

A Text-based Grammar for Expository Writing

Teaching Grammar in the
CSU Expository Reading and Writing
Course

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What Do We Mean By “Grammar”?

- “Grammar is the internalized system that native speakers of a language share.”
 - Martha Kolln. *Closing the Books on Alchemy* (140).
- What assumptions about language and about grammar are embedded in this quotation?
- BUT...50% of students in K-12 are NOT native speakers; others speak non-standard dialects.
- AND...native speakers who are poor readers often don't have full control of academic written English.



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Why “Grammar Instruction” Has a Bad Rap!

“Those who defend the teaching of grammar tend to have a model of composition instruction that is rigidly skills-centered and rigidly sequential; the formal teaching of grammar, as the first step in that sequence, is the cornerstone or linchpin.”

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Donald Murray's Advice to Writers:



- "Lower your expectations until you can start."
- Writing is in the revision and the editing.

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Peter Elbow



- "Good writing" is usually surrounded by lots of "bad writing."
- He wants students to do lots of "bad writing" in order to find their good writing.

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Composition Instruction Is a Recursive Process



- Fluency
- Form
- Correctness

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Ineffective Pedagogical Assumptions



- Student sentences
- Student paragraphs



"d" paragraphs.
"d" rger

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Program Goal

- To teach students how to **EDIT** their own writing for mechanical correctness.
- This goal is not the same as teaching students to write “correctly.”
- This goal assumes that early drafts may be mechanically unconventional and in need of repair.

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What Is Expected by 12th Grade?

- **1.0 Written and Oral English Language Conventions:** Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions.
 - 1.1 Demonstrate control of grammar, diction, and paragraph and sentence structure and an understanding of English usage.
 - 1.2 Produce legible work that shows accurate spelling and correct punctuation and capitalization.
 - 1.3 Reflect appropriate manuscript requirements in writing.

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Our Purpose:

- Teach “grammar” (conventional use of standard written English) **so that students can use it IN THEIR WRITING for an intended (and appropriate) rhetorical effect.**
- To meet the needs of multilingual and bidialectal students

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“intended rhetorical effect”

- What does that mean?
- “A Rose for Emily”

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“A Rose for Emily”



- The man himself lay in the bed.
- For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin.... What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

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“intended rhetorical effect”



- Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. Leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, one of us lifted a long strand of iron-gray hair from the second pillow. (my version)
- OR...
- “Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.”

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What the Introduction Tells Us...



- Review of key passages
 - p. ix-practioner demonstration
 - p. x organization
 - p. x teacher paper load and feedback

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What the Introduction Tells Us...



- p. xi not every student benefits equally from every chapter
- p. xi-strategic decisions about what to teach
- p. xii-ultimate goal: independent editors
- p. xi-focus on student editing; portable rules

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Survey the Text



- Do a “flip through” of the book.
 - What looks different from traditional grammar texts?
 - What looks useful?
 - What do you notice about its content? Its organization?

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Important!



- This is NOT a student text, but a teacher resource!
- Available digitally at the Online community:
- <http://writing.csusuccess.org>
- Sign up:
<http://writing.csusuccess.org/community>

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Key Instructional Premises



- Instruction is based on text-based, functional grammar.
- Students observe how language is used by real writers for specific rhetorical ends. They learn to read “like writers” (Donald Murray).
 - What is the rhetorical *purpose* for a particular grammatical pattern?
 - How does this language use impact readers?

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Chapter Sequence Focused on Using Language for Rhetorical Purposes



1. Sentence Fundamentals for Expressing Ideas
2. Sentence Problems (fragments and run-ons)
3. Noun Forms and Subject-Verb Agreement
4. Verbs for Expository Writing
5. Sentence Focus and Defensible Assertions
6. Linking Ideas and Making Logical Connections
7. Adding Information to Sentences
8. Writing about What Others Say

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Chapter Organization



- Statement of Chapter Focus (for students and teacher): page 1
- Student Exercises followed by information for teachers (e.g. page 2) who may need a little help brushing up on their own grammar skills or who may appreciate examples from the text to share with students.
- Charts or tips that teachers may wish to replicate for students (in gray boxes).

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Chapter Organization



- First exercise in each chapter is a **Guided Composition Activity. Page 1**
 - Begins with a dictation. Students listen for the first reading, then take notes during the second reading.
 - Students reconstruct the text as a short paragraph.
 - In pairs or small groups, students compare and revise their paragraphs.
 - Collect what students have written. At the end of the grammar instruction for the unit, the papers are returned and students edit for the specific elements addressed in the instruction (as well as anything taught in earlier units).

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Let's DO It!!!



- Step 1: I will read all the sentences aloud at a conversational (lecture) rate of speed without pausing. You listen HARD to get the GIST of the passage.
- Step 2: You will take notes, trying to capture as much **information** as you can. This is NOT word-for-word! You are NOT trying to replicate the sentences exactly. You are listening for meaning and trying to capture as much of the information as possible.

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Guided Composition Activity,



- Step 3: Reconstruct what you heard, using your notes and key words from the passage. Double space. BIG margins. 5 minutes.
- Step 4: Compare what you have written with a partner. Make changes as needed. Teach students how to use a caret (^). 5 minutes.
- Step 5: Collect the papers and **SAVE** them.

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Reflection



- What did you accomplish **as learners** from this activity?
- What did you learn **as teachers** from this activity?
- How might you integrate this activity into your classes?

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Noticing Language on page 2



- What is the purpose of this activity?

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Organizational Keys



- 1.1 etc. (for teachers)
 - Defines the grammatical/ editing focus
 - Provides teachers with a quick overview of the grammar involved and examples to use in mini lessons
 - Provides materials to reproduce for student use (e.g. see chart on page 7 and “Tips for Writers” on page 8).

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Organizational Keys



- Chart 1.2-page 7
- How might you use this chart (or others like it) to help students become independent editors of their own writing?
- Available to download

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Organizational Keys



- Exercises: Title (for students)
 - Students move from their writing (Exercise 1)
 - to looking at examples based on the readings (Exercises 2-9)
 - to application: looking at student samples (Exercise 10)
 - to application: looking at their first writing (Exercise 11)
 - to application: editing the writing they plan to hand in (Exercise 12).

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Exercise 6 on page 7



- How is this activity different from a typical grammar activity?

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Tip for Writers on page 8



- What is the function of this section?
- How might you use it with students?

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Chapter Organization



- Final three student exercises in each chapter ask students to:
 - **Edit** a sample student essay (Exercise 10 on page 12).
 - **Edit** their earlier Guided Composition Activity (Exercise 11 on page 13).
 - Choose and **edit** a portion of the writing they are doing for the module (Exercise 12 on page 13).
- Answer key for teachers

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Chapter Structure



- Students identify the **targeted feature(s)** as used by real writers.
- Students receive **targeted instruction**.
- Students apply what they have learned.
- Students edit effective student essays based on the modules.
- Finally, students edit their own writing for the **targeted feature(s)**.

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Six Principles of Successful Sentence Level Instruction



- Materials are contextualized and text-based;
- Topics are based on student needs;
- Classroom activities are interactive and engaging (uses group and pair work, not homework);
- Instruction comprised of spaced and repeated practice (not drills);
- Instruction is directed towards making students independent editors of their own writing;
- Lessons are aligned with English Language Arts Standards and EAP/EPT assessment.

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How Can Teachers Use these Materials with Students?



- Before you start: Diagnose students' needs: have students write a short essay; mark errors; select key area(s) to focus on.
 - Frequency
 - Gravity
 - Teachability
- Less is more. Teach a few topics well; don't skim over a lot of topics.

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How Can Teachers Use These Materials with Students?



- Plan instruction:
 - Pair activities with readings.
 - Space activities over the time span of the module (2 – 5 weeks).
 - Focus on the key objective: preparing students to edit their own writing.
 - Require editing and give feedback on ability to edit correctly.
 - Don't make more work for yourself. Have students work in groups; correct activities as a class.
 - Always have students apply what they have learned to their own writing (after doing the activity with student writing).
 - Once you have taught a topic, hold students accountable.

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One Teacher's Experience

- She taught Chapter 3 (Noun Forms and Subject-Verb Agreement) as the **focus of a 15 week semester**. (They began with the module. Then went on to read and write about other topics but kept the editing focus on noun forms and subject-verb agreement.)
- Gave students feedback regularly on their writing and their editing.

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Student Responses

For one of my examples [for the portfolio letter], I frequently use "are" and "is" in the wrong places. When I declare more than one person in the sentence, I mistakenly use "is" instead of "are," and I sometimes omit them in the sentence. Also, another example is my tendency to run-on my sentences. With a missing period or comma, the long-winded sentence would sound too lengthy. However, after every revision, I correct my mistakes and improve upon them by adding the proper words. Over the entire semester, I have made dramatic improvement on my ability to fix grammar errors.

Coco

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Student Responses

In the beginning of the semester I noticed the little errors and as time passed I began to have less. The useful exercises we practiced throughout the semester allowed me to develop well thought out [examples] and less grammatical errors in my writing.

Juliana

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~~Text-based Academic Language~~
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