**Teach grammar with the most practical relevance.** The state measures academic progress on a district level through the use of standardized testing, however, much of the preparation for such tests never makes it past a student’s short-term memory. Cramming the mechanics of grammar into a student’s head through the use of prep books or worksheets does them no good five years down the road when they’re asked to submit a resume. Ever since the construction of adolescence, the secondary school system has been designed to prepare students for the work force. When did that shift to test scores and budget concerns? I understand my feelings may change when I do indeed have my own classroom and my own state and federal guidelines for education to abide by, but I believe in teaching lessons that students will take with them out of the classroom, and gerunds aren’t exactly on that list.

The jargon of grammar mechanics is confusing and students approach it as something to memorize rather than master. We need to concern ourselves with grammar concepts instead of terms. If students learn how to correctly apply grammar in their writing, they will be able to recognize what is correct and what contains errors in the mechanics section of standardized tests without a problem, and what’s more, the concepts will be carried with them out of the classroom to apply in career writing. It is a actually proven that the men and women who score standardized tests place more value on the development of voice in the writing section than they do on the command of grammar mechanics. The truth is, they go hand in hand. If we teach our students how to write, we will teach them how to command and master the English language, and as The Power of Grammar reminds us, that power demands respect and leads to success.

**Answer the question, “Why do we need to know this?”** As a secondary educator, it is foolish to forget that we are working with adolescents. With all of the physical, emotional, and cognitive changes going on in their lives, academics are often placed on the back burner. Motivation is hard to come by and very rarely will they devote their time and energy on a subject they find irrelevant in their daily lives. It is our job to show them why grammar matters. Providing sentence constructs from Hemingway or Twain is hardly enough. Constant referencing of the work of accredited literary figures is ineffective because students view them as having already attained a level of mastery they will never reach. If anything, it’s discouraging. Instead, we can use examples a little closer to home. Effective grammar is used all around us and can help enhance student writing. Ask students to pay attention to billboards or school flyers, listen to commercials or radio broadcasts, and even take note of successful examples they notice in their favorite novels or internet blogs. Once they start to see that what they learn in the classroom applies to the world outside it, they will be more likely to engage in the study of grammar.

Aside from seeing grammar in their common, everyday lives, we can show students how grammar can be used to initiate or further their future careers. Grammar and writing aren’t solely confined to the standard business world, and while writing resumes and cover letters are important skills for students to learn, every profession, from musicians to news broadcasters to athletes, involves the utilization of grammar concepts. Have your class watch a famous sports figure or politician get interviewed and discuss how his speech and diction influences perception. YouTube the clip of Miss South Carolina struggling to answer her pageant question about world maps. Not only do these exercises bring multimedia and pop culture into the classroom, helping to engage students, but they show the affect our language has on others’ perceptions of us.

**Teach by example.** In addition to real world sources, bringing our own work into the classroom can help encourage students in their exploration of the writing process. Save your own high school papers and use examples from them to demonstrate poor grammar usage. Being able to see that even established writers had to start somewhere makes it easier for students to accept their own mistakes and they will often become discouraged less quickly. Some teachers even make it a practice to complete their own assignments alongside their students to show that the process of learning never really ends. There is no right or wrong in writing, only progress.

Using examples from students’ writing is also a great tool in the practice of teaching grammar in the context of writing. Segments from student examples are at their level rather than at a drastically unattainable one and having a piece in its entirely allows the class to examine the context in which an example came from. Being able to see what function a sentence accomplishes over simply what it says is a significant milestone in grammar comprehension. Reverse outlining is a good exercise to have students perform on their own work in order to observe grammar functions. Metacognition exercises can also be used to have students reflect on their own writing and the process surrounding and enveloping it.

On a related note, teaching by example goes beyond just grammar instruction. Adolescence is a time of imitation and modeling, often of peers, but also of adults and authority figures present in an adolescent’s life. Your behavior directly affects your students’ behavior, as well as your attitude in the classroom. If you appear disinterested in your subject matter, your students will lose interest as well. So be excited and believe in what you teach. Make yourself someone worth modeling.

While my first three strategies covered how I view grammar, the following three will discuss ways in which I intend to teach it. I will:

**Teach, whenever possible, at an individual level.** Our students enter our classrooms with vastly different learning backgrounds. Upon their admission into our classes, some may struggle with distinguishing a detail from a main idea, others with proper nouns. The point is, they all have different starting points. If we begin our teaching with a predetermined concept, say compound sentence construction, we may have already begun above some students’ heads. They will quickly become discouraged and frustrated, giving up before we even give them a chance to grow. Other students may be beyond compound sentences, eventually becoming bored with the lesson and dismissing it as unimportant and irrelevant. Every student has a unique zone of proximal development and can only learn when the lesson is within that zone. So the question becomes how can we teach within so many zones at one time? And the answer is by teaching on an individual level.

Assess the level of each student’s writing at the beginning of the semester by assigning an initial paper. Identify areas that need work in each individual paper and grade the following assignments based on the progress in each area. For example, if Jenny struggles with topic sentences, verb tense, and passive voice, mark only errors in topic sentence construction in her first paper. Let her revise until her topic sentences are all correct to use for reference in writing her next paper. On the second assignment, mark only errors in topic sentences and verb tense, once again allowing revision. This approach lets students build on their previously learned skills while mastering others at the same time. This method of teaching grammar creates more work for the teacher but each student will leave the class having accomplished and applied at least one grammar concept relevant to cohesive writing.

Teacher-student communication is also essential in this method. Schedule one-on-one meetings with each student to discuss his or her writing and what task he or she should specifically focus on next. If students see how invested you are in their writing, they are more likely to put a higher value on it as well and feel comfortable coming to you with questions.

Another aspect of teaching at an individual level is incorporating student choice. Students learn more from material they have a say in. Many teachers assign journals, free writes, or even short classroom warm-ups to their students to keep them writing. Such an assignment is wonderful for student-driven content. Student-chosen activities at the individual level also help with the development of adolescent identity, allowing students to experience and express what’s happening in their lives through writing and places a more tangible value on written expression.

**Take advantage of teachable moments.** I had a teacher in high school that would refer to impromptu lessons as teachable moments. I like that and I liked the way she would use them to apply what we were learning in the classroom. Anytime the principal would make an error in his morning announcement, she would write it on the board while we continued to listen so that we could analyze it when he was finished. I still remember the morning he walked into our classroom while we were critiquing such a fault in his communication and he actually laughed at his own mistake. As a student, it showed me that errors happen frequently to the best of us and made me more confident in my own mistakes.

Encourage students to bring questions and confusing constructs they find outside of class into the classroom and make time in your day to discuss them. Teachers know classroom time is difficult to manage but the most effective use of time is spent connecting students with what they’ve learned.

**Teach revision as a process, not a punishment.** Too many teachers offer students the option of revising only when their grade on their initial paper has dropped below a predetermined point. With that standard, students begin to view revision as a punishment rather than a crucial part of the writing process. (And speaking of punishment, stop with the red pen. It’s intimidating to get a paper back covered in curlicues and symbols that just look like they’re screaming at you. Marking up a paper is unnecessary, at least like that. Provide students with written feedback at the end of their papers or make your own notes and meet with each student one-by-one to discuss their grades.) Revision should be encouraged for what it really is, a chance to “see again” the ideas presented in a paper. It is entirely up to the author and every student deserves to have a feeling of ownership over his or her work.

The hundreds of pages of text used in this course have taught me a handful of valuable things: grammar is most practical when taught in a real-world context and its relevance applies to every career as well as many aspects of our daily lives. Teaching through example, revision, and at an individual level is most effective in engaging students in the study of grammar. While I am walking away from this course with vast new knowledge, I think I’ll remember most the power that grammar can hold, in speech, on paper, but most importantly, in every one of our lives.