

Introducing new language structure

Language is the chief means by which the human personalities express themselves and fulfill their basic need for social interaction with other people. Language skills help students to choose different words and models in their speech. As teachers we should be prepared to use a variety of techniques to help the students learn and acquire grammar of the target language. Sometimes this involves teaching grammar rules; in other cases it means allowing students to discover the rules for themselves.

When the teacher introduces grammar, it can easily be explained and presented. There are many different ways of doing this, which do not (only) involve the transmission of grammar rules. The teacher's job at this stage of the lesson is to present the students clear information about the language they are learning. Teachers must also show their students what the language means, how it is used, what the grammatical form of the new language is, and how it is said and/or written. Students need to get an idea of how this new language is used by native speakers, and the best way of doing this is to present language in context.

The context for introducing new language should have a number of characteristics. That is why many useful contexts have the new language being used as a written text or a dialogue and they should be interesting for students. This does not mean that these contexts should be wildly funny or inventive all of the time. But the students should at least have a motivation to see or hear the information.

Finally, a good context will provide the background for a lot of language uses so that the students can use the information not only through the repetition of model sentences but also for creating their own structures. Often the textbook will have all the characteristics mentioned above, and the teacher can confidently rely on the material for the presentation. But the textbook is not always so appropriate: for a number of reasons the information in the book may not be right for the students needs and in such cases teachers will want to create their own contexts for the language use.