CAMBRIDGE

active GRAMMAR

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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Contents

How is grammar best taught and learnt?
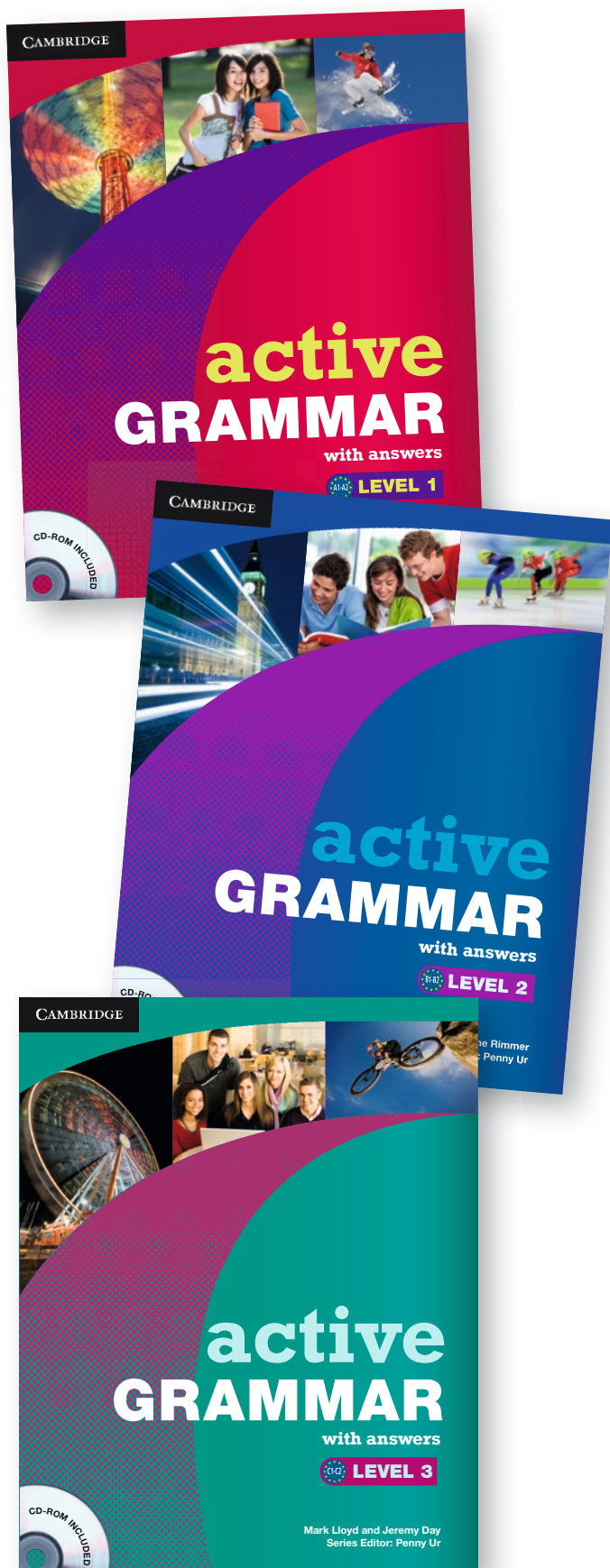
Explicit teaching

This series is based on the principle that the best way to help a student learn the grammar of English as a second or foreign language at school or university is to provide examples of the grammar in context, followed by explanation, practice and testing. All this is 'explicit teaching': you are actually teaching your students about the grammar, rather than just exposing them to it and hoping they'll pick it up. That doesn't mean that general communicative experience of the language is not important as well, of course it is, but it is not enough.

In our mother tongue (L1), we just pick up the grammar as we go: hear and use it in natural communicative situations with parents and other speakers around us, and gradually get more and more proficient. Some people would say that this should work for an additional language learnt at school or university as well, but it doesn't. This is partly because the first language inevitably interferes. Learners naturally perceive the new language through the 'spectacles' of the language they are used to and produce new language forms that are based on how they'd say the same thing in their own language. For example, if they're used to inserting adverbial expressions before a direct object in their own language, they are likely to do so in English as well – for example 'She plays well tennis' – unless and until they find out that in English this doesn't work, and you have to say 'She plays tennis well'.

A more important reason why it's better not to rely on your students intuitively picking up English grammar is that it simply isn't efficient: it demands an enormous amount of time, compared to the actual learning achieved. A child learning his or her L1 has hours, days and years of exposure to the language, and can take his / her time in listening, experimenting, correcting and finally acquiring the grammar. A child or teenager studying English in school in a country where English is not spoken outside the classroom usually has only three or four lessons a week for eight years or so, and just doesn't have the time for such gradual 'natural' acquisition. It is much faster and more efficient if we take the obvious short cuts: explain the rules to our students and then provide them with opportunities to practise. And we can work according to a rational syllabus: make sure that they learn the most common grammatical words and structures first and the less

important ones later, so that they can express what they want to say as soon as possible.

It is, of course, important also to provide plenty of purely communicative reading, writing, listening and speaking in a general English course. But the best way, I believe, to teach grammar to students of English as an additional language is to provide explicit grammar teaching: examples, explanations, practice, tests.

The following sections provide more detailed guidelines on each of these.

Providing examples

Before starting to explain, it's important to let students read or hear some examples of the target grammatical feature in a text. They need first to understand what it means, and start getting a feel for how it's used and what it sounds and looks like. This jump-starts the learning process, and will be a good basis for later explanation of the underlying rules. You could provide the initial examples simply by drawing attention to a sentence out of a text you are reading with the class, or by correcting a mistake made by a student, or by providing sample sentences or phrases you have made up yourself. In the books in this series, such examples are provided through short texts at the beginning of the units. You can go on to use these texts also, incidentally, for vocabulary expansion and reading-comprehension practice as well as content-based learning ('CLIL').

Explanation

Good grammar explanations

A good grammar explanation needs to be:

▶ True: providing a reliable description of how the grammatical feature works in context in speech and writing.

▶ Clear: in clear language, avoiding complicated grammatical terms.

▶ Given in stages: the basic rule provided first, and later exceptions or more complicated additions provided later.

▶ Simple: each bit of explanation should be short and to the point, without going into too much detail.

▶ Exemplified: illustrated by simple examples of the grammatical feature in full sentences or phrases, showing how the rule works in practice.

Form, meaning and use

There are three main components to any grammar explanation: form, meaning, and use in context.

The form includes things like spelling rules (e.g. the rules for spelling of the *-ing* form of the verb), when to add suffixes (e.g. third person *s* in the present simple), or how to form more advanced tenses or constructions (e.g. the present perfect). You need to teach these carefully at the early stages of the explanation. Meaning is, perhaps, ultimately more important: but you can't teach the meaning of something if you don't know what it looks and sounds like.

The meaning includes things like the difference between the present perfect and the past, or the meaning of the comparative form of adjectives. Note that you sometimes need to invest quite a lot of work explaining such meanings – but not always. It depends on the feature you're explaining. The meaning of the present perfect, for example, is quite difficult to explain and understand: although the students' L1 may have similar forms, it doesn't have any with an exactly parallel meaning, so you need to spend some time making sure students understand it. The comparative of adjectives, on the other hand, is likely to have an exact equivalent in the students' L1, and you don't need to explain its meaning very much, if at all: in this case, it's the form which needs most attention.

The use of the target feature in context is worth drawing students' attention to, as it can prevent them from using it later in contexts where it clearly doesn't 'belong' from the point of view of style or formality level. Students need to know which of two similar usages is the more common (e.g. *should* is more common than *ought to*, especially in questions and negatives), or which is likely to be used in informal conversation and which isn't (e.g. in relative clauses *that* is more informal than *who/which*), or which is more polite (e.g. 'Could I talk to you, please?' is more polite than 'Can I talk to you, please?').

Deductive and inductive process

Explanations can be simply provided by the teacher or book, as described above. This involves 'deductive' teaching and learning: the students are taught a rule and then apply it in practice. Another possibility is 'inductive' process: the students try to work out the rule on their own based on a series of examples. Most teachers and learners tend to prefer the traditional deductive method: it's simpler, clearer and, at least in the short

term, time-saving. Working inductively, students may fail to understand the rule from the examples, which can be demotivating, or – worse – come up with a mistaken rule, which may confuse and mislead the class. However, more advanced and mature students sometimes enjoy the challenge of working out rules from examples, and the very process of discovery – if successful – is likely to lead to better learning. In such cases, however, the rules the students come up with do normally need confirming and sometimes adding to by the teacher or textbook.

Contrast with L1

It can be very helpful to students to contrast English grammar with that of their L1. This is particularly true when there are some significant differences between their L1 and English which the students might not notice on their own, and which can lead to mistakes. The present perfect is a classic example: students might not notice that this form is used in sentences with *since* or *for*; so it's helpful to draw their attention to the fact that in a sentence like 'We have lived here for ten years', their own language would use the present tense, but English uses the present perfect. Another example is the placing of the adverb, mentioned previously. A useful strategy here is to translate the English sentence literally, word for word, into the L1 … sounds funny, but look, this is how English does it!

In general, learners can avoid a lot of mistakes if they are made aware of the differences between how their own language expresses something and how English does.

Grammatical terminology

For more advanced students, it can be useful to teach and use grammatical terminology, like *relative clauses,* when explaining grammatical points. Teachers of young learners, in contrast, will probably avoid grammatical terms, and prefer to stick with simple explanations, maybe in the L1. Adolescent intermediate students are somewhere in the middle: they can cope with more abstract thinking than young learners, and a few simple items can help you to explain grammatical points more clearly. It's probably worth making sure they understand basic terms such as *word, sentence; tense, past, present, future*; *noun, adjective, verb, pronoun; singular, plural; question, negative.*

Practice

The functions of practice

Practice exercises have two main functions.

First, they simply provide more opportunities for reading, hearing, saying and writing the grammar in use. They thus increase learners' awareness of how it works in the context of single sentences or whole texts.

Second, and, I think, more importantly, they give students experience of using the grammar themselves successfully, and thus help them gradually 'automatize' their knowledge of it. In other words, the more times learners use the grammar successfully in different contexts, the more they get used to 'doing it right', and the more likely they are in the future to use such grammar on their own without consciously having to refer to a rule every time. The old proverb 'practice makes perfect' expresses this function. This saying shouldn't, of course, be taken too literally: if they do lots of good practice exercises, as defined in the following section, learners may not achieve perfection: but they will certainly get a lot better!

Good practice

Good grammar practice is characterised by the following features: **quantity** and **variety**; **success**; **interest**; **meaningfulness; personal application**.

The first requirement is that the exercises do in fact provide a large **quantity** of practice! One exercise is not enough, nor are four or five items to an exercise: you need much more. Sheer quantity, not just quality, of practice is a significant contributor to progress. But these exercises also need to be varied: to allow students to work on both form and meaning, both meaning and use in context, and to use the grammar in a **variety** of contexts for a **variety** of purposes. This is partly because different learners learn in different ways, and we need to cater for these different learning styles; but also in order to cover as many aspects as possible of the target feature's form, meaning and use.

Success is a less obvious, but important, feature of good practice. What we want is that our students should *get it right*, so that they can get lots of experience of correct and appropriate use of the grammar. Getting it wrong and being corrected can help raise awareness; but it is only using the grammar successfully to make meanings, lots and lots of times, that will contribute to students' own intuitive 'feel' for the correct forms and the 'automatization' I mentioned earlier. Exercises therefore shouldn't be difficult, and shouldn't set traps for students to fall into.

Interest, of course, is vitally important for various reasons: to raise motivation to engage with the exercise, to promote enjoyment of the learning process, and to make sure that students maintain attention and effort. The exercises therefore need to be based where possible on interesting topics, based on real-world information or on 'fun', stimulating ideas that appeal to teenagers. More importantly, they need to utilize varied, challenging tasks that will arouse interest even if the topic itself is routine.

Exercises should in general have **meaningfulness**: the student should have to understand what the questions *mean* in order to answer them. This doesn't mean, incidentally, that there is never any place for any drills that can be done mechanically. Some forms – irregular past tenses, for example – need to be learnt by heart, and it can be really useful to drill them, in rather the same way as learning multiplication tables by heart can later help you solve real mathematical problems. But in most cases learning will be best if the students actually understand and produce meanings in response to a task. This doesn't necessarily involve imitating 'authentic' communicative situations. It could mean simple tasks like matching questions to answers, or choosing the most appropriate ending for a sentence ... provided that all the cues given need to be understood, and that the student also understands the responses he / she is giving and why they are right.

Finally, there is the aspect of **personal application.** It's important for students to have opportunities to use the target feature *actively* (note the title of this series!) to understand and make meanings, to 'say their own thing' and not just produce some kind of pre-determined text. This means that there should be at least some tasks that invite meaningful responses made up by the students themselves. Some examples of these are free sentence completion, for example, open responses to suggestions or cues, or performance of a communicative task that elicits the grammatical feature. This is the main function of the MY TURN! activities in these books. Only through engaging with tasks using the target feature will students achieve a feeling that they have made the grammar their own and be able to use it to communicate and express their own ideas.

Testing

At some point we have to test our students to see how far they have managed to master each feature. The main point of such testing is to find out whether, or how much, more work is needed, or if we can now just move on to the next unit. This can be done very quickly and informally: in a classroom, the teacher often just elicits a sentence or two from students to see if they can get it right on their own. Alternatively, formal written tests can be used.

Tests are, obviously, necessary at some point. But they should be seen as a means, not an end. A large amount of time and effort invested in written tests leads to various undesirable outcomes: over-emphasis on teaching grammar through the exercise items that will be used in the test; allowing students to be satisfied with getting the forms right (as this is what is usually tested) rather than investing time in using them to make their own meanings; focus on getting good grades rather than really knowing the grammar in order to communicate; waste of time (i.e. less time available for teaching and learning more language).

A test should, therefore, be a brief stage in the teaching of grammar, allowing teachers and students to 'take stock' from time to time of how well the learning is progressing, before continuing to further learning.

P.S.: flexible timing and use

The various components listed above can all, I believe, make a positive contribution to good grammar learning in the context of a school- or university- based course for teenage learners. However, they don't all have to be used necessarily in the order laid out here; they don't all even necessarily need to be used!

If, for example, you are fairly sure your students know all about a particular grammatical feature well – they may have learnt about it in a previous class – you might not bother to explain at all, but go straight into practice. Or if you see that they are using it excellently, but feel they should learn about some exceptions or detailed associated usages, you might only explain and not practise. Or you might use a test early on, to check first what needs explaining and practising and what doesn't.

Teaching mixed-level classes

Definitions

What is a 'mixed-level' class?

What we term a 'mixed level' class should rather be called a 'heterogeneous' class: 'heterogeneous' means 'of mixed kind', not just 'level'. Because heterogeneous classes are of different kinds of people, varying all sorts of different ways: ability and intelligence (or intelligences), personality, age, gender, interests, expectations, levels of motivation, attitudes, socio-economic background, linguistic and cultural background, personal life-experience, learning habits and learning strategies. The problems we have in teaching this kind of class are, it is true, mostly linked to coping with the different levels of proficiency: but we should be aware of the other differences as well.

Any class is more or less heterogeneous. Some, however, are very much so, and it's here that the problems arise, complicated in the case of large classes, by the sheer number of different students with whom the teacher needs to interact.

Problems

The central goal of the teaching of any class is how to provide learning opportunities for all its members: it just becomes far more difficult to achieve this goal when the class is heterogeneous. We have to address such ongoing pedagogical issues as how to:

▶ pace the lesson;
▶ decide what level to address;
▶ select or design suitable materials;
▶ cope with different interests and learning styles.

Then there is the fact that inevitably at some times we are neglecting the needs of some part of our class, which means that some students may become bored and alienated, leading to problems of unruly behaviour and classroom management.

Finally there is the issue of assessment: should we assess by some external norm, or should we assess each individual according to his or her effort and progress?

Advantages

There are, however, some advantages to such classes. Heterogeneity offers various educational advantages: students are learning in a social group that is, as it were, a microcosm of the surrounding society, rather than in a limited social group of people like themselves: they get to know and learn to work with students from different backgrounds. In discussion or information-gap activities, you have many more different experiences and cultures to draw on. Finally, there is some evidence that the difficulties actually help teacher development: teachers rise to the challenge and actively search for and find original solutions to the various problems. They thus increase their own professional expertise much more than if they were teaching an 'easier' class.

Practical principles: some things that can help

We could, of course, solve most of the problems listed above by preparing individualized or differentiated tasks and materials for different groups and individuals within the class: but, for most of us, this solution is simply not practicable: we don't have either the time or the money available to do so.

So in this section I'll suggest a series of *practical principles* (general guidelines that are the basis for practical techniques), which require little preparation: they mostly involve 'tweaking' ready-made textbook tasks, or the design of new activities that can be simply and easily planned and administered. Such practical principles don't claim to provide complete solutions for any of the problems listed earlier: but they do perhaps provide partial solutions, and go some way towards improving learning for the members of such classes. Hence the cautious heading of this section.

The principles can be divided into three headings:

1 **Keeping students motivated:** providing for varied and interesting lesson content.

2 **Reaching the individual:** finding ways to allow each student to engage with learning activities according to his or her own needs or preferences, and using peer teaching to provide more learning opportunities.

3 **Providing for learning at different levels:** designing activities to allow all students to respond to the same activity in different ways according to their own needs and abilities.

Keeping students motivated 1: Variation

In a heterogeneous class we can't possibly be actively teaching all of the students all of the time. There will be times when we are, for example, doing individual work and thus neglecting the students who like to

work in groups – or vice versa. At other times we may be neglecting our more advanced students in order to spend time to helping the others to catch up. We can't avoid such things: nor should we. And we can't always use the 'heterogeneous' tasks suggested later in this section. What we *can* do is make sure that we allot time and attention to the different groups of students in our class in a balanced way, by varying our teaching in the following ways.

1   **Level of demands**. Sometimes use more demanding texts and tasks, at other times easier ones; and similarly, sometimes work at a faster pace, sometimes more slowly.

2   **Type of classroom organization**. Some students really like working with their classmates; some like working alone; yet others prefer to be taught directly by the teacher. We need, therefore, to vary types of interactional organization to allow for all three types of preferred learning styles. There is no general advantage to group work (though it's been very 'fashionable' in recent years!), or to individual work; and there is nothing wrong with a teacher-fronted lesson (though again, this has been 'out of fashion'). Each has its advantages and disadvantages for any given learning objective; and it's important to allow students who like learning in different ways each to have a chance to work in their preferred mode.

3   **Mode / Skill**. Some students are more visually oriented and prefer using the written language; some more oral / aural and prefer using the spoken. Some function better when being active and productive, so like to be speaking and writing; others are more reflective and receptive, so prefer listening and reading. Again, it's a question of finding a balance, of selecting or designing classroom activities in different ways at different times.

Keeping students motivated 2: Interest

Inevitably, as mentioned above, we shall sometimes be working at a speed or level inappropriate for some of the members of the class: the problem then is that some of them will become bored and cease to participate, or – even worse – start misbehaving. The trick is to try to keep them all motivated, so that even if the task may not be suitable for some of the students from the point of view of level, mode or interaction style they will continue to attend to it and do it because they find it *interesting*.

An interesting topic helps to start with; hence the emphasis on content-based learning (CLIL) in these books and the use of 'fun', unusual or dramatic contexts

for exercises. However, there is always the problem that what is interesting for one student may not be so for another. Also, it is, unfortunately, all too easy to 'kill' an interesting topic by using a boring task. Fortunately, however, the converse is also true: the most boring topic can be made interesting by using it as the basis of a stimulating task. It's usually the *task* not the *topic* which maintains interest in doing an activity in the classroom.

Any grammatical structure is, in itself, not very interesting. With time expressions with *since / for* for example, we could just give students a set of time expressions with *since / for* and basic facts, and ask them to construct sentences combining them. But the exercise becomes much more interesting if we provide personal facts and ask the students to say how long these have been true for *them:* for example, how long they have known their best friend, or how long they have been at this school (or university). See, for example, MY TURN! in Unit 14, Level 1.

In this case the interest is based on **personalization** (on which I will have more to say later); but there are other task-design features which also help to provide interest. Here are some main ones:

1   **Game-like features**. The provision of 'rules' or limitations, as well as a clear, achievable goal together tend to result in a 'fun' challenge, the slight rise in adrenalin which is the source of the pleasure in a game. Asking students how much of a given exercise they can do in exactly five minutes is one example: the time-limit induces a sense of 'positive stress' and challenge, which results in interest even for those students for whom the task is relatively easy. Or you can ask students to recall as many sentences as they can from the exercise they've just done: the limitation here is that they can't 'peep' to find out the answers. This is obviously much more interesting than asking them to do the exercise again from the book.

2   **The use of higher-order thinking skills** is another contributor to interest. Just filling in obvious answers doesn't involve much thinking or challenge. But asking students to do such things as to think about what they would do in a given situation (as in MY TURN!, Unit 37, Level 2), or to predict outcomes (as in MY TURN! Unit 19, Level 1), involves creative or logical thinking, and is far more interesting than the standard gap-fills, matching exercises or sentence completions that demand no more than knowledge of the grammatical forms and meanings.

3   **Entertainment**. Anything which is aesthetically pleasing (a good picture, a song, a poem), or humorous (a joke, a cartoon), or dramatic (an extract from a movie, a story) – can keep students interested. Such items are consistently provided in these books with the first text, and sometimes also with exercises. See Exercise B Unit 55, Level 1.

4   **Visual stimuli**. The visual is normally the most powerful of all the senses; a visual stimulus attracts attention and interest and prevents attention wandering elsewhere. It is therefore important not only to have pictures as mentioned above, but to vary the design of the texts themselves: have clear, colourful and varied fonts and backgrounds, as throughout these books.

5   **Open-ending.** Again, this is something about which I shall have more to say later. The principle is that a 'closed-ended' question is boring because the answer is one single pre-determined right answer. If a question demands lots of possible 'right' answers then the exercise becomes much more interesting: partly because these often demand higher-order thinking skills and creativity, but also because when used with the full class, student responses are unpredictable, and often original, quirky, or amusing. See MY TURN!, Unit 10 Level 3.

Reaching the individual 1: Individualization

Individualization is not the same as personalization: we are not talking here about finding a space for the expression of the student's whole personality, but rather about individualization of instruction: strategies which enable students to learn at their own pace and level even within a conventional teacher-led exercise. Here are two simple ideas:

1   **Start wherever you like.** In a conventional exercise with numbered items, give students a minute or two to read through the exercise, then invite them to raise their hands and answer any one of the items they like: they don't have to start at the first. This allows weaker students to go first for the easier items, and in general allows more choice and flexibility.

2   **Set time, not quantity.** Instead of saying 'Do exercise 6', tell students: 'Do as much as you can of exercise 6 in five minutes'. The same can be done for homework: 'Work on this task for twenty minutes' rather than 'Finish this task'. The slower-working students will do less, faster-working ones will do more, but all will be working according to their own pace and ability.

Reaching the individual 2: Personalization

Personalization is not only a way to attract interest, as described above: it's also a very basic aspect of task-design in heterogeneous classes, since it provides students with opportunities to express their individual tastes, experiences, opinions, and so on. This aspect is provided for mainly in the MY TURN! section of the units, where students are often asked to write sentences that are true for them, or to relate to their own experiences or opinions. See MY TURN! Unit 30, Level 2.

Reaching the individual 3: Collaboration

Allowing students to work together on completing a task gives scope for peer-teaching, and allows monitoring of the work of individuals even if the teacher can't reach them all: students learn from one another and are enabled to perform the task better as a result of the collaboration. A variation is to allow students to do a given exercise, and then exchange to let each other approve answers or correct mistakes. The final joint, collaborative result is likely not only to be of a higher level than the individual one, but also gives a feeling of achievement, and solidarity within the group.

Providing for learning at different levels 1: Open-ending

Open-ending is the design, or adaptation, of activities so that any one cue invites a large number of equally acceptable responses rather than one 'right answer'. The result is that students can use more, or less, advanced language in their answers, according to their level. Most of the MY TURN! exercises are like this: but some other exercises here also allow for open-ended responses. See Exercise C Unit 22, Level 1.

The majority of exercises in these books are closed-ended: but they can often easily be adapted to make them open-ended by, for example, deleting the possible alternatives to a gap-fill or sentence completion exercise so that students can fill the gaps with whatever they like (as long as it makes sense and is grammatically correct!); or by deleting one of the columns in a 'matching' exercise and inviting students to invent the 'matches' themselves.

Providing for learning at different levels 2: Compulsory and Optional

The principle here is the provision of a compulsory 'core' task which is easy enough to be accessible and successfully done by all members of the class, together with an extra task which is longer and more

challenging, but explicitly defined as optional. In this way, all members of the class can succeed at the basic task, while there is enough extra content to keep the more advanced or faster-working students busy and challenged at a level appropriate to them. The choice is thus in principle not between 'success' and 'failure' but between 'success' and 'more success'.

Almost any classroom task to be done by individuals can be adapted to accord with this principle. The key phrase to add to the instructions in order to implement this principle is *at least*: 'Do at least five of the following questions'; 'Make at least five suggestions' – implying 'more if you can'! (See MY TURN! Unit 7, Level 3). Sometimes an extra task can be added, with the instruction *if you have time*: 'Finish this exercise for homework; if you have time, do the next one as well.'

To summarize

Teaching mixed-level classes is a challenge, and there are no easy, complete solutions. But there are some simple techniques that can help:

1   vary activities to cater for different learning styles and levels;

2   make them interesting, so that more advanced students won't be bored by lower-level activities;

3   'individualize' activities to offer choice in order or number of items to be done;

4   'personalize' activities to allow room for self-expression of different individual learners;

5   encourage collaboration, to take advantage of possibilities of peer-teaching and peer-learning;

6   give activities an 'open-end', to create opportunities to respond at different levels;

7   design tasks with a clear, easily-achieved success level plus further optional extensions for faster or more advanced workers.

Many of the practical tips provided in the section 'Using *Active Grammar*' suggest how to adapt the texts and exercises of these books based on the guidelines outlined above.

Using *Active Grammar*

This section provides some practical guidance on how to use *Active Grammar*: how to integrate the books within your main course programme, as well as how to use the specific components (the texts, the explanations and tips, the exercises, MY TURN!, MY TEST!, and the Review units).

How to use the books in a general English course at school or university

How much time should I allot to working on grammar with the books in courses which are aimed at general proficiency in English?

That depends on a lot of things, which I'll come to in a moment. In my own teaching context, where I have four lessons a week and the students have little if any contact with the language outside my classroom, I allot about a quarter of my teaching time to grammar teaching. The rest of the time goes on teaching vocabulary and occasionally pronunciation, and a lot of communicative work on reading, listening, speaking and writing.

But you may want to do a lot more grammar work, or a lot less.

More if:

1   there's an exam coming up, in which your students are largely assessed on the correctness of their grammar.

2   your students expect you to teach a lot of grammar, and respond well to it.

3   your students' parents and / or the school / university set great store by correct grammar, and expect you to teach it thoroughly.

4   you yourself feel grammar is very important, and worth spending time on.

Less if:

1   communicative ability is the declared aim of the course, and this aim is supported by the students, parents, principal, and colleagues.

2   students will therefore be assessed on their communicative ability, and will be penalized very little, if at all, for inaccurate grammar.

3   your students themselves want to use English for practical communication purposes, and aren't interested in correct grammar.

4   you feel grammar isn't so important, and that it is worth spending more time on communicative tasks or vocabulary expansion.

Should I have whole 45-minute lessons devoted to grammar, or divide up lesson time between grammar and other things?

At A1-A2 level and working with young adolescents, I would recommend dividing up the lesson and doing two or three different kinds of activities in the course of a 45-minute period, rather than devoting a whole period to a single learning objective (whether this is grammar, or work on a reading text, or anything else for that matter).

Older adolescents and adults are likely to be able to cope with longer periods of time devoted to one learning objective; but even these students, in my experience, appreciate some variation of topic and activity within a single teaching period. I would recommend in general not spending more more than 20 minutes to half an hour on grammar.

If you are introducing a new grammar feature, then put this at the beginning of the lesson, when students are freshest and most receptive to new material. Then move on to communicative tasks, or vocabulary work, or whatever. If you are doing exercises, then these can come later, after the beginning of the lesson, perhaps, has been devoted to reading or discussion. Just remind students briefly of the rule(s) and then spend 10 or 15 minutes on practice exercises.

Having said that, you may wish occasionally to spend the whole period on a grammar unit. The material in these books is varied enough so that the students are unlikely to get bored; and the units include reading, speaking and writing practice within them.

What if *Active Grammar* is my only textbook? Can I use it as a coursebook?

Yes, but it would need supplementing.

These books include reading texts and exercises, which can be used as a basis for vocabulary as well as grammar teaching, as well as discussion; and the MY TURN! exercises are also often bases for group- or class-discussion activities as well as free or guided writing. So you would need to make sure that you are focusing on reading, vocabulary, and practice of conversation and writing as well as grammar as you work through the units.

But you would need to supplement with further materials in these areas, particularly vocabulary expansion exercises, extensive reading and listening texts. Some sources for these are given in the 'Supplementary materials' section of the Bibliography.

Can the students use the books for self-access?

There are in fact self-access editions of the books available, with answer keys at the back of the books. But if you're using the standard classroom editions, then you can use the exercises for self-access work, print out the answer keys from the website, and let students look at them as necessary. You can do this either by placing the answer keys in an accessible place in the classroom, or by keeping them with you, and distributing them as and when requested.

cambridge.org/elt/activegrammar

The text

Most of the texts are content-based pieces, providing real information about varied and interesting topics: see for example Units 1 and 2, Level 1, whose texts relate to linguistics and literature respectively. Occasionally they are simply stories or dialogues with no particular content base, but designed to relate to situations or topics relevant to teenagers' own experience: see Unit 1, Level 2 and Unit 25, Level 3. Note that the items highlighted in the text can be found with explanations in the glossary at the end of the book.

How can I introduce the text?

Where the text is information-based, and before students have had a chance to read it, you might provide 'teasers' that awake their interest in what the text is about and invite them to think about what they already know about its content. In some cases you can ask them the comprehension question at the bottom of the text; ask them to guess the answer and then verify as they read. Or ask them to guess some of the facts given ('How many people would you guess speak English in the world today?' in Unit 1, Level 1); or simply ask what any students already happen to know about the topic.

Where the text is not topic-based, there are various other options for providing a 'teaser': read out a sentence or two from a dialogue and ask students to guess who is speaking or to whom: for example, in Unit 21, Level 1 someone says: 'Could we go on a safari in South Africa?' – What kind of a person is speaking? To whom? If it is a story, read aloud the beginning and get them to guess how it continues or ends: for example, in Unit 12, Level 3 you might read them the first sentence of the story: 'This guy was walking along a mountain road one stormy night ...' and ask them to guess what happens next. Then add the next few words ... 'he heard a noise', and see what they come up with. Or provide a few key words (a good way of introducing new vocabulary!) and get them to predict the content: for example, write up the words *party, damage, expensive, teenager, parents, awful* and get students to guess what the content of the story in Unit 67, Level 1 is going to be.

What's the best way of 'doing' the text?

I've found that the most learner-friendly way to present the text for the first time is to read it aloud myself as clearly and expressively as I can while the students follow: I explain any problematic vocabulary as I go. Then they can read it again themselves to check they've understood, and ask any questions they need to.

Only if you're pretty sure that the text is nearly all within the vocabulary level of the students, should you invite them to read it on their own first without any help. If there are lots of words they don't know, they won't be able to get the gist. If your students know 95%–98% of the text i.e. only four to ten words in our texts are unknown, then they might be able to manage. If they know less, then they are unlikely to be able easily to understand the main ideas on their own, and will just get frustrated and demoralized by being asked to try.

A third possibility is to read the text aloud as a listening comprehension activity, while students have their books closed – simplifying or explaining as you go, if necessary. This is a good idea if it's a dialogue, or story, or another type of easy-to-grasp passage; it's not appropriate for the denser, more content-packed texts, which really need to be read as well as heard.

A fourth method is to ask students to read the text aloud, one after the other, round the class. This is probably a less effective method. Two problems here: first, learners' reading aloud is much less clear and easily understood by the rest of the class than yours is; second, a student who reads aloud is necessarily focusing on his / her own decoding and pronunciation, and has proportionately less attention to spare for comprehension – which is, surely, the main objective. However, in some teaching contexts it's the convention to 'read round the class' like this, and some students really like it, so you may feel you have to do it sometimes even though you're aware of the disadvantages. At least make sure that this kind of reading is done only *after* you've been through the text once and know that the students understand it, not as 'sight reading'.

Should I teach the new vocabulary? Pre-teach?

More difficult items are highlighted in the text, and students will be able to find explanations of them in the glossary at the end of the book. These are usually items that are needed for this particular context, but are (particularly in Levels 1 and 2) well beyond the range of lexical items appropriate for students at this level of proficiency. You probably will not, therefore, need to teach such items for active knowledge.

You can pre-teach, of course, particularly if you spend a little time discussing the meanings of the new vocabulary as in the last 'teaser' suggested above. But research indicates that it's usually better to explain it as you go, in context, and then review later.

As regards the rarer vocabulary, words you think the students are unlikely to need for their own communication, just explain and move on. But it's important to teach more thoroughly words or expressions you think are common, useful and should be learnt. Put them up on the board, get students to write down and learn them, and make opportunities for review later.

How do I know which words are more common?

You can usually just rely on your own intuition! But if you want a more objective assessment, then try using 'Lextutor' (www.lextutor.ca/vp/bnc/).

Type the text into the box provided and click on 'Submit'; the version that appears at the bottom of the next webpage shows the most common thousand words in blue, and the next thousand in green: it is, in principle, these words that your students should know, or learn, at this level. Less common words are shown in other colours, according to a given key.

But note that 'Lextutor' doesn't show common multi-word expressions, which are just as important to teach as single words: those you'd have to notice and teach yourself.

Also, there might be words you want to teach in spite of the fact that they're less common: because they're relevant or interesting for your students, for example, or because they're similar to words in the students' L1.

What's the best way of explaining the meanings of new words?

In many cases there's a picture or brief explanation supplied with the text; but if not, then I'd say the most straightforward and efficient way is just to give the L1 equivalent. If you don't know their L1, but it is a monolingual class, see if you can get one of the students to translate.

For a multilingual class, try to explain using synonyms, opposites, definitions, examples, drawings or mime. Or tell students simply to look it up in their dictionary!

How should I check text comprehension?

If your students can answer the comprehension question, that's a pretty good indication they've understood. If you want to be more thorough, then the easiest and most reliable way is probably to ask your students to summarize in their own language (or

possibly in English) what the text was about. This is likely to be volunteered by your more confident and / or advanced students: but it's helpful for the others to hear it as well, as an opportunity to back up or correct their own understanding.

Can I ask students to translate the text into L1?

Sure. Translation is a very good way of checking comprehension, and a lot of students enjoy doing it. The only problem is that it can be much more time-consuming than the comprehension tasks described above, and you can get side-tracked into long debates about which is the precise translation of a particular phrase or word. If you can keep it short, confine yourself to rough equivalents and not worry about precision or style, then fine.

It's particularly useful to get students to translate the bits that illustrate the grammatical point that is the focus of the unit, to raise their awareness of what these mean in context.

How else can I use the highlighted grammatical features in the text?

5 Present continuous
She's wearing a bright yellow dress.

Mark: Hi, Monica. Are you looking for Nicole?

Monica: Mark, hi. Yes, we're waiting for her at the party. She isn't answering her mobile. Is she getting ready?

Mark: No, she isn't. She's lying on the sofa.

Monica: Are you serious? Everyone's arriving now.

Mark: She isn't feeling well.

Monica: That's a shame. We're having a great time. Diego's playing his new guitar and some people are dancing. That strange girl Bianca is here too. She's wearing a bright yellow dress and a green hat. She's ... Are you listening?

Mark: Wait a minute ... Nicole is coming now ...! See you there, Monica.

? Who is ill? a Mark b Monica c Nicole

These can be used as a 'springboard' for the grammar explanation that is coming up. Make sure students have understood the meanings of the the target grammatical features highlighted in the text (possibly by translation, as suggested above) and then you can ask them 'What do you notice about these bits? What do they have in common? Any comments?'. Do this if you're fairly sure there are students in the class who can provide some reasonably acceptable answers; because if they can't answer, or answer wrongly, the result is to discourage, or, even worse, actually confuse the class. But if you get good, clear generalizations from students, you can accept them and then just use the following explanation in the book as a quick confirmation and reinforcement – or even skip it completely!

Or, you might get something partially true, in which case you can say: 'OK, that's a good start, let's check it out with the explanation in the book'.

Any ideas on follow-up work on the content of the texts?

Well, it depends what kind of text it is. Here are some ideas.

A factual text

(Most of the texts in the books provide factual information, formatted in different ways.)

A useful exercise is to ask students to check out the facts given in the text, by research on the Internet, or asking anyone they know who might be knowledgeable on the topic. Such tasks are important for the fostering of a critical approach; they carry the message that you should always double-check your facts, don't take anything for granted just because it appears in print.

Another follow-up, based on the above: can they find out any other interesting associated facts and share them with the class?

A third suggestion: is there anything in their own experience which is relevant to the information given in the text: illustrates it, or casts doubt on it, or adds further dimensions?

Dialogues, monologues, short emails, chats

(See Units 6 or 21, Level 1)

After you've been through the text once or twice, tell the students to re-read it one last time, then close their books: challenge them to recall any of the utterances. Write everything they can remember up on the board. Then tell them to open their books again, to see which bits they didn't remember: check these are understood. (Actually, this technique can be used with any text, but it's best for dialogue-type ones.)

Health or educational recommendations

(See Unit 18 or 44, Level 2)

18 Multi-word verbs 2: phrasal verbs
Throw away the remote control.

Are these the 6 best ways to get fit?

1 Surprise your friends and **tidy up**. It uses a lot of energy to **pick up** all those clothes from under the bed.

2 Do you like chocolate? The good news is, you can still have chocolate! But why don't you **put on** your trainers and run to the shop to buy some?

3 Don't ask your parents to **pick** you **up**. Walking home with your friends is fun and gets you fit.

4 Put your alarm clock outside your bedroom door. When it **goes off**, run and **turn** it **off** … before it **wakes** everyone else **up**!

5 You don't have to **take up** a new sport to get fit. Just include sport in your weekend. Is there a swimming pool near you? **Find out** and go with your friends.

6 Are you someone who is always changing the TV programme? Why don't you **throw away** the remote control? And then **get up** to change the TV programme every ten minutes …

? 1 Do you do any of these things?
2 Which do you think is the best way of keeping fit?

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Ask students if they agree with the recommendations here. If they don't, why not?

Can they link any of the recommendations to their own experiences?

Can they add any recommendations of their own?

Literature / Movies

(See Unit 8, Level 1 or Unit 27, Level 2)

Find out if any of the students have read the book or seen the play or movie.

Can they add any more information to that given in the text? Recommend it to other students?

If they have not yet read or seen it, then invite them to predict what happens next or how the story ends, based on the information given in the text.

News reports

(See Unit 9, Level 1 or Unit 34, Level 3)

9 Past simple 2: regular past forms
She lived in a tree.

Julia Hill **lived** in a tree from December 1997 to December 1999. She **stayed** in the tree because she **didn't want** people to cut it down. Some people **liked** her. Some people **called** her a criminal. We **asked** Julia, 'Why **did you decide** to do it?' Julia **replied**, 'It **seemed** the right thing to do. They **didn't need** to cut the tree down. I told them not to do it but they **didn't listen** to me. I **believed** I was right.'

? Underline the correct option: Julia *lives / doesn't live* in a tree today.

Answer: doesn't live

Brainstorm in class the kinds of questions a television interviewer might like to ask the main person, or people, who appear in the report.

Then either discuss what the answers might be or, more interesting (but also more challenging), ask one or two of the more confident students to assume the role of these characters (or do so yourself), and ask the rest of the students to interview them: the interviewee improvises answers.

General knowledge quizzes or questionnaires, puzzles

34 *Make, do* and *get*
Do you get angry?

Are you a good friend?

Read our questionnaire and answer the questions.
a You **get a text message** from a friend. Do you reply immediately?
yes no maybe

b Your friend has **made a cake**, but it tastes horrible. Do you tell him or her?
yes no maybe

c Your best friend has **done something really stupid**, and tells you about it. Do you tell your other friends?
yes no maybe

d You helped your friend **do her homework**, and she **gets a good mark**. Do you tell the teacher?
yes no maybe

e Your friend uses your phone and **makes a lot of calls**. Do you **get angry**?
yes no maybe

f Do you always **get your friends a present** on their birthdays?
yes no maybe

? What do you think? Are you a good friend?

(See Unit 40, Level 2 (quiz), Unit 34, Level 1 (questionnaire) or Unit 42, Level 1 (puzzle))

A fairly obvious follow-up to this type of text is to challenge the students to provide their own answers, then discuss them in class.

The next step could be to ask each student (or pair of students) to devise at least one more similar question (and note for themselves the right answer, if there is one). These can be exchanged immediately to be answered by other students, or taken in and compiled into another quiz / questionnaire similar to that in the book.

The explanations

Can you give me some ideas as to different ways to use the explanations?

To start off with, you don't necessarily need to use the explanations at all. You may feel your students already know the rules pretty well, and you're just using the books to review or consolidate, to 'mop up' things they're still tending to get wrong in spite of a theoretical knowledge of the rules. In these sorts of situations you might skip the explanation altogether, and just come back to particular items if you find students are making errors in the exercises that you want to explain.

Alternatively, use the explanations selectively. Look through them yourself before the lesson, and pick up any particular items there that provide new information, or that you think it's important to remind your students about. And skip the rest.

If, however, you want to work more thoroughly and systematically, then go through the items one by one, making sure they are understood.

Another possibility is to take the grammatical features as they come up in the text and ask students to explain as much as they can on their own, supplying yourself only things they've forgotten to mention, or correcting if they get it wrong. In this case, you are using the explanations only as a back-up, to confirm, correct or supplement students' suggestions.

What about timing? Should I always do the explanations as they come in the books – after the text and before the exercises?

This is probably the most usual and convenient order; but there are other options.

You might, for example, if you're fairly sure your students can cope, start on the exercises with the class immediately after reading the text. In that case, use the explanations as a 'fall-back' strategy: if a student makes a mistake, go back to the explanation to show how and why the mistake has been made, and 're-teach' that particular feature.

Or do the exercises first, and then go back to the explanation to raise awareness of the rules underlying the target features.

If I use the explanations as they stand, should I read them out myself, or ask students to do so?

In principle, read them out yourself, or paraphrase. You read better and more clearly than they do, you can stop to clarify things as necessary, or explain difficult words as you go. As I wrote above relating to the reading aloud of a text: a learner reading aloud not only conveys meanings less well than you do, he or she also will be concentrating on the decoding and pronunciation, and is likely to have less attention to spare for comprehension – which is the top priority here.

Note that if you share, or know, the students' L1, it can be very helpful, particularly at lower levels, to translate as you read. That makes the explanations optimally clear and comprehensible, and often saves time that can then be invested in practice or further examples. At higher levels, students should be able to cope with most of the explanations in English: but even in these classes, occasional quick explanations in the students' L1 can make things clearer and save time.

Do I need to teach grammatical terminology like 'present continuous'?

It isn't absolutely essential: you can explain most of the grammatical points in simple language. And this may well be preferable if you are working with younger or beginner classes. But as you progress, the terminology becomes more and more useful. (And it helps a lot if they already know and understand concepts like *noun, verb* etc. in their own language.)

Past simple 3: irregular past forms

1   Many past simple verbs do not end in *-ed*. They have irregular forms. For negative and question forms, use *did* and the infinitive without *to*.
The Romans **made** *Britain a colony.*
They **didn't feel** *happy.*
Did they **speak** *Latin?*

statement ✓	negative ✗
You **sang**.	You **did not** (**didn't**) **sing**.
She **told** her brother.	She **did not** (**didn't**) **tell** her brother.
The army **went** home.	The army **did not** (**didn't**) **go** home.

question ?	short answer ✓ ✗
Did I / you / he / she / it / we / they **sing**?	Yes, (I) **did**. No, (I) **did not** (**didn't**).

present	past
be	was / were
become	became
begin	began
bring	brought
buy	bought
come	came
do	did
eat	ate
get	got
give	gave
go	went
have	had
hear	heard

present	past
know	knew
leave	left
make	made
mean	meant
pay	paid
put	put
say	said
see	saw
speak	spoke
take	took
tell	told
think	thought

▶ See Appendix 1 for a list of irregular verbs.

At this level, I would suggest first teaching the following terms:

word	past	noun	singular	question
sentence	present	verb	plural	negative
	future	pronoun		statement
		adjective		
		adverb		

Then teach more terms, like *present continuous,* as you find you need them in specific units.

What are some ways of making sure that the explanations have been understood?

One strategy is to ask students to provide further examples for any particular target explanation point, to add to the examples provided in the book.

Another, more time-consuming but more thorough, is to ask them to write down later, possibly in their own language, what the rules are and some examples. They should do this, however, with books closed, so that they really have to think on their own, basing their writing on their own comprehension and not on mindless copying, or translating, from the book.

Then get them to compare their results with each other, and consult you if there are any uncertainties or substantial differences between their versions.

The tips

What's the difference between the 'tips' and the numbered items in the explanations?

The tips are basically 'micro' points of grammar; the way particular words behave grammatically, or how to avoid common errors, or useful expressions and idioms.

Position of adverbs

3   An adverb can come at the beginning, middle or end of the sentence. If it comes at the beginning, there is usually a comma after it.
    Apparently, the Earth looks beautiful from the moon.

TIP   Don't put adverbs between verbs and objects.
*It won't hit the ground **immediately**.*
NOT *It won't hit immediately the ground.*

If it comes in the middle, we put it before the main verb, or after *be* or the first auxiliary verb. There is usually no

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So how do I use them?

You can, of course, just discuss them as you are going through the explanations, drawing students' attention to them as if they were just another item to be explained.

Alternatively – and this is how I often use them myself – use them as independent 'fillers' in a lesson which is not necessarily devoted to grammar. They are normally 'autonomous' bits of useful information so I can introduce one or two if I have a few minutes to fill in at the end of the lesson, or at a point of transition from one activity to another. Being both brief and in clear contrast to what has gone before, the tips are likely to attract student attention and result in a useful bit of learning, as well as contributing to variation of the lesson routine.

The exercises

The main aim of the exercises is to check if the students have understood and can apply the explanation, right?

No, not really. What the exercises aim to do is mainly to *consolidate* (not 'check') the knowledge students have acquired theoretically through the explanations. The function of practice is to provide learners with rich experience using the target feature successfully and meaningfully, so that they become used to doing so, and absorb the grammar into their own language system as practical 'knowing how' to use it, rather than theoretical 'knowing that'. All this works in rather the same way as you learn to drive well by lots of practice driving, or learn to perform skilfully on stage through plenty of rehearsal. So we don't want to 'test' them, as your question implies; we want to give them lots of opportunities to 'get it right', over and over.

This is why it's important that the exercises are appropriate to the level of the students and not too difficult; designed so that they are likely to succeed in producing acceptable responses.

Practice

A   Read each sentence a, then complete sentence b with a suitable adverb.

1   a   They have a healthy diet.
    b   They eat ___healthily___.
2   a   I had a bad diet when I was a student.
    b   I ate _____ when I was a student.
3   a   I like eating fish because it is quick to cook.
    b   I like eating fish because you can cook it _____.
4   a   My little sister is noisy when she eats.
    b   My little sister eats _____.

Are all the exercises the same level?

No. On the whole, they get more difficult as they go on: so Exercise A will normally be the easiest, Exercises D or E the most difficult (I'll come to MY TURN! later). The idea is that as students get better and better at 'doing' the grammar, they can cope with increasing challenge.

So should I work through all the exercises with my class?

Not necessarily, for several reasons.

First, you may find in some cases there are simply more than you need. The students may know the target grammar already and not need so much practice: so it's worth just doing one or two of the exercises on the page and then moving on to a unit where you want to invest more time and effort.

Second, there is a very wide variety of types of exercise in these books. Obviously not all will suit all teachers and all students: so feel free to skip the ones you feel are inappropriate for the class or don't suit your own teaching style.

Third, you may simply not have time. Personally, I rarely, if ever, manage to cover all the material I would like to in a course: it's a matter of making (sometimes tough!) decisions: which bits am I going to omit in order to make time for the higher priorities?

On the other hand, you may find exactly the opposite: that the exercises in a unit don't give enough practice, your class needs more. More on this later.

Any tips on presenting the initial instructions how to do the exercise?

It's crucial that the students understand the instructions before they start, so it's worth investing some effort to make sure they are clear to everyone. If they haven't understood properly, a lot of time can be wasted on confusion and rewriting. On the other hand, you don't want to spend too much time on preliminaries: the main thing is the exercise itself, so if you spend a lot of time explaining, that's time taken away from the practice itself.

So here are some tips.

> **B** Complete the sentences using adverbs made from the adjectives in the box.
>
> careful   early   far   fast   good   happy   ~~hard~~
> immediate   late   sudden

1   **Translate.** Explain the instructions in L1 if it's a monolingual class whose language you know. At lower levels, this is probably the easiest and quickest way to get them started on doing the exercise. More advanced students should be able to cope with English instructions on their own, particularly if you've reviewed the most common instructional phrases with them in advance (see 4 below).

2   **Use the sample item.** The first item of the exercise is always 'done' for you, use it to show the students what they are meant to do. Then perhaps get them to suggest the answer to the next item, before inviting them to do the rest on their own.

3   **Explain carefully, then get students to paraphrase or translate.** It's a good idea to get students to repeat the instructions in their own words: that way you're sure they've understood, and the less able students in the class have an extra opportunity to grasp how to do the exercise.

4   **Make sure the students have learnt useful 'instruction' vocabulary in advance.** This is a good investment not only for these books but also for other English textbooks they may use now or in the future. It's worth spending some time at the beginning of the year teaching such vocabulary: two or three new words or phrases each lesson, reviewing the ones you've taught previously each time. Within a couple of weeks, they should have a useful basis for understanding instructions alone, and you'll find you can challenge them to read them on their own and go straight into the exercise. (If they aren't sure they can always ask you!)

Teach first the grammatical terms listed above, under **Explanations**, point 4, which come up quite a lot in exercise instructions: *word, sentence; tense, past, present, future; noun, adjective, verb, pronoun; singular, plural; statement, question, negative.* Some useful further vocabulary to teach for instructions is listed below. Start by teaching the phrases.

Phrases	Words	
Complete the sentences / table	answer	correct
Circle / Underline the correct form / option	complete	use, using
Put the words in order	circle	true
in brackets	underline	false
Turn ... into	change	mean, meaning
Write sentences / reasons	table	option
Make sentences	appropriate	form
An appropriate form	possible	dialogue
... means the same as ...	rewrite	without
more than one answer is possible / both are possible	text	add
in your notebook	insert	cross out
at least		

What if the exercises don't provide enough practice for my class?

You will find extra exercises in the 'Review' sections and in the CD-ROM accompanying the books.
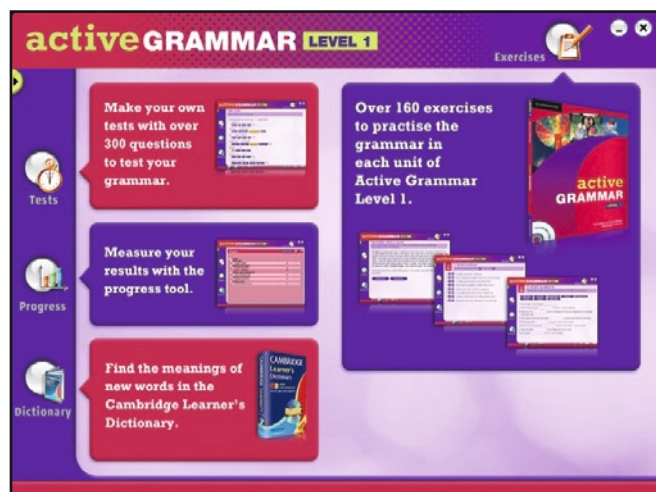
So there is no lack of extra exercises available to you through *Active Grammar*!

But perhaps it is just as useful to look at how the exercises on the practice page of the unit can be extended to provide extra 'engagement' and review of the target features, without going elsewhere to look for more. See next question.

So how can I exploit the exercises in the books to give added practice? Just doing them again is boring ...

Various ways. Here are some to start off with:

1   **Recall and share.** When the class has finished doing an exercise, tell them to close their books and try to see how many of the sentences they can remember and write out. They don't have to remember the exact wording: just more or less what the sense was and how the target grammar was used in each. When they have had five minutes to do this, let them share in groups and see how much they can remember all together. Optionally, elicit all the items they can remember and write them on the board. Then open the books, and let students check what they forgot.

What they are doing here is in fact re-doing the exercise, but with added challenge and effort of memory that adds interest and gives some point to the review.

2   **Add a word.** Having done the exercise once, invite students to do it again; but this time they have to provide the answer to each item **adding** one or two extra words – on condition that the whole sentence still has to make sense. One advantage of this technique is that each sentence can actually be 'done' several times, since different students will have different ideas which words to add.

A variation of this is to require students to **delete** one or two of the words: but still, the sentence has to make sense. Or to **change** a word.

3   **Add items.** Challenge students to compose more similar items (questions, sentences) of their own. This is probably best done as pair work. Give them ten or fifteen minutes to compose their new items, providing them with new vocabulary as they need it. Each pair can then read out its compositions and challenge the rest of the class to answer them; or, if you have time, take in all the new items and combine them into a new exercise which you can print out for the class to do the next day. But it is really the composition of the new items rather than the answering which provides the practice.

4   **Ask for more answers to each item.** If the exercise is already open-ended (no one right answer, but a variety of possibilities), then demand at least three possible answers to each item, not one. Or as many as they can think of! A single item of one of the more creative exercises can produce a board-full

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of interesting, original and sometimes humorous responses, that provides an enormous amount of extra practice: particularly suitable for a mixed-level class. If it isn't open-ended, perhaps change it to make it so … which makes it a lot more interesting to do. See the question on making exercises more interesing below.

What different ways are there to use the exercises in class?

The simplest and most conventional way to do exercises like these is what's called IRF: Initation, Response, Feedback. The teacher states which exercise and which item is to be done, and calls on the class to volunteer answers ('initiation'). Students raise their hands, and one of them is nominated to answer, which he / she does ('response'). The teacher then gives feedback in the form of approval (if it's right) or correction (if it's wrong) ('feedback'), moves on to the next item and does the same again, until the exercise is finished.

The problem with this procedure is that at any one point in the lesson, most of the students are not in fact doing very much, and may not be 'engaging' with the exercise at all. And many of them are probably getting bored.

Here are some variations.

1   Write it first. Ask the students to write the answers in first, and then elicit answers through IRF. This ensures that all the students do all the exercise, and enables you to go through the answers much more quickly, as the exercise is already familiar to the class.

2   Write it then self-check. As above, but instead of you eliciting the answers from the students, simply provide the answers for them to self-check: write them on the board, or have them on paper available to individuals as they finish. Then deal with any problems that have come up or possible alternative answers.

3   Do it in groups. Tell students to get into pairs or groups and do the exercise together. They call you over if there are any items they have a problem with, or in order to check that they've got it right.

For more variations for specific objectives, see more questions and answers below.

If an exercise is too difficult, how can I make it easier?

1   Shorten it. If the exercise consists of a list of items, tell the students to do only the ones they easily understand, in any order they like, using one of the procedures suggested above. That's it. Later, if you wish, explain and do the rest yourself. (But you don't have to!)

2   Prepare. Go through the text of the exercise, explaining or translating (with the help of the students where appropriate), but without actually eliciting answers. Then, when the text is thoroughly understood, invite them to actually do the exercise. This is particularly appropriate for exercises based on full texts rather than separate numbered items.

3   Do it yourself. Tell the students this is a difficult exercise, you're going to show them how to do it. Then talk them through it, supplying the answers yourself (but welcome any contributions from the class!). When you've finished, challenge them to go back to the beginning and recall all the answers on their own, writing in as many as they can. This is a particularly good idea when the answers are 'open-ended': no one right answer, but building on students' individual creativity. You could, of course, provide them with the sample answers in the Answer Key as examples: but it's much better if you provide your own, particularly if you can introduce a personal note!

If an exercise is too easy, how can I make it more challenging?

1   Add items. Get students to compose additional items, or continue the story / text (see above). You can also prepare further items yourself, if you have time.

2   Ask for explanations. Tell students they not only have to supply the right answers, but also explain why these are right, in terms of the underlying rules.

3   Delete the word box. If there are items to choose from a 'box', tell students to ignore them and supply their own suggestions as to how to complete the given sentences. Similarly, if a clue is given in brackets at the end of the sentence, tell them to ignore this, and complete with something else. Another advantage of this is to change closed-ended (one-right-answer) cues into open-ended ones (lots of right answers); so the students can suggest as many answers as they can to fill each blank space in the exercise.

4   Delete the second column in a matching exercise. Tell students to ignore, or cover up, the right-hand column in a matching exercise, or the sentences that are supposed to match pictures, and suggest their own ways of completing the left-hand column or their own captions to the pictures. If you do this, however, you need to stipulate that their answers must use the target grammatical feature.

How can I make the exercises more interesting?

The exercises vary a lot: so try to go for the ones you know your students would find more interesting to do (MY TURN! for example), and skip, or go very quickly through, the ones your students would find less relevant or interesting to them. But you can raise motivation even to do 'boring' exercises by strategies such as the following.

1   **Let them choose …** which exercise to do. Tell the class to scan through the exercises, and decide which two exercises they would like to do, and which they wouldn't. Discuss their choices and their reasons for them, and then do the exercises the class as a whole has decided they prefer.

2   **Let them choose …** which items to do. Tell the class to read through the exercise: they are allowed to do only *six* of the items given: each student, or pair of students, decides which six they choose, and compare which ones other students have chosen. Then do the 'top six' items. Discuss why some items were unpopular (and answer or elicit answers to them as you do so!).

3   **Set a time limit.** Tell the class they have ten minutes to get through an exercise: how much of it can they do in the time? Let them work in pairs or threes, and make the starting point clear and dramatic: 'Don't start yet, only when I say 'Go'. Ready … GO!' Give them exactly ten minutes and then shout 'STOP! How much have you done?'. This can, of course, be made into a pair or group competition. Or, next time, try it again with a different exercise of similar format and see if they can 'break their record' (and get all the answers right as well!).

4   **Change it!** Challenge them to do a particular exercise, but when they write the answer they have to take out one word, or insert one extra word, or change one word from the original item. Other students then identify what the change was. They can make the meaning as absurd as they like, as long as it is grammatically correct.

5   **'Open-end' it!** If the questions demand one right, pre-determined answer, that can be rather boring. You can make exercises 'open-ended' by using one of the following strategies:

1   In a 'gap-fill', tell students they should not use the given items to fill the gaps, but may insert any they like. Same for multiple choice.

2   In a 'matching' exercise, tell students to ignore the right-hand column, and complete the items in the left-hand column any way they like (provided it uses the target grammar!). Or vice versa: delete the left-hand one.

3   In a sentence completion, delete the second half of the sentence, and tell students to finish it any way they like.

Can you give me some more ideas for checking answers, other than just eliciting orally from individual students round the class?

In principle, if you've explained well and selected, or adapted, the level of the exercise so that it suits the level of your class then they should have got most, or all, of the answers right – which is the main point of the exercises (see the first question in this section).

If you're pretty sure that this is so, then it is mainly a matter of confirming right answers rather than correcting wrong ones. And it can be a bit of a waste of time to go round the class reading out the questions and answers (see my criticisms of 'IRF' above).

Here are some alternatives:

1   **Self-access checking.** Provide the answers written out somewhere accessible: on your desk, for example, or attached to the board. Then, as students finish one exercise, they come to check their answers and then proceed to the next, applying to you only if they have a different answer from the one given and want to know if it's wrong or an acceptable alternative.

2   **Peer-checking.** Students do the exercises on their own; anyone who finishes raises his or her hand, and looks around for another student who has also raised his / her hand. They get together to compare answers; again, they only apply to you if there's a problem they can't solve between them, or want your reassurance that they've thought of acceptable alternative answers.

3   **Collaborative filling in and checking.** Students work in pairs or threes, working through the exercises together and agreeing on the right answers. They then check with you, or send a representative to look at a 'self-access' source to make sure their answers are right. If the latter then, as usual, they will apply to you in cases of uncertainty.

4   **Just tell them the answers.** If students have done the exercise individually or in groups, or using the 'time-limit' idea, then simply read out the answers when they've finished so they can tick off their own right answers or write in corrections. Students ask questions only if they have mistakes they don't understand, or want to suggest alternative answers.

5   **Take in the books to check.** This is the most time-consuming strategy, and you can't do it every week. But it is important to take in students' books every so often and check for yourself how they are doing: write in ticks for correct answers, add approving comments, and / or, if there are a lot of mistakes, advice as to what they should be looking out for. It's good for class morale, and gives you a chance to relate to students individually – which is not always possible during lesson time, particularly if you have large classes.

> 2 We speak Russian. ✔
> 3 She's a strange woman. ✔
> 4 My aunt drives very badly. ✔
> 5 They live in this street. ✔
> 6 He has two brothers. ✔
>
> *Well done*

Most of your ideas above apply only if there are 'right answers'; what about the exercises where there are lots of possible answers? How do you check then?

The most straightforward and conventional way to do this is simply to elicit various suggested answers round the class and approve or correct as you go. This is more interesting than 'IRF' because the answers are not predictable, and because the responses come much faster than in the conventional teacher-student 'ping-pong'. The disadvantage is that it is still very time-consuming: there's no way you can hear all the responses of all the students in the class to all the items, unless you want to spend the entire lesson on it! So you'll need to be selective: allow only two or three answers to each question, and make sure that as far as possible different students contribute each time.

The peer-work / peer correction can still be used, as suggested above: students listen to, or read, each others' responses and decide together if they are acceptable or not. They can always ask you if they are not certain.

Another option is to tell students to get together in groups of three or four, share their answers, and then each group selects one or two of the responses to each item to tell the rest of the class: the funniest, or the most interesting. Then have a 'sharing' session in the full class. This can be really fun, as students enjoy each other's original productions, and also results in a large amount of both exposure to and production of the target grammatical feature.

But if I let them work together, or correct each other, or correct themselves through self-access – how do I know whether they got it right on their own or not? How do I give a grade?

The answer to both questions is: you don't.

But that's not the goal of checking answers to practice exercises anyway.

Your question relates to testing, where it is really important to know that a student has been working alone and has earned whatever grade it is. This isn't testing: it's practice, which is a whole different ball game. The point of practice is the successful experience of getting it right, not the earning of grades. And anything which increases the amount and quality of this successful experience is good!

Checking exercises is done not for the sake of assessment, as in a test, but for goals such as: to reassure students that they are indeed 'doing it right' and reinforce their knowledge; to correct them if they are getting it wrong so that they can avoid similar mistakes in the future and, incidentally, by the repetition of the right answers, to give them yet another bit of exposure to the correct forms. Nothing to do with grades or objective assessment.

Some of the exercises will need to be done for homework, right? Any tips on this?

Right. You can't possibly get through all the exercises in class; even if you decide to omit some exercises as less appropriate for your class, your students will only get enough practice if they do some also for homework.

It's important to select exercises for homework that you are sure the students will be able to do successfully on their own. Some strategies to ensure successful homework completion are the following:

1 **Begin in class.** Make sure the instructions are understood, and do, or explain, the first item or two in class, so you are quite sure everyone knows what the task is.

2 **Do the whole exercise orally in class first.** If you are not sure if some of the students will be able to cope with the exercise on their own, then tell them to put down their pencils, and just talk them through the exercise, eliciting possible answers, without allowing them to write anything down. This is particularly useful for those exercises which have 'open' answers, but works well also with the 'closed' ones. Students then have a good idea of what is expected, and will be more likely to complete it successfully at home.

3 **Limit by time, not by quantity of work to be completed.** Instead of telling the students that they have to complete, say, exercises A, B and C for homework, tell them that you expect them to work for at least half an hour at home: they should do as much as they can in half an hour (or 20 minutes, or 45 minutes – whatever is appropriate for your class). If they wish, they may do more than that, but they don't have to. The advantage of this instruction is that this allows all members of a mixed class to work at their own speed; each individual does as much as he / she is able, rather than being asked to do either too much or too little, as very often happens with a 'fixed' homework assignment.

It's important to check their homework as soon as possible after they've done it; see a previous question for some ideas on checking.

But if I give exercises for homework, won't they just copy from one another?

We have to make a distinction here between mindless copying – which obviously doesn't result in much learning – and helping each other to get it right, which can result in excellent learning. One of the differences between testing and providing practice, is that a test is always done individually, whereas practice may very often be collaborative.

If the emphasis is on successful experience, and the students don't get grades for their homework, then the temptation to copy is much less. If students ask if they can work together on their homework, then agree, even

encourage it: they are more likely to get the exercises right, and will get through more material.

How useful is it to correct their mistakes? Even if I correct something today, it often doesn't seem to have any effect, they make the same mistake again tomorrow.

There's been quite a lot of research on this point. Some people say there's no point in correcting at all, it just demoralises and doesn't result in better learning. And we've all had the experience you describe of repeatedly correcting a particular feature, only to have the mistake come up again and again afterwards. But some corrections *are* implemented and used by students to help them avoid mistakes later; and often corrections are only taken on board after they've been made several times: i.e. the effect is cumulative.

In other words, if there's even a slight chance that the correction will raise students' awareness and help them eventually get it right, then it's probably worth doing, in principle. Or in other words: correcting is, on balance, more productive than not correcting! Note also that if you ask students, most of them will tell you that they want to be corrected; and most teachers also see it as part of their professional responsibility.

There may, however, be some cases where we should deliberately refrain from correcting: when, for example, a less confident student is at last expressing himself / herself fluently (in response to a MY TURN! task, for example) and we don't want to interrupt or disturb him or her. But there's no 'rule' about this: it's a matter of professional judgement, when it's appropriate to correct and when not.

In general, if the main target of a task is grammar practice, then probably nine times out of ten we will respond to a mistake by correcting it.

Doesn't correction have the effect of hurting students' feelings or demoralising?

As I wrote above, most students are aware of their need to be corrected. It's up to you to make sure that the correction is made supportively and without any implication that the student is silly or inferior in any way. They need to be aware that making mistakes is a natural and integral part of language learning.

Having said that, many students come to the classroom with a fear of making a mistake and 'losing face'; they may be reluctant to contribute an answer to an exercise because of this fear. This is, of course, not your fault, but let's look at some things you can do about it.

1 **Find an opportunity to raise awareness of the function of error correction.** Just give a little talk (possibly in L1) about how important it is to make (not avoid!) and correct mistakes in language learning, and how this is inevitable and natural, and not something to be ashamed of. Give some examples of mistakes you benefited and learnt from in your own language-learning experience.

2 **Deliberately praise a student who makes a mistake.** 'That was an excellent example of a slip I'm sure lots of other students need to learn about – thanks, Hans! Now, let's see …'

3 **Acknowledge the correct part of the answer as well as drawing attention to the mistake.** ' "Did they wanted to go …" Right, Katharina, you make a question in the past with 'Did', correct. But notice that ….'

4 **Be aware that sometimes we should not correct.** When a shy or inhibited student has at last said something, we may prefer not to correct but just to encourage and support.

What's the best way of correcting a grammar mistake in oral work?

Let's start with the worst way. The worst way is simple 'recast': the student says something wrong ('she going'), you simply repeat it correctly ('she **is** going'). The reason why this is the worst way is that research[1] indicates this is the kind of oral correction that students 'notice' least and learn from least. Sometimes this is just because they may not notice the correction at all, and simply think that the teacher is repeating (i.e. approving) what they said. In other cases they may notice it, but because it is so quick and fleeting they don't pay sufficient attention in order to learn from it.

It appears that to make sure that oral correction has an optimum effect, you need to make sure that the student who made the mistake (as well as other students in the class) has noticed and paid attention to it. Some ways to do this are:

1 **Elicit the correction from the student.** Just stop him / her and repeat the mistaken utterance with a doubtful intonation, or slight frown, or even say frankly: 'No, Carlos, that was wrong, can you correct it?'

2 **Explain.** Stop the exercise for a minute or two and and explain why the utterance is wrong, and what it should be.

3 **Translate into mother tongue.** If there is a parallel in the L1, then showing how funny the parallel mistake would sound in the L1 is a very effective way to draw students' attention to the nature of the mistake. Then elicit the right version, as in 1 above.

How about getting other students to correct someone who has just made a mistake?

Probably not such a good idea: a survey I did once with students indicate that they strongly prefer being corrected by the teacher. This is not necessarily because they feel embarrassed or distressed at correcting / being corrected by their classmates, but rather because they rely more on the teacher to make the right correction.

And if the exercise is done in writing: what's the best way of correcting?

In the same survey I've just mentioned, most students said that they prefer the teacher to write in the correct form, not just underline the wrong one. At first I thought this was just because they're looking for an easy option and didn't want to make the effort to work out the right one themselves. But in a later question, they also said that they thought the teacher should require them to rewrite a correct version later - which indicates that they aren't so lazy after all!

Probably, then, the best answer is a compromise: underline, or mark with a cross, those items which you are pretty sure the student can self-correct; and for other errors, write in the correct version. In any case, it can be a very useful exercise to get them to write out again those items they made errors in. Or, a week later, provide them with a 'clean' copy of the exercise and challenge them: 'Last time you did this exercise, you made a lot of mistakes: let's see if you can do it with (almost) no mistakes now!'

[1] Lyster, R. & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies* in Second Language Acquisition, 19, 37-66.

MY TURN!

What's the difference between MY TURN! and the other exercises?

Basically, it has the same function as the other exercises: to provide the students with opportunities to produce meaningful samples of the target grammar feature in order to consolidate their learning and make their use of the grammar more 'automatic'.

But in this case, it is assumed that they can already make correct responses in more structured exercises, when their attention is focused on 'getting it right'. Now they need to try to do the same again, when they are focused more on meanings, and when they are using the grammar to 'say their own thing'.

So there are no 'right answers' in most MY TURN! tasks: students have to find ways of expressing themselves in response to a task, using the target grammar feature in order to create personalized messages relating to their own situations, opinions, questions, experiences, tastes, friends and family, needs or wants. Sometimes the tasks are not overtly personalized, but nevertheless elicit creative ideas that are the students' own initiative, not imposed by the books.

If the MY TURN! is to be done in a notebook or orally, then students can make the responses as long or as short as they like.

MY TURN!

In your notebook, write present simple statements about your school morning.

1 Every morning I _____ have breakfast with my family.
2 I always …
3 You never …
4 My teacher …
5 The school …
6 My friends sometimes …
7 We …

So it's a sort of optional extra, right?

No. I think it is just as important as the other exercises – maybe even more so. Learners won't really master the grammar satisfactorily just by doing masses of form-focused exercises: they need to have experience of using it successfully in order to create their own discourse and their own meanings. That's what will help them integrate knowledge of the grammar into their own acquisition system, and that's what the MY TURN! tasks provide.

On the same principle, general communicative tasks are also good for grammar! While working on speaking or creative writing activities, find opportunities to encourage students to use recently-learnt grammatical features. And draw their attention to similar items within reading or listening passages.

What are some good ways to use MY TURN?

A lot of the suggestions given earlier on how to use the 'core' exercises in the unit will work also for MY TURN!.

A recommended procedure is to ask students first of all to do the task for homework. Then, in the next lesson, they can share with friends in pairs or small groups, to compare their different answers (and help each other correct mistakes, if any).

A variation on this is 'find a partner': students go round the class comparing their responses with those of others, and trying to find other students who have at least one identical response to their own. They find as many as they can, and then in a full class session report which 'partners' they found, and for what responses.

How can I check if the answers to MY TURN! are correct?

Some suggestions as to how to check open-ended exercises like MY TURN! are provided above. But be aware that even if not every mistake is corrected, this is not a disaster! The number of correct sentences produced will far outnumber the incorrect ones, and will still provide valuable personalized practice, even if a few errors have slipped through.

MY TEST!

What's MY TEST! for?

MY TEST! has a different, and complementary, function from the exercises. The exercises have the job of providing students with lots of opportunities of reading, writing, saying and hearing the grammatical feature in various contexts in order to amass successful experience of using it. The MY TEST! on the other hand is just a check as to whether the basic form and meaning of the target grammar has in fact been mastered.

With the exercises, students can't immediately check their answers unless you supply them with an answer key, and the focus is on the process of working through the exercise, rather than the outcome in terms of 'score'. MY TEST! is accompanied by an answer key, so students can immediately check and give themselves a score.

The information you and the students get from MY TEST! will enable you and them to decide whether more explanation and / or practice is needed, or whether you can progress to the next unit.

ructions.

ny help?

a coat.

he stairs.

.

for me?

.

MY TEST!

Circle the correct option.

1 The tourist .... for the Eiffel Tower.
   a is looking   **b** look   **c** are looking
2 He has a map, but he .... it.
   a isn't understanding   **b** doesn't understand
   c isn't understand
3 A: .... a car? B: Yes, but I never drive in Paris.
   a Are you have   **b** Do you have
   c Are you having
4 When we are in Paris, we always .... by metro.
   a are go   **b** are going   **c** go
5 It is often sunny in Paris, but today it ....
   a are rain   **b** is raining   **c** rains

My Test! answers: 1a 2b 3b 4c 5b

How do I use it?

Simply let students fill in the answers in class, and then immediately check themselves and give themselves a score.

But surely if they have the answers there on the page, they can easily cheat.

They can; and they might, if the test is used for a mark that afterwards goes towards some kind of final grade. But if the aim of the MY TEST! is made clear to them – that it's not to give them a grade, but to see if we need to do more work on this item or not – there is no point in cheating, and they are likely to 'play fair'.

Tell them that their actual score will remain private: they don't need to tell anyone else how many they got wrong.

So how do I find out and use the results of MY TEST?

With smaller classes, you can check individual students' scores privately, with them.

With larger ones, ask them to do the test, check the right answers, and note down their own scores. There are then various ways you can proceed.

With some classes (particularly young adult or academic classes) you can simply ask them to let you know themselves whether they feel they need more work on this grammatical item or not, without forcing them to tell you their scores. This can be done publicly: 'How many of you feel that we need to do more work on this point? Can you raise your hands? How many of you feel that you're OK on this point and would like to start working on something else?' If you feel that this would be embarrassing or entail a loss of face for some students, then just ask them to write you private notes: 'I feel I need more work on this grammar / I feel I know this grammar'. In this case, they can feel free to add any further information to you about their own learning needs.

You might, however, feel that such a process would be inappropriate for a class of adolescents, and you really need to know individual scores. In such classes, it may be better to take in their books and simply note down the results.

And if I do want to test them for assessment purposes and give them a grade?

In that case, MY TEST! is not an appropriate vehicle. Not only can they easily access the answers, but also it is very short and limited in scope, so only gives a broad, general evaluation of how well they have mastered the grammar: enough to decide whether you need more work, but not really a fair basis for a grade.

If you want to give a more formal test, I suggest you use the tasks provided in the Review units: see below.

Review

How do you recommend using the Review pages?

The Review pages provide extra practice of the features focused on in the preceding units: they have no texts or explanations.

They are optional: you may prefer not to use them at all.

The exercises can be used exactly the same way as you used the exercises in preceding units: see above for some ideas.

But you may also want to use the Review units as tests or as a basis for a grade.

R1 Review: present simple and present continuous

A Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb. Be careful with spelling.
1 My sister ....plays........(play) tennis every week and always ....watches........(watch) tennis matches on TV.
2 Look at that cat! It ....(run) very fast. I think it ....(try) to catch that bird.
3 My uncle ....(work) in a factory. He ....(fix) broken computers.
4 The baby ....(cry) again. She always

C Change the statements into negatives and the negatives into statements.
1 I'm very good at sports, but I don't like watching sport on TV.
  I'm not very good at sports, but I like _watching sport on TV._
2 My brother plays the guitar, but he isn't very good at singing.
  _____

How do I use Review pages as tests?

Select three or four exercises from the Review page which you wish to use as a basis for testing. Alternatively, use the entire Review page; but then make at least one exercise 'optional' (see question 3 below).

Then choose one of the following options:

1. Use the Review page as it stands. But if you've decided not to include all the exercises in your test, make sure the students know which to do and which not, and which are optional.

2. Give the Review exercises on a piece of paper, and issue as individual test sheets.

In either case, decide in advance how many marks will be alloted to each section (exercise), and how the whole grade for the test will be calculated: it's important for students to know this information, before they start.

If I give a test like this, then what do I do about students who finish early? Or who don't finish?

It's important to make the basic test one which you are fairly sure all your students will be able to complete, so that the second possibility is less likely. So you may want to make it shorter and not include everything in the Review page.

Then mark one or more of the other exercises as an extra, optional part of the test. It's best to choose the more difficult exercise(s) for this.

If you are using option 1 above, then just tell the students as they finish to go on to whichever exercise(s) you've selected as the optional extra; if you are using option 2, then add the extra exercise(s) at the bottom of the piece of paper ('test sheet'), making sure that it is / they are clearly marked 'optional'.

This way the faster-working students will have something to do as they finish the 'core' test; and the slower-working ones will have a better chance of finishing.

But then how do I give marks for the extra bits?

The basic test should be marked out of 100, so that even someone who hasn't finished all the optional material can get a high grade. The optional bits get up to 20% 'bonus' points, awarded and written separately.

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> A very reader-friendly series of explanations and practice exercises, for all levels.

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