

Some things that matter in grammar teaching and some things that don't

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Michael Swan

1. Am I teaching enough grammar?
2. Typical grammatical mistakes: How to prioritise the grammar you teach
3. Explanations
4. Examples
5. Exercises
6. How to include grammar in other practice: vocabulary, reading and pronunciation

Michael Swan looks at the theory and practice of grammar, and its role in the classroom. Do you feel like you teach enough grammar in the classroom. Do you teach too much or too little? Can we ever expect our English language learners to produce perfect grammar?

Gain a better understanding of the typical grammar mistakes learners make and how to prioritise the grammar you teach. Learn Michael Swan's three 'Ex's for teaching grammar and how to include grammar in other language practice.

Who is this session for?

New teachers who need to learn more about teaching grammar
 Teacher trainers looking for video-based materials for grammar training session
 Experienced teachers who are interested in comparing what they do in class with what Michael Swan recommends.

Before you watch

What is your opinion: do you think grammar should be taught implicitly or explicitly in the classroom?
 When required, do you think grammar explanations should be given in the target language or in the learners' native tongue?

About the speaker

Michael Swan is a well-known writer in ELT, famous for his grammar books. His work includes Practical English Usage, Basic English Usage, and a number of course books.

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Real life practice

Task 1

- List ten typical grammatical mistakes in English that your learners make. Rank these in order of severity.
- Which mistakes are least important? Which are most important? What criteria did you use to make your decisions?
- If possible, give this short task to one of your fellow teachers. Ask them to also rank the sentences in order of importance. Then compare your results together.
- Did you agree with each other? If not, what were the reasons for your different opinions?
- Consider what you have learned from this task. How will it influence your teaching practice in future?

Task 2

- Consider again the 'three Ex's' of grammar teaching and learning that are discussed in the talk: Explanations, Examples, Exercises.
- Think about how much time you spend on each of these in your own classroom.
- Ask an observer to record how much time in your lesson you spend on each of the 'Ex's'. Then discuss the results in your after-lesson conversation. Do you think you got the balance right? What, if anything, would you change in future when teaching grammar to increase or reduce the time spent on different types of useful exercises?

Five top tips

- Try to stop worrying about whether you teach too little or too much grammar! Mix it up. Do it differently each lesson!
- Watch the other grammar seminar by Michael Swan seminar in the British Council seminar series 'What is grammar?'
- Try out the grammar activities that Michael Swan shares with you in the seminar in your teaching. Reflect on and record in a learning journal which ones work best for your students.
- Remember that the grammar of written English is different from the grammar of spoken English. Address both in your classroom.
- If students need to actually study grammar through written exercises, try and assign these tasks for homework. Bring grammar to life in your classroom through as much real-life communication as possible.

Discuss these questions with your peer teachers, if you can:

- To what extent is it possible or even desirable, to ask for grammar perfection from students?
- Too much or too little grammar? What do you think is the right amount of grammar to teach your students?