

Professional Development Programme

Facilitating Learning and Teaching Grammar in Context in the Secondary English Language Classroom

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Workshop Objectives

- To enhance teachers' capacity to adopt effective teaching strategies that guide students to learning grammar in meaningful context and make connections between language forms and functions
- To introduce approaches and strategies that facilitate students' exploration and application of grammar, enhancing their ability to use appropriate language items and structures to communicate the intended meaning, and deepen their understanding of how grammar affects the coherence, tone, style and register of the texts
- To provide suggestions on designing, selecting and adapting resources and activities for the learning, teaching and assessment of grammar

What is Grammar?

- Grammar is an essential component of language learning.
- “a knowledge of what words can go where and what form these words should take” (Harmer, 2015, p. 32)
- “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (Ur, 2012, p. 76)
- “a nourishing resource that will strengthen students’ learning of the language” (Burns, 2011, p. 76)

What is Grammar?



Communicative
functions (e.g.,
inform, argue,
persuade)

- Four major senses of grammar (Weaver, 1996):
 1. Grammar as **prescriptions** for **how to use structures and words**
 2. Grammar as a **description** of **syntactic structure**
 3. Grammar as **rhetorically** effective use of syntactic structures
 4. Grammar as the **functional command** of sentence structure that enables us to **comprehend and produce language**



e.g., tone,
style, register

Supplementary Notes

Learning and Teaching of Grammar

[Supplementary notes to Chapter 4.3.1 Task-based Learning and Teaching in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp. 74-75]

Grammar is an essential component of language learning. To enable learners to use a variety of language items accurately and appropriately in different contexts, it is important to help them connect grammar items and structures with the communicative functions they perform. In doing so, learners will gain a better understanding of how, why and when to use particular language items and structures and develop an awareness of how the items make meaning in the texts.

To enhance the effectiveness of grammar learning and teaching at the senior secondary level, teachers should consider learners' previous knowledge in grammar and design meaningful tasks for the application of their grammar knowledge in context. The following are some suggestions for planning grammar learning and teaching at the senior secondary level.

Building on learners' learning experiences in the previous key stages

As learners at the senior secondary level should have encountered most of the essential structures and grammar items in KS1-3, the focus of grammar learning at this level should be on consolidating grammar knowledge and extending it to a greater degree of complexity by exploring how different grammar items and structures perform the same or a similar communicative function or how multiple communicative functions can be achieved by the same grammar item or structure. When planning for grammar learning and teaching, teachers can review the coverage of grammar items in the previous key stages and identify items that need consolidation or extension, and provide tasks for the application of such items in context. To extend grammar knowledge to a more advanced level, in addition to everyday use of English for general communication, learners should be exposed to more complex, formal and academic texts on a variety of topics to enhance their understanding of how grammar functions in different contexts. This not only helps them cope with the language demands at the senior secondary level, but also addresses their needs in learning content subjects through English.

Grammar: What does the EDB say?

English Language Education

Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 6)



Prepared by
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HK SAR
2017

Key Stages 3 – 4 (S1 – 6)

Students at the junior and senior secondary levels should have been exposed to most of the essential language items and structures of English in the previous key stages of learning. Items learnt in KS1 – 2 should be consolidated and extended to a greater degree of complexity at KS3 – 4.

The following table serves to illustrate the relationships between some of the language items and communicative functions that students are expected to learn in KS3 – 4.

Language Items and Communicative Functions	Examples
Use adjectives, adverbs, formulaic expressions, etc. to make comparisons and give descriptions of processes and situations	Exercise will make you <u>healthier and stronger</u> . You cannot expect <u>more</u> pay for <u>less</u> work. John walks and talks <u>like</u> his father. Although the twins look <u>alike</u> , they are very <u>different</u> in character. Nancy is the girl in an <u>old-fashioned, blue, tattered</u> dress. <u>After two months</u> , we found the missing ring under the carpet. The children are <u>upset</u> to hear that the picnic has been cancelled. It is <u>kind of you</u> to help. Tom is <u>old enough</u> to travel by himself. To a large extent, the two pieces of work are <u>similar</u> in terms of content. It's an own goal! <u>What a blunder!</u>
Use the simple present tense, gerunds, conditionals, etc. to make general statements about the world and "universal truths"	Greed <u>is</u> not the only force that <u>moves</u> the world. Hong Kong <u>is</u> a financial centre. <u>If</u> there <u>is</u> a thunderstorm, you <u>should not swim</u> in the sea. The plane <u>leaves</u> for Beijing at seven o'clock tonight. <u>Swimming</u> is a popular sport in Hong Kong. <u>Surfing the Internet</u> is a very popular pastime among Hong Kong teenagers.
Use a variety of tenses, the passive voice, reported speech, adverbs, etc. to refer to events in the past, present and future and to the frequency with which things occur	The volcano last <u>erupted</u> in 1960. He said that he <u>used to swim</u> for half an hour every morning. I <u>may have thrown</u> away the book by mistake. My brother <u>is working</u> as a nurse in a local hospital for the time being. I <u>was watching</u> the stars when I <u>saw</u> a strange flying object. Manchester United <u>will be playing</u> against Millwall in the FA Cup Final. He <u>has been talking</u> on the cell phone for two hours already. I <u>will get</u> in touch with you sometime next week. Security in the region <u>is threatened</u> by the recent bomb attacks. He <u>has worked</u> in this bank for twenty years. He <u>has been working</u> since January. She <u>said</u> she <u>would arrive</u> before noon. She <u>has been</u> the Chief Executive Officer of that company for seven years.

Language Items and Communicative Functions	Examples
Use conditionals, inversions, formulaic expressions, etc. to express gratitude and regret	<u>Had it not been</u> for my teacher, I <u>would never</u> have had the confidence to finish this project. <u>May I take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to</u> all our teachers for their guidance, patience and support. <u>If you had come</u> earlier, you <u>would have met</u> Michael Jordan. I'm sorry I won't be coming to your graduation ceremony. <u>It's a pity</u> that the concert has to be cancelled because of the typhoon. <u>I wish I could</u> take back my words. <u>I wish I had been</u> more careful with my spending.
Use adjectives, inversions and formulaic expressions to pay a compliment or make a criticism	<u>Never have I seen</u> such a badly put together documentary. <u>Well done!</u> <u>How clever of you</u> to think of all that! Our students were deeply <u>impressed</u> by the love and respect with which the elderly were treated in your centre.
Use formulaic expressions, adverbial clauses, etc. to make a complaint	<u>I've had enough</u> of this nonsense. <u>I'm afraid that</u> the noise your dog makes has kept us awake all night. <u>What a nuisance</u> it is to have to fill in so many forms! You have shown no improvement in your behaviour <u>even though you have been warned several times</u> .
Use adverb phrases and adverbial clauses of reason, concession, result, etc. to justify one's behaviour, decision and point of view in a variety of situations	We have put more chairs in the school hall <u>in order that more people can be accommodated</u> . <u>As a result of</u> the new law, many foreign workers are allowed to work in Hong Kong. <u>Owing to</u> the heavy rain, the concert was cancelled. The two friends have fallen out <u>due to</u> a misunderstanding. Mr. Lee has decided to stop selling deep-fried snacks in the tuck shop <u>because of</u> parental pressure.
Use adjectives, adjective phrases, formulaic expressions, etc. to describe one's feelings and responses to happenings and states of affairs in some detail	It's difficult to describe my feelings at the airport. I was <u>thrilled</u> about studying abroad, <u>sad</u> to leave my family and friends, a little <u>anxious</u> about adapting to a new place, and intensely <u>aware</u> that I had to make something of myself. The runners were <u>too tired to move</u> after the marathon. <u>Embarrassed by his careless blunder</u> , John went all red in the face. <u>You must be joking!</u> <u>What a shame!</u>
Use modals and formulaic expressions to ask for and give advice on a variety of matters	<u>We would be grateful if you could</u> supply us with information on university education in the United Kingdom. <u>Could you</u> give us some hints on how to solve the problem? <u>Why don't you</u> add more illustrations to your project? <u>Perhaps you should</u> discuss this with your parents. Yes, <u>it is a good idea</u> for our students to take part in voluntary service.

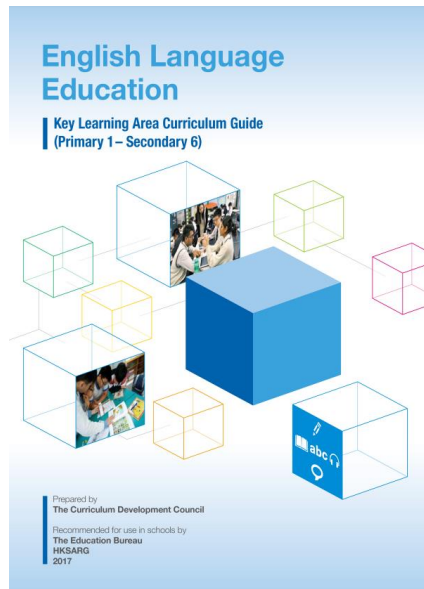


Grammar Teaching Approaches



Task-based Grammar Learning

- **Pre-task:** Before the task, the teacher identifies the language items and structures needed for completing the task and considers the language support required by students. The teacher then engages students in exercises or activities to help them understand and practise the forms and functions of the target language items and structures.
- **While-task:** During the task, students apply their grammar knowledge in an authentic context that involves meaningful use of the target language items and structures to complete the task. Students are guided to evaluate their own learning and reflect on how grammar makes meaning in the process.
- **Post-task:** Extended tasks or projects which provide new contexts for the use of the language items and structures previously learnt can be provided for further application and consolidation purposes. Concepts about the use of the target language items and structures are clarified and reinforced.



Major Grammar Teaching Approaches

**Deductive
approaches**

**Inductive
approaches**

Presenting Grammar in Context

- **Key principle:** Introducing and explaining grammar structures **within meaningful, real-life situations or texts**, rather than teaching them in isolation through abstract rules or disconnected examples → Understand both the **form and function of grammatical structures**

Common Problems with Textbooks

- Rule-based teaching, limited opportunities for discovery or noticing
- Overemphasis on form over meaning
- Overemphasis on sentence-level grammar
- One-size-fits-all explanations (e.g., use *will* for future events)
- Isolated mechanical drills
- Sentence-level decontextualised exercises
- Activities without a real-life context or purpose



- Students can't use grammar communicatively
- Weak transfer to real-world contexts
- Mechanical accuracy, low fluency
- Students may perform well in written drills but struggle with spontaneous speaking or writing
- Passive learning

Adapt textbooks
to facilitate
student learning!

Suggestions and Implications for Grammar Teaching

Learners

- Replace the textbook's example sentences with ones that feature your students' favorite celebrities, local places, school events or pop culture references
- Before introducing the textbook's grammar explanation, give students a snippet from a popular song, social media post or clip from Netflix that they like and have them identify the target grammar structure in a real, engaging context
- For students who need more practice, increase the number of examples or add visual supports or sentence starters
- For advanced learners, reduce the number of basic drills and instead assign a mini-project where they must use the grammar to achieve a goal (e.g., create a survey and present the results)

Texts and Activities

- After the controlled / mechanical practice in the textbook, add a critical thinking task. For example, after practising comparatives, have students design a better school cafeteria menu or create a winning sports team using comparisons to justify their choices ("This player is more strategic than that one...")
- Bring in authentic texts (e.g., grammar errors from online comments, headlines, lyrics or ad slogans) and have students correct or analyse them

Textbook Quality

- Present the grammar components in a more engaging order: Start with several authentic examples, let students deduce the rule, then present the textbook's explanation for confirmation, and finally do the practice exercises
- If the textbook uses artificial contexts (e.g., "Peter writes letters to his grandmother"), use other real-life contexts like giving advice on a social dilemma, comparing smartphone features or summarising a trending YouTube video



Form, Meaning & Use

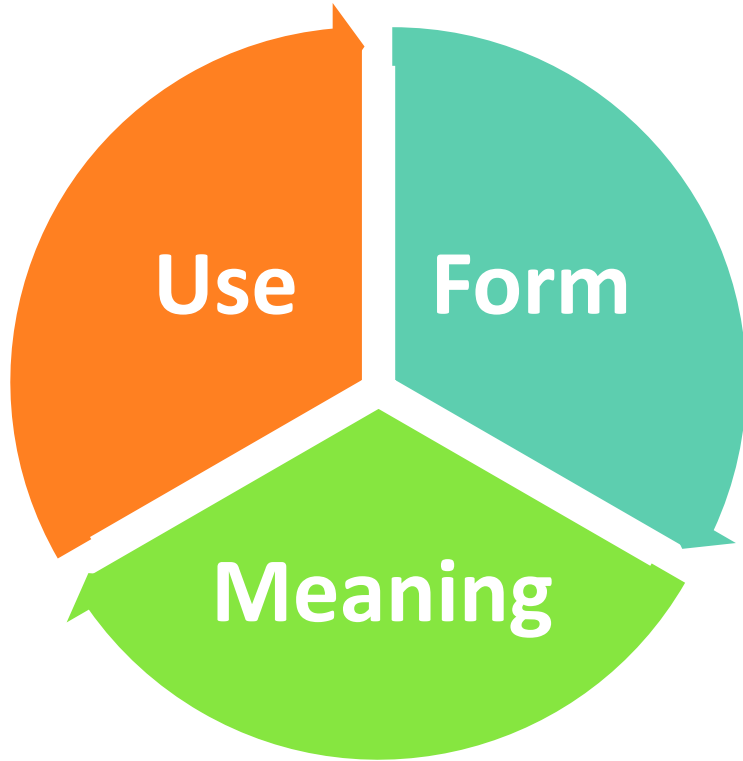
Which Error Matters Most?

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
A: Where do you live? B: I lives in the city center.	A: What are you doing tomorrow? B: I went to the cinema with my friends.	A: Teacher, close the window!

- All three examples are “grammatically” problematic in some way.
- Identify the problem in each example. Rank them from most serious to least serious for communication.
- Which should be corrected immediately vs. postponed for later? Why?
- In your own teaching, which kind of error do you tend to focus more on?

Grammar teaching is not (just) about eliminating all errors, but about helping learners **express intended meaning appropriately** and understand others clearly. It should prioritise the types of errors that impede **understanding** or **appropriateness** in real-life communication.

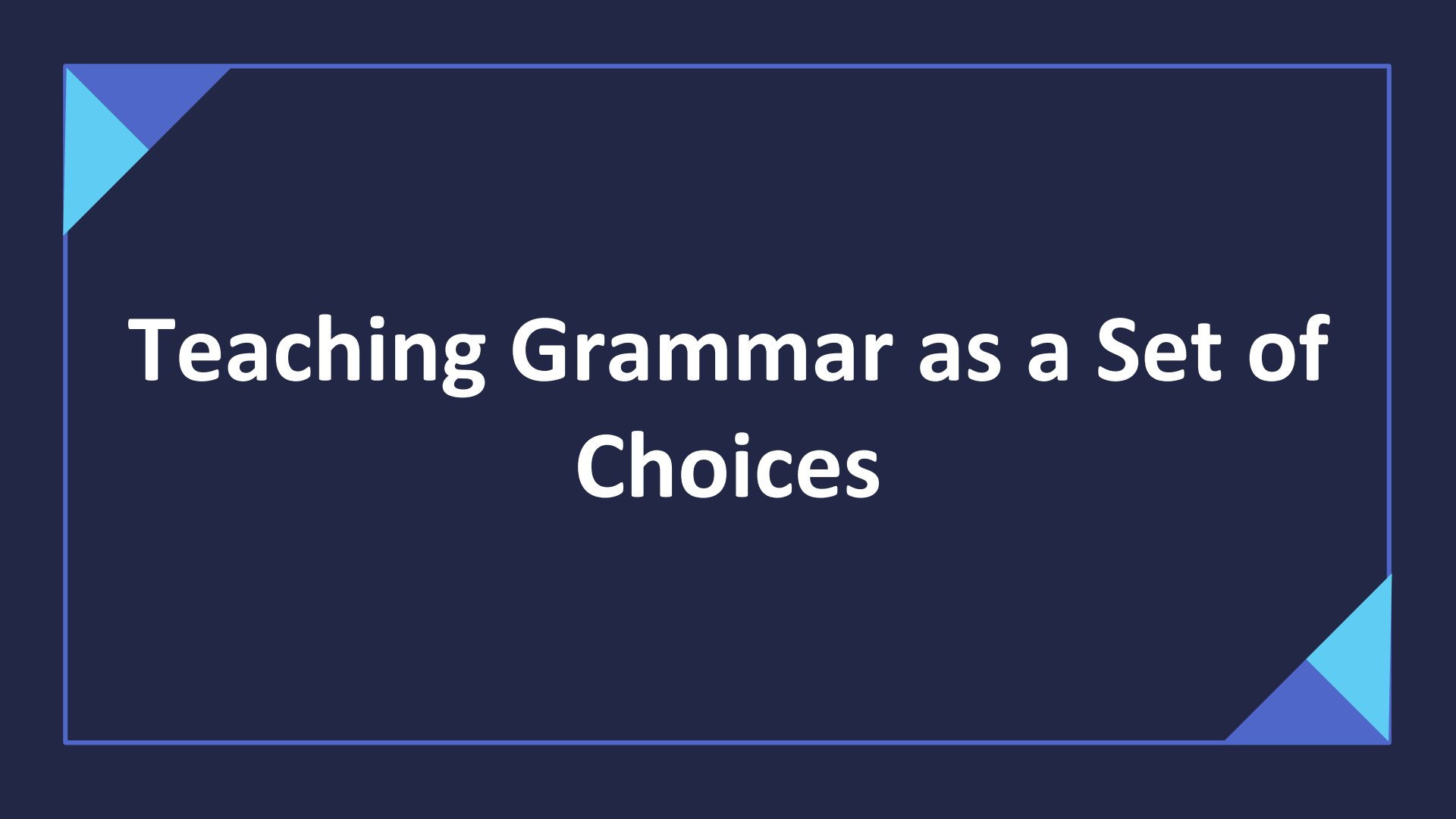
Form, Meaning & Use



Form	Structure and accuracy (How it is built)
Meaning	Semantic content and clarity (What it means)
Use	Pragmatic, appropriacy and communicative competence (When and why it is used)

Form, Meaning & Use

- Knowing form ≠ Knowing meaning and use in authentic discourse
- Knowing form ≠ Communicating the intended meaning
- “... the FMU distinction is a useful guide to help teachers decide the focus of their lessons as well as how to describe and explain grammar to students” (Crawford, 2020, p. 10)
- “Grammaring” as a “fifth skill”: “the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 143)



Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

- Grammar: A meaning-making resource
- Teaching grammar: Develop students' ability to choose and use the right forms for communication → Produce texts and express meanings in real-world contexts
- Grammar tasks should show learners that **grammatical choices create different meanings** and **shape the tone of communication**.
- **Communicative purpose and intended meaning** determine **which grammatical form to use**.

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

Scenario:

Asking a classmate
to lend you a pen

Give me a pen.

Could I possibly
borrow a pen?

Can I borrow a pen?

I was wondering if I
might borrow a pen.

How do they differ?

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

Scenario:
Explaining why a classroom
window is broken

Tom broke the
window.

The window was broken
(during the game).

How do they differ?

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

Scenario:
Describing a surprising
event

The principal walked onto
the stage silently.

It was the principal who
walked onto the stage.

Silently, the principal
walked onto the stage.

How do they differ?

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

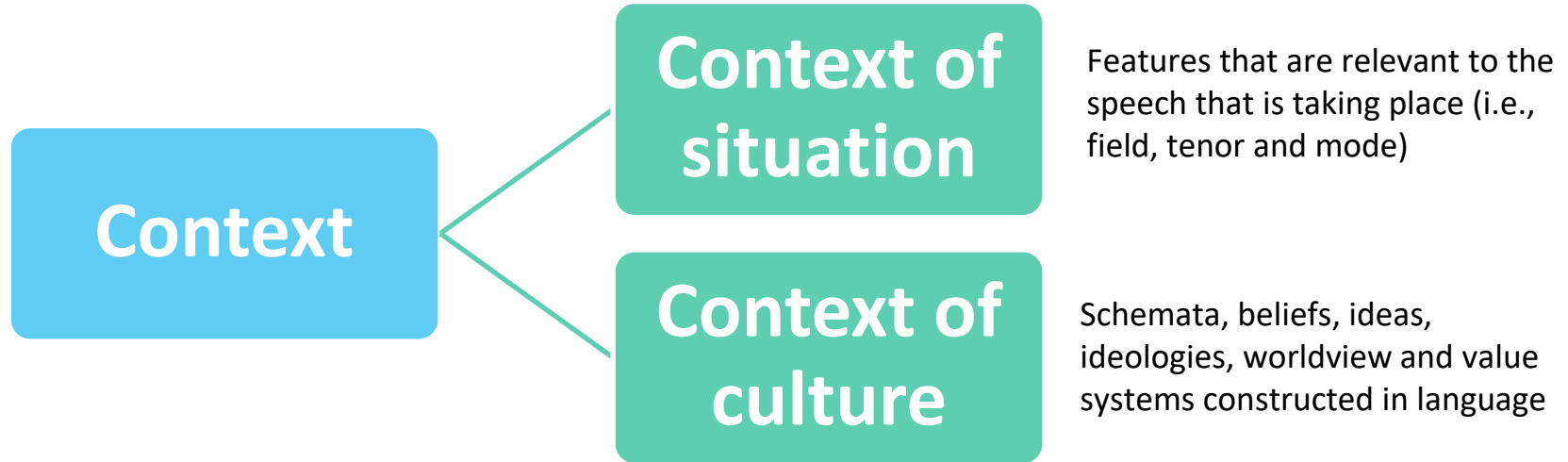
- We base our **language / grammatical choices** on three key considerations:
 1. **Purpose** (Why am I writing this?)
 2. **Audience** (Who am I writing this for?)
 3. **Form** (What kind of writing would be appropriate?)

Teaching Grammar as a Set of Choices

- **Register:** The specific language used in a particular social context and by a specific group or profession (e.g., legal, medical or scientific) when talking or writing about their own field of interest and expertise
- For example, a doctor is likely to use the medical register differently depending on the audience (e.g., writing for peers in a medical journal vs. giving a lecture to first-year medical students vs. explaining a diagnosis to a patient)
- Register is created by how **language** and **grammar** are used.

Importance of Context

- “All meaning is made by **contextualization**; the actual occurrence-meaning, use-meaning or text-meaning of a word or phrase depends entirely on its contextualization” (Lemke, 1988, p. 165)



Key Words

Tone

Style

Register

**How do you usually explain / illustrate
these concepts to your students?**

Sentence-level Grammar → Text Grammar

- The concepts of tone, style and register cannot be taught or understood fully at the sentence level. They are text-level phenomena.
- Tone, style and register are **the cumulative result of repeated grammatical choices made across a text.**

Sentence-level Grammar → Text Grammar

- **Sentence-level:** The modal “could” is more polite than “can” (A rule about a single word)
 - **Text-level:** Consider a job application letter. How does the consistent use of formal modals (“would”, “might”, “could”), passive constructions, polite lexical choices, etc. create a **tone** of respect and professionalism throughout the text? (An analysis of a pattern for communicative effect)
-
- **Sentence-level:** Avoid contractions in formal writing (A rule)
 - **Text-level:** Compare a text message chain between friends vs. official school newsletter in terms of pronouns, sentence completeness, vocabulary, use of slang/abbreviations, etc. How do these systematic grammatical choices across the entire text establish a formal / an informal **register**? (Register is a consistent pattern of choices, not a single switch)

Sentence-level Grammar vs. Text Grammar

Sentence-level Grammar (Traditional Grammar)	Text Grammar (Functional Grammar)
Grammar is taught at the level of the word and the sentence.	Grammatical patterns are observed in the context of whole texts.
Grammar as a set of rules. It is concerned with the form and structure of language.	Language as resource for making meaning. It is based on the functions that language serves in our lives. It is concerned with how language has evolved in our culture to enable us to do things.
Grammar use is correct or incorrect.	Grammar is a system of choices (though accuracy is also encouraged).
Context is irrelevant. Grammar rules and structures are seen as generic in all situations.	The choices we make vary according to the context (e.g., purpose, audience, topic, mode of communication).
An explicit knowledge of grammar allows us to parse sentences and name the parts of speech.	An explicit knowledge of grammar provides us with tools for exploring texts – to investigate and critique how grammar is involved in the construction of meaning.
It is a grammar of the written language.	Looks at how written texts differ from spoken texts (and from visual texts).
The focus is often on individual words – the ‘parts of speech’ – simply as a naming exercise.	The focus is generally on ‘chunks of meaning’ (sentences, clauses, groups and phrases) and their function rather than discrete words.
Grammar is taught out of context as an end in itself.	Grammar is learnt in the context of authentic, purposeful curriculum tasks to enhance learning.
Grammatical exercises usually use ‘idealised’ sentences constructed to teach a particular rule.	Authentic texts are carefully chosen to exemplify relevant grammatical points.

English Language Education

Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide
(Primary 1 – Secondary 6)



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Text types

Text types refer to different forms of speech and writing. The intended purpose and audience of each text type determine its structural, stylistic and linguistic features.

To assist students in their development as proficient users of English, it is important that they are introduced systematically to a good variety of text types. Different text types provide meaningful contexts for the learning and purposeful use of specific language items and vocabulary. An awareness of the demands of different text types is essential for successful and effective communication.

Teaching grammar
(and vocabulary)
through text types

Supplementary Notes 1

**Building a strong interface between the junior and senior secondary curricula:
Focusing on the development of literacy skills**

[Supplementary notes to Chapter 1.4 Interface with the Junior Secondary Curriculum and Post-Secondary Pathways in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6) (CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp.3-4]

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/references-resources/SN1_Interface.pdf

Language and Style

- Fostering learners' abilities to present ideas with appropriate stylistic features through, e.g.
 - emphasising the use of grammar in context to achieve the intended writing purposes
 - enriching learners' word choice and contextualising their vocabulary knowledge by assigning writing tasks associated with a wide range of themes, providing authentic practices in lexical expansion and teaching vocabulary building strategies explicitly
- Raising learners' awareness of tone, style and register to achieve the intended writing purposes (such as the degree of formality, reader-writer relationship)

Major School Genres

Narrative

Recount

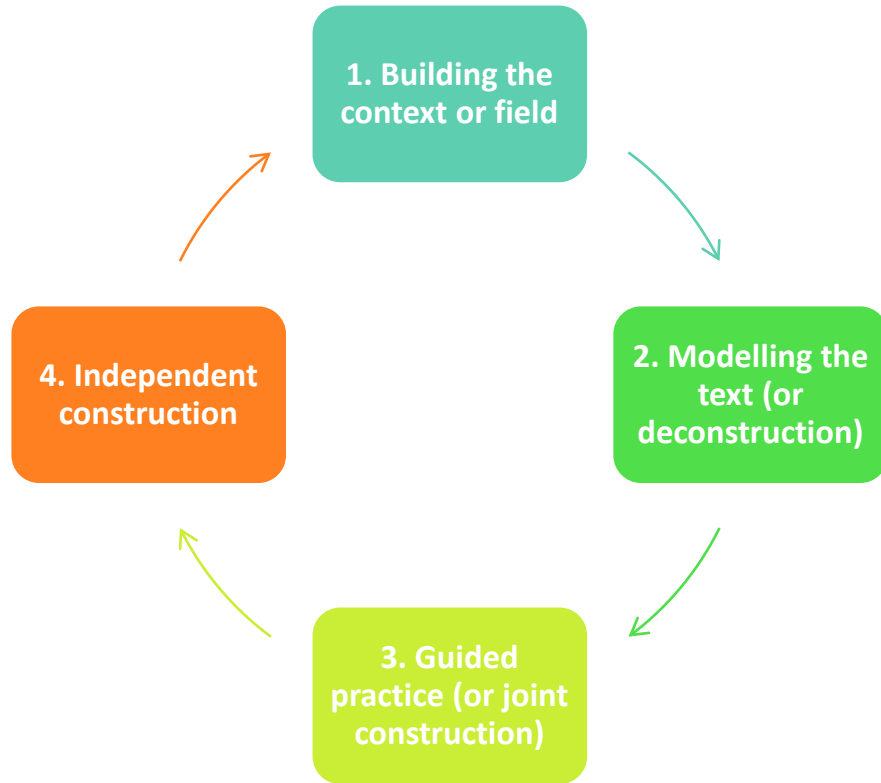
**Information
report**

Procedure

Persuasion

Explanation

Genre-based Approach: The Teaching-Learning Cycle



Scaffolding: Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend

1. Understanding the role of texts in our culture and building shared understanding of the topic
2. Using model texts to focus explicitly on the structure and the language of the text, how language choices work to shape meaning, and to build a metalanguage
3. Teachers and students jointly constructing a text
4. Students' independent writing or approximation of the genre

Understanding Levels of Formality

- Study the extracts and try to guess the intended audience, purpose and context.
- What linguistic features support your guess? How do these features serve the text's purpose?
- What strategies can you employ to help your students notice these linguistic features?

English Language Education

Key Learning Area

English Language

Curriculum and Assessment Guide

(Secondary 4 - 6)

4.2.3 Promoting the Academic Use of English

English is one of the major mediums of instruction in different senior secondary subjects and university courses. It is therefore crucial to promote the academic use of English to heighten students' awareness of English commonly used in academic texts they read and/or write in other subjects, facilitating their current and/or further studies. English teachers can take the lead to raise students' awareness of the style and features of academic texts by selecting appropriate texts and designing relevant learning activities.

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English Language Education

Key Learning Area

English Language

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Common Features of Academic Texts

Academic texts refer to texts that students read and/or produce when studying subjects of other KLAs (e.g. Science Education, Mathematics Education, Personal, Social and Humanities Education). The purpose of an academic text is usually to explain an idea or concept with data/statistics, to discuss an issue with evidence or to argue and justify a point. Academic texts are generally formal, objective, precise and technical (with subject-specific terms).

Formal

Objective

Precise

Technical



Everyday English



VS

Academic English



Everyday English

Skinny guys should eat more protein and **carbs** to **put on weight**.

We **did a study** and **found** that lack of regular exercise **causes** a range of chronic health conditions.

The software helps firms **keep and find old emails**.

One of the effects of **cutting down too many trees** is that some animals and plants will lose their **homes**.

Style of Academic Language

Formal

e.g. Use **nouns** & avoid colloquial language

Objective & Impersonal

e.g. Use **the passive voice** & **hedging words**

Precise

e.g. Use **exact words** & provide specific details

Technical

e.g. Use **subject-specific words**

Academic English

A higher intake of protein and **carbohydrates** helps **underweight people** to **gain weight**.

A study was **conducted** and it was **found that** physical inactivity **could be a cause** of a range of chronic health conditions.

The software helps firms **archive and retrieve emails in the past 12 months**.

One of the effects of **deforestation** is the loss of **habitats** for some animals and plants.



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Resources > Academic Use of English

Academic Use of English



English is one of the major mediums of instruction in different senior secondary subjects and university courses. The academic use of English is promoted to heighten students' awareness of English commonly used in academic texts they read and write in other subjects, so as to facilitate their current and further studies.

A variety of learning and teaching resources are developed to support schools in incorporating elements of the academic use of English into the English Language curriculum and facilitate students' self-directed learning. These resource materials can be used in combination flexibly to help students acquire the skills in the academic use of English more effectively.

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/references-resources/Academic-Eng/home.html>

Summary

- Deductive vs. inductive approaches to grammar teaching
- A text-based approach to illustrate target grammar items inductively → Noticing and active processing through comprehensible and meaningful input
- Form, meaning and use → Teaching grammar as a set of choices
- How grammar affects the coherence, tone, style and register of the texts
- Genres and text deconstruction
- Instructional strategies (e.g., The Teaching-Learning Cycle)

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