

Renee Moore
Classroom Data Analysis

Introduction

Grammar problems in our students' writing or their scores on tests of grammar may at first make the challenge of instruction seem overwhelming even impossible. Below is an example of some data analysis that I did of my students performance during one year of my research study.

Summary

60 students, 11th grade (ranging from high at-risk to above average).

Average score on grammar pretest = 64

Average score at the end of the first semester = 78

In their pre-assessment writing, I found the following grammatical problems and listed them in order of occurrence:

- Using inappropriate verb forms or tenses
- Omission of commas after introductory elements
- Faulty parallelism
- Problems with pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Faulty subject verb agreement
- Wrong word choice (incorrect meaning or misuse of homonyms)
- Inappropriate use of comparative forms
- Misuse of apostrophes
- Double negatives

This is a formidable list; however, it is workable. Just looking at the stack of student papers with marks all over them, it was hard to tell where to begin and easy to fall into the trap of thinking the students didn't know anything or that we needed to start from scratch.

What's more interesting is what's NOT on this list. There were many things the students did well in their writing. But my students' control of the elements of standard usage would change as they focused on different topics, as they stretched as writers, as they were distracted by other issues in school and life. The same week they did this writing sample, I also gave a more traditional style grammar test (orally). These were some of the results:

- None of the students recognized an adverb in a sentence; some thought is was the verb.

- Students were only able to locate the main verb in sentences 16% of the time.
- They could only locate and correctly identify prepositional phrases 47% of the opportunities presented. [This frequently contributed to problems with subject verb agreement.]
- Students could only identify direct and indirect objects with 24% accuracy.

This pretest (and most of their standardized grammar tests) revealed that students were inconsistent, at best, in recognizing grammatical structures by their names or functions within context. This was particularly puzzling since their writing clearly showed that they could use many of the structures with fluency (complex sentences, verbal phrases, and others). Looking for these patterns in student work helped me get a more realistic picture of my students' abilities and of where I needed to focus my instruction. I decided it wasn't necessary to waste a lot of precious classroom time trying to teach them grammatical terms they would probably never need anyway. On the other hand, I determined there were some terms (and structures) they needed to know and recognize in order to more effectively evaluate their own work and be able to edit their own writing.