

# 19

## Hints for improving syntax and morphology

### Goal

Many authentic opportunities for learning and reflection present themselves in the process of writing texts, including those concerning grammatical topics, such as syntax and morphology. The following suggestions illustrate how to create and use these learning opportunities to their full potential. The subject of orthography will not be discussed here, as the rules for spelling vary among the different languages.

### 1. Syntax

2<sup>nd</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> grade

20 minutes



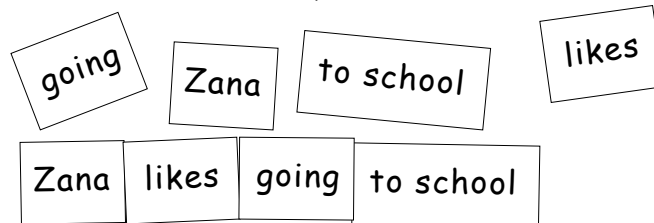
Materials:

Small cards with cut-up sentences (see right).  
Possibly a roll of toilet paper.  
Lists of nouns, verbs, etc. (see right).

Valuable opportunities for developing and teaching a feeling for sentence building and the syntactic repertoire are suggested in the exercises and experiments in #17.

The following exercises are particularly appropriate for younger students (1st–2nd grade) in that they promote the feeling for sentences and self-discovery of sentence construction. (The materials can be prepared by the teacher or older students):

- The instructor writes simple sentences on strips of paper and then cuts them up, not word for word, but by clauses. The paper pieces that belong together are held together with a paper clip. The students (alone or in pairs) receive one or more sets of the cut up sentences. Their task is to put them together to create functional sentences (and possibly write them down as well). Example:



Since, at times, there are various possibilities, they must absolutely be discussed (language feeling!). Example:



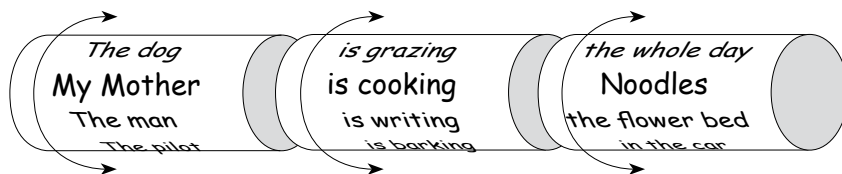
- Alone or in pairs, the students receive three lists of words: 1.) 10–12 nouns (subject), 2.) with 10–12 verbs, 3.) with 10–12 accusative objects and/or adverbs of place and time:

<p>The dog My mother The man The pilot The ball The child The clown The cow The student The owl</p>	<p>is flying is watering is grazing is cooking is writing is barking is riding is playing is sitting is hunting</p>
<p>in the notebook in the night in the meadow a unicycle the whole day noodles the flower bed in the car in the room in the water</p>	



For the “sentence computer” use the cardboard (inner) core of a roll of toilet paper and wrap the paper strips, cut from an A4 size sheet of paper, around the core like a scroll. (see below).

The students move the three lists around to align the words and write down all the sentences which make sense. Variant: the lists are wrapped around a core (a round peg, or cardboard roll) to line up the words. The students then write down all the sentences which make sense. In moving the strips around the core to create different word combinations, students can generate meaningful and meaningless sentences with this "sentence computer".



- The above exercises can be expanded for older students by adding additional sentence elements (indirect object, adverbs of place and time, etc.).

## 2. Morphology (correct forms)

3<sup>rd</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade

25 minutes



Materials:  
Text as an outline or template  
(see right).

The alternative word exercises described in #15.2 are also very well suited for grammar work with 3rd-6th grade students, when appropriately adjusted.

Examples:

- The students receive a text for working in pairs. Their task is to rewrite the text and change all nouns into plural form. The questions for discussion include: What grammatical changes does it cause? (Answer: the verbs and adjectives must agree in number!).
- Variants: Change all plural forms to singular; change all verbs from the present tense to the preterite or perfect forms (or vice versa); change all adjectives from the normal form to the comparative or superlative.
- A special and interesting function of gap-fill exercises is that they are useful for assessing language competence (see #15.1 gap-fill exercises for specific grammar points). Common mistakes would suggest the need for remediation and additional practice in the areas of weakness.
- Specific grammatical issues can often be remediated and practiced in the area of writing with appropriately formulated, targeted writing assignments. Examples:
  - Subject area of training: past tenses. Task: write a story about when you were younger (Topic suggestion: What I did as a 3-year old; a fairy tale; something from history...)
  - Goal of training: adjectives. Task: describe your favorite meal (an appetizing description with as many details as possible; or a very detailed description of a picture, etc.
  - Goal of training: subjunctive. Describe contrary-to fact conditions with topics like "if I were a wizard/a witch", "if there were no more schools", "if my (grand) parents had not emigrated".