

Rationale

Once students have studied the present simple and the past simple, they've met the two structures that are used 80% of the time in both spoken and written English. By Intermediate level, they've already studied – often more than once – almost all of the main structures they'll ever need. While students will continue to make mistakes and to need correcting, full accuracy takes a long long time to develop. Accuracy at higher levels is partly to do with developing the ability to monitor output and notice repeated errors better, and partly to do with learning the patterns that go with words students learn – the **colligations** of new words. Many students believe grammar is their main problem and as a result they spend the majority of their study time doing endless exercises on structures they've studied many times before. Whilst studying grammar is a good idea and can help, too much means less time available for the study of vocabulary, and it's developing a broader understanding and range of vocabulary (including the words interact with grammar) that will really push students to advanced levels.

Activity

This exercise is designed to allow space for teachers and students to explore and discuss some of these ideas. Start by telling the class you're going to be talking about grammar – how they feel about it, how important is, and how much time they should be studying it. You could ask which structures they find hardest – and why. If you have a monolingual class, you might be able to comment on how things work differently in their L1 and English.

Split the class into small groups and give them three minutes to discuss the first question.

You could round up just by asking for a quick class vote or you could ask a couple of groups for their opinions and get them to explain why. At this stage, you may want to briefly explain your own thoughts on the matter, or you may just want to move on to the next stage.

You could keep students in the same groups – or change them around a bit. Give out the worksheet. Let students read through the sheet and ask about anything they're not sure of. Explain any new vocabulary. Give them a few minutes to discuss what (if anything) surprises them – and what they feel the implications of each fact are. As students chat, monitor and get a sense of what students already believe about grammar – and what their study habits are. Once the conversation has peaked, stop the class and round up. Ask first if anything really surprised anyone – accept whatever answers come up. Ask why. Then go through each statement, asking what students think the implications are, and adding your own comments.