Form-Focused Instruction

Most Asian students spend countless hours learning grammar structures in school. Unfortunately, for the most part, they are unable to transfer these grammatical structures into use in social conversations. The traditional teaching methodology in Asia, which focuses on rote memorization, has long been blamed for this inability to internalize grammar structures. EFL teachers have, as a result, aimed to adopt the communicative method as a means to help students automatize grammar forms.

However, in a typical conversation class, the teacher spends very little time on the *form* and *meaning* of a grammar point and a lot of time on the activities or *use* element. Can we teach grammar in such a way that second language learners can internalize the structures? Some argue that this can be achieved through Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) applied in tandem with the communicative method. This article defines FFI and expands on the sort of activities that might be useful to help students better internalize grammar forms.

> *FFI aims to naturally draw students' attention to form as it arises in lessons.*

Ellis (2001) defines *focus on form* as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (pp. 1-2). The primary purpose of this instruction is to naturally draw students' attention to form as it arises in lessons. There are different types of FFI activities that can be applied, depending on the difficulty of the target structure. However, they all differ from the form-meaning-use trilogy in that the target structure is not modeled to the students from the outset. The reasoning is that if target form is taught first, students will be more like robots during the meaning and use part of the lesson, and thus, the grammatical rules are less likely to become implicit grammatical knowledge. Following are the three types of FFI activities mentioned by Ellis (2003): comprehension activities, structure-based production activities, and consciousness-raising activities.

Let's say you were teaching a low-level class the structure of comparatives and superlatives. An example of an FFI comprehension activity would be to prepare a text in which target forms are frequently used and are essential to comprehension of the text as a whole. Next, a structure-based production activity could be given, differing from a comprehension activity in that the former is designed for students to use the target structure to complete the activity. Activities are designed so that using the target form makes completion of the activity easier. For some activities, it is essential that the form focused on be used to complete the activity. An example gap activity for this is called Who's Who? Students are given a picture of six people and different clues

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about each one. They have to ask each other questions using the form that is focused on to find out who is older than whom and who is the youngest, etc. Finally, an example of a consciousness-raising activity is to give students a story with many examples of the targeted structures. Students underline forms that have something in common (i.e., *-er* and *-est* words). Then the students try to find a grammatical rule on their own. Consciousness-raising activities are designed for students to induce and formulate the grammatical rules on their own and by interacting in small group work.

FFI has assisted me in helping students to actually acquire the language taught and used in class. Before, the grammar taught often did not stick with them. If I asked them to use the very same grammar points a few days later in a spontaneous speech, they are unable to produce the target form that went so smoothly a few days before. So, I have embedded a focus on form into the communicative activities I use to assist students in internalizing grammatical structures.

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Interpersonal Relationships

Many language learners find themselves frustrated by the nuances they miss in conversations with native speakers. Perhaps this is because many language classes focus on formal "school grammar" structures and to a lesser extent on the less formal structures of conversational English. Not only do the aforesaid structures need to be taught but so do the environments and situations in which they occur. There are implicit rules, rooted in interpersonal discussions that govern grammatical structure, which need to be taught.

Formal grammar, in large part, dictates the standardized rules of the written language. For instance, the rule to not apply the past participle when expressing a sentence in the simple past: "I *seen* that movie before." Or to not use the word *ain't* to express *isn't*.

Conversely, conversational grammar describes how a language is actually used in spoken discourse. This may not reflect the "conventional rules" of school grammar. For example, textbooks dictate that *will* is used at the time of speaking and *be going to* to state the intention of the speaker. Generally, this description also applies in the spoken language. Yet, depending on the interpersonal relationship between the speakers, which has much to do with politeness, this rule does not always apply. Such situations are endless; the following are just a couple of illustrations.

Situation 1: A hostess at a dinner party late in the evening states: *Oh dear, I think I am going to have to go to bed*. **Situation 2**: The speaker came specifically to a particular restaurant to try the burger, yet says: I'll *have the double cheeseburger, please*. In the first situation, the speaker made the decision while speaking. Thus, the general, school-grammar rule would dictate the use of *will* in this situation. Yet, the speaker uses *be going to*. Why? Most native speakers feel that using *think* and *be going to* together dilutes the directness of the phrase, and would therefore use this form to be more polite. In the second example, the speaker has gone to the restaurant to try the burger. The general grammar rule tells us that we use *be going to* for intention, when there is a definite plan. Therefore, in this case, *be going to* is the correct form to use. However, we customarily use *will*, which expresses a sort of personal detachment that is dictated by the server-customer relationship.

Students are very aware of the interpersonal relationships that exist in the Korean language, which is heavily nuanced with changes to verb and noun forms. They need to be aware that these interpersonal relationships also exist in English, albeit in a different way. Few teaching materials contain the grammar rules that address interpersonal relationships such as the above example. This is because the spoken language has historically been seen as a sort of informal, inferior version of the "official"

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language and a threat to established grammatical structures. Yet, the distinct use of spoken-language grammar rules can inhibit learners' comprehension or ability to be understood. Accordingly, we need to go beyond merely teaching common grammar structures in the classroom and address how interpersonal relationships in a given environment can influence these grammar structures.

Activities can be built to have students focus on such rules. For example, take parts of a conversation and instruct students to: 1) Underline places where they think the formal rules are not being used. 2) Specify whether it is an informal or formal situation, and (3) explain why. 4) Discuss rules that can be inferred. 5) Make a short role play using the interpersonal rules identified.

Teachers often assume that communication in social contexts with native speakers will naturally ensue if they employ a communicative method which includes the *form*, *meaning*, and *use* trinity dictated by formal grammar. However, this alone does not address many of the interpersonal relationships that guide the spoken language. Situational influences should be taught in tandem with the grammar rules to enable learners to have a better feeling for the spoken language.

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Truth & Lies

As a warmer, I like to use PowerPoint to illustrate many grammar elements, such as the present perfect, when technology is available. Yet the same objective can be reached through the use of handouts. For example, beside my rainbow-colored timelines, I have a funny image of Lee Hyori with dollar signs and music notes coming out of her mouth and ears as a way of explaining the use of the present perfect to express an accomplishment that one has made at an unspecified time in the past. Below the picture of Lee Hyori are the sentences: "She has made over 10 million dollars" and "She has sung in Busan over 20 times." The students love it and tell me how the colored pictures and PowerPoint presentation make the explanation interesting and therefore easily retainable.

Opportunities to focus on meaning and use, not only form, are essential for grammar acquisituin.

Truth and Lies: A Game for the Present Perfect

After going over the form, meaning, and use of the present perfect via the PowerPoint presentation, it is time to get students to actually use the language. I find the present perfect challenges students in both use and meaning. The concepts of unspecified time in the past and of applying the past participle correctly when speaking are invariably hurdles for students. This simple activity, which I call Truth and Lies, involves students using all four skills with the present perfect and works as a great ice breaker to this difficult grammar. In the end, it aids students in understanding its use compared to the simple past. It also gets them out of their seats and moving around in a fun way! Through the written homework, reading, creating impromptu sentences, and final feedback, students are pushed to use the target grammar, which helps them overcome their difficulties with the present perfect.

Here is the way it works. First, for homework I have students write three sentences about themselves, using the present perfect with time markers such as *never, always, rarely*, etc. One of their three sentences must be a lie. This step allows practice with *form*. Then, at the beginning of the next class, each student is given five chips. The students get up and randomly take turns reading their three sentences to other students along with one new sentence using the present perfect made on the spot. This new sentence is thus not rehearsed. The listener has to guess which sentence is a lie. If the guess is correct, then the reader must give the listener one chip. If the listener is wrong, then the reader must surrender a

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chip. The students move around the class taking turns reading and guessing while the teacher monitors. Students return back to their seats, and count their chips. The student with the most chips is the class champion! At this point, the teacher can provide feedback on mistakes noted. The activity gives students an opportunity to focus on the *meaning* and *use* of the present perfect as they are constructing their own sentences and receiving feedback through peer interaction and the teacher's feedback. Other *meanings* and *uses* of the present perfect, such as talking about an action which started in the past and continues to the present, and talking about a past action that has the result in the present, can follow in subsequent lessons or be presented all together depending on the students' level.

I like to give the winner a small token. This motivates students to interact with as many other classmates as possible for the duration of the activity. It works as great positive reinforcement. It is a push that students do not even realize is happening as they are moving about the class using the target language.

Truth and Lies can be adapted for many grammar forms and can even be incorporated with extended discourse for higher levels, rather than being restricted to sentences only.

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Colorless Green Grammar Games

While still a fiercely debated construct, Noam Chomsky's theory of "Universal Grammar" (UG) has given linguists plenty of food for thought since it was put forth in the 1950s. For those readers not familiar with UG, here is the basic premise: Even before the age of five, children without any formal instruction can consistently form and understand sentences that they have never even heard before. Moreover, native speakers of English can instantly recognize that a string like "KOTESOL organization an is" is not accurate English, although we have a sense of what it could mean. UG, then, is a set of unconscious constraints, a type of pre-organization of language, that is innate in all humans and that lets us make decisions on what is grammatical and what is not when learning our first language. How UG relates to second language acquisition is less clear and has been the subject of much speculation and controversy. Do second language learners have the same unconscious constraints? If so, how is it that they create sentences that they have never heard before but that a native speaker would instantly recognize as incorrect? Do we "switch off" our UG parameters for an L2?

Questions abound, but while linguists hash it out at conferences, people have been having some fun with UG. In particular, Chomsky's famous phrase: "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" has had mass appeal. It was composed to show how a sentence can be syntactically correct but semantically nonsensical, thereby displaying the inadequacy of probabilistic models of grammar. Fifty-three years since its inception, the phrase has entered the realm of popular culture, from t-shirt logos to band names (the Colorless Green Ideas have finally left their garage in Ghent, Belgium). Second language educators, too, have brought the phrase to the classroom.

One use of the sentence is to have students start or end a poem with it, much as Clive James did in his anti-Vietnam-war poem "A Line and a Theme from Noam Chomsky." In addition, learners can take the British Council's "Chomsky Challenge" (http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-chomsky-challenge-3.htm). The BC contends that humans will always assume that there is meaning in everything that people say or write. They therefore challenge anyone to write in a so-called nonsensical sentence for which they will find an acceptable context (with a warning that the site does contain lies). The site has some particularly funny "explanations."

Kevin Griffith (http://www.ateg.org/conferences/c6/griffith.htm) uses Chomsky's sentence and others to introduce the fun of surrealist poetry to advanced students of grammar. Using another famous "nonsensical" example, Andre Breton's "The Exquisite Corpse," (*le cadavre exquis*), the game can be played by two or three players. The object of the game is for each player to follow a set sentence pattern. One

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person writes down in a column three versions of the first three slots (article, adjective, noun); that person then folds the paper so that the next person cannot see what is written. The second person then jots down three verbs, folds the paper again, and passes it to the third person, who writes out three versions of the final noun phrases. The key is that in writing the words, each person must fold over the paper. When the final sentence is unveiled, students discover "some witty, yet strangely poignant lines which embody the surrealist spirit."

As Griffith points out, since the poems may not make semantic sense but do make grammatical sense, they demonstrate the underlying, mechanistic nature of language, making this a particularly useful game when reviewing form and structure. The game can also be adapted to various lesson plans.

The relationship between UG and SLA still is not clear, and researchers continue to investigate this big, important area. While they do, why not let your students unleash their inner poet, semanticist, and philosopher by pondering the great question: Can colorless green ideas sleep furiously?

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Lyrical Grammar

Bésame. Bésame mucho, como si fuera esta noche la ultima vez. (Kiss me. Kiss me a lot, as if tonight were for the last time). It has been almost twenty years since I took my first Spanish class, but amazingly, I can still remember the grammar lesson in which this lyric helped me to learn the Spanish subjunctive. Sometimes even now, when choosing between the indicative and subjunctive moods, that same lyric will pop to mind. It is a testimony to the powerful role of song in language learning.

Most teachers know that songs are great language learning tools and that there is no shortage of songs from which to choose. However, in some language courses, songs are considered mere supplements and might be covered too quickly and randomly, without time for language practice or discussion. In the case of academic courses, songs may be for "edutainment," with lyrics hastily downloaded and photocopied for time-filling lessons on days after important tests. This is a mistake. Considering the mnemonic staying power of a lyric, it is worth choosing songs carefully, integrating them properly into a curriculum, creating detailed exercises to accompany them, and attaching accountability to the content and language of song lessons.

> *Considering the mnemonic staying power of a lyric, it is worth choosing songs carefully.*

If teachers are having difficulty finding an appropriate song for a certain course unit or justifying using a song in an academic learning environment, a grammatical approach might be useful. To help fit songs into a course based on grammar points, the free and user-friendly *Musical English Lessons* web site is an invaluable tool (http://www.musicalenglishlessons. org). Upon entering the web site, clicking on the "For Teachers of English" link brings up an index categorized by grammar structures. Each song has a variety of worksheets and answer keys, with a different focus to each exercise, and a proficiency grading. For example, Queen's *We Are the Champions* has three different listening practice sheets: for spelling and pronunciation (pre-intermediate), present perfect (pre-intermediate to intermediate), and common phrases (intermediate or upper-intermediate). It also has exercises on prepositions and particles (intermediate / upper intermediate), a faux-interview matching exercise (post-intermediate to advanced), and the full lyrics.

For example, with the present perfect sheet, the students listen and fill in the blanks on the lyrics sheet before them. Here is an example from the present perfect sheet: Verse 1 (1) _____ *my dues, time after time.* (2) _____ *my sentence, but committed no crime / And bad mistakes, I've made a few.* (3) _____ *my share of sand kicked in my face, But* (4) _____ .

In the faux interview, Freddie Mercury sings a line (one of a pair of students can read the line out), and then the reporter (the other student) responds to it, either from a list of choices (see the box below) or with their own question. For example:

Freddie: I've paid my dues, time after time.
Reporter: (1) _____ .
Freddie: I've done my sentence, but committed no crime.
Reporter: (2) _____ .

The Reporter's Responses to Choose From

A: You weren't expecting life to be easy, were you?
B: Yes, we all know you've been an actor
C: Are you saying you have been to prison for no good reason?
D: That's a good way of looking at things.
E: What type of dues?
F: What sort of mistakes?

Looking at the examples, it is easy to see how, with the right language-focus exercises, a song could provide appropriate, hard-hitting grammar practice for any class. As long as the teacher ensures that the vocabulary is appropriately glossed and that students will be accountable for knowing and understanding the lyrics (e.g., a lyric dictation or grammar focus on a test), songs can go into any serious course and may, indeed, be the most memorable part of a class.

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Web Sites and Learner Training

The other day, I saw a Korean grammar structure that I can only faintly recognize and could not quite figure out how to use. As one of the weaker students in my Korean class, I hesitate to bug my teacher with my grammar questions, so I asked her if she knew of any helpful resources. She mentioned that there was a grammar book available in the stores, but what I really wanted was a nice, convenient, free web site. Unfortunately, there was nothing she could think of.

There are plenty of helpful Korean language-learning sites, but I am not aware of any that are exclusively for grammar points. However, there are heaps of grammar sites for learners of English. Whether your class is grammar-based (in which case a web site could help students have advanced, remedial, or just extra practice) or is completely unfocused on observation of forms (in which case a web site could help those students who are interested in what you are not covering), it is in the best interest of everyone involved in the learning process for teachers to know where learners can access extra information about grammar. Below are a couple of examples of the many sites out there and some tips on how to use them.

> ## There are heaps of grammar sites for learners of English.

Usingenglish.com
In the "Quizzes" section of this handy web site, online quizzes can be easily transformed into printable handouts or answer sheets at the click of a button. Divided into beginner and intermediate categories, the quizzes test learners on common errors between similar forms, such as between *many* and *many of*.

Edufind.com
This site has some clear and visually attractive charts for students, with lots of examples in each category. Sometimes there are over a dozen examples, more than a teacher could easily come up with, probably more than are in the grammar section of your textbook, and while fewer than in a corpus, all are graded. Unfortunately, some of the information is not quite complete (e.g., under "Determiners" it says that we do not use the definite article (*the*) with uncountable nouns, which is not true), and you need to go to another section to take the tests. However, the online quizzes themselves are brightly colored and suitably graded. Also, it is handy that there is an explanation before the test, and for each wrong answer an explanation pops up.

What can a teacher do with such online exercises?
1) Make a list of handy sites (or direct students to: http://www.rong-chang.com/grammar.htm which, with links to other sites, could give students plenty to look at) and distribute the list for students' and parents' reference, noting the list on the first day. 2) Get students to notice a rule inductively by doing preview exercises the night before a grammar lesson. 3) Post or email a link to the relevant section right before any grammar lessons or right after handing back feedback from a writing assignment. 4) Create a webquest with links to grammar sites. (An example of a webquest question is "Go to Usingenglish.com/ and click on the 'Quizzes' section. What is the answer to question 4 in the 'Many vs. Many of' category?") 5) Print out the worksheets and use them as in-class handouts, quizzes, or games. (To turn a handout into a game, remember three basic factors: a) competition (a clear way to win), b) speed, and c) surprise (e.g., turning papers over, guessing, or using dice). 6) Have students evaluate sites. 7) Learner training: Have learners contrast a decontextualized sentence to a passage with the grammar point. Which is easier to grasp?

> ## To turn a grammar handout into a game, remember: competition, speed, and surprise.

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Grammar Cards

While writing sentences can help students to consolidate vocabulary and structures, it can quickly become boring and repetitive. This is where grammar cards can help. They are tactile and can be rearranged, and they feel "game-like," while still being useful to review structures like word order. Moreover, when students make their own cards, they can drill vocabulary they have learned in class.

Group Language Kits: 2-4 students
Before a new semester, get some tissue boxes for the kits, and buy some elastic bands to keep the card categories together. Starting the kits can be a bit work-intensive, but this will pay off later. The cards can be made from recipe cards cut into thirds or on small word cards found in stationery shops. But since colored cards are more desirable, light construction paper and a paper cutter can be ideal. Take a couple of hours one afternoon to chop up piles of blank cards (at least 15 to an A4 sheet) - pink for nouns or noun phrases, blue for verbs (use the base form), yellow for adjectives, purple for adverbs or adverbial phrases (e.g., "last year"), green for prepositions, orange for pronouns, and so on. Keep white paper for question words, idioms, articles, conjunctions, quantifiers like "many," small morphemes like "-s," "-en," "-ly," "un-" or "-ing," and other types of language. Keep inseparable phrasal verbs like "get off" (the bus) on one card. For separable phrasal verbs like "shut off," have students write them together on one card and then use scissors to cut a puzzle-like line between them so that they can be separated or matched up.

Have students focus on word order.

To save some time, provide groups with a starter-kit of blank cards at first (give more of the noun, verb, and adjective cards, less of the other kinds) and have them make their own blank cards later in the semester. Decide how many categories you want, depending on the age, language level of the learners, and kinds of activities that you will be doing. Have learners make lots of copies of words like "the," "and," "to," and "not," as well as punctuation marks. Also, make sure the words are in lower-case. Students can add capital letters when they rewrite the sentences they make.

An alternate system is to provide students with white blank cards for adverbs, adjectives, and verbs, and for you to lend them a laminated kit of prepositions, modals, question words, etc. for activities. Or, have students focus only on word order using a skeleton of form words, adding the function words later as they rewrite sentences. Decide how students will add to the kits: Will they do it in class or for homework? At the end of a day, week, or unit? How will you ensure that the groups all have the words they need for any given activity? Also, is there classroom space for the language kits?

In addition to providing sentence practice, the versatile kits also work well for any flashcard game like a speed quiz. *Note*: When students are making sentences, have them say aloud any changes they would need to make, such as capital letters at the beginning of sentences or irregular past tense verb changes. Also, since words often need to get repeated in sentences, students can make temporary extra copies of needed words on little strips of scrap paper.

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Example Activities (a) **Timed Sentences**: The scoring is what makes game fun. Within five minutes, students need to use as many cards as possible to make complete sentences. Change up the scoring system every time, e.g., give 1 point per card, but double points for sentences longer than six words; or give points for the funniest, longest, or most complicated sentence. (b) **Copy-cat / Dictagloss**: Put a sentence up on the board or read it aloud and see who can reproduce it the fastest with their cards. (c) **Add-on**: Put a simple sentence on the board (e.g., "I like chocolate"). Have students add to it to make the longest sentence possible out of their cards. (d) **Conversation Stations**: Students form a discussion question and leave it on the desk. When you say "Switch," groups travel to the next station and have a discussion.

These are just a few examples of what you can do with the grammar cards, but let your imagination go to work and you can create many more.

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Part 2: Treating Errors

The previous *Grammar Glammar* article focused on the debate regarding the treatment of grammar errors in writing tasks. I share Ferris' belief that studies support some sort of error treatment. But what techniques are beneficial? Alas, as in all TESOL-related matters, there is no one-size-fits-all technique for dealing with errors, and the jury is still out on the relative effectiveness of more-salient vs. less-salient forms of correction. General tips are limited to suggestions for dealing with errors before, while, and after marking written assignments.

1) *Make grammar count sometimes, but not all of the time.* It is a great idea for students in any course to do writing that will not be assessed. Writing has different purposes in learning, and accuracy does not always need to be a focus. But if we never grade for grammatical accuracy, we may be discouraging proper editing. Even motivated students need a kick-start sometimes.

2) *Teach and remind students of good editing practices* before they start working on assignments. It is hard for writers to get going if they are trying to correct their grammar along the way. The good news is that since sentences can be cut later, grammar should be among the last to get edited. Content and organization comes first, so encourage students to get those ideas down and revise later.

3) *Rubrics help.* When students get rubrics before an assignment, they can clearly see the teacher's expectations and have an editing checklist, which leads to fewer errors in the final product. Creating rubrics also helps the teacher to think about what they want and makes grading faster and more accurate. Carefully consider the weighting of categories, and make it a reflection of classwork. In my students' paragraph assignments, the grammar category is worth 5/30 marks: enough that an unedited assignment would not get an A, but not so much that grammar overshadows the importance of content, structure, and clarity. Remember, rubrics are a great way to give positive feedback without having to write as much.

4) *Correction codes can help with noticing.* But they can help only if they are used consistently, if students clearly understand the codes, and if writers are given a reason to look at the markings you have made and revise their work.

5) *Conference if you can.* Certain grammar items benefit from explicit written feedback. In addition, five minutes of conferencing can be more effective than the written feedback alone. Note: When conferencing, instead of handing back a paper and beginning to talk about it right away, leave students time to re-familiarize themselves with what they wrote. And start conferences with students' questions.

6) *Sooner is better.* When choosing assignment due dates, plan carefully for faster feedback.

7) *Ask for double spacing, and teach what that is.* Put a mention about double spacing in the grading rubric so that you will not have yourself to blame if you have no space for comments.

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8) *Use pencil or a color other than red.* Teachers make mistakes, too. If the student's work is already in pencil, use pink, green, or any color but red (the official color for "This is wrong").

9) *Praise grammar well done.* Whether students have correctly used a grammar point you have worked on in class or have taken risks and attempted complex structures, give learners credit! Likewise, when creating error identification exercises based on a class's work, include some of the great sentences students have made as correct examples.

10) *Comment on content, too.* It is crushing to give your thoughts and emotions to your teacher and get no comment about them. Even a quick "Interesting thought!" or "Good point!" or "Amazing story!" is better than no comment, plus a page full of circled errors. Whether we are treating grammar errors or not, let us always remind students that we do care about what they have to say.

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Written Grammar "Correction"

In the field of ELT, unsolved mysteries abound. For those of us who teach writing skills, one of the most pertinent and disputed questions involves the treatment of errors. Should we "correct" learners' written grammatical errors or not? For anyone who has spent long Saturdays in a Dunkin' Donuts huddled over piles of student papers, the question is especially relevant. Are we just wasting our time? Worse, are we wasting students' time, too?

The debate has been raging for some time now. On the "anti-correction" side, John Truscott very famously cited prior research and concluded that studies simply haven't shown that error feedback facilitates learning. In fact, some researchers believe that correction can be disheartening and confusing to students. Although writing students and language programs may expect teachers to show their professionalism through grammar correction, the conclusion of many researchers has been that time spent on content feedback would be better justified.

The Great Debate: Is error correction effective?

Yet many teachers insist that grammar feedback does make a difference. Is this just stubbornness or is there evidence to support this feeling? Researchers like Dana Ferris believe that there is evidence. While debating Truscott's position, Ferris not only pointed to positive evidence of the benefits of grammar correction, but maintained that Truscott's review of the research was incomplete. Five years later, adding empirical research to an extensive literature review, Ferris further concluded that second language learners, adults in particular, need their errors made salient and explicit to them. Since then, other academics like Jean Chandler, have added compelling evidence suggesting that teacher feedback on errors is indeed beneficial.

However, even Ferris admits that the existing research base is still inadequate, with too few longitudinal studies. Most teachers recognize that error feedback helps students improve from the first draft to the second one of the same paper. But what we really want to know is: Will learners transfer that knowledge to their next composition? Will they be better at the end of a full year of error correction? And importantly, will they be better than someone who has not received any error correction? Ferris points out a key flaw in the design of many studies, the absence of a control group. Too few studies, she states, compare the writing of students who have received grammar correction with that of students who have not. So we actually know very little about what happens in the long term if we do not give learners error feedback compared to what happens if we do. In the end, Ferris and Truscott do agree on something: More research should be done.

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Research is ongoing, but it will take years for longitudinal studies to reveal their results. What are we teachers and our students to do in the meantime? Personally, I find the evidence in favor of error feedback convincing and agree that until further notice, we need to identify ways of addressing learner errors and establish these as an integral part of our teaching practice.

However, papers like Ferris' do not do much to address what this error correction should actually look like. This brings me to the other giant grammar question in L2 writing: If we do support the idea that some kind of error treatment is beneficial, what *method* should we use? This is yet another extremely relevant question for writing instructors, and one which I will attempt to address in my next column. In the meantime, I advise all writing teachers out there to keep abreast of the latest research in this all-important debate. Whatever our position on error feedback may be, we should at least have an informed approach to taking that position.

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Good, Old-Fashioned Drills

Recently, a teacher-in-training mentioned how she had avoided putting any kind of repetitive grammar practice into her demo lesson. "I know that as a language teacher I need to consider these things," she reflected, "but I just don't know how to make grammar drills interesting." Years ago, I gave some KOTESOL workshops about grammar drills. Her words prompted me to go back to my notes from those workshops, which I have condensed here.

Why drill at all? Isn't that "anti-communicative"? Didn't drills follow the demise of audiolingualism? I will not get into the giant questions about where controlled grammar practice fits into a curriculum, but I do want to mention some benefits of drilling. It can help with confidence, familiarization, comprehension checking, automatization, and energy (whole class oral drills can be an exciting affair). Moreover, while we often think of drilling as accuracy practice, it can also lead to greater fluency - having chunks of language on hand helps learners get their message out faster.

Types of Drills
There are many types of drills, and they can all be made extremely boring or quite exhilarating. **Repetition** drills can take the form of jazz chants. **Substitution** drills can involve interesting picture prompts instead of word prompts. **Transformation** drills can get students to provide missing information. **Chain** drills can lead to fun storytelling (A: "If we had a million dollars, we could buy a mansion." B: "If we bought a mansion, we could include a giant pool." C: ...). Information gaps like "**Find someone who** ..." drills are an interesting way to practice questions. ("Have you ever ridden a camel?" / "Have you ever seen a ghost?") **Surveys and questionnaires** can personalize a grammar structure. **Sentence completion** can drill any grammar point while leading to wonderful thought-sharing and exciting stories.

Motivators
The motivators that improve a grammar drill really apply to any sort of language teaching. 1) Make the **topic** of a sentence or question interesting. 2) Consider the **task**: Problem-solving drills, info-gaps, and game-like competition make for more stimulating drills. 3) Bring in **variety**. Even the place in the lesson where you drill can change - try mixing up the three "Ps" in a PPP lesson. 4) **Visual focus** can mean using pictures, gestures, and movie clips. 5) **Interactivity** spices up any lesson and involves more practice - get students to Q and A each other. 6) **Personalization** makes a

difference. 7) The **teacher's demeanor** also matters. Do you look bored and cranky or engaged and positive? 8) **Safety** is an issue. Students need space to make mistakes without embarrassment, so avoid randomly pointing at one student out of thirty and asking her to instantly conjugate a verb. 9) Finally, **feedback** matters.

Points to Consider
In addition to the motivators, there are a number of other points to consider when drilling grammar. Will students practice speaking, writing, listening, and reading? Will they drill form, meaning, and use? How much

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of a prompt will you give the students? Will students practice different subjects (not just "you" or "I"), phrase order, negatives, and questions? Have you limited vocabulary to words that students already know (reducing the cognitive load)? If using commercially produced materials, have you adequately presented the structures or meanings that students will drill? Have you integrated speed into the drill? (At some point, students will need to be able to do things quickly). Is the language natural? Who will lead the drill - only the teacher, or sometimes the students? How will learners get feedback?

Perhaps most importantly, we need to consider what our expectations will be after the drill. We know drilling is not enough, and that people don't jump from a simple drill to fluent, accurate speech and writing. Just as ballet dancers practice at the bar, communicators of all proficiencies and ages can benefit from drilling. The dancers' true test is in their performances, and language learners' in conversations or writing pieces. Drilling just helps everyone get there.

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Practicing the Past

Activities to practice talking about the past never go out of style. Once students have seen simple past, present perfect, past continuous, past perfect, used to, and would for habits in the past, they need a variety of activities to mix everything up and observe differences. It's easy enough just to have students talk about their weekends or past vacations, but it's always good to have something a little different on hand. That's where these activities, all taken from the grammar section of the "Idea Cookbook," part of *Dave's ESL Cafe*, can come in handy.

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Used To

This activity practices used to for habitual actions in the past. Students each get a strip of paper, with a fake life-changing "event." They then tell the group three things that they did or didn't use to do. The group tries to guess what the event was, asking *Did you use to . . .?* questions when possible. Unusual and surprising events include: Three months ago, you had your first baby; Five years ago, you were found guilty of robbery; six weeks ago, you won the lottery; one year ago, you retired from your job; two years ago, you met the man/woman of your dreams; one month ago, you won an Olympic gold medal in sumo wrestling. Variation: Students invent a life-changing event for another student to present to the class. (*Submitted by Bernadette Kelly of Belfast, UK.*)

What Did They Do?

Judith C. Shaffer of Tegucigalpa, Honduras submitted this game for practicing the simple past. Compile a list of at least twenty different names of famous people. Divide the class into teams. The first team gives you a number. Find the number's corresponding name on your list of famous people and read it aloud. The team makes a sentence to answer the question *What did s/he do to become famous?* The answer really needs to show what the person did to become famous. (So, *He lived in England* would not be good for Shakespeare, but *He wrote* Hamlet would be a good answer). To really practice different verbs, prohibit the verb *to be* from the game (*He was a writer*). Scoring: a correct answer in less than 30 seconds = 2 points, 1 minute = 1 point, incorrect answer = minus 1 point, pass = 0 points (the next team can take a shot at it). Note: You can check out the full description of the game online for a list of famous names. For a faster pace, simply change those answer time limits.

Cut and Past

Simon Mumford of Izmir, Turkey wrote in this clever idea for showing the difference between simple past and present perfect. Although it is not a practice activity, it would be very useful in the presentation stage or as a reminder just before you go into practice games. Tie a piece of string to a door handle. Have one student hold the other end of the string. On the board, write this dialogue:

> Have you been to France?
> Yes, I have.
> When did you go?

Two students read the dialogue. Cut the string as soon as they get to "did." This reminds students why we replace the present perfect with the past tense: The connection with the past is clearly broken.

Tobasco Treat

This one is for kids or teens and would truly spice up long afternoons with those SAT exam preparation books. It would be particularly useful for reviewing irregular past tense changes or differences between two different past tense forms. Write out a story of about ten sentences on the blackboard or projector. Make one or two errors with the past tense in each sentence. Stand in front of the class with a cup of tomato juice and a bottle of tobasco sauce. The class works together or in teams to find the mistakes in the story. For each mistake that students correct, pour a little tobasco sauce into the cup. When they have found all of the mistakes, congratulate the class, and *one shot* your spicy tobasco treat! (*Anonymous*)

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Grammar by Example

Whether to accompany the examples from your textbook or simply to personalize language for your classes, chances are at some point you're going to make up some grammar examples of your own. It's hard to make up good examples on the spot, so most of us need to spend time planning them out.

Here's a checklist of what to look for when you're creating great grammar examples:

☐ *Are the examples clear?* Is the vocabulary familiar to students? Can the examples be generalized, or do they show rare cases? Do all of your examples show the actual point in question? Is there enough context to make the meaning obvious?

☐ *Are there enough examples?* Will students be able to use the language in other contexts? Three examples for each point are better than one.

☐ *Are the examples easy to see?* Patricia Byrd et al. (2002) found that students preferred it when examples were (a) written in a different typeface from other materials in the text; (b) easy to find by being set apart from the rest of the text; and (c) put into charts and boxes.

☐ *Are the examples authentic?* If you made up the example yourself, are you sure that this is language that other people actually use? Does the language sound natural? Did you use the Internet or a language corpus to find the language?

☐ *Are the examples relevant?* Will they engage students? Will they help to spice up a grammar lesson? Are they age-appropriate? Are they culturally relevant? [For more tips, check out Byrd et al.'s online article, see references.]

Busting Stereotypes

Sharpling (2002) makes a great point about examples: Grammar presentation can be used to raise awareness of diversity. TESOL educators have various ways of bringing diversity into the classroom. We often give lessons on English as an international language. Our listening material may feature speakers with different accents, and the pictures we use may reflect people of different shapes, sizes, and skin colors. In addition to all these areas, we also need to think of the grammar examples we create. Sharpling reminds us of a number of areas to watch out for.

■**Names**: *John comes from Canada.* →*Mohammed comes from Canada.* Do Peter, Michael, Karen, Mary, and Lisa keep popping up in your handouts? Are the only non-Anglo names Korean? When was the last time Jayashri, Shomari, Keiko, Alonso, or Zoya appeared in a grammar lesson?

■**Gender Roles**: *His mother works at the stock exchange. / Maarten has been a florist since 1998./ Patrick enjoys staying home with his two children./ Mario spent two hours ironing clothes. / Ji-hye can jump higher than Han-sol.*

■**Socio-economic Class**: *Elise, whose dad was a sanitation worker, is studying law. / Li Wei, Dr. Chan's son, loves working at the building site.*

■**English Ability/Eloquence:** *Omar's speech was powerful and touching./ Dr. Lee helped Jenna with her essay on Shakespeare. / Tapiwa's students appreciate her funny examples in English class.*

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■ **Physical Ability**: *Huong goes to work by wheelchair./ Pierre has had the same guide dog for ten years. / "I disagree with the new policy on computer use," Emma signed.*

■**Sexual Orientation**: *Mario and Jim have been dating for five years./ Marietta and Janelle are clearly in love. / Makiko might bring her partner to the party.*

[For more examples and the reasoning behind them, refer to Sharpling's online article, see references.]

As Sweet (1964) reminds us about grammar learning, "The rules are mere stepping-stones to the understanding of the examples…" (pp. 131). The examples are what it's all about. That's why we, as teachers and materials designers, need to take time to create examples that are clear, accurate, relevant, and enlightening.

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Trendy Grammar: Describing Graphs

Your business English students are no doubt very familiar with the vocabulary that goes along with describing economic trends. Even upper-beginners have been known to use terms like *skyrocket*, *plummet*, and *slight fluctuation*. The tricky part comes when it is time to make sentences. If you are seeing sentences like this: **In 1998, prices skyrocket, but now slight fluctuation, and in future plummet*, then it might be time to work on the grammar of trend description.

Prepositions

Sometimes preposition errors do not make much of a difference to the meaning of a sentence. **I'll see you on August* might not be right, but we get the gist. When describing trends, however, prepositions matter. **The population increased two million people* is not clear: Did it rise TO or BY two million? Before focusing on verbs, it is worthwhile for students to check out common graph prepositions: *from/to* + a number or time expression; *between/and* + time expression; *by* an amount, *in* a year. Try this info-gap practice activity: Students sit back-to-back and fill in blank graphs with the information their partners describe. To focus only on the prepositions, limit the vocabulary to "increase" and "decrease" and use just one verb tense. Also, try this online quiz which focuses entirely on graph prepositions: http://www.admc.hct.ac.ae/hd1/english/graphs/prepquiz3.htm
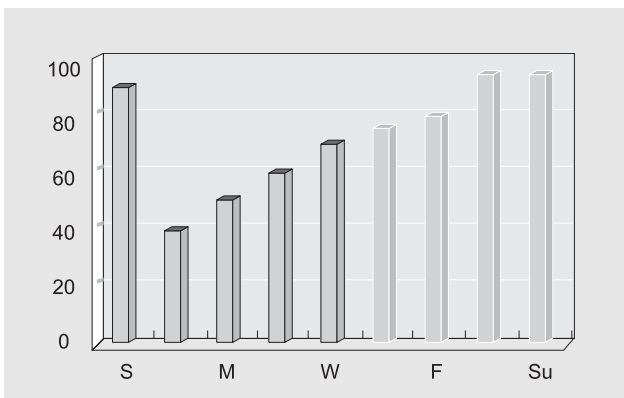

Figure 1: Sujin's Enjoyment Levels

Verbs: Fun Graphs

Bar graphs are a wonderful way to review verb tenses. You can focus on any tense you want by just altering the dates on the x-axis. If students are already familiar with all of the tenses, extend the graph's time period to include the past, present, and future. As a practice activity, try Fun Graphs: Students create graphs which detail the level of fun they have been having. Imagine, for example, that today is Tuesday, and Sujin is describing how much fun she has been having in the past week, e.g., "As you can see from this chart, last Saturday, my overall level of enjoyment *started off* well at 90%. However, the next day it *dropped* to about 40% because I got a cold. Since then, it *has been increasing* steadily, and because I'm almost over the cold, my level of enjoyment *is* now at about 70%. From Thursday to this weekend, my health *will probably improve*, and I*'ll be having* more fun than I did last weekend" (Fig. 1).

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Again, if you want to focus only on particular tenses, keep the vocabulary constant (*increase/decrease*). Note that while it can be very useful to review verbs and prepositions by describing each point on the graph, do ensure that students are asked to give an overview of the graph to get practice in describing the overall trend. Also, be sure to draw the students' attention to the types of words they are learning - are they nouns or verbs? If they are nouns, what verbs would go with them? How would they fit with adverbs? A vocabulary journal can help with this. For neatly structured photocopiables from Oxford University Press, visit the web site http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/elt/catalogue/0-19-431517-7-b.pdf. For a selection of graphs and exercises, go to http://www.eslflow.com/describinggraphstables.html/

Learning vocabulary is more than just word recognition.

Remember: While business students and IELTS candidates surely need to work on the grammar of graphs, practicing trend description is beneficial for any learner. Consider incorporating some graphs into general classes, and see how trendy grammar can be become.

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Wishes and Hopes

"*I wish the quiz tomorrow will be easy." If you've heard utterances similar to this a lot and are wondering about the differences between *wish* and *hope*, here are a few tips.

Meaning Michael Swan (1984, pp. 122, 136) explains the difference in meaning between *hope* and *wish*. "If I *hope* for something, I want it to happen, but I am not sure that

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it will, and I can do nothing about it. *Wishing* (usually) is wanting something that is impossible, or that doesn't seem probable - being sorry that things are not different." Many teachers explain that *wish* is harder to achieve, and that *hope* is more likely, but to me "being sorry that things are not different" - that tinge of regret - is the true key to wishes. The classic example uses the weather. Draw two pictures on the board: Mr. Hopeful and Mr. Wishful. Mr. Hopeful is outside, looking up at the cloudy sky. He says: "I hope it doesn't rain. I haven't brought an umbrella with me, and if it rains, I'll get all wet." In the other picture, Mr. Wishful is standing in a downpour. He says, "I wish it weren't raining. I haven't brought an umbrella with me, and I'm getting all wet."

Here are some more examples of *hope* with future meaning: *I hope she calls me back today.* (I want her to call, but I can't control it). *We all hope you get the job.* (We want you to get it, but we can't control whether you do or don't.) *I hope the movie is good.* (I want it to be good, but who knows?) Examples of *wish* with present meaning: *I wish I had a billion dollars.* (But I don't, and I probably never will.) *He wishes he knew more vocabulary.* (But he doesn't, and now he's having trouble with the test.) *I wish you wouldn't look at me that way.* (But you are, and I can't make you stop.)

Form When students understand the meaning of present *hopes* and *wishes*, they can start to look at some different forms that go with them.

Hope Structures

hope for + object	I'm *hoping* for an A on the test.
hope + infinitive	I *hope* to get an A on the test. (Can be used for same-subject sentences.)
hope + (*that*) clause	I *hope (that)* I get an A on the test.
hope so	A: Will you get an A? B: I *hope so.*

Wish Structures

To express wishes about the present: subject + *wish* + past tense.

> *I wish the world was more peaceful.* (*Were* is used in a more formal context)
> *She wishes she had straight hair. She hates her curly hair.*
> *I wish something interesting would happen. I'm bored!*

To express wishes about the past (regrets): subject + *wish* + past perfect.

> *I wish we had won the game last week. We didn't, and now we won't play in the finals.*
> *He wishes he hadn't eaten all that cake. Now his stomach hurts.*

Note about forms: (a) Work on *hope* and *wish* during different lessons. When students have had some practice with each, then work on contrasting them. (b) If you are just working on the error we saw at the beginning, "*I wish the quiz tomorrow will be easy," you will need to point out one main difference. *Wish* is *not* followed by the present or future tense. *Hope* can be followed by the present or the future tense, but refers to the future in both instances. (c) Do not include "I wish you a merry Christmas," in your regular examples. When it comes up, you can simply tell students that we use "*wish you* + noun" for certain fixed expressions. (I *wish you* the best of luck/ joy in your marriage/ a happy birthday).

For free practice activities on *hopes* and *wishes*, head to http://www.eslflow.com / conditionalsrealunrealsituations.html. They have plenty of exercises for all levels. I hope your students enjoy them.

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Good Intentions, Bad Constraints: Grammar and Assessment

We all know about the usual challenges for secondary school English teachers in Korea: large size, multi-level classes, student burnout, the looming shadow of the college entrance exam. However, not everyone is familiar with another huge classroom constraint: limited control over assessment. Here, I'll describe this challenge and its effect on grammar teaching and learning.

At my university, I can evaluate my students' performance as I see fit, and I can include options such as presentations or book reports. In contrast, many secondary school teachers have very little control over evaluation. The individual teacher can determine sometimes only 5-15% of a student's total grade. The remaining points go to multiple-choice achievement tests created by a group of teachers who teach in the same grade. These tests are frequently based entirely on the textbook, with exact replicas of the book's reading/listening passages and grammar/vocabulary examples. You can imagine why a teacher would want to make sure all the testable material has been covered in detail. What are the implications for grammar instruction? Teachers cannot choose to skip over structures in the book that they feel are irrelevant or unnatural. Moreover, with textbook reading/listening passages recreated precisely on the tests, students are not compelled to learn how structures work in different contexts. Their best bet for achievement test success is to memorize the entire passage and its translation.

So if achievement tests are based entirely on the textbooks, are the books at least well designed? Unfortunately, no. In all of the government-approved books that I have seen, structures appear at the end of a unit, in groups of three or four. The format is predictable. A very brief presentation - two or three examples taken from the reading/listening passages - precedes two or three quick fill-in-the-blank or mix-and-match questions. Production exercises are rare. The grammar structures are frequently not recycled between chapters. Clearly, it is not much in the way of grammar instruction, so most schools assign additional grammar books. While these may offer more exercises, the content is (amazingly) even more boring than in the textbook and can confuse students with new vocabulary.

Given these almost crippling constraints, how can a teacher even begin to stimulate any real grammar learning? Keep in mind the following very basic tips: (1) Say no to "Grammar Tuesdays." Even if you have to cover all of the material in a unit, no one said you have to teach five unrelated grammar points together on one day, as they appear in the book. (2) Spice up the presentation. Even when you are crunched for time, a very quick lead-in to the grammar point is better than "Open your books to page 64." Pictures, a song lyric, or a mimed example can add to presentation interest. Minimize translations and explanations, maximize interesting examples, and elicit, elicit, elicit. (3) Expand the

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practice section with your own worksheets. Three mix-and-matches simply are not enough, and often the answers can be figured out from vocabulary clues. Some teachers keep a stockpile of photocopied worksheets in the students' homeroom for individual selection. Collecting worksheets is time-consuming, so share with and borrow from colleagues. (4) Add the tiniest bit of production, like sentence completion exercises. Production will not be tested directly, but it will help students to personalize and retain structures. (5) Be funny. Draw goofy pictures on worksheets and practice tests. Use cartoons. (6) Use celebrities or students as the subjects in sentence examples. (7) Have students label rare or literary structures versus common or spoken ones.

Finally, remember to re-evaluate your constraints periodically. If you do not have rigid departmental achievement tests, you should not be teaching and testing as if you did. The more you can supplement or replace dull and overread passages, the better. With additional grammar books, check out all the options for your school's price range. And if your department does have a common test but you have some sway, push hard for a change in test design. After all, even the college entrance exam will not replicate exact passages from your textbook. To succeed on proficiency tests, students need to use their grammatical knowledge to decipher passages that they have never seen or heard before. Interestingly enough, that is the way it works in real life, too.

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Self-Study Grammar Resources

One question most teachers get asked at some point is "How can I improve my grammar?" In preparation for the next time you're asked for pointers, here are some self-study tips.

Admittedly, grammar drills are not always a picnic, but a good grammar exercise book provides clear explanations, controlled practice, and instant feedback - three hallmarks of self-study satisfaction. The classic *Grammar in Use* series gives explanations on the left page and exercises on the right. Regrettably, the grammar points are somewhat decontextualized and there are limited production activities. Still, the series is very accessible, making it a favorite. *Grammar Builder* opens each unit with a good error-noticing exercise and the short activities include a controlled paragraph-writing task. *Grammar Dimensions* provides readings that feature grammar in context, and has exercises for practicing the form, meaning, and use of each grammar point. It is the "use" section that stands out, as few grammar books focus on pragmatics. For business students, *Market Leader Intermediate: Business Grammar and Usage* is an excellent resource, and for beginners, there is *The Collins COBUILD Elementary English Grammar* with explanations in Korean. My favorite ESL/EFL grammar series is *Focus on Grammar*. Each unit has a theme, so vocabulary gets recycled and learners can really concentrate on the grammar. Moreover, there is interesting reading and listening content, detailed but clear charts, and challenging exercises. Many of these grammar books also come with CD-ROMs.

For free practice, there are always web sites. The Ohio University ESL web site has numerous links to English grammar web pages (http://www.ohiou.edu/Esl/english/grammar /activities.html). Unfortunately, many grammar web sites simply show either explanations or multiple-choice quizzes with point-and-click answers. However, Charles Kelly's Interesting Things for ESL Students web site (http://www.manythings.org/c/r.cgi /quiz) does provide a new set of questions every time you log on. For more fun, there are some tutorials and games on BBC's Skillswise grammar page (http://www. bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/grammar/).

It might sound old-fashioned, but reading and writing are still two excellent ways to work on grammar independently. One of the best resources a student can have is a graded reader. If the learner knows all but about four words on every page, then the books can serve well for extended reading (i.e., extended grammar exposure). Writing is also easy for students to do on their own - the trick is to get feedback. To this end, dictations are useful, as students can check their writing immediately. Songs, movies, and podcasts are all great sources. For texts with longer sentences, textbook CDs or the tapes that accompany graded readers are very handy. Even better than dictation, a *dictagloss* really helps students to master their grammar knowledge. They take notes while listening to a one-minute text (no dialogues) without pausing. After three listenings, the students try to recreate the text. Also good are error correction activities. Students copy a paragraph from an authentic source, then pick one grammar point (e.g., all the articles or prepositions) and remove it from the paragraph. Importantly, they must not leave a space where the grammar point should go. Two days later, they try to put the missing grammar point back into the paragraph.

Finally, flashcards and journals are handy tools for grammar improvement. Students write the grammar point, a sentence example, a Korean translation, and the date and source of the original example. Check out The Amazing Flashcard Machine online to make web-based flashcards (http://www.flashcardmachine.com/).

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Yes, We Have No Bananas

Distinguishing between affirmatives and negatives is a grammar point that really matters. When you get things mixed up, you might express the exact opposite of what you mean. Unfortunately, getting it right is notoriously tricky. Here are a few tips on how to raise learners' consciousness of how this works in English.

Teacher: **Do you have any questions?**
Student: Yes.
Teacher: Oh, good - what's your question?
Student: ????
What the student meant: No, I don't have any questions.
What the student conveyed: Yes, I have a question.
The problem: While some students might remember that "any" is used in negative statements, they might forget that it is also used for interrogatives.

Tips

1. Use classroom English. "Are there any questions?" is not only a comprehension check - it's grammar reinforcement. Ask it at the end of every activity.
2. Students write surveys with three "any" questions. Examples: "Do you have any brothers or sisters?"/ "Have you seen any good movies lately?"/ "Can you speak any languages besides Korean and English?" Students must get extra information if the respondent answers "yes."

Teacher: How was your weekend?
Student: Boring.
Teacher: Oh, really? **Didn't you go out at all?**
Student: Yes.
Teacher: Oh, you did? Where did you go?
Student: ?????
What the student meant: No, I didn't go out.
What the student conveyed: Yes, I went out.
The problem: L1 interference - in Korean, if you agree with what the questioner says, you answer with the equivalent of "yes" and may restate the fact: "Yes, (that is correct); I didn't go out at all.

Tips

1. Many students don't actually know that negative questions work the opposite way in English compared to Korean. Ask the class a negative question *at the very beginning of your semester*. When students answer "yes," get them to clarify and point out what the "yes" or "no" answers signify. If you do this early on, later when students say "Yes, I didn't go out," they'll be able to self-correct with prompting.
2. Discourage students from remembering a rule that the answers to negative questions are the reverse in English and Korean. Remembering "it's the opposite" is a bad pneumonic device because later when the right answer has become second nature, you won't remember what "the opposite" means.
3. Do *not* use recasts (reformulated answers) for feedback. ("Oh, you didn't go out? That's too bad"). Research shows that students tend not to notice your correction -they think you're just keeping the conversation going.
4. Test it. On your next quiz, add a dialogue like the one in the example. After Teacher: *"Didn't you go out at all?"* put *Student: "_____."* Have the students write *yes* or *no*, with a clarification ("No, because I was too busy" or "Yes, I did, but it was boring anyway")

Teacher: **I've never been to Paris.**
Student: Me too.
What the student meant: "Me neither." or "Neither have I."
Teacher: **I love cats.**
Student: Neither do I.
Teacher: Oh, do you have a cat?
Student: No, I hate cats.
Teacher: ?????????

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What the student meant: Oh, personally I don't really like cats.
The problem: L1 transfer + teaching-provoked error. In Korean, "Me too" and "Me neither" can both be expressed with a single expression, *nah-do*. On top of this, when teaching "neither," we might unintentionally mislead students into believing that "neither" is for disagreement.

Tips

Speaking practice. First, teach that "too/neither" are both for agreement. Do some controlled practice with agreement and disagreement. Then, on a piece of paper, students write one affirmative and one negative statement about themselves. (I like bananas. I don't like dogs). When you shout out "Agree!" students must go around agreeing to their classmates' statements. (*You like bananas! So do I! You don't like dogs? Neither do I!*) When you call out "Disagree!" students must disagree diplomatically. "You like bananas? Oh, I guess they're okay, but personally I prefer apples." Finally, call out *"Real answers!"* and students can either agree or disagree.

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Grammar for Young Learners: *A Few Tricks*

This issue's *Grammar Glammar* is for teachers working with elementary or middle school-aged students. As you've no doubt noticed about most textbooks geared towards beginners in this age group, the same grammar points continually pop up. The following activities focus on getting students to produce typical grammar points (i.e., drills) in a creative way.

Superhero Can/Can't

Show students a picture of a superhero (e.g., Spiderman). Write two columns on the board: CAN and CAN'T. Elicit from the students things that the superhero can do: *Spiderman can make strong spider webs. He can swing on the webs. He can catch crooks just like flies. He can take great photos. He can pull off wearing latex suits around town*. Then elicit what the superhero can't do: *Spiderman can't fly. He can't see through walls. He can't make it to a date on time*. Once a list has been made, students get into groups and make posters of superheroes they invent. Make sure they make a list of each superhero's abilities. The other students in the class will then ask the groups about their superheroes. *Can Super Teacher Ksan fly? No, she can't. But she can drink three lattes in a single morning*. Note 1: You may have to elicit action verbs before you start. Note 2: Before students present, go over the pronunciation of *can* and *can't* sentences. Note 3: Students generally don't pay attention when others are presenting, so remove all of the posters and give them back when the groups are about to present. Also, do a comprehension check afterwards (e.g., *Now what can this superhero do?*).

Grammar can be interesting if you make it so.

Funny Pictures and Adverbs of Frequency

Get the funniest/craziest pictures of people or cartoon characters available. Number the pictures 1-10. Review frequency adverbs *sometimes, never, always, often*, etc. with the students. Students write a column of numbers 1-10 in their notebooks. They get into pairs and select a picture. Write an action verb on the board (e.g., *wash*). Get the pairs to write a sentence about the picture using the action verb plus an adverb of frequency (e.g., *Shrek rarely washes his face*.). Give students a minute to write a sentence and then yell "Switch!" Students get a new picture. At the end, put the pictures up on the board and have students read out their sentences. Variation: The pairs create sentences for just one picture of a person they don't know. Afterwards, they introduce their person to the class. (Adapted from an entry in the Idea Cookbook at Dave's ESL Cafe: http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?display:1069280858-29873.txt).

Who Would Win? — Comparatives/Superlatives.

Make cards with pictures of celebrities, animals, or objects. For middle school, you can write the names or words instead of using pictures. Shuffle the deck. Have a student choose two cards from the deck and tell the class what is on the cards. Then tell

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students there will be a battle - which card will win the fight? Who is stronger, smarter, faster, meaner, mightier, tougher, nastier, braver, scarier, more graceful, more intelligent, crazier? Would Bugs Bunny beat a ninja? How about Bae Young Jun and a frog? Have students speculate using comparatives, and then introduce a third card to work on superlatives (e.g., the bravest, the fastest). Source: Will Habington, Takada, Japan, "Dog vs. Monkey," Dave's ESL Cafe. http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?display:1043149396-255.txt

Some Notes About Teaching Grammar

1. Start with noticing (provide input, and draw students' attention to grammar) before working on production.
2. Practice doesn't make perfect. It doesn't matter how many times you drill third person "s"; they'll still be making that error for some time to come.
3. When practicing comparatives, do not compare students. The "Ji-sun is thinner than Min-ji" lesson is fodder for future therapy.
4. Make sure that students practice more than just the first and second person singular (*I* and *you* are overdone; provide opportunities for *they, we, he, she, it*).
5. Don't tell your students that grammar is not fun. Remember that it can be interesting if you make it so.

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Meanings of Modals: "Must" and Co.

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By Ksan Rubadeau

One truly frustrating aspect of language learning is how many of the most common words and structures have multiple meanings. The English modal system - words like *must, could, can*, and *should* - definitely fits into this category. Take the case of Philippe, one of the most fluent students I've ever taught. A union/company intermediary, he used his advanced English daily at his demanding job. That's why I was quite taken aback during a conversation we had involving the modal *must*. I had told Philippe, "With all of your deadlines lately, you *must* be very busy." He looked surprised and asked me why I had used *must* in this context. It baffled him because, as he informed me, "*must* is used to give orders. You know, you *must* get up at 5:30; you *must* go to the doctor when you are sick... It's like *have to*."

It was as if Philippe was channeling the voices of the ghosts of grammar teachers past. Unfortunately, it seemed that his classroom learning had drilled in only one meaning of *must*, the basic meaning, but not the only meaning (and not even the most commonly spoken meaning, in fact). Philippe is not alone. Ask any of your students about *must*, and you'll likely get a similar answer. To be fair, modal usage is complex, and teachers necessarily present them in simplified form to prevent confusion. The trick is for subsequent teachers to review some of the basics and then help students to move on to other meanings.

What could a logical probability modal lesson look like?

This semester my first-year university students and I are delving into the different meanings of modals. First we'll review the familiar old social ("You *can't* go to the party because you're grounded.") and ability modals ("Rosa *can* run a kilometer in under five minutes."), with an emphasis on production and form. Then we'll quickly be moving on to new territory for many of them: the logical probability modals. Not just the future probability meaning, which they surely saw in high school ("It *may/might/could* rain tomorrow."), but the more elusive present ("You walked here? You *must* be tired!") and the past ("It *must* have been love, but it's all over now.").

So what could a logical probability modal lesson look like? Here's an adaptation of one that my colleague Suzie Beaulieu and I developed for adults. The focus is on only one meaning - making inferences in the present.

Activity 1: Elicit social modals by asking questions like, "What would you say to someone who is dirty? How about someone who is sick? Write these on the board; teach the word *modal*; and mention that now you're going to look at another side of modals.

Activity 2: Students read a dialogue in which a group of people discuss a piece of abstract art. (Put the art on the handout.) The modals and accompanying verbs (usually "be") are in bold. For example:

A: What do you think this Picasso represents?
B: Well, I think it **could be** a picture of a woman.
C: Are you kidding? That **can't be** it. Look at the colors. That **must be** a flower.

Activity 3: In pairs, students look back at the dialogue and determine if the speaker is "almost certain" about what he/she says or "less certain." After they see a chart with "almost certain" modals (*It couldn't be that. It must be a flower. That can't be it*) and less certain ones (*It could be a woman. It might be a tree. Couldn't it be a flower? You may have something there.*), students fill in blanks in the chart with other examples from the dialogue.

Activity 4: Students see examples like this one from the dialogue: "Couldn't it be a tree?" a) It can't be a tree. b) It might be a tree. Students circle the sentence most similar in meaning to the example.

Activity 5: Students look at another abstract painting and discuss what they think it represents, using the modals they've seen. (Note: They should also defend their opinions with a "because" statement.)

Of course, with my class, there will be a special emphasis on *must* for inferences. By the end of the semester, my students should fully understand when I tell them, "You must be so relieved to have a break!"

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Graded Grammar

In your teaching situation, explicit grammar instruction might be somewhat taboo. If that's the case, your primary role as a grammar instructor could be to find engaging classroom materials that target your students' grammatical level. This is where a graded reader (a learner-adapted novel or story) could be your best friend. Advocates of graded readers often focus on vocabulary benefits (readers are usually graded by the number and frequency of headwords), but the books also have plenty of grammar advantages. First, they expose students to oodles of contextualized grammar points, including great examples of tense (*she went* vs. *she goes*) and aspect (*he watched* vs. *he was watching*). Second, because vocabulary has also been graded, students can focus more on what the grammar in a passage is doing (although getting students to notice grammar may require a bit of explicit instruction). Best of all, there

One of the first rules: Find an enjoyable topic.

are so many graded ESOL readers on the market that finding suitable themes is quite easy; one of the first rules in spicing up pedagogical grammar is to find an enjoyable topic.

Consider this passage from *The Ironing Man* (Campbell, 1999):

> Marina and Tom had planted some grass in the garden when they first came to the village, and bits of grass were coming through, here and there, but not, I am sad to say, everywhere. The garden looked a bit like the beard Tom had tried to grow as a student. Parts of it were really quite good with lots of hair, but other parts had no hair at all. The parts with hair looked like a coconut, and the parts without hair looked a bit like an egg. But, well, eggs and coconuts do not normally go together. So Tom's beard did not really look like a beard, and this garden did not really look like a garden. (p. 19)

The Ironing Man's humor appeals to my bookworm side, and the super examples of the past perfect (*Tom had planted; had tried*) are manna for the grammar teacher in me. How many fake past perfect sentences have made their way into ESOL classes? (Teacher: "Students, we use the past perfect when one action happens before another. For example, *I had gone to school and then went to the store.*") Yikes! In *The Ironing* Man, the past perfect comes in naturally to refer to events told out of chronological order, like flashbacks. Will your students notice this while they're

reading? If it's independent reading they might not, but they will get some past perfect exposure. And if you ever need to focus on that grammar point, you'll have a great resource.

There are myriad ways to use graded readers with your class; I'll just describe what I've being doing with my first-year university classes (using ideas from my colleague, Andy Burki). First, I

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determined appropriate levels for my different classes - Oxford Bookworms, Cambridge English Readers, and Penguin Readers' levels 1 and 2 for two groups, 3 and 4 for the other two. Then I selected three or four choices of books for each group, checking in advance that these were quickly attainable in Korea. My selection criteria: (a) different genres, (b) engaging topics and settings, (c) modern language and culture (no classics), (d) British and North American English options, and (e) no movie version. In Week 2, students did an information gap exercise with the book blurbs, and then all chose their own readers, which were ordered and bought within a week. In Week 4, students sat in groups of three or four for pre-reading activities. I provided a suggested reading schedule and a blank reader's log.

For mid-term oral evaluations (worth 10% of course grade), students needed to have read up to a certain point in the book. They sat in groups with classmates reading the same book and answered discussion questions. Short book reports were due at the end of the semester (10%). As for my contribution as the grammar teacher, it mostly came at the beginning when I chose the levels. In doing so, I led my students into a reading project aimed at improving reading fluency, vocabulary, and good old grammar.

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Active Strategies for the Passive Voice

I've got a beef with textbooks and the passive voice. Celce-Murica and Larsen-Freeman (1998) show how grammar points have three aspects: form, meaning, and use. But in many cases, textbooks focus on form only. You have probably seen this: "Change the following sentences from the active to the passive voice. Example: The cat ate the mouse = *The mouse was eaten by the cat*." A transformation exercise like this one helps students to form passives. But that's all it does. Granted, the form is no simple thing. You need to add the *be*-verb, you need the right past participle, and you might need to add "*by*" + *agent*. To really complicate things, the passive voice works with any verb tense. No wonder form gets so much attention.

But what is missing in transformation exercises? First of all, you can't tell if students understand the *meaning*, especially if the agent is taken out. *The mouse was eaten*. Did something eat the mouse? Or did the mouse have a piece of cheese? Also, what about *use*? When do we choose the passive over the active? Here are some tips for addressing these challenges.

Form

Tip 1: If you're doing transformations, make sure that the resulting sentence isn't odd. The *students are doing some homework* sounds acceptable, but *Some homework is being done by the students* is odd. Delete strange examples from your textbook, and have students take out the agent whenever possible.

Tip 2: When introducing the passive voice for the first time, use an irregular past participle which doesn't resemble the simple past tense (*eaten, driven, taken, etc.*). This reduces confusion.

Meaning

Tip 1: Use minimal pairs and pictures. Minimal pair = one difference in form which creates a difference in meaning (*The man hit the bus* vs. *The man was hit by the bus*). Thornbury's (1999) great activity shows 10 cartoons and sentences. The teacher reads the sentences and students match them to the right cartoons. Some sentences have agents and some don't. The sentences are simple; the challenge lies in listening closely for meaning.

Tip 2: Pictures are not just for beginners. Forsyth and Lavender (1995) demonstrate this with eight short but tricky minimal pairs (*The car stopped* vs. *The car was stopped*). The cartoons not only illustrate and test meaning, but make a potentially boring activity much more engaging.

Use

Tip 1: Don't tell students that the passive voice is the same as the active voice, but just turned around. We use passives differently - often to hide or de-emphasize an agent. Politicians frequently use the active voice in their campaign promises ("I'll increase educational funding") and the passive when things don't work ("Mistakes were made").

Tip 2: Don't tell students that the passive voice is necessarily more polite than the active voice. It's true sometimes, but not a rule.

Tip 3: These days, business and academic writing uses more active voice than ever before. Have your writing students pick out wordy or vague passive sentences and change them to direct, active ones. (*The report has been sent - I've sent the report*).

Tip 4: Context, context, context. Find a passage with an interesting topic and lots of passive voice, with verb tenses appropriate for your level of learners. Here's part of one about John Lennon's assassination which I've used with intermediate adults: "John Lennon was shot and killed by a deranged fan... had been interviewed by RKO Radio... was pronounced dead at 11:07..." (McKinney, 1998). Have students color scan (passives in purple, actives in green) quickly for the verbs and then go over why the passive voice is used (e.g., nobody cares who pronounced him dead).

Form, meaning, and use. Keep them in mind and your learners will benefit.

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Which-Who-That: What?

In the last Grammar Glammar, I asked this question:

Why can't we say sentence 2?
1. She told me her name, **which** I promptly forgot.
2.*She told me her name, **that** I promptly forgot.

If you figured out that the answer has something to do with defining and non-defining relative clauses, congratulations! For those of you who have no idea what I just said, don't worry, I'm going to explain it.

Defining and Non-defining Relative Clauses
One of the most off-putting things about pedagogical grammar is the confusing terminology. You might have heard these terms for relative clauses: defining/non-defining; restrictive/non-restrictive; identifying/non-identifying. Don't sweat it - they're all the same thing. Here, I'm just going to use "defining/ non-defining."

Defining relative clauses: The information given in the clause is crucial to understanding the meaning of the sentence. For example, Many of the actors who appear in the movie "Taegukgi" are very famous. (Which actors? There are so many actors. I need to define the sentence more clearly, so I use *who appear in the movie "Taegukgi"*). I could still say, "Many of the actors are famous." But without the defining relative clause, nobody knows exactly what I am talking about.

Never say "never" to your students

Non-defining relative clauses: The information given in the clause might be interesting, but it is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. For example, The actor Won Bin, who appeared in such hits as "Taegukgi," is very famous. In this sentence, the relative clause gives extra background information. Without it, you'll still know that I'm talking about Won Bin's fame. Note the commas - those are for non-defining relative clauses.

Who Cares?
You may have been told that *that* can replace *which* or *who* in a sentence. You may even have told your students this. But actually, this can usually only happen in defining relative clauses, and that's why we need to know the difference. Another example: Many of the actors that appear in the movie "Taegukgi" are very famous. But not *The actor Won Bin, that appeared in such hits as "Taegugki," is very famous.

So this explains why sentence 2 in my original question is incorrect. The "which I promptly forgot" is not needed because it is non-essential information; it is a non-defining relative clause. Therefore, the *which* cannot be replaced with *that*.

Varieties and Registers

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British and American English differ when it comes to relative clauses, but I won't get into all the details in this article. Just remember, never say "never" to your students (Avoid saying: "We never use that in a non-defining clause.") Those kinds of sweeping generalizations will probably get you into trouble later. Also note that *that* replaces *who* in an informal style of English, but not generally in formal written English.

What to Tell Your Students
What if a student asked you my tricky question in class? I'm sure we can all identify with Joe from Seoul, who wrote to me saying "You're in front of the class and your mind goes blank, with thirty faces looking at you." Thankfully, Joe wisely decided to 1) offer to explain the grammar point after class, 2) provide many examples, and 3) refer to his copy of Swan's *Practical English Usage*. Good thinking! Teachers can also ask the other students in the class for their explanations.

Who Ya Gonna Call?
For immediate answers to your learners' questions, *Practical English Usage* and *The Grammar Book* are very useful references. For free online information, visit http://esl.about.com. Another wonderful free resource is "The Grammar Lady," http://aacton .gladbrook.iowapages.org/id3.html/.

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Relative Clauses: Practice Techniques THAT Students Like

Relative clauses - you might not know the name, but you've definitely seen them. They are in sentences like these:

1. A pilot is a person **WHO flies airplanes.**
2. Is he the guy **THAT you use to date?**
3. She told me her name, **WHICH I promptly forgot.**

Relative clauses are extremely tricky to learn and can be even trickier to teach. Grammar gurus Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 571) warn in *The Grammar Book*, "You'll need to know a great deal about relative clauses as a teacher of ESL/EFL." They weren't kidding. We need to know how to explain relative clauses to grammar-savvy students. And, since relative clauses tend to be boring to learn, we need a stock of interesting practice activities. Flying in the face of tradition, we are going to start here with some practice techniques. In a later article, we will work on the explanation part using answers provided by you, the readers.

Grammar Auction

Focus: Error correction at the sentence level.
The aim is to buy as many correct sentences as you can. Students work in groups of 3 or 4. Each group gets 50,000 won to start. On the board or using PowerPoint, show the sentences with relative clauses. Reveal one sentence at a time. Some of the sentences are correct, others are not. Give the groups some time (less than 15 seconds) to decide if they want to buy the sentence or not. Start the bidding at 1,000 won and go up in increments of 1,000. Stop the bidding at a pre-determined amount. The teacher keeps track of the money used and lost (in buying incorrect sentences) and sentences won. The winners are the group with the most correct sentences.

Sentence Grid

Focus: Sentence formation; meaning of sentences.
How many logical sentences or questions can you make?

		who	I	saw
The	man	Where	is	sitting
friend	She	is	there	over
bought	my	the	person	love
you	that	book	that	I

Put a few sentences with relative clauses into a grid on a handout. Students have to re-create the sentences. The rule is that you cannot jump over squares; you have to connect adjacent squares. You can move vertically, horizontally, diagonally, forward, or backward, but you must move to an adjacent square. Give points for the longest sentence. Otherwise, count every word and make a word total from all the

sentences students can make. To check the meaning of the sentences, get students to draw pictures, summarize the long sentences using shorter ones, or create a short skit with their sentences. As a follow-up, have students work in pairs to create their own grids to share with classmates.

Give Me the Details

Focus: Form, meaning, and use of non-defining relative clauses in discourse.
Penny Ur's *Grammar Practice Activities* (1988, p. 268ff) has great ideas for relative clause practice. Here's an adaptation of one of them:
Take a short reading passage and re-copy it with a comma and space after some of the nouns. For example: *Once upon a time, there was a princess called Snow White, _____ . She lived in a castle, _____ , with her father, _____ .*
In pairs, the students fill in the blanks with relative clauses. (e.g., "called Snow White, who had black hair"). Encourage creativity, and check that they are non-defining.

Conclusion

All three of these activities can be adapted to just about any level, using sentences right out of the students' textbook, if you wish. However, only the last one focuses on grammar in discourse. When choosing your practice activities, do make sure that at some point students will have opportunities to notice the use of relative clauses in reading and listening passages. Getting students to read extensively is one of the best methods to see grammar in discourse.

In preparation for our next discussion, here is your question:
Why can we say sentence 1 but not sentence 2?
1. She told me her name, which I promptly forgot.
2. *She told me her name, that I promptly forgot.

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