

depaul.edu/writing
The University Center for
Writing-based Learning

the writing
center

the writing
fellows
program

work
shops

the
collaborative
for multilingual
writing &
research

outreach

What Is This and How Do I Talk About It?

Confidence and Empowerment for Tutoring Grammar

Jennifer Finstrom

Goals

- Revisit how you think about grammar
- Gain new strategies for approaching grammar in both Face-to-Face and Written Feedback appointments
- Connect talking about grammar to empowering the writer and (yourself) through the Core Beliefs

But first...

Let's take a moment to reflect and freewrite.

- What do you remember about how you learned grammar? How was this material presented to you? Is there a particular anecdote that you recall?
- Take 4-5 minutes to reflect and write down some thoughts.

Part One

**A GRAMMAR PEDAGOGY
(AND PHILOSOPHY)**

Grammar Philosophies

- We all have one whether we're aware of it or not—try to look more closely at your underlying beliefs about grammar
- Here are a few sources that have formed my own grammar philosophy—there are different ways of thinking about this!

Grammar as Rhetorical Choice

Martha Kolln: *Rhetorical Grammar*

“Rhetoric means that your audience—the reader—and your purpose make a difference in the way you write on any given topic. To a large degree, that rhetorical situation—the audience, purpose, and topic—determines the grammatical choices you make, choices about sentence structure and vocabulary, even punctuation”

(Kolln 2).

Grammar as Style

Joseph Williams,

Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace

An excerpt from this book is also one of our Core Readings!

In the following quotes, think about the connections between grammar and potential writer anxiety. Williams is talking about why some writing seems ineffective.

William's Three Kinds of Rules

1. **Real Rules** “define what makes English English” (Williams 15).
2. **Social Rules** “distinguish standard English from nonstandard” (Williams 15).
3. **Invented Rules:** “Some grammarians have invented a handful of rules that they think we all should observe” (Williams 15).

Real Rules

- An example Williams gives of a “real rule” is article use: articles come before nouns—that placement is one that we recognize. We say “the book” not “book the.”

Social Rules

- Williams describes this as a usage choice that we recognize as being “nonstandard”—for example, think of the use of “ain’t.” These “rules” are often perceived as having to do with class and education—but notice doesn’t consider them “real rules.”

Invented Rules

- This is my favorite category to talk about! Here we have split infinitives, ending sentences with prepositions and more!
- Let's talk briefly about split infinitives to illustrate this.

Another Question

How do we observe rules thoughtfully?

Williams writes that “if you mindlessly obey all of the rules all the time, you risk becoming so obsessed with the rules that you tie yourself in knots. And sooner or later, you will impose those rules—real or not—on others” (16).

- What, then, do we do with our knowledge?

Part Two

**GRAMMAR TUTORING, or
“What do you want to work on
today?”**

“What do you want to work on today?”

- The answer is often **grammar!** But before we talk about how we might do that, let's think about what it is a writer means when they say **“grammar.”**
- How many things can we come up with?

How do we determine what a writer wants?

- In a *Face-to-Face appointment*, we can simply ask questions. For example, “What do you find challenging about grammar? Is there something that your instructor asked you to be aware of?”
- In a *Written Feedback appointment*, this isn't always so easy.

Once we know what a writer wants, how can we best help them? These strategies can be adapted to any appointment modality.

- Look for patterns
- Provide explanation
- Model sentences
- Be affirmative
- Share experiences

Look for Patterns

- Looking for patterns is possible in whichever appointment modality you have. Not only does this give you something concrete and text based to provide feedback on, you're also helping the writer with future writing projects. A writer might not know that they have a traceable habit of leaving one comma off when there is generally a pair.

Provide Explanation

- Just pointing out to a writer that they have a comma splice or an unnecessary comma won't be a great deal of help unless you're able to provide a bit more information.
- Grammar is a process—a writer might not internalize what makes a comma splice with just one comment, but your explanation is a step in that process.

Model Sentences

- Giving a writer multiple model sentences that illustrate what you are showing them is so helpful, particularly for “making better writers.”
- Model sentences show what is happening grammatically and take the discussion out of the specific writing task, though a writer should be able to more easily edit their own work with the help of modeling.

Be Affirmative

- This is just as important with grammar use as it is with other aspects of a text, particularly if grammar is what the writer has asked to work on.
- If grammar is something a writer finds challenging, they might not have a clear idea of what they are doing that works. Pointing out an effective use of a semicolon (and again, explaining why) can be very helpful!

Share Experiences

- We mentioned earlier that grammar is a process—think about how you learned what you did and when.
- Doing this also keeps the appointment from feeling hierarchical.

Grammar Card Game!

- What fun! Get in groups of two (or three if necessary) and draw a purple card, a yellow card, and a blue card.
- **Purple Cards:** Appointment Modality
- **Yellow Cards:** Grammar Element
- **Blue Cards:** What the writer has told you (or not)

Grammar Card Game

If you drew Face-to-Face for your modality, choose who will be the writer and who will be tutor.

If you drew Written Feedback, work together to write a comment.

Grammar Card Game

- It may be necessary to create some backstory for your fictional appointment, but know that the grammar element is a pattern that you can see in the text.
- Use some (or all) of the strategies that we've discussed and then we'll share!

Strategies to Draw From—Plus One More!

Look for patterns

Provide explanation

Model sentences

Be affirmative

Share experiences

Can you suggest a resource?

Part Three

GRAMMAR & OUR CORE BELIEFS

But wait! There's more!

- This is the really exciting part where we're going to discover some things together. We've just begun to make connections to talking about grammar and the Core Beliefs, and we want to see what you think.
- Divide into six equal groups and each group will take a Core Belief—what connections can you make?

Works Cited

- Kolln, Martha. *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. 6th ed. Boston: Pearson/Longman, 2010.
- Williams, Joseph. *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*. New York: The University of Chicago, 2009.