

Grammar Journals

Levels

Any

Aims

Receive ongoing, consistent grammar feedback and learn a system for logging correct grammatical forms and word usage
Activate passive knowledge of grammatical structures for use in writing
Learn proofreading skills

Class Time

Little

Preparation Time

45 minutes

Resources

English dictionary and grammar reference book recommended

This journal activity enhances students' written grammar and proofreading skills, with the goal of promoting independence and editorial control in the students' future writing.

Procedure

1. Explain the journal procedure and hand out a copy of the journal guidelines and list of grammar correction symbols to each student. Any set of symbols can be used, but a simple system works well at the intermediate and advanced levels as it puts the burden of correction on the students and is less time consuming for teachers (see Appendix).
2. Introduce proofreading skills, explain why proofreading is important, and demonstrate how to do it effectively. If time allows, give students a chance to practice in class before proofreading at home on their own.
3. Assign for homework a journal entry on an assigned topic. Topics can come from a variety of sources. Students can be asked to summarize and respond to an article or passage that they have read or a video they have watched. Alternatively, they can be assigned to report on a topic that has been discussed during a pair or group activity.

Topics which are related to the content in a reading, listening, or speaking class are particularly successful because students will be familiar with the topic and relevant vocabulary. Personal topics are not recommended for this type of journal as students may discuss painful events or personal problems, making grammar correction difficult or insulting.

4. Ask the students to proofread their entries and hand them in for comments. While proofreading, they should pay particular attention to grammar points covered in class and to error corrections made to previous entries. (Proofreading can be assigned for homework or done as an in-class activity.)

5. After collecting the journals, read each entry twice, first for content, then for grammar. Respond to the content in the form of an endnote by commenting on the students' opinions, sharing your own experiences, and answering any questions that have been posed. Then give a grade for thoughtfulness and effort. For simplicity, a ✓ +, ✓, ✓- and system can be used, though a letter or number system is also possible.
6. During the second reading, look for grammatical errors and, using a different color pen, insert in-text symbols where errors occur. Based on your preference, class proficiency level, and course focus, you will need to decide which errors to mark. You may want to address all errors, those errors which have been addressed in class, or only those occurring frequently within a student's writing.

In addition to the in-text symbols (and using the same color pen), you may want to add summary grammar comments. You can point out specific rules or areas for individual focus, such as "*Even though* is always two words," or "In your next entry, please check your punctuation carefully." You and your students can refer to these comments easily—students, to obtain accurate grammar information for future use, and teachers, to ensure that students are applying their suggestions to future entries. At this point in the procedure, do not grade students on their grammar usage.

7. After the entries are returned to the students, they must do two things: reread what they have written, and then correct the areas which have been marked.
8. Next, collect the journals again, read the students' self-corrections, and supply corrections for improperly corrected or uncorrected text. At this time, give a grade for the quality of their grammar corrections, not their initial grammatical accuracy. Here, too, a ✓ +, ✓, ✓-grading system works well.
9. Finally, after the journals are returned, the students should use a highlighter to mark the grammar points that they want to remember. They can highlight grammar rules or corrections that have been provided by the teacher or corrections that they have made themselves. This procedure allows for easy reference because the highlighted grammar information appears in the same notebook where future entries will be written.

Caveats and Options

Step 9 completes one entry cycle. You may want to complete one cycle before assigning the next journal topic, or assign students to correct a previous entry and write a new entry at the same time.

1. Each week, present a particular grammar point for students to focus on when writing their journals. Choose journal topics that will elicit these forms. For example, after a lesson on the past tense, assign students a story to summarize using the past tense.
2. Though this type of journal is somewhat time-consuming for teachers, it is effective in promoting grammatical accuracy. It provides students with an opportunity to hone proofreading skills and to develop a system for recording useful grammar information. Most importantly, it brings great satisfaction to students, especially at the end of a course, when they look back and see the progress they have made.

Appendix: Sample Journal Entry

If I had \$1 million, I would
^{at first}
 buy a new residence near TMC Hospital
^a
 & Mercedes-Benz Coupe. I would
 drive all over Japan with my wife and
 daughter. I would go to Hawaii
 with my ~~family~~ wife, daughter, parents,
 etc. who ^{they would} want to go with ^{me}. I would
 present ^{jewelry} ~~valuable~~ to my wife, ^{part of} ~~precious~~ watches
 to my parents. ^{check} ~~to~~ ^{pretty} ~~new~~ and baby bed
 I would go ^{to} ~~for~~ watching ^{at the} horse race,
 and buy tickets ^{at the} ~~highest~~ highest
 odds. ~~At~~ Finally, I would deposit
 the ^{left overs} ~~at the bank~~ in the Bank.

Kazuhiko,
 You sound like a very
 generous man! I'm sure your parents,
 wife, and daughter would be very
 happy to receive the gifts you have
 mentioned. Be careful at the horse
 races!

✓+

grammar corrections = ✓+

Contributor

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