

Grammar Mini-Lessons

Grammatical deficits limit a student's ability to express meaning, encode a variety of messages, and effectively participate in conversations. If not targeted, poor grammar skills can persist well beyond the preschool years and impact academic success and literacy. The following strategies can provide opportunities to develop your student's grammar skills during authentic activities involving reading, writing, and speaking:

Record the errors: Make notes of what your student is saying and writing incorrectly. Keep a list of erroneous sentences and discuss them with your Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).

Understand the errors: Learning the jargon that describes the error will help you communicate with your SLP and teach the student what he is incorrectly producing. For example, you will need to know what a relative clause is in order to teach your student how to speak or write them. Past tense, auxiliary verbs, plurals, pronouns, and subordinate clauses will become your friends again!

Targeting the errors: Once you know the grammatical targets, you can target them in your student's academic and conversational activities.

What are mini-lessons?

Before a writing activity, introduce what you want your student to concentrate on. For example, "We are going to work on using the word 'he' today. The word 'he' means that we are talking about a boy or man. It is usually at the beginning of the sentence and it is the subject or doer of the sentence. Let's practice making up sentences with 'he' and then we can try them in your journal."

Once you have introduced your target (or targets up to a maximum of three), the following strategies can be used to scaffold your student's learning:

Observational modeling: Present a series of sentences containing a target form using pictures or short cohesive texts (poems, books). Then, have your student write or say sentences using the target and give feedback.

Teacher: Look, He *is* running. He *is* eating. He *is* swinging. Tell me about this one.

Student: He *is* swimming.

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Content Alterations: Model the grammar target while reading text or describing pictures. Then, allow the student to replicate the grammar target with different content.

Teacher: Look at my picture. He *jumped* on the bridge. What happened in your picture?

Student: The cat *bumped* the glass.

Contrastive modeling and imitation: Expose the student to the target form and another related form and contrast the changes in meaning.

Teacher: Say this: This morning, John *ate* yogurt for breakfast.

Student: This morning, John *ate* yogurt for breakfast.

Teacher: Yes. John *ate* yogurt just this morning. Now say this: Bill *had eaten* yogurt for breakfast everyday last week.

Student: Bill *had eaten* yogurt for breakfast everyday last week.

Teacher: Yes, Bill *had eaten* yogurt so many times he's really sick of it now!

Sentence Expanding: Give an example of a simple sentence and then ask the student to add length and complexity.

Student: He was standing in an aisle in a library

Teacher: Tell me the time of day this happened. Start with "when" and tell me the location again.

Student: *When it was noon*, he was standing in an aisle in a library.

Sentence Combining: The student starts with two or more simple sentences and is asked to combine them into one longer sentence. Target sentences can be taken from their own writing or reading materials.

Student writes: The car is big. The car is ugly.

Teacher: Let's use "and" to make one sentence. The car is big *and*....?

Student: The car is big and ugly.

Teacher: Great! Let's write that down.

Even though the above teaching strategies are described separately, they are often used together during mini-lessons in order to help a student achieve fluency with his grammar errors or to develop the use of longer and complex sentences. Don't forget to add simple comments that address the forms being used and the meanings conveyed by those forms.

Resource in Henry Grube Library:

Contextualized Language Intervention: Scaffolding Prek-12 Literacy Achievement by Teresa Ukrainetz.

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