



LEARNING GRAMMAR ACTIVITIES TO STUDENTS OF LINGUISTIC DEPARTMENTS

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The learning of grammar should be seen in the long term as one of the means of acquiring a thorough mastery of the language as a whole, not as an end in itself. Thus, although at an early stage we may ask our students to learn a certain structure through exercises that concentrate on virtually meaningless manipulations of language; we should quickly progress to activities that use it meaningfully. And even these activities will be superseded eventually by general fluency practice, where the emphasis is on successful communication, and any learning of grammar takes place only as incidental to this main objective.

Before any classroom exercise you usually make some brief comments to introduce it. The most important thing here is clarity: as a result of the introduction, the students should know exactly what the objectives of the activity are, and how they are expected to achieve them (in the students' native language).

For more mature learners it is a good idea to let them know more precisely what you are going to practise with them: for one thing it helps them and you to feel that there is a sharing of the responsibility for learning; for another, they are more likely to make an effort if they know exactly what it is for. If the class is to do any kind of independent (individual, group or pair) work in the process of the activity, it is vital for the instructions to be clearly given before they start. This is the weak point of many inexperienced teachers: they give instructions that are clear to themselves, and then launch into the activity without checking that the students are sure what they have to do. The result is very often that the teacher has to stop the activity in the middle to reissue instructions, or that there is delay and a constant distracting buzz of talk as students consult each other.

There are various ways of making sure that instructions are clear: by slowing down delivery, repeating, and/or using the students' native language; by doing a 'trial run', or demonstration of an activity with the full class before letting them work independently; by simply asking them, before setting them to work, if there is any unclear point they would like to ask about.

The instructions for an activity based on independent (individual, group or pair) work, incidentally, should usually include some provision for ending: how long the activity is expected to last, what the students should do after they finish, what happens if some finish early or late, what is to be done with any written or recorded results.

The place of a grammar-practice activity is preferably in the middle of a lesson rather than right at the beginning or at the end. Students are freshest and most recep-



tive at the beginning of the lesson: this is therefore the best time to present new language topics or texts, or to re-present difficult material. More extensive fluency practice tends to come later in the period. The end of the lesson we like to leave for 'rounding-off': reviewing what we have done, checking that everyone knows what is to be prepared at home, possibly a brief 'lightweight' activity involving not too much effort of concentration to give the session a pleasant finish.

There are various ways of extending practice activities in order to provide the extra repetition; here are some of them.

i) Repeating in a different mode. An exercise that has been done orally can then be redone in writing, or vice versa.

ii) Repeating selectively. Some bits of the exercise can be selected for review; this lessens the boredom.

iii) Recalling. After an oral practice activity, students can be challenged to recall as much as they can of what was said. If, for example, a conventional discrete-item exercise was used, they can be asked to shut their books and try to remember all the items; if a brainstorm, when a large number of utterances have been heard, they may be asked to try to recall a defined number of sentences: 'Can you remember (at least) ten suggestions that have been made?' The recalling can be done orally or in writing, individually or in pairs or groups.

iv) Editing. After a written activity, students can get together and go through the exercise again in order to help each other correct and improve their work. If the exercise was not open-ended, groups of students can pool their efforts to produce a final joint version as correct as possible. If open-ended - that is to say, if each student has something different, as in essay-writing - then students can read their texts to each other, and exchange comments and advice.

v) Composing. Students can be invited to compose their own exercise as a continuation of a textbook one, using the same kind of texts and task. They can then ask each other, or the entire class, to perform it. You can add further incentive by inviting students to improve on the interest, humour or drama of the original, or to adapt it to refer to their own circumstances or personalities.

vi) Varying. In 'matching' or slot-filling exercises, students are often asked to put together two components in order to form logical propositions. As a follow-up, you might suggest that they match incongruous components to make nonsense or humorous propositions (but still grammatical!) - and then possibly justify them or suggest situations where they might be true. Or they may simply invent their own 'fillers' to make original, personal, or amusing sentences.

Reference:

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2. *Franck C., Rinvolucri M. Grammar in Action.* – Pergamon, 1983.
3. *Jones I. Use of English.* – Cambridge University Press, 1985.