

Some Brief Notes on Grammar for AP Vertical Teams

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Grammar and AP English

For many teachers, *grammar* is a dirty word associated with pointless exercises. For others, it represents hope for maintaining revered standards. Certainly grammar study should not be the end goal; rather, it should be taught as a way to help students improve their writing and analyze the writing of others, necessary skills for success in advanced English courses such as AP English Language and AP English Literature.

For example, since the essay portion of both exams accounts for 55 percent of the final score, students must be able to write cogently and persuasively to an audience that values precise language. That is not to say that every subject must agree with its verb, but the essay must show evidence that the student has the ability to control language, and it must convince the Reader that the writer has the skills to revise relatively few errors if given the chance. If usage errors impede the flow of the essay, the student will score in the lower half of the 9-point rubric.

Grammar Across the Grade Levels

Grammar is one of the most important skills that Vertical Teams can address. The older the child, the more difficult it is to fill in grammar gaps. It is impossible for students to learn and remember basic grammar concepts in one year. They need direct instruction, guided practice, and meaningful assessment year to year. Students need to hear the same terms from each of their teachers, or learning grammar appears to them impossible. Vertical Team members should decide which grammar concepts are most important for their students and concentrate on teaching those. Less is often more, especially with grammar instruction.

While the word *grammar* carries with it certain negative connotations and certainly has its limits, an understanding of its principles can provide students with a system to understand how language works and help them develop a sense of rhetorical purpose

and style. For instance, an analysis of nouns in a poem can help students understand characters and setting. A look at prepositions in the same work can help students understand relationships among those characters. If students understand clauses, they can infer meaning about an author's apparent as well as subtextual meanings. If they understand pronouns, they can draw more meaningful conclusions about speaker and audience. An understanding of dangling participles and misplaced modifiers can aid students in analyzing comedy.

An Added Benefit

Grammar can also be used to show students the sophisticated patterns in dialects other than Standard English. Using the principles found in grammar books, students can analyze dialects found in many of the great authors. A grammatical analysis of Jim and Huck reveals that Jim actually followed the rules of Standard English more closely than Huck. Grammar can be used as a system through which students can analyze assumptions and biases.

In Conclusion

In sum, grammar instruction is helpful on several levels in preparing students for challenging courses such as AP English. A solid, vertically aligned English curriculum in grammar offers students a system that helps them control meaning in their own writing, understand complex ideas, and raise their awareness of the power of language in shaping our perceptions.