

Chapter **Two**

Grammar for beginning learners

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

Goals

- ✓ **describe** the grammatical items that are typically taught to beginning learners.
- ✓ **explain** the following key principles used to support the teaching of grammar to beginning students: keep the learning load manageable, recycle, emphasize inductive over deductive learning.
- ✓ **create** materials and activities based on the following task and activity types: fill in the blanks, cloze procedure, word scramble, conversation scramble, sentence cues, error correction, comprehension questions, drills, surveys, information gap, grammar dictation/dictogloss, and games.
- ✓ **examine** pieces of classroom interaction and identify the principles underpinning the instructional sequences.
- ✓ **describe** practical techniques for assessing beginning learners' grammar.

1. Introduction

In this book, the learners' level of proficiency is used as a basic organizing principle. In this chapter, we will look at the teaching of grammar to beginning learners. In Chapter 3, we will look at intermediate students. And in Chapter 4, we will look at advanced learners.

The tripartite distinction between beginning, intermediate and advanced learners is very much a rough fit, spanning as it does a huge ability range. In fact, most language schools and many textbook series have finer distinctions, such as:

- Beginning
- High-beginning/False beginning
- Pre-Intermediate
- Intermediate
- High-Intermediate
- Advanced

Even with this finer-grained distinction, the range can be quite pronounced from one level to the next. Also, proficiency does not consist of a series of discrete steps labeled beginning, high-beginning, etc. Rather it is a continuum. Because of this, learners do not jump from one step to another. Instead they move forward along the continuum. They also sometimes slide back. It is therefore not always easy to identify precisely when a learner has moved from one level of proficiency to another. Another factor to keep in mind is that different countries, educational systems, and publishers will tend to vary somewhat in their application of the terms beginning, intermediate, and advanced. When I began teaching **English as a Second Language (ESL)** in England, after having taught in Australia for a number of years, I was given an intermediate class. I was really surprised on the first day to find that the students had language skills that in Australia we would have classified as advanced.

In this chapter, we look at the teaching of grammar to beginning and near-beginning (that is, learners who have had a little formal instruction) learners. In Section 2, we look at the kinds of grammatical items that are typically introduced in programs and textbooks for beginners. Next we will look briefly at principles for teaching grammar to beginning students in Section 3, then turn to the heart of the chapter, Section 4, which describes and provides examples of the types of activities that can be used to teach grammar to beginning learners. Section 5 explores different types of assessment that work well with beginners. In the last section, we look at the approaches taken by a number of teachers in authentic classroom contexts.

There are two broad ways in which we can think of language. One is as a subject to be studied, much like other subjects in the school curriculum such

as math, science, or geography. The second is as a tool for communication, which is the orientation of this book.

What, then, can beginners do with this tool called language? According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1986), beginning students can be characterized as follows:

- Oral production consists of isolated words and learned phrases within very predictable areas of need.
- Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies.
- Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of interlocutor's words.
- Speaker may have some difficulty producing even the simplest utterances.
- Some speakers will be understood only with great difficulty.

2. Syllabus design issues

As with other books in the *Practical English Language Teaching* series, the overall focus of this book is methodological. In other words, we are principally concerned with the *how* of language teaching, classroom tasks, and techniques. However, as a language teacher, you should also be aware of the kinds of grammatical items and patterns that are typically taught to learners at different levels of proficiency. The purpose of this initial section is to look at the *what*, the kinds of grammatical items you can expect to encounter in **syllabus** outlines and textbooks aimed at beginning and near-beginning students.

Until about twenty-five years ago, an approach to pedagogy called **mastery learning** was popular in English language teaching. In mastery learning, grammatical items were introduced one at a time, and the teacher was supposed to ensure that learners had totally mastered an item before moving on to the next item on the syllabus (thus the term “mastery learning”). In addition, succeeding items were meant to build on the ones that had come before. As McDonough notes: “The transition from lesson to lesson is intended to enable material in one lesson to prepare the ground for the next; and conversely for the next to appear to grow out of the previous one” (1981, p. 21).

For beginning learners, a typical progression might look something like the items set out in Figure 1.

Unit/lesson	Grammatical content
1	Drill copula and adjective combinations e.g., <i>She is happy.</i>
2	Introduce the <i>-ing</i> form of the verb e.g., <i>She is driving a car.</i>
3	Introduce existential <i>there</i> e.g., <i>There is a man standing near the car.</i>
4	Distinguish between mass and count nouns e.g., <i>There are some oranges and There is some cheese on the table.</i>
5	Introduce the verbs <i>like</i> and <i>want</i> e.g., <i>I like oranges but not cheese.</i>
6	Introduce <i>don't</i> e.g., <i>I don't like cheese.</i>
7	Introduce verbs with stative meaning e.g., <i>I don't come from Newcastle.</i>
8	Introduce simple present tense with adverbs of frequency e.g., <i>I usually come at six o'clock.</i>

Figure 1 Sequencing of grammatical items in a mastery learning approach (*Psychology in Foreign Language Teaching*, McDonough, 1981, p. 21)

An important consideration in teaching grammar and one of the key principles underlying this book is the importance of helping learners establish relationships between grammatical forms and communicative functions. Figure 2 on page 41 shows how one popular textbook series relates grammar and function in the first five units of the course.

Reflection



When teaching beginning students, you should be familiar with the grammatical terms used in Figure 2. Study the items in Figure 2 and underline any that are unfamiliar to you. Find further examples of these in a grammar reference book.

Unit	Grammar	Functions	Sample
1	<i>Wh-</i> questions and statements with <i>be</i> ; <i>yes/no</i> questions and short answers with <i>be</i> ; contractions; subject pronouns; possessive adjectives	Introducing yourself; introducing someone; checking information; asking about someone; exchanging personal information	What's your name? My name is Chuck. Where are you from? I'm from Taiwan. Who are they? They're Amy's parents. Are you on vacation? No, I'm not. I'm a student. Is Sarah from Australia? Yes, she is.
2	Simple present; <i>Wh-</i> questions and statements; time expressions; prepositions: <i>at, in, on, around, until, before, after, early, late</i>	Describing work and school; asking for and giving opinions; talking about daily schedules	What do you do? I'm a student and I have a part-time job. Where do you work? I work in a restaurant. Where does Andrea work? She works for Thomas Cook travel. What does she do? She's a guide. I get up at seven in the morning on weekdays. I leave work early on Fridays.
3	Demonstratives: <i>this, that, these, those; one and ones</i> ; questions: <i>how much and which</i> ; comparisons with adjectives	Talking about prices; giving opinions; talking about preferences; making comparisons; buying and selling things	How much is this necklace? Which one? The blue one. Which one do you prefer? That one is nicer than/cheaper than/prettier than that one.
4	Simple present <i>yes/no</i> and <i>Wh-</i> questions with <i>do</i> ; question: <i>what kind</i> ; object pronouns; modal verb <i>would</i> ; verb + <i>to</i> + verb	Talking about likes and dislikes; giving opinions; making invitations and excuses	Do you like jazz? Yes, I do. I like it a lot. Does he play the piano? Yes, he does. Would you like to see a movie? Yes, I would.
5	Present continuous <i>yes/no</i> and <i>Wh-</i> questions, statements and short answers; determiners: <i>all, nearly all, most, many, a lot of, some, not many, a few</i> and <i>few</i>	Talking about families and family members; exchanging information about the present; describing family life	Are you living at home now? Yes, I am. Is she still working in Seattle? Nearly all women with children work.

Figure 2 Matching grammatical and functional aspects of language (*New Interchange. Student's Book 1*, Richards, 1997)

Figure 2 raises several key issues that need to be considered when introducing key grammatical items and structures to beginning learners. The first issue has to do with the **learning load** imposed on beginners. Consider Unit 1. Learners are introduced to a wide range of grammatical structures.

The samples show the impossibility, within a communicative curriculum, of the mastery learning position that one should only introduce one item at a time. Communicatively, it makes no sense to simply teach *pronouns: I, you, he, she, we, they*. Nor does it make much sense to teach in isolation the verb *be: am, is, are*. These and other elements need to be introduced simultaneously. This can be done at the beginning of the learning process by teaching utterances as formulae.

A **formula** is a piece of language that learners memorize as a single functional “chunk” without, in the first instance, breaking it down into its different grammatical elements. For example, students can learn the formula “I’m...” for performing such functions as *Introducing yourself* (“I’m Chuck.”) and *Saying where you’re from* (“I’m from Taiwan.”) without memorizing the verb *be* paradigm (*am, is, are*). Over time these formulas can be broken down, or unpacked, as learners gradually acquire mastery of the grammatical system through engagement in the kinds of exercises described and illustrated in this chapter.

Three other issues are worth considering here. The first relates to contracted forms. The issue here is whether to introduce students to contracted forms such as *I’m, you’re, she’s, they’re*, which are, after all, what they will encounter in natural speech, or whether to introduce the unnatural sounding *I am, you are, she is*, etc., which they will need eventually to unpack key items (in this case the verb *be*) in the way suggested in the preceding paragraph. If you follow the most common procedure of introducing contracted forms to begin with, you then have to decide when to introduce the uncontracted forms.

The second consideration is whether to introduce entire paradigms or only part of a paradigm to lessen the learning load. The load on learners for the verb *be*, for example, is considerable, involving as it does first, second, and third persons in singular and plural as well as in positive, negative, and interrogative statements and questions. The extent of this load is evident in Figure 3.

Positive	Negative	Interrogative
I am/I'm A. You are/you're B. He is/he's C. She is/she's D. It is/it's E. We are/we're F and G. Your are/you're H and I. They are/they're J and K.	I am not/I'm not A You aren't/you're not B. He isn't/he's not C. She isn't /she's not D. It isn't/it's not E. We aren't/we're not F and G You aren't/you're not H and I. They aren't/they're not J and K.	Am I A? Are you B? Is he C? Is she D? Is it E? Are we F and G? Are you H and I? Are they J and K?

Figure 3 Forms of present tense *be*

Deciding how to distribute this learning load creates further complications for syllabus designers, materials writers, and classroom teachers. In introducing negatives, you have to decide which form to use – *No, she's not* or *No, she isn't*. (Most textbooks use the *be* form *isn't* because it reinforces the formation of the verb and is more common in natural speech.) Introducing interrogatives raises the issue of the uncontracted form of *be* as well as the issue of introducing short responses, such as *No, I'm not*. *No, you aren't*.

The third issue has to do with the complexity of most grammatical forms: for example, tense forms such as simple present are used in a variety of ways. The textbook writer and the teachers have to make decisions about which aspect of the form to introduce first, which to introduce next, etc. For instance, in Figure 2 the simple present is introduced in Unit 2 and then recycled in Unit 4.

Action



1. Select two textbooks for beginning learners that you have used or that you are familiar with and review their scope and sequence, usually found in the front of a book.
2. What similarities and differences are there between them in terms of (a) the actual grammatical items themselves, (b) their sequencing, (c) their relationship to language functions?

3. Principles for teaching grammar to beginning learners

In this section, we will expand on the following three principles, which I think are important for teaching grammar to beginners. First, keep the learning load manageable: don't overload the learners. Second, recycle. Third, place the emphasis on inductive over deductive learning.

1. Keep the learning load manageable.

There is no such thing as a simple rule in English. Even rules that at first sight seem straightforward, such as the use of the article system in English (when to use *a/an*, *the*, or no article at all), turn out to be quite complex. In fact, an adequate description of the English article system would cover many pages.

Reflection



In order to provide you with a feel for just how “slippery” grammatical explanations can be, answer the following questions.

1. Which is the better alternative answer to the questions below?
 - A. How come Bob was able to fix your car?
He used to be a mechanic./He was a mechanic.
 - B. What did Bob do in Salt Lake City?
He used to be a mechanic./He was a mechanic.
2. Provide an explanation for your preferred choice.

I have done this Reflection exercise with teachers and advanced learners many times, and in almost all instances, participants agree that the following are the preferred choices:

- A. How come Bob was able to fix your car?
He used to be a mechanic.
- B. What did Bob do in Salt Lake City?
He was a mechanic.

However, coming up with an explanation proves to be extremely challenging. In fact, it sent me scurrying to a raft of grammar books, some of which provided less than satisfactory explanations of when to use *used to* and when to use the simple past form of *be*.

What does this mean for teaching grammar to beginning students? Firstly, we need to simplify, and even oversimplify, the grammar for learners in the beginning stages. They will only have a partial understanding at these stages anyway. Secondly, we should help them perceive patterns and regularities that can be developed over time as learners “grow their grammar.” A popular term for this process is **consciousness-raising**. Through the exercises and activities we present to learners, their awareness of the principles, regularities and rules of the language is gradually raised. However, increasing the load on the learners has to be done gradually. One of the quickest ways of killing motivation is by overloading beginning learners.

2. Recycle.

As already mentioned, learners do not acquire a grammar item the first time they encounter it. Therefore, in order to help learners grow their own grammars, you need to reintroduce key grammar points at regular intervals. In the course of this recycling, learners should encounter the target items in different communicative contexts. For example, different forms of the verb *be* are typically introduced in the context of asking for and giving one’s name: *What is your name? What is his name? What are their names?*

The next time the learners encounter this form it might be in the context of asking about nationality: *What is your nationality? What is her nationality? What are their nationalities?*

Further encounters might be in terms of asking about and providing one’s home address, email address, and so on.

From such encounters, learners can begin to make generalizations. They can begin to break down formulaic language into its various components. And they can begin to identify relationships between the forms that the language takes and how to use those forms for communicating.

3. Emphasize inductive over deductive teaching.

In attempting to raise learner awareness of grammatical principles, you need to consider whether or not you will provide grammatical explanations. Many beginning learners, awash in an ocean of uncertainty, crave such explanations. Unfortunately, as beginners, they will not have the linguistic ability to comprehend any but the most rudimentary explanation, which in any case will be a gross oversimplification because of the reasons already given. Just imagine how ludicrous it would be to begin a grammar lesson for beginning learners with a statement such as the following:

Right, now, students. Today, I’m going to introduce you to the simple present tense, right? OK, so I want you to remember this. When you make declarative statements in third person singular, you have to put an s on the end of the verb. OK?

So, what is to be done? One alternative to the **deductive** approach of providing grammar explanations is to take an **inductive** approach. This approach guides learners towards an intuitive understanding of the rule or principle in question. (For a nice example of an inductive way of introducing third person *s*, see page 20.)

In summary, here are some principles to keep in mind when teaching beginning students. (For further elaboration on general principles for teaching grammar, see Nunan 2004).

1. Keep the learning load manageable.
2. Recycle, recycle, recycle.
3. Place the emphasis on inductive over deductive learning.

4. Tasks and materials

The purpose of this section is to describe and exemplify a range of task and exercise types that can be used with beginning learners. The aim is to provide a compendium of task and exercise types that can be used as models for you to develop your own materials. Each of the subsections below contains a description and rationale for the technique along with an example. Reflection and Action boxes provide you with an opportunity to develop your own examples. The following exercise types are described and exemplified:

1. Fill-in-the-blanks
2. Cloze procedure
3. Word scramble
4. Conversation scramble
5. Sentence cues
6. Error correction
7. Comprehension questions
8. Drills
9. Surveys
10. Information gap
11. Grammar dictation/Dictogloss
12. Games
13. Grammar charts

1. Fill-in-the-blanks

Fill-in-the-blank exercises are a common means of providing grammar practice, particularly at beginning and intermediate levels. They are simple to construct, and are particularly suited to grammar items such as articles, prepositions, and verb paradigms (for example, the verb *be*: *am, is, are*).

Reflection



What grammatical point is the exercise in Example 1 targeting? How would you set this exercise up in the classroom? How would you follow it up?

Example 1

A Complete these conversations. Then practice with a partner.

1. A: What you ?
B: I'm a student. I study business.
A: And do you to school?
B: I to Jefferson College.
A: do you like your classes?
B: I them a lot.
2. A: What Kanya do?
B: She's a teacher. She mathematics
at a school in Bangkok.
A: And what about Somsak? Where he work?
B: He for an electronics company.
A: does he do, exactly?
B: He's a salesman. He computer equipment.



New Interchange. Student's Book 1 (Richards, 1997, p.10)

Action



Design a fill-in-the-blank exercise for another grammatical item from Figure 2 on page 41. Share your exercise with a classmate or colleague.

2. Cloze procedure

Cloze procedure is a special type of fill-in-the-blank exercise. In a cloze procedure words are deleted from a passage at a regular rate; usually every fifth or seventh word is deleted. The rationale for cloze is similar to that for fill-in-the-blanks. The difference is that with fill-in-the-blanks a single grammar item is usually the focus of the deletion, while cloze exercises test a range of grammatical items.

Reflection




Here is an example of a passage from which every fifth word has been deleted. See if you can identify the missing items. Which ones are easy? Which are difficult? Why? Why do you think they are difficult? (You will find the original deletions at the end of the chapter, but try not to peek!)

The jungle was full (1)____ wonders. It was alive (2)____ they were in the (3)____ of it. There was (4)____ bird that sounded exactly (5)____ – that laughed in human (6)____. There was an insect (7)____ perched on their lips (8)____ night, breathing their breath. (9)____ were leaf-cutter ants whose (10)____ cut holes in their (11)____. There was an animal (12)____ ate that had the (13)____ of a rat, the (14)____ of a rabbit, the (15)____ of a pig. They (16)____ ate snake, turtle, jungle (17)____, jungle turkey, armadillo, tapir (18)____ caiman.

(The Best American Magazine Writing 2002, Junod, 2002)

The cloze procedure is an effective tool for recycling or review practice. Because words are deleted at a set rate, a range of grammatical (as well as content) items are tested. In teaching and testing grammatical knowledge, *n*th word deletions are not always particularly useful, because both grammar and content words are deleted at random. It is better to use a modified cloze procedure in which items relating to the grammar you have been teaching are deleted. Consider Example 2 on page 49. Assuming that we leave the heading and decide to delete every fourth word beginning with “teenage,” the first word to be deleted will be the student’s family name—*Pedrosa*, which is an impossible word for students to guess. It would be better to delete the sixth word *is*, which would test students’ knowledge of the verb *be*. Then, if you wanted to test articles and determiners, you could delete the first word of the second sentence—*the*.

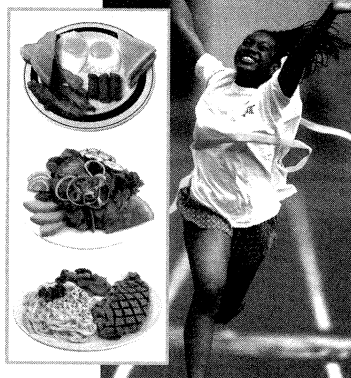
Example 2

 Read the magazine article. Circle the food words.

SPORTS

Runner eats well!

Teenage athlete Katrina Pedrosa is in the news again. The Middlebrook High student is champion runner for the second year. So, how does she do it? "I eat lots of healthy food," says Katrina. "I love fruits and vegetables. For breakfast, I eat a large fruit salad made with apples, bananas, and oranges. Sometimes I like eggs, too. For lunch, I have salad and a sandwich, although on the weekend I like hamburgers and french fries. For dinner, I eat chicken or steak with more salad. And for dessert I have ice cream. I know it's not very healthy, but I love ice cream — especially chocolate!"



Go For It. Student Book 1 (Nunan, 2004, p. 39)

Action



Turn the "Runner eats well!" passage in Example 2 into a cloze exercise. Decide which grammatical elements you want to test, delete the items, and decide what your scoring criteria will be for each deleted item.

In constructing modified cloze passages, it is important to ensure that gapped words are sufficiently far apart so that students have enough context to infer the deleted word. If you are using the cloze passage as part of a classroom test, you need to decide what your policy is on correcting the students' responses. Do you only accept exact word replacements, or do you also accept words that are grammatically and semantically acceptable? For example, would you accept it if a student provided the following response?

Teenage running star Katrina Pedrosa appears in the news again.

While *appears* sounds a little odd semantically, given the rest of the passage, it is not an absurd choice.

3. Word scramble

Word scrambles are also useful ways of reviewing and testing grammatical knowledge at the sentence level. Word scrambles are particularly useful for practicing items involving word placement. Example 3, for instance, tests the students' ability to form *yes/no* and *wh* questions with *was/were*.

Example 3

B Put the words in the correct order to make Yes-No and Wh questions with *was* and *were*. Then write short answers.

Questions	Short Answers
1. born/you/the U.S./Were/in <i>were you born in the U.S.?</i>	No, I wasn't.
2. Where/born/you/were
3. you/When/born/were
4. weekend/last/were/you/Where
5. was/weekend/How/your
6. yesterday/school/Were/at/you
7. at/Why/school/you/were
8. long/Monday/How/school/at/you/were/last

C Ask two classmates the questions from Exercise B. Write their answers in the chart.

SHORT ANSWERS	
Classmate 1:	Classmate 2:
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

Now write eight sentences about one of your classmates.

EXAMPLE: *Lisa wasn't born in the U.S.*

Grammar Step by Step 1 (Fragiadakis, Rosenfield, and Graham, 2004, p. 149)



Design a word scramble for another grammatical item from Figure 2 on page 41. Share your word scramble with a classmate or colleague

4. Conversation scramble

Conversation scrambles are similar to word scrambles except that instead of mixing up the word order, whole questions and responses are scrambled. Below are two variants on the conversation scramble technique in Examples 4 and 5.

Example 4

Pair Work: Number the questions and sentences in the correct order to make a conversation. Then practice the conversation.

- ___ No, it's too cold.
- ___ I know what we can do.
- ___ No, it's too expensive.
- ___ What can we do this evening?
- ___ Why don't we go to the new show at Lincoln Center.
- ___ We can stay home.
- ___ What?
- ___ Why don't we go to the free concert in Central Park?

ATLAS: Learning-Centered Communication. Student's Book 2 (Nunan, 1995 p. 62)

Example 5

Pair Work: Draw lines to match the suggestions and answers. Then practice them.

Suggestions	Answers
Why don't you visit the gallery?	It's too expensive.
So, why don't you go to a concert?	She doesn't like going out at night.
Well, how about taking Tomoko out?	Because I'm bored—I told you.
Well, why don't you just stay home.	I don't like looking at paintings.



Create a conversation scramble for another grammatical item from Figure 2 on page 41.

5. Sentence cues

Sentence cues present students with the content words from a list of sentences and require them to insert the grammar words to make grammatically correct sentences or questions.

Example 6

2 Your Turn

Make sentences about yourself with *I can* or *I can't*.

Example:

write with my left hand

You: I can write with my left hand. OR I can't write with my left hand.

1. write with both hands

I can't write with both hands _____

2. eat with chopsticks

3. see without glasses

4. drink tea without sugar

5. stand on my head

6. type fast

7. cook pasta

8. ride a bicycle

9. run three miles

10. play basketball

11. sing

12. dance

13. paint pictures

14. sew on a button

Grammar Form and Function 1 (Broukal, 2004, p. 272)

The first phase in this exercise is a purely mechanical one of applying the positive and negative forms of the modal *can*. However, the exercise is then given a personalized dimension by having students write about themselves.

Action



Find other examples of sentence cue exercises in a coursebook for beginning learners. Share them with a classmate or colleague.

6. Error correction

Error correction exercises ask students to read sentences or short texts and find the errors. For beginning students this task can be made more challenging by interspersing sentences containing errors with those that are error free.

Example 7

■ **EXERCISE 45—REVIEW:** Correct the mistakes.

1. It's raining today. I am needing my umbrella.
2. Do you want go downtown with me?
3. There's many problems in big cities today.
4. I like New York City. I am thinking that it is a wonderful city.
5. Does Abdul be sleeping right now?
6. Why you are going downtown today?
7. I'm listening you.
8. Are you hearing a noise outside the window?
9. I'd like see a movie tonight.

Basic English Grammar (Azar, 1996, p. 125)

Action



Design an error correction exercise for another grammatical item from Figure 2 on page 41. Share your exercise with a classmate or colleague.

7. Comprehension questions

Answering comprehension questions is a traditional exercise type. The questions can either be based on an input text (either a listening or reading passage) or, as in Example 8, draw on content from the students' own lives. By personalizing the task so that students are required to contribute their own experiential content, the task becomes meaningful. The second part of Example 8, which is practicing *count/noncount* nouns with *how much/how many* questions, also requires students to use their imaginations.

Example 8

Unit 8

9 GRAMMAR FOCUS

How much *and* how many

Uncountable nouns

How much crime is there? There's **a lot**.
There's **a little**.
There isn't **much**.
There isn't **any**.
There's **none**.

Countable nouns

How many restaurants are there? There are **a lot**.
There are **a few**.
There aren't **many**.
There aren't **any**.
There are **none**.

A Write answers to these questions about your neighborhood. Then practice with a partner.

1. How many apartment buildings are there?
2. How much traffic is there?
3. How many bookstores are there?
4. How much noise is there?
5. How many movie theaters are there?

B Pair work Write questions like those in part A about these topics. Then ask and answer the questions.

crime parks pollution restaurants schools stores

New Interchange. Student's Book 1 (Richards, 1997, p. 50)

Action



Find several comprehension question exercises in a beginning level textbook and compare them. Do the questions focus on a single grammatical structure or several structures?

8. Drills

Drills are designed to provide learners with intensive, repetitive practice in a particular grammatical item or structure. Drills were the central classroom technique of **audiolingualism** (see page 15) and were designed to instill target language items in the learners through a process of habit formation.

Example 9 is a sample substitution item for drilling simple past tense forms. As in all transcripts of classroom interactions in this book, T stands for teacher and Ss stands for students.

Example 9

T: *I read a book yesterday. (pause) magazine*

Ss: *I read a magazine yesterday.*

T: *they*

Ss: *They read a magazine yesterday.*

T: *last week*

Ss: *They read a magazine last week.*

T: *watched a movie*

Ss: *They watched a movie last week.*

T: *she*

Ss: *She watched a movie last week.*

T: *this afternoon*

Ss: *She watched a movie this afternoon.*

T: *television*

Ss: *She watched television this afternoon.*

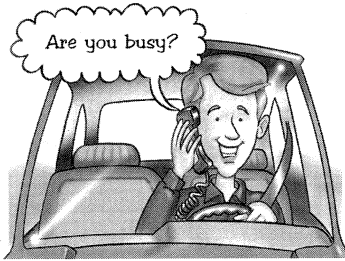
In order to do this exercise successfully, the students simply need to “slot” the substitution item into the correct place in the pattern: *Pronoun + verb phrase + time adverbial*. With a little thought, drills can be made more student-centered and engaging by adding a communicative or pseudo-communicative dimension.

In my own attempts at language learning, as well as when I am working with beginning students, I find that “disguised” drills are an indispensable means of internalizing new structures and beginning to develop oral fluency.

Example 10

Are You Busy?

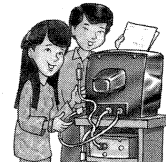
	I	am.
Yes,	{ he she it }	is.
	{ we you they }	are.



1. Is Frank busy?
cleaning his apartment



2. Is Helen busy?
feeding her cat



3. Are you busy?
fixing our TV



4. Are Jim and Lisa busy?
painting their bedroom



5. Are you busy?
doing my homework



6. Is Richard busy?
washing his clothes

Side by Side. Book 1 (Molinsky and Bliss, 2001, p. 29)

The exercise in Example 10 is designed to give students practice in making yes/no questions with the verb *be*, practicing subjective pronouns, and giving short answer replies. For students playing A, this involves little more than a mechanical drill. However, B has to draw on his/her language skills to provide an appropriate response.



Select a grammatical structure that you want to teach and design your own exercise based on Example 10. Share your exercise with a classmate or colleague.

9. Surveys

Surveys are excellent ways of providing intensive practice of a target language item in a way that requires learners to take part in an authentic information exchange. They, therefore, have all of the benefits of drills, but have the added value of communicative language work. For beginning levels one type of survey works well because it is broken up into manageable steps. This type of survey is often called “Find Someone Who....”

Reflection

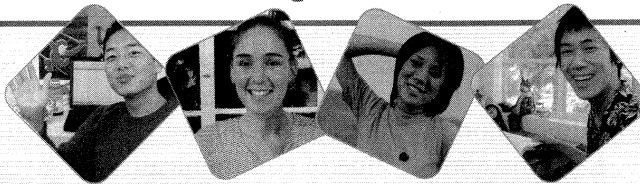


What grammatical point is the focus of the “Find Someone Who...” survey in Example 11 (p. 58)? How would you set this exercise up in the classroom? How would you follow it up?

Example 11

unit 0

Welcome to English Firsthand



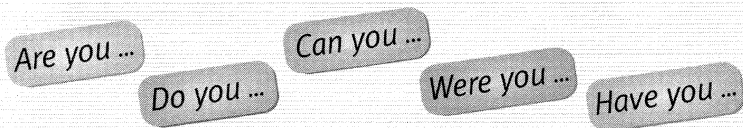
Language Map

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Can you _____ (speak two languages? / do 10 pushups?) | Yes, I can. / No, I can't. |
| Are you _____ (happy today? / shy?) | Yes, I am. / No, I'm not. |
| Do you _____ (like spicy food? / have a pet?) | Yes, I do. / No, I don't. |

Find someone who...

Meet your classmates. Ask other students the questions. When someone says, "yes," write the name on the line.

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. _____
is very happy today.
<i>Are you...?</i> | 2. _____
has a pet.
<i>Do you have ...?</i> | 3. _____
likes spicy food.
<i>Do you ...?</i> | 4. _____
likes to cook.
<i>Do you like ...?</i> |
| 5. _____
is shy.
<i>Are you...?</i> | 6. _____
can do 20 push-ups.
<i>Can you...?</i> | 7. _____
uses the Internet a lot.
<i>Do you...?</i> | 8. _____
speaks two languages.
<i>Can you...?</i> |
| 9. _____
is from a big family.
<i>Are you from ...?</i> | 10. _____
can sing karaoke well.
<i>Can you...?</i> | 11. _____
is from a small town.
<i>Are you...?</i> | 12. _____
is sleepy today.
<i>Are you...?</i> |



English Firsthand 1 (Helgesen, Brown, and Mandeville, 2004, p. 8)

Example 12

Lesson plan

Note: The teacher's script is in *italics*.

① T: *Look at page 8. You are going to get to know the other students in this class.*

② Introduce the task. T: *Find someone who. You need to find one person who can say yes for each question.*

③ T: *Ask other students the questions. When someone says "yes," write the name on the line. Use a name only one time.*

④ Demonstrate the task. Go to any student and ask: *Do you play a musical instrument?*

If the student says "no," ask a different question.

Continue until the person answers "yes."

If the student says "yes," ask the person's name.

Write the name. Then go to another student and ask another question.

⑤ Point out the language box and the "question words" next to each item. T: *Ask questions like this:*

Are you happy today?

Are you shy?

Do you like spicy food?

Do you have a brother?

Can you sing well?

Can you do 10 push-ups?

The question words – Do you...? Are you... – are next to each item.

⑥ Have students do the task. As they do, circulate and help.

⑦ As students finish, have them continue to circulate and answer other people's questions. When most people have finished, you may want to ask follow-up questions on some of the more interesting questions. For example, *What other languages do people speak? How often do people sing karaoke? What do they like to cook? What do they use the Internet for?, etc.*

English Firsthand 1 Teacher's Manual (Helgesen, Brown, and Mandeville, 2004, p. T8)



Select a grammar point and design a “Find Someone Who...” that practices the point. (You will need to take care in selecting an appropriate grammar point—not all grammar structures are amenable to this kind of treatment.) Share your exercise with a classmate or colleague.

10. Information gaps

Information gap tasks are another excellent way of providing practice of a grammar structure within a meaningful, communicative context. In information gap tasks, students work in pairs or small groups. Each student has access to different information, and they have to pool this information in order to solve a problem or come to a conclusion.

Example 13

The following information gap task is designed for two students.


7

Work In Pairs

Student A

Student B: Use page 36

A Look at the women in the picture. Where do you think they are?



B Look at the information about the three women

- Mary is from Austr
- Ms. Lee isn't from

Name

C Read your information. Finish the chart. Ask yo


7

Work In Pairs

Student B

Student A: Use page 35

A Look at the women in the picture. Where do you think they are?



B Look at the information. Then fill in the chart with as much information as you can about the three women's names, where they are from, and what they're doing.

- Ms. Stewart isn't from Taiwan or Brazil.
- Mary is on vacation.
- Jenny is from Taiwan.
- Two of the people are students.

Name	From?	Doing what?

C Read your information to your partner. Listen to your partner's information. Finish the chart. Ask your partner questions to check your answers.

Expressions: Meaningful English Communication. Book 1
(Nunan, 2001, p. 35–36)



Select a grammar point and design an information gap task based on Example 13 to practice the point. (You will need to take care in selecting an appropriate grammar point—not all grammar structures are amenable to this kind of treatment.) Share your information gap exercise with a classmate or colleague.

11. Grammar dictation/Dictogloss

Grammar dictation, also called dictogloss, is a favorite technique of mine. It can be used with students at almost any proficiency level, from beginner to advanced; it tests a variety of grammatical knowledge in an integrated and contextualized way; and it gets learners working collaboratively and, in the process, requires them to take part in authentic communication.

The technique has a number of aims and potential benefits. Learners get to use their grammar productively as they recreate a text. They are also encouraged to find out what they do and do not know about English.

Wajnryb (1990, p. 7) outlines four stages in the dictogloss procedures.

1. Preparation: when the learner finds out about the topic of the text and is prepared for some of the vocabulary.
2. Dictation: when the learner hears the text and takes fragmentary notes. (Wajnryb recommends that the text be read twice, at normal speed. The first time through, learners simply listen to get a general sense of what the text is about. The second time, they write down key words.)
3. Reconstruction: in which learners work in small groups, pool their notes, and reconstruct the text.
4. Analysis and correction: when learners analyze and correct their texts.

Reflection



What grammatical point could the text below be used to practice? How would you set this exercise up in the classroom (e.g., pre-teaching vocabulary, revising grammar)? How would you follow it up?

Text

I'm Kate and I come from Greece. I've been in this country for three years and I really like it here. I'm twenty years old and I'm single. I share a house with two other girls. I am a student and I really like learning English.

Here are Wajnryb's notes for using this text in a dictogloss lesson.

Example 14

1.4 I'm Kate

TOPIC _____ Self-identification

LANGUAGE POINTS _____ Contractions
Present simple tense
Present perfect simple tense, showing duration (*for*)
Gerund after *like*
Adverbial intensifier (*really*)

PREPARATION _____ The warm-up section of this activity will only work if you are dealing with a new class, or if your students do not know each other very well. Before the class begins, copy the chart below onto the blackboard or prepare it on slips of paper, one for every two students.

Name	Where...?	How long...?	Age?	Married?	Like English...?

WARM-UP _____

- 1 Ask the students to form pairs.
- 2 Then ask each pair to find out their partners' names, where they come from, how long they have been here, their age, whether they are married, and whether they like studying English.
- 3 The pairs can either record their responses on their slips of paper, or call out the information for you to put up on the board. This will help them to get the feel of the corporate history of the class.

PRE-TEXT VOCABULARY _____

single (*adj*) not married
to share (a house with) (*v*) to live with other people

TEXT _____

1 I'm Kate and I come from Greece. 2 I've been in this country for three years and I really like being here. 3 I'm twenty years old and I'm single. 4 I share a house with two other girls. 5 I am a student and I really like learning English.

NOTES _____

S1 *I'm* – This is a contraction of *I am*.
 S1 *I come from* – Also possible here is *I'm from*.
 S2 *I've been* – This is a contraction of *I have been*.
 S2 *in this country* – This could also be *here*.
 S2 *I really like* – *Really* is an adverb adding intensity to *like*. Note its mid-position between *I* and *like*. An alternative is *I like it very much*.
 S2 *like being* – Verbs of liking (such as *like, love, fond of*) and verbs of disliking (such as *dislike, hate, can't stand*) are followed by the gerund form: in S2 *I really like being here*; in S5 *I really like learning English*.
 S3 *twenty years old* – This could also be simply *twenty*; or more formally, *twenty years of age*.

Grammar Dictation (Wajnryb, 1990, pp. 29–30)



Design a grammar dictation task for three grammar items relevant for beginning students. (For ideas on which grammar items are appropriate, see Figure 2 on page 41.)

12. Games

Games come in all shapes and sizes. However, most games have two characteristics in common—they have rules and they have winners (and losers!). The winners can either be individuals or teams. Rinvolucri (1985), who has written several books on games for teaching grammar, argues that the kinds of games he has developed have four particular advantages in the grammar lesson.

1. The students have to take individual responsibility for what they think the grammar is about.
2. The teacher is free to find out what the students actually know, without being the focus of their attention.
3. Serious work is taking place in the context of a game. The dice-throwing and arguing lightens and enlivens the classroom atmosphere in a way that most people do not associate with the grammar part of a course. The “game” locomotive pulls the grammar train along.
4. Everybody is working at once—the 10–15 minutes the average game lasts is a period of intense involvement. (p. 4)

Example 15

Competitive games

I.9 Grammar tennis

GRAMMAR: Parts of irregular verbs

LEVEL: Post-beginner

TIME: 10 minutes

MATERIALS: None

In class

- 1 Bring two students out to the front of the class – they sit facing each other. You are by the board and have the role of umpire and secretary.
- 2 To start the game student A ‘serves’ by saying the *past participle* of an irregular verb he or she knows, e.g. hidden.
If A gets the past participle wrong, e.g. hidded, you give him or her a second chance (like the second service in tennis). If A still gets the past participle wrong then B gets a point and you tell the players and the class what the correct form is, writing it up on the board.
It is now B’s turn to respond to the ‘service’ and give the *simple past form* of the same verb. B only gets one chance. If B is right then A has to give the *infinitive* of the same verb. If B is wrong then you give the correct form and write it up on the board, following which A gives the infinitive.
- 3 Now B serves, choosing a new irregular verb he or she knows. The ‘service’ is always the past participle, etc.
- 4 The first person to get five points is the winner.
- 5 Repeat the process with a new pair. Keep the games short and snappy. Write up the parts of the verbs on the board as they are got right or as you have to correct them. Insist that the ‘spectators’ at the grammar tennis game refrain from helping the players.

Grammar Games: Cognitive, Affective and Drama Activities for EFL Students
(Rinvoluceri, 1985, p. 38)

Reflection



What other grammar points could be practiced through “grammar tennis”? (Hint: you need language features that have at least three forms, such as, language/nationality/country—for example, Turkish, Turk, and Turkey.)

13. Grammar charts

Although the current trends in teaching are toward meaning over form, grammar charts continue to be popular tools for introducing or reinforcing

grammar rules. Most often when using grammar charts, teachers employ a deductive approach. The teacher explains the rules presented in the chart and then sets up exercises to practice those rules. However, the use of grammar charts does not have to be dry. Once the rules have been explained, teachers may use any of the tasks listed in this section. Another benefit of grammar charts is that new teachers may not feel comfortable explaining grammatical rules and exceptions. Charts can also reinforce the teachers' knowledge.

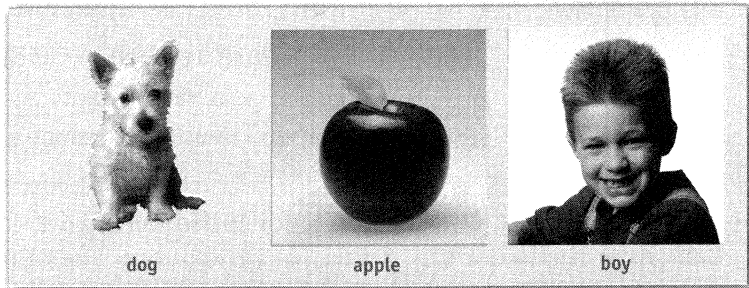
In Example 16 is a grammar chart from a beginning level grammar book. The chart presents the basic rules for articles.

Example 16

1a Nouns: Singular

Form / Function

Nouns name people, places, animals, and things.



Nouns can be singular (one) or plural (more than one).
We put *a* or *an* in front of many singular nouns.
A and *an* have the same meaning. They mean one (1).

1. We use *an* when a word begins with the vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, and *o*.

an apple **an** egg **an** ice cream **an** orange

We use *an* when a word begins with "u" and has a vowel sound .

an umbrella **an** uncle

But we use *a* when a word begins with the vowel "u" and sounds like "y."

a university **a** united country **a** unit

2. We also use *an* when a word begins with a silent "h."

an hour **an** honest man **an** honorable person

But we use *a* when the "h" is not silent.

a house **a** horse **a** hat

3. We use *a* when a word begins with a consonant sound: *b*, *c*, *d*, *f*, *k*, *l*, *t*, *w*, *y*, and so forth.

a book **a** teacher **a** country **a** cat **a** flower

Grammar Form and Function 1 (Broukal, 2004, p. 2)



How would you present the grammar chart in Example 16 to a class of 20 beginning students who do not all share a native language? Write a script of what you would say. Share your script with a classmate or colleague.

Below is the practice exercise that follows the grammar chart. Teachers can always expand on the exercises given. For example, after doing this exercise, the teacher could ask the students to write or say a sentence using each word.

Example 17

I Practice

Put *a* or *an* before the word.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <u> a </u> table | 9. <u> </u> city |
| 2. <u> </u> ear | 10. <u> </u> house |
| 3. <u> </u> animal | 11. <u> </u> bed |
| 4. <u> </u> hotel | 12. <u> </u> exercise |
| 5. <u> </u> eye | 13. <u> </u> university |
| 6. <u> </u> armchair | 14. <u> </u> elephant |
| 7. <u> </u> question | 15. <u> </u> office |
| 8. <u> </u> uncle | 16. <u> </u> fish |

Grammar Form and Function 1 (Broukal, 2004, p. 3)

5. Grammar in the classroom

In this section, I want to look at how teachers deal with grammar in the beginning learners' classroom. As there is an infinite variety of ways in which new points can be introduced, errors corrected, and repetitive practice provided, this section must necessarily be selective. However, the examples given do show real teachers in action in genuine classrooms.

Reflection



Study the instructional sequence in Extract 1 on page 67. What is the grammar point being taught? How is it being taught? How old do you think the learner is?

Extract 1

T: *What's that?*

S: *It's T Rex.*

T: *Is it big or small?*

S: *Big.*

T: *How big?*

(silence)

T: *This big* (demonstrating small size with hand a few inches off the floor)?
(Student shakes his head to indicate no.)

T: *This big* (demonstrating a waist-high size with hand)?
(Student shakes his head to indicate no.)

T: *This big* (demonstrating a human size with hand)?
(Student shakes his head to indicate no.)

T: *THIS big* (demonstrating as high as the ceiling with hand stretched up)?
(Student nods his head to indicate yes.)

T: *Yes, it was VERY big!*

Teaching Language to Young Learners (Cameron, 2001)

Here we have an instructional sequence with a young child in which the teacher models inductively a target grammatical item that is made meaningful to the child by the context in which it is presented. The teacher makes the following comment on the sequence:

By the end of our short conversation, not only had we reached agreement on the size of T Rex, but I had modeled for the child a new piece of grammar which he seemed to need to express what he already knew about the dinosaur, that *it was very big*. Moreover, the little boy had understood the meaning of the new piece of English grammar; the topic of the talk was clear from the picture, and the idea of size was clear from the gesture and his knowledge of *big*. (Cameron, 2001, p. 7)

Reflection



What is the grammar point being taught in Extract 2? How is it being taught? Which of the techniques from the preceding section is the teacher using?

Extract 2

T: *Let's just listen to the next conversation. I'm going to ask you to listen to the conversation and then practice it. But I want you to use—I want you to use language that is true for you. So use your own name, where you're from, and so on.*

Tape:

A: *Hi! I'm Yongsue. What's your name?*

B: *Vera.*

A: *Where are you from?*

B: *Chicago. What about you?*

A: *I'm from Seoul, Korea. What do you do?*

B: *I'm a student. What do you do?*

A: *I'm a student, too.*

T: *OK, I want you to practice the conversation with your partner. But use your own name, use where you're from, and say what you do. OK?*

Ss: *Mmm.*

T: *Off you go.*

(The students mill around practicing the conversation for several minutes. The teacher circulates and monitors.)

The pedagogical point of this exercise is the practice of the *Wh-* questions *what/where* with both *be* and *do*. Notice that the approach to grammar here is an inductive one. The teacher does not begin the lesson by putting a paradigm illustrating *what is/what are* and *what does/what do* on the board. There is nothing stopping her from doing this, of course, although in this instance she chose not to. When I spoke to her after the lesson, she said that she wanted to get the students using the grammar in a context that would make clear to the learners how the grammar was used for communication. In other words, she was striving to integrate grammatical form and communicative functions into this part of the lesson.

Extract 2 was taken from an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom where students came from different places. In **English as a Foreign Language (EFL)** settings, where it is highly likely that all of the learners will be from the same place and will all be students, variety can be introduced by giving students role cards to work from. They can then circulate around the class, introducing themselves and eliciting personal information from other students in the class in a way that simulates what might happen in a social situation in real life.



What is the grammar point being taught in Extract 3? Is it being taught inductively or deductively? How old do you think the learners are?

Extract 3

T: *If we have many of them ... two of them?*

Ss: *Cows.*

T: *Horses?*

Ss: *Horses.*

(some more examples of regular forms)

T: *Sheep?*

Ss: *Sheep.*

T: *Yes, we don't put the s at the end of sheep. Wolf?*

Ss: *Wolves.*

T: *How do we write it? Yes?*

Ss: *W-O-L-F-S*

T: *You should—one should think so, but it isn't so yes?*

Ss: *W-O-L-V-E-S*

T: *Yes, yes, it's a special word. One wolf with F/two wolves with V.*

Teaching Language to Young Learners (Cameron, 2001)

Here the teacher is engaged in metalinguistics (talking about language) with a group of ESL learners about plural forms in English. He uses a form of induction or guided discovery by getting the students to focus on a number of examples before formulating the rule for *wolf/wolves* at the end of the instructional sequence.

The author comments:

We see that it is both useful and quite possible to talk about language without using technical terms. However, since these children seem to have the concept of plural and singular, the technical term might be usefully introduced to them. This will also depend on whether they have learned metalinguistic terms in their first language lessons. (Cameron, 2001, p.120)

I like this sequence because it shows that inductive and deductive teaching are not mutually exclusive. In Extract 3, the teacher moves between the two, eliciting examples, and then makes the principles explicit.



What is the teacher trying to do in Extract 4? How might she follow up on the sequence?

Extract 4

The students all have copies of a train timetable.

T: *Now, back to the timetable. Where do you catch the train?*

(There is silence, and so she points to a student in the front row.)

S: *Keswick.*

T: *Yeah.*

(She turns away from the students and writes on the whiteboard
Where do you catch the train?)

T: *Do you know where Keswick is? ...OK. Where do you catch the train? At Keswick. Keswick is near the city—but not the big railway station. It's about, oh, one kilometer – two kilometers from the city. ...All right, so where do you catch the train? At Keswick. Now—what time...what time does the train leave?*

Ss: *Nine. Nine o'clock. Nine p.m. Nine p.m. Nine p.m.*

T: (Leans over a student and checks the timetable to verify that this is the correct answer.) *OK. Departure nine a.m.* (Note that the teacher corrects the students from p.m. to a.m., but doesn't draw attention to the correction. She returns to the board.) *What can I write here? What time... (She writes What time on the board] What comes next? What time...? ...does...does (She writes does the train...) ...does the train...yes?*

(One student makes an inaudible comment.)

T: *No, what time does the train...? What's another word for depart?...leave. (She writes leave on the board .) OK, you, you tell me.... It leaves at nine a.m. OK. What time does it arrive?*

S: *Er, eleven fifty-eight a.m.*

T: (Leans over student's shoulder and checks his timetable.) *Now – where does it arrive at eleven fifty-eight? At Victor Harbor?*

Ss: *No, Goolwa.*

T: *No?*

Ss: *Goolwa, Goolwa.*

T: Goolwa. Have a look on your map and see if you can find Goolwa. See if you can find Goolwa on this map.

S: Near, er, near the Victor Harbor.

T: Near Victor Harbor, yeah. (She writes *What time*) OK, what comes next? ...*What time...?* What's the question? *What time...?* ...*does* (*does*)

S: ...*the train arrive...*

T: Arrive (She writes *does the train arrive at Goolwa?*) All right, so what time does the train arrive at Goolwa? OK. What time?

S: Eleven, eleven fifty.

T: Eleven fifty...*eight*. What's another way of saying eleven fifty-eight? Two minutes to...*twelve*. Yeah, two minutes to twelve. OK.

(The teacher continues in this fashion attempting to elicit questions and responses from the students and write the questions on the board until the following is displayed.

Where do you catch the train?

What time does the train leave?

What time does the train arrive at Goolwa?

How long does it take to go to Victor Harbor?

How long does it take to come back?

How long do you spend in Victor Harbor?

How much does it cost?)

The aim of this part of the lesson is to draw the attention of the students to the grammatical form *Wh-* questions with *do/does*. This form has been previously introduced, and is now recycled within the communicative context of planning a trip to the beachside resorts of Goolwa and Victor Harbor. Having built up the paradigm on the board, she has a number of options for exploitation. One would be to get students working in groups to work out inductively the rule for when to use *do* and when to use *does*. Another would be to drill the question forms, perhaps by extending the pattern to contexts such as *When do you come to school?*

Reflection



As you read Extract 5, note differences between the teacher's approach to grammar and that taken by the teacher in Extract 4.

Extract 5

(The teacher and the students are sitting in a large circle. The teacher has some cards in her hand. She looks at a question.)

T: *Let's have the question live.* (She gestures with her hand.)

S: *What do live?*

T: *No, not what. What's the question?*

S: *Where*

T: *Where! Good. Where* (She leans forward and gestures with her hand.)

S: *Where...you...live?*

T: *He's nearly there. Can you help him?*

S: *Where...*

(The teacher begins counting off the words on her fingers and repeats each word as the student says them.)

S: *Where (where)...do (do)...you (you)...live (live)?*

T: *OK. Listen.* (The teacher speaks rapidly and makes sweeping gestures with her hand to indicate the intonation contour.) *Where d'you live? Where d'you live? Where d'you live? Where d'you live?* (She sweeps her hand around the group.)

Ss: *Where do you live?*

T: *OK. Victor, please ask Roberto.*

S: *Where do you live?*

T: *Where do you live?*

S: *I live...in Smithfield.*

T: *OK, fine. What was number five? The question – languages?*

S: *What...languages...do...*

T: *Do*

S: *...you...speak.*

T: *Yes. What language do you speak? What languages do you speak? Remember? What languages do you speak? OK. Daniel, ask Pia.*

S: *What languages do you speak?*

S: *I speak English.*

T: *Uh-huh. All right. And in your country? I speak Viet...?*

S: *I speak Vietnamese.*

T: *Good. I speak Vietnamese. And...*

S: *And...a little...*

T: And a little English. And a little English. And a little English. And a little (The teacher pauses, gestures and smiles encouragingly at one of the male students.)

S: English.

T: OK. I know you don't like saying you speak a little English. (laughter) What's the next one? (She consults her cards.) Question. Married. What was the question?

S: Are...

S: Are you married?

S: Yes, I am.

T: Yes, I am. This is my... (points to one of the male students.)

S: This is my wife.

T: Wife? (laughter)

S: Ah, husband.

T: This is my husband. OK. Have you got. Have you got any children? Have you got a pen? Have you got...a book? Have you got any brothers or sisters? Remember yesterday? OK, Helena, could you ask Victor the question please?

This teacher is also practicing questions—in this case with both *be* and *do*. Although the interaction takes the form of a grammar drill, she gives it a communicative dimension by making the students use information that is true for them. The teacher is more aggressive in demanding that students come up with the required responses. (The teacher in Extract 3 tended to provide the answers for the students when they hesitated.) The sequence also provides a good example of a teacher **scaffolding** instruction for low proficiency students. One final point to note is the way the teacher personalizes the lesson by getting students to come up with questions and answers that are true for them.

In this section, we have explored how some of the principles introduced in Section 3 and some of the techniques described in Section 4 can be activated in the classroom. We have seen that both inductive and deductive methods can be used with beginning learners—although the bias is towards inductive learning. We have also seen that intensive grammar practice need not involve rote learning or mechanical drills, and that repetition work can also be both meaningful and communicative.

6. Assessing beginning learners

In this section, we will look at the issue of assessment in relation to the beginning learner. Points touched on here will be revisited and elaborated on in the next two chapters. As indicated in Chapter 1, the main focus of this book is on formative assessment. In other words, assessment should be part of the learning process. Assessment tasks should be directly linked to program goals and objectives and should provide useful feedback to teachers, learners and others on learners' strengths and weaknesses. The implication of this orientation is that assessment should be biased towards direct rather than indirect forms of assessment.

One of the challenges in assessing and providing feedback to beginning learners is that, by definition, they make a great many errors. The question then arises as to which of these errors should be dealt with, when and how. At this level, informal observation of students as they complete learning tasks in class should be a central means of assessing learners' spoken grammar. If the students are engaged in communicative tasks, they should not be interrupted in the course of completing the task. However, you should make a note of the grammar items that have been covered in previous classes. Remember that it is important to note instances of success as well as areas of failure. Those items that many students are getting wrong should then form the basis for follow-up grammar-focused work. Checklists such as Figure 4 can provide a useful record of how individual students are progressing with target language items. The checklist can either cover a range of items or be targeted on a particular area of grammar, such as modals or question forms, as is the case with the checklist below. A simple key can be used to create a profile of each student's success on each item. For example, a check mark can be made in the box each time a question is accurately formed, a minus sign can indicate errors, and a question mark can be used to indicate uncertainty. Qualitative comments can be made in the final column.

Grammar item: question forms	Students (insert student ID in the top box below)									Comments/ observations
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
<i>Am/is/are</i> questions										
<i>Do/does</i> questions + <i>be</i>										
What questions + <i>be</i>										
What questions + <i>do</i>										

Figure 4 Observation checklist for recording beginning students



Create your own checklist using Figure 4 as a model. If possible, observe a group of students completing an oral task (either your own or someone else's), and use the checklist to record their progress.

Practically any task that can be used for teaching can also be used for testing. The key difference between a teaching task and an assessment task is that an assessment task should have criteria attached for evaluating student performance. Another important difference is in how you record and give feedback on student performance.



Select an exercise type from Section 4 and turn it into an assessment task. Share your assessment task with a classmate or colleague.

In the opening paragraph to this section, I made the point that assessment should be part of the learning process. In other words, assessment should mainly be used to improve learning by providing feedback to learners on their strengths and weaknesses. Ongoing self-assessment also sensitizes learners to ways of improving their own learning. The bias in this book is towards formative assessment. However, as pointed out in Chapter 1, formal, summative assessment is also an important part of any educational system and needs to be taken into account.

Tests, whether used for formative or summative purposes, are time-consuming to prepare. However, there are many commercial testing packages published today, and it is worth spending a little time to find out whether such packages are available for your students. If you are using a commercial coursebook series, then it is advisable to find out whether the series is accompanied by a testing package or if the teacher's manual includes tests. (This will usually be indicated either on the back cover of the coursebook or in the publisher's catalogue.)

Example 18 is a test from the teacher's manual of a popular beginning level series.

and practicing grammar with beginners were described and illustrated. In Section 5, several different types of assessment strategies to use with beginners were presented. Then in the sixth section, we also took a look into a number of classrooms where teachers were focusing on grammar with beginners.

The next chapter will cover similar terrain in relation to intermediate students.



Further readings

Ur, P. 1988. *Grammar Practice Activities: A practical guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book presents many great practical ideas for introducing specific grammar points.

Parrott, M. 2000. *Grammar for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book helps teachers to develop their knowledge and understanding of English grammar and provides an accessible reference for planning lessons and clarifying learners' problems.

Azar, B. 1996. *Basic English Grammar*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Although this book has been around for many years, and although it contains mainly discrete point, reproductive exercises, this beginning book and in fact the whole "Azar" series remains highly popular. It is a useful reference source for both students and teachers.



Helpful Web sites

Owl Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/>)

This site, which is maintained by Purdue University, has downloadable, printer friendly handouts and exercises containing explanations and many practice activities for most basic grammatical items. The site also contains interactive online exercises.

English as a Second Language: Grammar
(<http://esl.about.com/cs/grammar>)

Part of the about.com Web site, this grammar site offers grammar resources and guides, quizzes, lesson plans, and links to other helpful sites.



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Cloze exercise deletions (page 48)

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|-----------|--------------|----------|
| 1. of | 7. that | 13. tail |
| 2. and | 8. at | 14. body |
| 3. middle | 9. There | 15. face |
| 4. a | 10. jaws | 16. also |
| 5. human | 11. T-shirts | 17. pig |
| 6. tones | 12. they | 18. and |