

ADOLESCENT BASIC LANGUAGE ARTS FOR WRITING AND READING SKILLS

By P. M. Langland

Many students in senior high school around the state have problems with very basic grammar skills. They never seem to get a firm grasp on English usage, and if asked to tell the subject or verb of a sentence, often stumble on past the linking verbs and choose some noun or adverb after as the sentence subject. Mind you, I'm not saying that everyone should be able to know the subject of the think they are reading, but, it surely might help their reading understanding.

For years, students unable to pass basic English have eventually had to take remedial English, either in college, or somewhere else at their own expense, to be able to better themselves. I have had students unable to learn in the basic skills class in senior high school enter my class for the sole purpose of learning "school grammar". The method I use is unique in that the students write their own English book and learn the function of words in the language, not just rote form.

I have developed a set of transparencies to present information for review of the four basic sentence patterns, as well as each individual part of speech. Learning noun definitions, kinds, and uses for sentence patterns enables students to choose subject, object, and object of preposition nouns from any standard text exercise. The knowledge of noun functions can then be called upon to help in understanding phrase usage, clause uses and verbals. Rules for plurals and possessive case of nouns can be added as students progress.

Adjectives are words that tell more about nouns and articles point to nouns, helping students find them faster. This also helps make the adjective usage in the possessive case easier to understand. Predicate nominatives, like dependent adjective clauses either before or after the verb, are also more palatable after an understanding of adjectives.

The introduction of personal pronouns reinforces noun cases and uses. Possessive pronouns reinforce the possessive case of nouns. Demonstrative pronouns can easily be shown as

adjectives, leading to simplified grammar understanding.

Verb transparencies are introduced as soon as possible. Most difficult of all is teaching the three principal parts of irregular verbs. For each improper use of a verb the student is questioned until he or she correctly verbalizes the proper part for the tense being used.

From the beginning, students keep careful notes, under organized headings in their own notebooks. The teacher determines how many pages should be set aside for each part of speech, or if notes are to be made on one side of the page only. Two pages may be set aside for nouns with the definition under the heading; three pages for pronouns; seven pages for verbs, etc. As learning progresses the students add to these pages: kinds, cases, uses, and examples with suffixes for each part of speech. Regular verbs with 'ed' suffixes and 's' suffixes for third person singular verbs are written in the notebooks to facilitate finding verbs in sentence exercises. Students write the text.

Specific words serve as examples of specific parts of speech. Certain words that always serve as adverbs are listed there. Certain verbs, especially auxiliary and linking verbs, are listed in that specific area. Suffixes determine the function of the words, they are added to and learning which ones signify which part of speech, and how to add them to words helps the student's spelling as well as reading suffix sounds. By learning something of suffixes, most students learn to see the function of the word quite easily; they feel more secure and will attempt more advanced sentence structuring and paragraphs with less fear or panic.

The students have in these notebooks all the necessary things to help determine word function rapidly, helping their understanding of whether they have written complete sentences or not, and if not, what is missing, or what they have done to make their writing improper. Having the materials on transparencies and having the students take required notes prevents students from getting lost looking through a long text book to find the thing needed at the moment. It is simple for the teacher to

quickly place a transparency in front of the individual having problems, rather than to refer the student to page sixty to read, when what is needed is the last line of the page in bold print.

Masking some of the total transparency material, so students have only material needed for notes or review has proven beneficial. Each transparency has some material that is new or may overlap for note completion. The format of presentation can be that of any text book for basic skills.

In summary, it is easier for a teacher to ask students to copy notes from a transparency than from a text book most students feel they don't need notes from. It is much simpler for the student to turn a few pages in a notebook than to look in a text table of contents to find how certain words function. A quick look at a transparency can effectively show what function the students should refer to for review. The cost of the material is minimal, considering the benefit to the students, and the ease with which they learn the basic grammar skills for future use. The transparencies can be used with any text that is available and being used. The notebook remains the student's brains to assist his or her skill on paper long after the English class is over and the text has been forgotten.

REVIEW:

Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1980 - 1981: Dealing With Differences, Gene Stanford, Editor, and the NCTE Committee on Classroom Practices. Jody Humpal, Chairperson: Composition Committee.

The concept of "mainstreaming" students with handicaps and other special needs has presented a new and unusual challenge to today's classroom teacher. The response to the challenge is both encouraging and enlightening. The latest in the popular Classroom Practices series published by the National Council of Teachers of English: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1980 - 1981: Dealing with Differences, is a morale booster.

Twenty-four short articles are brought together in this volume. Teachers of English/Language Arts from all over the

U.S. have contributed their experiences and insights in teaching the 'different' student. Articles concern work with children exhibiting various physical handicaps, learning disabilities, emotional problems and with non-English speakers. A few of the contributors work with the gifted, offering deeper insights into "differences."

Many of the articles describe specific methods and approaches teachers have found to be successful in integrating the typical student into the classroom. The fear and apprehension that has been a large part of the 'mainstream' effort has often lead to innovations beneficial to the whole classroom. Dealing with Differences shares the fears and explores the insights many have discovered.

Insights of value to all teachers are discussed in the short articles. In dealing with the different student, teachers have discovered that the "typical" student is becoming a myth. Using the normal and natural diversity to advantage can benefit everyone.

Once a teacher begins to explore ways to communicate with special students, great things can happen.

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