

INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING ADVANCED GRAMMAR

YOU WILL UNDERSTAND:

1. Prescriptive and descriptive grammar rules
2. Pedagogical grammar rules
3. Form and Use
4. Thornbury's E-Factor and A-Factor
5. The position of the Canadian Language Benchmark system on grammar
6. How to use and evaluate grammar sources
7. Your personal strengths and weakness with advanced English language structures through a brief self-diagnostic process

YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Develop an effective approach to teaching advanced grammar that integrates the pedagogical grammar concepts introduced in this module

INTRODUCTION

Before we delve into advanced grammar, we need to do a quick review of some things to remember when teaching grammar in general. These include: the difference between prescriptive and descriptive grammar, pedagogical grammar, how to teach both form and use, Thornbury's E-Factor and A-Factor, the position of the Canadian Language Benchmark system on grammar and how to evaluate grammar texts. At the end of this introduction, you will also complete a self-diagnostic test on the advanced grammar covered in this course.

PRESCRIPTIVE AND DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

Linguists generally accept that there are two ways to categorize grammar: prescriptive and descriptive. These two terms have been coined to delineate grammar use in any language.

Prescriptive grammar is focused on how language should be used. Prescriptive grammar is concerned with the rules of grammar. It states that certain forms are correct, and others are not.

Descriptive grammar is more concerned with how the structure of a language is used in context. It looks at how people use the language, and then creates rules that reflect what is being used.

For example, a prescriptive grammarian would insist that the subjunctive form of *be* after *if* (If I were) is the only correct form. However, a descriptive grammarian would recognize that many people use the past form of *be* (was) and not the subjunctive, so both forms would be considered correct.

Here is another example. A student says, “*Who are you speaking to?*”. A teacher following prescriptive grammar rules would offer correction because you should not end a sentence with a preposition. As well, *who* is not the subject of the sentence. A grammatically correct form would be “*To whom are you speaking?*”. However, this grammatically correct sentence would not sound very natural if the student used this at their place of employment. The teacher following descriptive grammar rules would talk about how to use this in a natural or more communicative way in informal places such as work or school.

Most teachers fall somewhere between prescriptive and descriptive grammar in their philosophy, but mostly we use one or the other. What we are teaching at a given point in time may ultimately decide how we teach grammar. If we are teaching a test preparation course and that test only recognizes the use of the subjunctive after *if*, then we will need to teach our students to use only that form. However, if we are teaching a communication class, then we may want to inform our students that native speakers will use both subjunctive and simple past forms after *if*.

PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR

There is an accepted adage that the goal of second language acquisition is to teach how to use language, not grammatical knowledge about the language. Accomplishing this is more difficult than it seems. All too often, instructors present the rules of descriptive and prescriptive grammar, believing their students can then take these rules and use them for effective communication. However, knowing a particular grammar point and being able to use it are two very different skills. Experience in the classroom has clearly demonstrated that students’ knowledge of descriptive or prescriptive grammar rules does not necessarily translate to an ability to use that knowledge to create language.

Descriptive and prescriptive grammar are merely definitions of two ways to understand grammar. Neither provides instructors with any way to operationalize this understanding in a meaningful, pedagogical way: this is where **pedagogical grammar** comes into the picture.

Pedagogical grammar refers to this process of operationalization by which instructors seek to impart the grammar rules of a foreign language to their students, with the goal of facilitating their acquisition of that language. Pedagogical grammar is a pedagogic activity, not merely an understanding or description of grammar rules. It activates the rules of descriptive and prescriptive grammar with a variety of techniques and practices, such as communicative exercises, charts and diagrams, noticing, explanations and more, in order to further second language learners’ language development. Pedagogical grammar is key to any second language instruction. Not only do instructors need to know grammar rules, they also need to know how to activate that knowledge so that their students can acquire communicative competence/ability.

Pedagogical grammar is a creative process where instructors make conscious decisions of what to do in the language classroom, based on their beliefs about how to teach grammar. Pedagogical grammar is all about the explanations that teachers provide, the activities and materials they use, and the feedback they provide to their students.

For more information on pedagogical grammar, see the source for this section:

How is Pedagogical Grammar Defined in Current TESOL Training Practice? By Wendy Wang accessible at <http://journals.sfu.ca/tesl/index.php/tesl/article/viewFile/274/207>.

FORM AND USE

When presenting grammar, it's imperative to provide not only rules of form, but also rules of use.

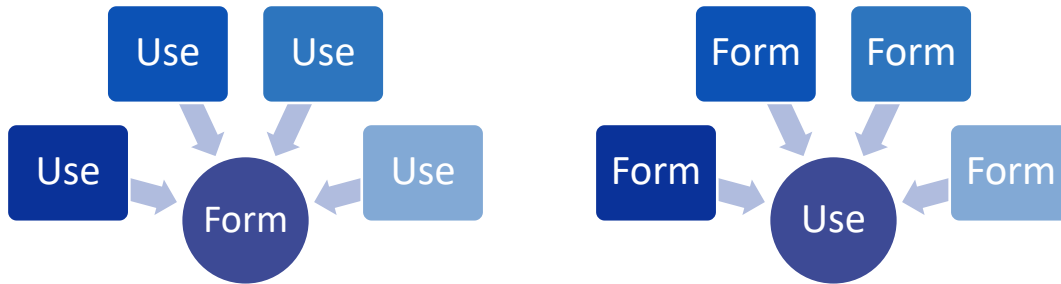
- Rules of **form** answer the question 'How is the language structure made?' (correctness)
- Rules of **use** answer the question 'What does the language structure mean and when/how is it used?' (meaning and appropriacy)

The verb tense system provides some clear examples of rules of form and rules of use. One of the biggest challenges when both teaching and learning the verb tense system is that the relationship between form and use is not one-to-one. One form can have several uses and one use can be represented with several forms. The form and use chart below for the simple present demonstrates this clearly.

There is one form, the simple present, but multiple uses:

Form	Use
He works out every day.	- to describe habitual actions in the present
The sun rises in the east.	- to describe general truths
I am exhausted.	- to indicate states
I go into the restaurant and there is this really strange looking woman waiting there.	- to tell a story verbally
She takes the ball from her opponent and runs towards the net.	- to provide commentary
My plane leaves at 6:00pm tomorrow.	- to express scheduled future

The diagram given below further illustrates the idea that the relationship between rules of form and rules of use is not one-to-one. Examples of the diagram on the left, in which there is one form and many uses, are the simple present and the present perfect verb tenses. These two tenses, while formed only one way, are used in many ways. Examples of the diagram on the right, in which there are several forms for one use, are the modal verbs. For example, to give advice we can use the modal 'should' (you should quit smoking), ought to (you ought to quit smoking) or must (you must quit smoking).



THORNBURY'S E-FACTOR AND A-FACTOR

In his textbook, *How to Teach Grammar*, Scott Thornbury presents two criteria for evaluating grammar exercises and lessons: the **E-factor** and the **A-factor**. These two criteria should also be kept in mind when teaching grammar.

The E-factor refers to **efficiency**, which can be further divided into economy (of presentation and resources), ease (of planning) and efficacy (at getting students' attention, developing understanding and being memorable). Since grammar teaching is only one part of the language classroom, it should be done as efficiently as possible, and the time and resources needed to deliver a grammar lesson should be justified by its outcomes.

The A-factor is **appropriacy**. An appropriate activity considers learners' age, level, interests, needs, cultural and educational background, class size, available resources and the educational setting. In this course, these two criteria will be used to evaluate lessons on different grammar topics.

For more information on these concepts, check out this [YouTube video](#) where the E-factor and A-factor are explained further.

THE CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS AND PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) are a series of standardized language outcomes that have been devised as a framework for describing and measuring the ESL and FSL proficiency of adult immigrants in Canada. They are descriptive, in that they set out to describe and measure ESL learners' communicative proficiency in each of 12 levels of competency, based on four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The CLB measure communicative proficiency in terms of real-life language tasks. That is, proficiency is measured by learners' ability to function meaningfully and communicatively in an ESL social context.

To this end, the CLB do not include grammar as one of the language skills. The theoretical framework for the CLB explicitly excludes grammar as a measure of competency. "In the CLB standard, the approach taken has been to integrate textual, grammatical, and sociolinguistic knowledge in the presentation of the benchmark pages; that is, these components of language ability are not isolated and presented discretely at each benchmark level. Rather, they are included in the benchmark pages where they are relevant to the description of the language user's ability. (pg. 36)

http://en.copian.ca/library/research/cclb/theoretical_framework_cclb/theoretical_framework_cclb.pdf

That being said, the CLB recognize the important, indeed, necessary position the acquisition of grammatical structures takes in learning a second language. It is incumbent upon ESL instructors to juggle the two balls of teaching functional competence, as outlined in the CLB, and grammatical competence. The intersection of the two is not always direct and clear; for example, a variety of grammatical forms may be used to perform a single communicative function, such as expressing a future plan (I'm going to go to Paris, I will go to Paris and I'm going to Paris). ESL instructors must be able to apply grammar instruction within a communicative approach to language. Students should not only *know* the grammar structure but also be able to *use* it communicatively.

The precepts of pedagogical grammar provide ESL instructors with a framework for giving structure-based grammar instruction within the communicative context of language use promoted by the CLB.

For more information on the CLB and for teacher and learner resources, explore www.language.ca.

USING AND EVALUATING GRAMMAR RESOURCES

There are many grammar resources available to both teachers and students. Most integrated 'four skills' textbooks also include grammar lessons. Finally, there are many, many resources on the internet for English grammar. We do not list internet resources here because there are so many of them and they change so quickly. Simply putting in the key words related to the grammar structure being taught can yield more than enough sites to start with. The challenge with internet resources is evaluating the quality of the resources. Be critical of the material on the sites you research before using them.

For **teachers**, grammar resources can be divided into reference textbooks and activity idea textbooks. For **students**, grammar resources can be divided into reference textbooks and student practice activity and teaching textbooks. Some reference textbooks can be used by both teachers and students.

Classic **reference** textbooks that are useful for both teachers and students are:

- Azar, Betty S. (2005). *Basic English Grammar*. Pearson Education.
- Azar, Betty S. (2005). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. Pearson Education.
- Azar, Betty S. (2009). *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. Pearson Education.
- Eastwood, John. (2001). *Oxford Practice Grammar*. Oxford.
- Swan, Michael. (2005). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford University Press.

Some **reference textbooks** that are more suitable just for teachers are:

- Celce-Murcia, Marianne and Larsen-Freeman, Diane. (2015). *The Grammar Book: Form, meaning and use for English language teachers*, Third Edition. Global ELT.
- Carter, Ronald and McCarthy, Michael. (2006). *Cambridge Grammar of English: A comprehensive guide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cowan, Ron. (2008). *The Teacher's Grammar of English*. Cambridge.
- Parrott, Martin. (2010). *Grammar for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge.
- Scrivener, Jim. (2005). *Learning Teaching*. MacMillan Publishers Limited.
- Thornbury, Scott. (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. Pearson.
- Thornbury, Scott. (2017). *About Language: Tasks for teachers of English*. Cambridge University Press.

- Thornbury, Scott. (2004). *Natural Grammar*. Oxford University Press.
- Thornbury, Scott. (2001). *Uncovering Grammar*. MacMillan Heinemann.

The following **activity idea textbooks** are good:

- Battersby, Alan. (1997). *Instant Grammar Lessons*. Global ELT.
- Watcyn-Jones, Peter. (2001). *Grammar: Games and Activities*. Penguin.
- Woodward, Suzanne. (1996). *Fun with Grammar*. Pearson.
- Woolard, George. (1999). *Grammar with Laughter*. Nelson.

Finally, the following are suggested **student practice activity and teaching textbooks**:

- Fuchs, Marjorie. (various publication dates). *Focus on Grammar Series*, Introductory to Advanced. Longman.
- Holder, Victoria. (1997). *Grammar on the Go*. Addison-Wesley.
- Larsen-Freeman, Diane (Series editor). (various publication dates). *Grammar Dimensions*. Heinle.
- Murphy, Raymond. (2017). *Basic Grammar in Use, 4th Ed*. Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy, Raymond. (2018). *Grammar in Use, Intermediate, 4th Ed*. Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy, Raymond. (2015). *Essential Grammar in Use, 4th Ed*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hewings, Martin. (2013). *Advanced Grammar in Use, 3rd Ed*. Cambridge University Press.
- Swan, Michael. (1999). *How English Works*. Oxford.
- Swan, Michael. (2001). *The Good Grammar Book*. Oxford.

With so many choices, how can a teacher decide which texts to use? As with any textbook, a grammar textbook should be appropriate for the learner's age, interests, and level. Activities that personalize and put the grammar point in context make the material more memorable. Often, published resources do not meet the teacher's or learner's needs, and the teacher must develop suitable materials on their own. With some thought, textbook exercises can also be adapted to meet the teacher's needs.

Another point to consider when deciding which resources to use, and how to use them, is that most published grammar textbooks focus on deductive learning and production-based activities. With deductive learning, students are simply given the rules for particular grammar structures and then presented with exercises with which to practice those structures. The best grammar teaching, however, is inductive, in which students must figure out the rules themselves, based upon examples provided. As teachers, we need to become skilled at changing deductive activities into inductive activities to challenge our students.

Now that you have reviewed some foundational principles for teaching advanced grammar, complete the self-diagnostic test of the grammatical structures covered in the course.

Complete the Self-Diagnostic Grammar Test.