

FOREWORD

Were you surprised one day to find yourself teaching ESL? I think that happens to many of us. Certainly I got into ESL by pure serendipity. It was 1965, and I was in my first year of teaching freshman composition in the English Department at Iowa State University. One morning between classes, I was with a colleague who taught the only ESL course offered at the university at that time. As she and I were walking down the hall of the classroom building, we ran into the head of the English Department. My fellow teacher said to him, “My English for Foreign Students class has too many students. We need to open another section.” The department chair said, “Okay. But who can we get to teach it?” There were only three of us in the hallway. So he turned to me and said, “How about you, Betty?” And I said, “Sure.” I had no idea what it was all about, but as a young instructor, I knew not to refuse a request from my department chair!

That very afternoon at 1:10 PM, I walked into my first ESL class. I returned compositions that the other instructor had corrected before the sections were divided and walked around the class answering questions. One student, a Spanish speaker, showed me an error the previous teacher had marked. He had written *waters* (as in *I was thirsty, so I drank some waters*) and wanted to know why that was incorrect. I stared at his paper and gulped. I had no idea—absolutely no idea—but I said to myself, “Wow, what an interesting question!” and told him I would find the answer and tell him tomorrow. That was my introduction to ESL and the grammar questions that our English language learners (ELLs) ask us.

After some scrambling, I came back to class the next day with a handout of explanations and exercises on **count nouns** vs. **mass nouns**, two terms I had never even heard of before. I had never noticed that some nouns can be counted in English (*one chair, two sofas, three tables*, etc.), and others can’t (*some furniture*). From that day to this, I have been fascinated by the workings of English grammar and especially fascinated by how the patterns of meaning in English are seen from a second language learner’s perspective.

If you’re like other teachers of ELLs, at one point or another you have found yourself standing momentarily wide-eyed in front of your class as your brain feverishly tries to puzzle through an answer to an unanticipated student question about an ESL grammar point, perhaps about comparative adjectives (“Why do we say *more expensive* but not *more cheap*?”) or verb tenses (“What’s the difference between *I’ve known him for years* and *I knew him for years*?”). What can you the teacher do to prepare yourself for this predictable hot seat?

As Keith Folse points out in Chapters 1 and 2 of this useful work, English grammar for ELLs is different from the grammar that native speakers learn in school, so

native speakers need to learn to see English from their ELLs' point of view. In Chapter 3, Keith goes on to explain 15 important ELL grammar issues in clear, accessible language that teachers can relate to and offers relevant information on the grammar topic as well as how it is treated in certain foreign languages. More concrete help comes in the unique Chapter 4, which offers 20 Hot Seat Questions that prepare teachers for some of the most commonly asked ELL grammar questions, including some really tough ones, before their class has even begun.

As a teacher, from my very first day in an ESL class, I put my students' needs first, finding out what they wanted from their English class, and then provided materials and activities to meet these expressed needs as best I could. I was constantly inventing materials, like so many other ESL teachers. Knowing ELL grammar in more detail will enable you to prepare more effective materials specifically focused on the needs of your particular students. To be certain, this suggestion applies to all teachers—ESL or EFL, K–12 or adult, whether the focus is on conversation or academic usage.

Our field has seen tremendous changes since 1965, when language teaching was shifting away from grammar. Fortunately, we have shifted back (though some of us never stopped teaching grammar, much to our students' benefit and delight). With both research and teaching outcomes on its side, grammar is now recognized by most in the field as an essential component in balanced programs of second language instruction.

Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook is not meant to be an exhaustive grammar reference book or summary of research studies. The biggest strength of this book is in fact the author's emphasis on teaching techniques. For example, each of the 15 grammar points in Chapter 3 ends with ideas for teaching the grammar. Further concrete teaching ideas can be found in Chapter 5, with techniques ranging from basic language drills to visual grammar presentations to more complex and fun games.

Using his lengthy background as a foreign language teacher and learner, Keith Folse has succeeded in creating a practical guide for teachers who want to learn more about grammar so that they can help their ELLs. To this end, the book avoids the heavy academic tone commonly found in some teacher development books. Teachers will also appreciate the lack of excessive grammar terminology. Like me, Folse advocates using only as much grammar terminology as needed to teach the material, advice that he himself adheres to in his own writing. Folse underscores that in teaching grammar, a teacher's goal is to show students how English works, not "teach grammar rules." Finally, as I have seen Keith demonstrate in many conference workshops and presentations, this book clearly focuses on practical application of grammar information in effective language teaching.

The whole purpose of teaching grammar to ELLs is to help our students gain language skills that will help them achieve their real-life goals. *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners: A Practical Handbook* offers a wide array of ideas for teaching and practicing grammar with their learners. This invaluable work will benefit both teachers and their ELLs alike.

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