

Don't Teach Grammar — Teach Functions

A while back, there was a blog post written specifically about what is wrong with PPP methodology and, sadly, the author stated:

PPP means that teachers will first present a grammar point

While I would agree that PPP has some limitations, I would never agree that PPP must be about teaching grammar. The writer would not think that after studying in my training classroom!

Now I quite understand that MOST TEFL training programs around the world take that approach, but a thinking teacher never would. Method should be about thinking your way through a lesson, not just following a routine over and over.

Why in the world would you make grammar the point of specific lessons? I sure can't think of any reasons beyond the predictable "because they need to know grammar".

Well yes, students do need to know and understand grammar, but this constant focus on grammar is one (of many) reasons why students hate studying English.

Why not teach students how to communicate about something they are interested in? Then, inside that lesson, teach them how to do that communication in a grammatically correct way.

Teach Language Functions

Functions are simply language that we use to exchange information. Language that has a purpose or a function.

Simple examples:

Asking and answering questions about your favorite sport

Dealing with complaints at work

Asking someone for a date

Asking and giving directions around town

Asking for assistance at work

Giving your opinion in a meeting

Making a sales call

Disagreeing

Talking about your product

Introducing yourself

Describing your favorite toy (food, hobby, music, actor, etc.)

Talking about your favorite video games

What is important or most relevant to your students? Talk about that and teach them the language for that. Do you really think your students talk about present perfect when they are away from school? Not likely!

Notice the functions always start with a word ending in *-ing*.

Asking and answering, offering, helping, assisting, complaining, talking about, directing and on and on.

You almost can't go wrong with the simple:

Asking and answering questions about...

Just ask your students what they want to talk about and fill in the blank. Wouldn't your students be more interested in your class if THEY got to pick what they are going to talk about? Of course, they would!

If you teach them how to talk about things they WANT to talk about, things they are INTERESTED in talking about, you will have a much more motivated student. One who just might enjoy their class rather than hate it.

Now I did say – Don't Teach Grammar – but what I meant was don't make it the point of the lesson. Just teach your students the proper grammatical structures they need to talk about the topic at hand.

That's all. They will get it. It is certainly faster than just memorizing irrelevant grammar points.