

# Conclusion

The introduction of this book asked several questions about the role of grammar in the language arts and English classroom. This conclusion summarizes some of the answers.

*How can we teach grammar to support learning in all language skills?* If you think of the grammar that you teach as a language about language, then grammar is useful any time you discuss particular words or sentences with your students. The formal term for this language-about-language is *metalanguage*, a vocabulary about language itself, one that makes it possible for us to redirect our words back on themselves so that we can talk and write about how we talk and write. As with any new type of language, you and your students will need some time to get used to it. But it is as handy—and necessary—in order to discuss what makes a sentence the way it is as the terms for science and mathematics are for talking about an experiment or a problem.

*How can we teach grammar so that students discover its rules and principles on their own instead of hearing us impose those rules and principles on them?* Grammar is a tricky word. On the one hand, it means “the language of language.” On the other hand, you may need to remind yourself from time to time that all of us are grammar experts: we all know grammar; we all know how to maneuver words and phrases in order to communicate effectively nearly all the time. We also are all keen observers of language. We see and hear the kinds of language that people use in different situations. The teacher’s challenge is to tap into all this expertise. You may want to consciously practice a repertoire of a few flexible questions and directions that can help elicit points of grammar in many different classroom discussions:

- “How would you say [or write] this in a certain situation, with a certain audience? How have you heard other people say it?”
- “Find examples of [a phrase, a type of sentence, a construction, etc.] in someone’s writing or in conversation.”
- “What is the pattern in these examples?”
- “What could the rule or definition be? Test it out on another example.”

The last two questions asked in the introduction are: *How can we teach grammar so that we strengthen rather than undermine our efforts to honor the voices and cultures of all students? How can we teach grammar so that the*

*knowledge it provides can help learners feel confident about their own language and appreciate the languages of others?* The answers to these questions take us back to a third definition of the word *grammar*—or at least a third aspect of it, besides its definitions as a metalanguage and as each person's ability to arrange words meaningfully. This third aspect is that all languages and language varieties have grammar. They all follow patterns, in other words. This is the foundation of understanding language and of understanding even the conventions of Standard English usage and punctuation. You need to grasp the universality of grammar clearly enough so that when a student speaks in a nonstandard idiom, when a second language student produces a strange-sounding phrase, or when a student paper reveals a repeated error, you can respond to the richness of the language patterns and not just to the absence of a particular one. With grammar, the glass is always half full.