

Teaching grammar better

By Hugh Dellar

1. Keep things real

Conversations - and the way they develop - have to start being given priority over the study of grammar structures in isolation. Tenses aren't used in isolation; indeed, we frequently answer a question in one tense using a completely different structure. From an early stage, students need to be exposed to the ways in which structures interact.

5 Using grammar: going to + verb

We often answer the questions in Activity 2 by saying:

- I'm going to + verb
- We're going to + verb

Look at the tapescript for the five conversations at the back of the book and find all the I'm going to + verb expressions. Write them down.

Ask a partner the questions in Activity 2. Use the expressions from the tapescript in your answers.

Real English: I'm going to go / I'm going

Both I'm going to go and I'm going are natural and correct.

I'm going (to go) running later.

I'm going (to go) swimming with a friend of mine tomorrow.

I'm going (to go) to a concert tomorrow night.

For more information on talking about the future see G6.

6 Who with?

We often say *who* we are going to do something with. Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

dad friends girlfriend own work

1. I'm going to go for a meal with some
2. I'm going to go on my
3. I'm going to go for a walk with my mum and
4. I'm going to play golf with a friend from
5. I'm going to go shopping with my'

Write true answers to the five questions in Activity 2. Then ask and answer the questions with some other students.

2 Practice

Complete these short dialogues by adding I'm/we're going to, I'll/we'll or I/we might.

1. A: What are you doing tonight?
B: I don't know. probably just stay in tonight and take it easy. I suppose get a video out. It depends what's on TV.
2. A: What are you going to do while you're in New York?
B: Basically, just go shopping. I've been saving up for about the last six months and I've decided go mad and spend it all. Apart from that, I've got no plans. I suppose go up the Empire State Building or something, if I have time, but I'm not that bothered one way or the other, to be honest.
3. A: Have you got any plans for tomorrow?
B: We haven't really decided yet. It depends on the weather. If it's sunny, probably go to the beach and spend the whole day sunbathing, but if the weather's bad, I don't know. I suppose go and have a look round the castle.
4. A: What are you going to do for your holiday? Are you going anywhere?
B: I'm not sure yet. My brother has rented a villa in Spain and asked if I wanted to go with him, so I suppose go and stay with him or another possibility is go and visit a friend of mine who lives in Munich. It depends. Then again, I'm so bad at making decisions, probably just end up staying at home and doing nothing!
5. A: What are you going to do after your English course finishes?
B: go back to the Czech Republic. I've still got to finish my last year at university.
6. A: What are you going to do for your birthday? Anything special?
B: I haven't really thought about it. probably just go and have a meal with my girlfriend. I suppose invite a few friends, but not have a party or anything like that.

2. Form and function are less problematic than lexicalisation

The form and the function of grammar structures pose far less problems for students than the variety of different ways in which structures are lexicalized. Grammar teaching needs to pay more attention to both *context* and *co-text*: the situations grammar is used in and the language it is used with. Students do need repeated opportunities to grammaticalise language, but they need to do so in meaningful ways, ways which consolidate and extend their knowledge of words which are often used with the structures.

3 | Always doing/never does

When we complain about things people do, we often use:

- always + present continuous
- never + present simple

I hate it. They're always gossiping.

He's so lazy. He never does the washing-up.

Make sentences using always or never and the correct tense.

1. he / do / anything round the house
2. she / leave / her things lying around everywhere
3. he / use / the phone
4. he / leave / the lights on
5. she / tidy up / after herself
6. she / leave / her hairs in the bath after she's had a shower
7. they / let / me watch what I want to watch on TV
8. he / take / things from my bedroom without asking
9. he / interrupt / me when I'm talking

Which of the people in 1-9 above do you think are ...

- selfish?
- messy?
- disgusting?
- lazy?
- rude?
- thoughtless?

For more information on how to use the present continuous to talk about habits, see G9.

[INNOVATIONS INTERMEDIATE: Page 57]

7 | Ways of adding emphasis

Did you notice these patterns for emphasising frequency?

- He's always / constantly / forever ... -ing
- He just never ...
- All he (ever) ... is ...

Choose some of these words to describe people you know. Use the patterns above to add follow-up comments.

an egomaniac	a loser	a party animal
a know-all	macho	tight-fisted
a ladies' man	moody	a whinger
laid-back	obsessed with	a workaholic

Tell some other students about these people.

[INNOVATIONS ADVANCED: Page 11]

3. Once is never enough!

Students need to have several chances to get to grips with core structures within each level. Instead of trying to teach everything about each structure in one big block, we need to do different things with the same structure at different times within a level. Students thus get to manipulate the grammar in different ways on different days - whilst also seeing the way the grammar works with different lexis and co-text in different kinds of conversations.

4 Using grammar: present perfect questions

You heard this extract in the conversation.

- T: The last time I remember having it was in the bank the other day.
A: Have you been back there to see if anyone's handed it in?

We often ask a question in the present perfect when someone has a problem. It's often a way of making a suggestion.

Complete the questions with the present perfect form of the verbs.

- A: I've got a bit of an upset stomach. I've had it for a couple of days now.
B: to the doctor's about it? (be)
- A: There's something wrong with this Walkman.
B: changing the batteries? (try)
- A: I had my bag stolen this morning when I was sitting in a café.
B: Oh no! it to the police? (report)
- A: I've got a terrible headache. I've had it all morning.
B: Oh no! anything for it? (take)
- A: I've lost my keys. You haven't seen them, have you?
B: in the living room? I remember seeing them on the table last night. (look)
- A: I lost my wallet last night. It had all my cards in and everything.
B: them all? (ring up and cancel)
- A: There's a guy in my class who is really annoying me. He keeps saying stupid things to me.
B: to the teacher about it? (talk)
- A: All the hotels I've rung are fully booked. Where are we going to stay?
B: ringing the tourist office? They can often help. (try)

7 Using grammar: describing changes

We can use the present continuous and the present perfect to describe changes. The present continuous (be + -ing) shows the change is not finished. The present perfect (have + past participle) shows the change happened before now:

- The economy's doing quite well at the moment.
- Prices have gone up a lot over the last few years.
- The cost of living has gone down since the election.

We often use at the moment with the present continuous and over the last / past few years and since with the present perfect.

Complete the sentences with the present continuous or the present perfect form of the verbs.

- Unemployment at the moment. (fall)
- Inflation at the moment. (go up)
- Children's behaviour worse and worse since my parents were children. (get)
- Crime worse and worse at the moment. (get)
- The world a more dangerous place since September 11th. (become)
- Racism worse over the past few years. (get)
- My English since I started this course. (improve)
- I a lot at the moment. (work)
- I a lot over the last ten years. (change)
- I very busy over the last few weeks. (be)

Which of the sentences are true for you and your country? Can you change the other sentences to make them true?

For more information on how to describe changes, see G36.

[INNOVATIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE: Page 127]

[INNOVATIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE: Page 139]

4. More conversations means more grammar

Everyday conversation naturally recycles expressions and core grammatical structures. By spending more time in class looking at how conversations work, students get covert exposure to grammar. A well-gapped listening can bring some of this recycled language to the fore. By asking questions about the language that's gapped in a listening, teachers can heighten awareness and encourage better noticing.

3 Problems on holiday

🔊 Listen to this conversation between two people – Tony and Adriana. They are both on holiday. The first time you listen, find out what problem Tony's got and what he's going to do about it.

Listen again and complete the conversation.

T: Hello. How are you?

A: Great. I've seen lots of interesting things. I'm really enjoying it.

T: Yes, it's a nice place, isn't it?

A: Yes, lovely. So what are you doing today?

T: Oh, (1) I've lost my passport, so I need to go to the Embassy and see if I can get a temporary one.

A: Oh no! Where did you lose it?

T: I'm not sure. The last time I remember (2) having it was in the bank the other day.

A: Have you been back there to see if anyone's (3) handed it in?

T: Yes, I went there yesterday, but they didn't have it.

A: (4) How annoying!

T: Yes, it's a real pain. Anyway, listen, (5) I must go. The Embassy opens at ten and I want to get there early.

A: Yes, sure. Well, good luck. I hope you (6) sort it all out.

T: Yes, thanks.

With a partner, have similar conversations about some of the problems you discussed in Activity 1. Begin by asking So what are you doing today?

Real English: It's a real pain

If something is a pain, it is annoying and it usually takes a long time to do.

I hate queuing! It's such a pain.

I've missed the last bus. What a pain! I'll have to walk now!

Can you think of anything else that is a real pain?

Have you heard the expression which means the same – It's a pain in the neck?

5. Teach grammar covertly whilst teaching vocabulary

Another way to ensure students get regular and repeated exposure to the most common grammatical patterns is to make sure you always teach words in full sentences - or even little mini-dialogues. Many students have acquired literally thousands of words passively - they know their meanings, but have no idea how they're used or how they *colligate* - which grammatical structures they are commonly found with. Fully contextualized and grammaticalised vocabulary teaching can counter this.

1 Vocabulary: banks

Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

account	a new account	my credit card
a loan	banks	

- I'd like to open
- I don't have a bank
- I'm thinking of changing
- I'd like to take out
- I need to cancel

Now complete these sentences with the words in the box.

apply for	change	make	pay	transfer
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- I'd like to a complaint.
- I'd like to my PIN number.
- I'd like to some money from my account in Japan to my account here.
- I'd like to some money into my account.
- I'd like to a credit card.

With a partner, discuss why the person wants to do these things. For example:

- A: I'd like to take out a loan.
 B: Maybe he wants to buy a car or perhaps he wants to go and study abroad for a year.

[INNOVATIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE : Page 134]

2 Using vocabulary: sorting out problems

Match the sentence beginnings with the endings.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I've had my bag stolen, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I've lost my passport, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. A cash machine has just eaten my credit card, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I bought this mini-disc player the other day, but it's not working properly, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I'm doing an English course at the moment, but they say I haven't paid, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I'm having some problems with this guy at work, | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- so I need to go to the Embassy and see if I can get a replacement.
 - so I need to go to my bank and see what the problem is and if I can get any money out.
 - so I need to go to the finance office and find out what's happened.
 - so I need to go and talk to my boss about it.
 - so I need to report it to the police and cancel all my credit cards.
 - so I need to take it back to the shop and see if I can get a new one.









[INNOVATIONS PRE-INTERMEDIATE : Page 126]

6. Students need exposure to more common structures earlier

Rather than spend 40% of our Elementary courses trying to teach students everything about every possible form of the verb *to be* and the present simple, we need to be exposing students to a far broader range of structures early on. These are best taught as *lexical chunks* - whole sentences containing particular grammar structures, but which can be explained simply as sentences, as they stand, without students being expected to do anything else with them - at this stage. This early exposure not only boosts communicative competence at lower levels, but also means students are primed for more in-depth study later on.

4 Using grammar: *How often / How long ... ?*

Match these questions from Conversation 3 with the answers.

1. How often do you do that?    
2. How long've you been doing that?    
- a. Quite a long time – about nine or ten years.
- b. Quite often – once or twice a week.
- c. Not very often – only about once a month.
- d. Not very long – only about three weeks.
- e. Not very long – only about a month.
- f. Quite a long time – about six or seven months.
- g. Not very often – only about two or three times a year.
- h. Quite often – nearly every day.

Cover the answers above. Now complete these answers. Use **ONE** word in each space.

- a. Not often – about three four times a year.
- b. Not often – once or twice a year.
- c. Quite often – nearly day.
- d. Not long – only a week.
- e. Not long – about a month.
- f. Quite a long – about or ten years.

For more information on using *How often* and *How long* see C8

[INNOVATIONS ELEMENTARY: Page 37]

2 Using grammar: *What's she like?*







We ask *What's he / she like?* when we want to ask about the personality of someone we don't know:

A: I met Lucy's husband last night.

B: Oh really? What's he like?

A: He's great – really nice, really friendly.

Match the questions with the answers.

1. What's your brother like? 
2. What's your sister like? 
3. What's your mum like? 
4. What's your dad like? 
5. What're your neighbours like? 
6. What's your boss like? 
- a. She's great. Everyone loves working for her.
- b. They're OK. They're better than the old ones. They were really strange!
- c. She's great. She's much younger than my dad – and much easier to talk to.
- d. He's OK. He's older than me. We're quite different. He's quieter than me. He's really shy.
- e. She's great. She's much younger than me, but we're very similar. We're both really creative. We both love art and music.
- f. He's OK. He's much older than my mum. He's more difficult to talk to.

Work with a partner. Ask and answer the questions above. Give answers that are true for you.

[INNOVATIONS ELEMENTARY: Page 105]

7. High level students have different needs!

High-level students don't really need to go over and over the same structures they've already studied to death, but they DO need to practise grammaticalising language and to get better at monitoring their own output. Similarly, whilst they don't need to spend hours and hours fretting over obscure and relatively useless structures, they do need to meet these structures - ideally, briefly, and in the contexts they're usually used in, with the lexis that frequently attaches itself to them.

5 How's business?

Complete the replies to the question *How's business?* with the correct forms of the verbs in the box.

be hit	boom	cut	lose
struggle	be inundated	break	get rid of
make	take on		

- OK. We're managing to even at the moment.
- Terrible. We already two of our biggest customers so far this year.
- Terrible. We really
- Great. Business
- Terrible. It looks like we a big loss this year.
- Great. We with orders. We're thinking of expanding.
- OK. We too badly by the recession so far.
- Great. We ten new people since last year.
- Terrible. We've had to twenty people so far this year.
- Terrible. We're going to have to costs drastically over the next year.

Do you know any businesses which are struggling or booming at the moment? Why?

[INNOVATIONS ADVANCED: Page 71]

5 Using grammar: No sooner had ... than ...

In the conversation, Erica said 'No sooner had I finished the sentence than this awkward silence fell.' We often use this structure when we're telling stories to emphasise the fact that the second action happened very quickly after the first.

Notice that we invert the subject and the auxiliary when we start the sentence or clause with **No sooner**. This adds emphasis.

For more information on how to use **No sooner** see C24

Rewrite these sentences using **No sooner**.

- It was awful! We got to the check-in desk and then I suddenly realised I'd left the tickets at home.
.....
- I felt awful! I did it and then I immediately realised I'd made a terrible mistake!
.....
- It was typical! We offered the unions a decent pay rise and then the very next day they called a strike.
.....
- It was weird! About half an hour after I booked an appointment with my doctor, the pain just disappeared.
.....
- It was such a stressful evening! First my ex-wife rang and then about five minutes later my lawyer called.
.....

[INNOVATIONS ADVANCED: Page 133]

8. There's more to grammar - and life - than tenses!

The relatively narrow grammar syllabus that most coursebooks are based on means there's plenty of other interesting patterns that all-too often get overlooked. If we really want our students to be fluent users of the language - especially the spoken language - we need to make more time for more of these significant, frequent and useful patterns - even if we don't have a catchy name for them or aren't really sure exactly what kind of grammar they are!

6 Linking ideas

On page 66, Lucy talked about the disco:
'It was so loud, I could hardly hear myself think.'

This is a common way of linking two ideas:

I was very tired.


I fell asleep in the middle of the film.

→ I was so tired, I fell asleep in the middle of the film.

Make sentences by matching the beginnings 1-8 to the endings a-h.

1. It was so cold,
 2. I was so exhausted,
 3. I was so hungry,
 4. It was so hot,
 5. His conversation was so dull,
 6. I was so angry,
 7. I was so worried,
 8. The film was so bad,
- a. I could've killed him!
 - b. I rang the police.
 - c. I could hardly breathe.
 - d. I walked out halfway through.
 - e. I just went straight to bed as soon as I got in.
 - f. I could hardly stop myself from yawning.
 - g. my hands felt like they were going to fall off.
 - h. I could've carried on eating all night!



 Listen, then say all these sentences, making sure you stress so.

[INNOVATIONS UPPER-INTERMEDIATE: Page 69]

7 Using grammar: comparing places

Choose the correct form in each sentence.

1. Their economy is nowhere / nothing near as strong as ours at the moment. Inflation is out of control over there.
2. The food here is miles / metres better, I can tell you! Everything there was really stodgy and it's very limited too.
3. The transport system there is a million fold / times better than the rusty, worn-out mess we've got here!
4. I like it here, but it's not even similar / close to being as romantic or charming as Paris. Paris is just such a seductive city.
5. I suppose Mar del Plata is the Argentinian equal / equivalent of somewhere like Bournemouth or Torquay - a classic seaside holiday resort.
6. The standard of living here is nowhere / nothing like as good as it is there. They've got it all figured out over there, you know!
7. I think there are definite comparisons / parallels between the two countries. We've both lost empires, we're both on a bit of a downward spiral and we're both very proud.
8. There's no comparing / comparison! I much prefer it here. It's out in the middle of nowhere there and it's totally dead at night.
9. I like my hometown, but it's not in the same league / competition as the capital.
10. Bangkok is amazing! I found the rest of the country a bit dull by / when comparison, to be honest.

For more information on making comparisons like this see G2.

8 Practice

Think of five towns, cities or countries that you know well. Spend a few minutes thinking about how they compare with the place you're studying in. Decide which of the comparison forms in Activity 7 you want to use. Then tell a partner.

[INNOVATIONS ADVANCED: Page 21]