

## Teaching Grammar

There has been much debate about explicit grammar teaching (**involves directly instructing students on grammatical rules and structures, focusing on clear explanations, examples, and rule-based practice to foster a deeper understanding and accurate language use**)—arguments about whether it does any good, or about what approach might be most effective.

Implicit grammar teaching **focuses on language acquisition through exposure and practice, encouraging students to discover grammar patterns naturally through communicative activities and authentic language use, rather than explicitly teaching rules**.

Yet explicit teaching remains a valuable mainstay of many language courses, and institutional context is a major influence on the policies adopted by individual teachers. Learners also usually expect to concentrate on grammar at some point during a course. The following tips are options for you to consider and where necessary.

1. **Expect grammatical errors.** They are a normal part of language development and you can't get rid of them by pointing them out. Learners might produce a new form correctly in a controlled practice activity, but get it wrong again the next day—this is normal, too. With lots of opportunities to use language for meaning, and focus on accuracy at appropriate points, they will improve over time.
2. **Provide learners with opportunities to use their full grammatical range.** This means providing meaning-focused production activities, where learners can choose what language they produce with the role play, task, etc. You may choose an activity which creates an opportunity to use recently studied grammatical structures, for the benefit of learners who are ready to consolidate in this way.
3. **Consider explicit practice activities.** These are activities where language is more controlled—the prime purpose of the activity is to practise a recently studied form. Such activities usually have a meaning-focused dimension, but learners are told what language they should use to express the meaning. For example, learners might be invited to discuss weekend plans using the “going to” future. These kinds of activities can be especially useful for less confident learners, and for those whose previous learning has been highly form-focused.
4. **Correct errors carefully.** In both meaning-focused and form-focused activities, errors will persist. As always, your attitude to correction and feedback should depend on the purpose of the activity and on what you think your learners are ready to learn.
5. **Make grammar presentations meaningful.** You may choose to present explicitly a new grammatical form; certainly, this is a widely used technique. If you do, make sure your presentation highlights the meaning dimension — elements of the semantic significance of the target form. You can check whether learners have understood this by using “concept” questions, which highlight an aspect of the situation which makes the meaning of the target form clear.
6. **Use discovery techniques.** An alternative to grammatical presentation is to show learners examples of a grammatical form in various contexts and to encourage them to work out its significance. The contexts can be drawn from both “authentic” and “non

authentic” sources. Many modern textbooks use a combination of discovery and presentation techniques; experience will help you find the right balance for your learners.

7. **Give clear and simple explanations.** At times you will be called upon to summarize the correct use of a grammatical form. Research your explanation, ideally in more than one grammar book– and then give an explanation that you feel best meets the current stage of your learners’ language awareness. Show them that explanations are really just workable simplifications; exceptions to ‘rules’ will inevitably be found. They are an opportunity to refine one’s understanding of the rule in question.
8. **Capitalize on learners’ existing knowledge.** Especially if they have previously learnt in a formal way, your learners will no doubt possess a grammatical metalanguage which you can tap into. Find out how they express the ‘rules’ that they already know, and work from there. Even if the rules they know are incomplete, they are probably still useful for the learners; so if you find you need to contradict them, do so sensitively.
9. **Balance the conditions for grammar improvement.** Meaning-focused work, restricted practice, explanation and analysis all have a part to play in building up the grammatical knowledge that learners have spontaneously available. Different conditions will help different learners at different times. So the important thing is to ensure that learners or series of lessons contain a good balance.
10. **Keep on providing rich exposure.** Even in a grammatically focused course it’s important for learners to read and listen to texts where complexity goes beyond the structures they have learnt about. Modify tasks to make texts like this accessible. Subconsciously learners will start to get used to the unfamiliar structures, and will be more receptive if the structures are focused on again at a later point.

One of the characteristics of a great teacher is the ability to ask brilliant questions. Look at how concept checking questions (CCQs) and instruction checking questions (ICQs) could transform your questioning technique and engage your learners on a new level.

## What are CCQs?

A concept checking question (CCQ) is a question used by language teachers to check students’ understanding of a specific concept or topic. Using a CCQ aims to ensure that all students have fully understood the key ideas, vocabulary or grammar structures being taught. (meaning, Form and use)

CCQs are therefore typically designed to be concise and focused, targeting only the core elements of the concept being taught. They are often closed questions that require a simple “yes” or “no” answer or a brief response. CCQs can also be open-ended, enabling

students to provide more detailed explanations or examples that demonstrate their understanding.

If educators do not get the anticipated response, then it is easy to see if / where further clarification and instruction may be needed. The use of CCQs is therefore particularly important after presenting new material and just before students start producing language using the new content. They can also be powerful when used at the end of each lesson / topic as a quick review.

Here's a simple example of a concept checking question being used in a common language teaching scenario:

Target sentence: "Look! The boys are swimming in the sea."

Potential CCQs and expected responses:

- Are they swimming now? Yes
- Have the boys finished swimming? No
- Can you see them? Yes
- Is this happening in the past, present or future? The present

In summary, CCQs serve as effective tools for assessing student comprehension, promoting active learning, and guiding instructional decisions.

## What are ICQS?

On the other hand, an instruction checking question (ICQ) is a question used to verify whether students understand and can follow instructions or tasks provided by the educator.

They are commonly used in language classrooms to ensure that students comprehend what is expected of them and can carry out the instructions correctly. If students are not clear then teachers can identify and address areas of confusion or misunderstanding, providing further clarification or guidance as required.

ICQs are typically short and focused and usually only require a brief response related to the given instruction. The expected response should clearly demonstrate comprehension of and an intention to adhere to the instructions provided.

Of course, it's important to take the time to clearly express your instructions in the first place. But they do still need to be checked with your students – no matter how clear you think that you might have been. This is really important in second language classrooms, where students might not understand your instructions or have the language ability to formulate a question of their own in response.

Here's a simple example of an instruction checking question being used in a common language teaching scenario:

Instruction: "For your homework, I want you to answer the reading comprehension questions that I have posted on Google Classroom. They are in the folder called Grouping learners"

ICQ: "Where are the questions for your homework?"

Expected Response: [On Google Classroom in the Grouping learners folder.](#)

ICQ: "What do you have to do?"

Expected Response:

As above, gaps can be addressed if not all students have correctly understood the task's requirements. Once everyone is clear on what they need to do, all students can begin the planned activity.

## Using CCQs and ICQs in language teaching

CCQs and ICQs are commonly identified as valuable tools in language teaching as they promote active learning, help assess understanding and provide language educators with immediate feedback. Importantly, they also allow teachers to monitor comprehension and to adjust their own instruction to facilitate effective language learning.

We've identified six key ways in which they could be used in your language teaching:

1. **Checking comprehension of vocabulary and grammar:** CCQs can be used to verify students' understanding of new words or grammatical structures. For example, after teaching the meaning of a new word, why not ask a CCQ to check if students understand its meaning or can demonstrate how it is used in context?
2. **Assessing reading or listening comprehension:** CCQs help educators to check students' comprehension of a text or a listening exercise. Asking focused questions about the main ideas or specific details in the text or audio can help teachers gauge how well students have understood the material.
3. **Verifying understanding of instructions:** ICQs are particularly useful when giving instructions for language activities or tasks. By asking ICQs, teachers can ensure that students understand what is expected of them and can carry out the instructions accurately. This helps prevent confusion and ensures that students are on the right track.
4. **Checking understanding of language functions:** Think about using CCQs to assess students' grasp of specific language functions or communicative purposes. For example, when teaching the use of the past tense for narrating events, ask CCQs to check if students understand when and how to apply the past tense in their own storytelling.
5. **Evaluating speaking or writing tasks:** ICQs can be employed to assess students' ability to produce language in speaking or writing tasks. For instance, before assigning a group discussion activity, ask a series of ICQs to verify if students understand the discussion topic, the time limit, and the expected outcome.
6. **Reinforcing and reviewing language concepts:** Finally, CCQs and ICQs could be deployed as quick review activities throughout a lesson or at the end of a unit to consolidate students' understanding of language concepts. By revisiting key points and checking comprehension, teachers can reinforce learning and address any lingering doubts or misconceptions.

Choose the activity (A,B or C) Which matches the characteristics.

1. These learners are mainly kinaesthetic.
  - A. The learners in groups tell a story based on a series of pictures they look at.
  - B. The learners go around the class reading posters made by the other groups.

- C. The learners listen to a recording about an athlete and fill in a table.
- 2. The learners have not yet developed their abstract thinking skills.
  - A. The learners read a story, then underline all the verbs ending in -ed.
  - B. The learners watch a DVD about healthy eating then discuss their opinions of it.
  - C. The learners describe their house to one another.

Choose (A, B or C) which does not complete the statement correctly.

- 3. The teacher wants the students to share their ideas before the class feedback so the teacher
  - A. tells them to check answer with a partner
  - B. Collects the students' answer paper
  - C. Tells them to exchange answer papers
- 4. The teacher wants the students to talk to as many of of their classmates as possible so the teacher
  - A. does an open pair activity
  - B. does a class survey
  - C. does a mingle

Match the teaching strategies 5 to 7 with the problems with group or pair work listed A,B and C

Problems with group or Pairwork	Teaching strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Some student dominate</li> <li>B. Some students always finish first and get bored</li> <li>C. Some students use too much L1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Make one student in each group responsible for monitoring language use</li> <li>6. Plan learner groupings carefully before the lesson so that all learners can take part</li> <li>7. Plan short extension activities and have them ready to hand out to students.</li> </ul>

For questions 8 to 10, match the classroom management techniques with their purposes listed A,B and C

Purposes	Classroom management techniques
<p>A. It promotes learner autonomy.</p> <p>B. It encourages student participation in class.</p> <p>C. It supports differentiation</p>	<p>8. The teacher decides to ask questions to the whole class rather than nominating.</p> <p>9. The teacher regularly changes the student groupings and pairings to match students' ability.</p> <p>10. Students correct their own work before writing their final drafts.</p>

14. Think about these comments from teachers. Which do you agree with and why?

1. My course book is good, but each unit follows the same pattern, so I need supplementary materials to give students some variety.
2. I don't see why supplementary materials have to fit into the syllabus. Sometimes it's just good for learners to have a change- have some fun.
3. You can't expect the coursebook to do everything for you –I often need supplementary materials for extra practice or for more material and activities that the coursebook doesn't provide.

15. Think about these comments from teachers. Which do you agree with and why?

1. I like my class to be very organised and I like to be in control. I believe the main roles of a teacher are to manage and assess.
2. I think of myself as a facilitator in my classroom because I want my students to become more independent.
3. I'm in my twenties. My students are the same age as me. I like the classes to be informal, so I don't think many of the teacher roles are appropriate for me.