinary.
* DON'T ask "do you understand?" or "is that clear?" Instead, ask questions that check to see whether they understand. Their answer to your question should demonstrate to you whether they understand. For example, to see whether students understand present perfect tense, write the following sentence: "He has played chess." Then, ask "Is he playing chess now? Do you know when he played chess?"

More resources for student-centered grammar activities

Buttner, A. (2007). Activities, games and assessment strategies for the foreign language classroom. *Eye on Education.*

Gerngross, R. Puchta, H. and Thornbury, S. (2007). Teaching Grammar Creatively. *Helbling Languages.*

Kealey, J. and Inness, D. (2002). Grammar-Focused Shenanigames: Grammar-Focused Interactive ESL/EFL Activities and Games. *Pro Lingua Associates.*

Rinvolucri, M. and Davis, P. (1995). More Grammar Games: Cognitive, Affective and Movement Activities for EFL Students. *Cambridge University Press.*

Ur, P. (2009). Grammar Practice Activities: A Practical Guide for Teachers. *Cambridge University Press.*

Seibel, C. and Hodge, R. (1991). Building English Structures: A Communicative Course in English. *Prentice Hall Regents.*

Woodward, S. (1996). Fun with Grammar: Communicative Activities for the Azar Grammar Series, Teacher’s Resource Book. *Pearson Education ESL.*