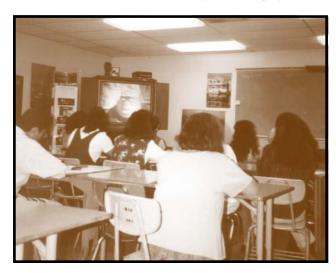# Grammar Video-Writing

Most second-language learners can "comprehend" or repeat grammar rules and fill in the blanks or manipulate sentence elements successfully—or at least sufficiently to pass their grammar-based language courses.

Their limitations and frustrations become evident, however, when they are required to apply grammar rules and patterns to "real life"—to use what they have learned to express their own ideas (correctly) in speech or in writing. These perhaps complex but always motivating and challenging video activities are likely to help.

⇒ **SPECIFIC TOPIC OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS:** Verb Tense Forms in the Past Time Frame

⇒ **LANGUAGE LEARNING & PROFICIENCY LEVELS:** Intermediate Through High Advanced

⇒ **MATERIALS:** a video-recorded segment (probably 5 to 20 minutes) on a topic that will naturally elicit the relevant grammar (sentence structures and phrasing patterns)

Video segments on topics that engage language students are useful not only for *content learning* and *discussion*. In addition, they offer motivating raw material for grammar writing lessons requiring the application of relevant patterns and rules to "real life expressive communication."

On the first viewing of this video, viewers are looking for main ideas that support the message of the story. Because the activity is also part of a *past-time* (*verb tense forms*) *grammar* lesson, they'll be expected to retell or write down the main events in correct sentences and good style.

INSTRUCTIONS: *How to Apply Grammatical Patterns & Sentence Structures to "Simulated Real Life"*

1. ***SETTING UP A VIDEO SEGMENT.*** Choose a portion of a video that not only interests learners but that naturally elicits the grammatical patterns being targeted. For example, to focus on *past verb tense forms,* use a piece on a historical topic (a significant event or time period). Or show an "audio article" on an interesting occurrence—such as a report from public television or a televised "news magazine." Another possibility is a *non-fiction story*—a personal account of a crime, a natural disaster, a difficult situation, an adventure, an amazing incident, a funny scene, a fantasy, or another involving sequence). Or it could be fiction—perhaps animation or the acting out of a children's story). Show the video in short clips, pausing when useful to rewind and replay, point out details of the action, help with vocabulary, explain what happened, emphasize main ideas, or summarize the points.

(Self-) Teaching Tips:

Getting Learner Enthusiasm for the Use of Video in Grammar Improvement

Because it's *so different from traditional grammar lessons, this activity may need learner "buy-in" to succeed—or it may take a few repetitions before students get the idea of what they are supposed to *do*. Spend time discussing effective and ineffective "grammar acquisition" methods. Ask learners what methods *they* have come up with for applying newly-learned sentence patterns to their speech and writing. Convince them that it's is *not* enough to memorize rules or complete exercises correctly. Instead, they must learn *which* sentence structures are appropriate to which contexts—and how to use them correctly to express themselves—newly acquired information as well as their own ideas. And of course, grammar skills aid in *listening comprehension* too—not only while watching video segments but also when listening to *others'* account and views of what they have seen and heard. Other than field trips—or perhaps even more because they're *repeatable—video* may be the most effective way of bringing "real life experience" into a classroom for language practice purposes.

2. ***SHOWING VIDEO.*** Explain the *purpose* of the activity. In addition to understanding the "action" of a segment, in later showings viewers are to pay attention to the *uses* of relevant grammar. "Warn" them that they'll be required to make use of these grammatical patterns or rules afterward. Then show the segment as many times as useful, stopping it when necessary or convenient to check that the class is following. Encourage them to take notes—on the info itself and/or on its important phrasing—so they can comment or ask questions during pauses.

Of course, before a video segment can be useful in grammar lessons, students must be able to understand *the point* and *the main ideas*.

View each clip several times yourself before presenting it. Before the first showing, you might give an appropriately adapted *preview*—by using short, simplified language to summarize its essence. You can write the significant vocabulary on a board and go over its meaning. You can provide a general outline or listing of main events from the video—or even a skeleton outline with blanks to fill in with the class later on. Encourage students at first to watch and listen *only* for general meaning—not to get distracted by details or vocabulary that might impede general comprehension.

While showing the segment, you might interject brief comments to help students follow what is going on. Don't try to "talk over" the narrative or speech of the tape itself, however. Stop the video when necessary and useful. Together with the class, review (summarize) what has happened so far. Encourage listeners to *anticipate* what will they are likely to see next. If the section has a clear message or "meaning," with your questions and comments prepare students to figure it out and state it in their own words.

After showing the video, allow/encourage discussion. If the sequence was a *narrative*, make sure that viewers/listeners understood the main events (happenings) and important supporting detail. Get them to express their *views* on its *message, point,* or *lesson,* if any. Replay it.

Reminding students again and again of the grammar they're to focus on, assign a writing topic—or ask one or more questions for them to answer—for individual or group work. Here are *general* examples of effective questions for narratives—the most productive kind of video for eliciting sentences in the past time frame.

- *What was going on when the action or activity of the clip began?*

- *What were the most significant events of the "story?" Why were they important?*

- *Was there a "message" or "lesson" in the video? If so, what do you think it was? Why?*

- *Did the creators of the video express or suggest a point of view (their own opinion) on the important events? If so, what was it? (Give supporting reasons for your ideas.)*

- (A specific question about the chosen video segment that will be particularly effective in eliciting the relevant sentence structures and grammar rules.)

Afraid that using video in a learning environment will foster passive tune-out? With motivated language-learners, the fear is probably unwarranted. A difficult challenge that many face is *getting the point* (the general meaning) of uninterrupted, fluent native or near-native speech. Therefore, they're likely to listen to English *intently—perhaps too closely,* which may cause them to tense up and *lose the thread of what is going on.* One advantage of engaging video is that it provides *meaning clues* through active *visual images.* Another is that it calms viewers/listeners to the point where they *can* follow, engage, and "get it."

One way to present or practice verb-tense forms and usage is within *time frames*—either the past or the present. Verbs can appear:

- as simple (one-word) verbs, with the necessary endings, if any: the *third-person singular* ending -*(e)s* in the *simple present tense* or the -*(e)d* ending on *regular past tense* verbs. (Examples: *learn, learns, learned*). Most very common verbs have *irregular* past-tense forms.

- in the *continuous* or *progressive* form, with an -*ing* ending on the main verb, which is preceded by a form of *be* (*am, is, are, was, were*). Some present continuous examples are *am doing, is doing,* and *are doing.* The corresponding past continuous forms are *was doing* and *were doing.*

- in the "perfect" form, which consists of the *past participle* of the verb after a form of *have* (*has, have, had*). Present perfect and past perfect tense examples for the main verb *go* are: *has gone, have gone, had gone.*

- in a combined *perfect-continuous verb phrase,* such as *has been working, have been working,* or *had been working.* These forms are called the "present perfect continuous" and the "past perfect continuous."

What about the "rules" for choosing the most appropriate tense forms for particular situations? As samples, here are some general guidelines for the past time frame: [a] use the *past continuous* to *set the scene* of a narrative or to *emphasize continuation* of action. Use the *simple past* the most often—for most activity in a narrative—to emphasize that it took place and is over now. Use the *past perfect tenses* for the "past in the past"—and so on. Of course, correct grammar usage requires considerable experience with language models, a major reason for including "Grammar Video-Writing" in the curriculum.

Allow time in class and/or for homework for students to write their papers or answer the questions. Remind them that in addition to giving *true information* or the "right answers" in regard to content, they're to use the *specified grammar*—in this case, *past verb forms.* In pairs or groups, they can read aloud what they wrote, helping one another to use appropriate sentence patterns and phrasing. Collect papers for correction, comment, and/or grades if appropriate. Unless you're teaching composition, you might want to "score" grammar usage, giving one point for each correct and appropriate use of the relevant grammar—in this case, each use of a verb in the past. Subtract one point for each mistake in that particular syntax. Return students' papers and allow for at least one rewrite.

In addition to or instead of writing, have students *talk* about the assigned topic or answer the assigned question(s). *Count*—or have learners count—or list the correct uses of the relevant grammar. *Who can use the specified sentence patterns or forms the most times while still making sense and expressing themselves effectively?*

Levels = Low Intermediate to High Advanced (How to Adapt)

⇓ If productive, *thoroughly* present, practice, and review relevant sentence structures and grammar rules *before* presenting a video segment. With novices, *limit* the number of choices to be used. With appropriate drills and exercises (that are not so long or tedious), provide helpful practice of the forms and rules for usage involved in the grammar topic. In "pattern language" (including notations like *VERBed, was/were VERBing*, etc.), list the structures to be used in plain view. Review the guidelines for grammar choice— in this case when to use the various *past-time verb-tense forms*. With the class, find relevant examples of the various patterns in the first few minutes of the video.

⇓ While the video is playing, on a board write notes about the significant events and ideas in order—probably the phrasing that is "key" to the point and the main ideas. After stopping the tape at convenient intervals, help learners to reconstruct what they have seen and heard by using the phrases in sentences that incorporate the relevant grammar.

⇓ Instead of requiring beginning or intermediate students to write about the video or answer questions in essay form, have them list true and relevant statements—using the required grammar patterns—about what they see and hear. Correct, comment on, and/or grade only the sentence structures and phrasing relevant to the grammar lesson.

VARIATIONS & OTHER AREAS OF APPLICATION

Here are some grammatical areas that may lend themselves to IDEA JJ: **Grammar VideoWriting.** Included are suggestions for kinds of topics that could naturally elicit certain sentence structures or phrasing and focus attention on rules.

- **PRESENT TIME FRAME:** For videos with more *action* than dialog, viewers can describe what's going on "at the present moment" in the *present continuous*—orally and/or in writing. Or they can use the "historical present" (mainly the simple present) to tell "what happens."

- **PAST TIME FRAME:** biographies, historical documentaries, survival stories, news reports, action-filled events, adventure movie excerpts

- **FUTURE TIME FRAME:** reports on coming technology, speculation on the future; narratives to stop at to predict what's is going to happen next

- **KINDS OF NOUNS (COUNTABLE, SINGULAR/PLURAL, UNCOUNTABLE):** clips about *things, shopping, food* and other areas of *health, science, technology*

- **PROPER NOUNS:** (especially place names)—travel videos

- **ADJECTIVES + ADVERBS, INCLUDING ADJECTIVE CLAUSES:** nature scenes, documentaries about animals, travel advertising, commercials

- **ADVERB CLAUSES (especially time clauses with _when_, _before_, _after_, _while_, etc.):** instructional video showing steps and stages in processes