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Chapter 1 : Books by John E. Warriner (Author of English Grammar and Composition)

The title of this book is "English Composition and Grammar" with Complete Course listed further down but, it covers much more. There are chapters on writing letters, poetry, fiction, essays, plays and more.

It is not uncommon for English teachers as well as their trainers and supervisors to hold that the teaching of grammar is quaint and unnecessary at best, prejudicial and exclusionary at worst. I know an excellent English teacher whose students, many years after graduation, remember her for her grammar lessons. Unfortunately, instead of being proud of this, she is chagrined. Of all things in my class to remember! I teach the writing process. Perhaps they remembered how lamentable it is that teaching writing through a process approach has become an orthodoxy in which the grammatical strand of English language arts is pitted against the literary strand, as if the two are not intertwined. Who set up this false dichotomy? My purpose in this essay is to debunk some of the myths about grammar instruction and to refurbish its tarnished reputation. It is not uncommon for English teachers as well as their trainers and supervisors to hold that the teaching of grammar is quaint and unnecessary at best, prejudicial and exclusionary at worst. The problem begins with muddled terminology. Before I turn my fire extinguisher on the grammar myths, let me clarify my terms: By grammar, I refer to the rules which govern how words function in a sentence to make meaning. That man bites dog means something different from dog bites man is a function of grammar. By usage, I refer to the social conventions that determine what is considered standard. By standard, I do not mean correct. I mean that style of the English language which most educated people accept in formal circumstances. By mechanics, I refer to physical manifestations of language such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization and other conventions. In the case of mechanics, the terms correct and incorrect are more appropriate than they are when we are talking about matters of usage, but even spelling is not without gray areas. Reasonable people can disagree over matters of content and methodology in teaching. However, I think everyone would agree that to understand a complicated system we need to know the names of its parts, their forms and functions, how the parts relate to the whole, and where these parts belong if the system is to operate at maximum efficiency. The explicit teaching of grammar does not improve writing ability, so time spent on grammar is time not spent on more worthy pursuits in the English classroom. Suppose my car is making a funny noise. Suppose I have no better understanding of what is going on under the hood than that. I take it to my mechanic, trusting his knowledge, integrity, and skill. That is how many car owners myself included operate. The trouble with our instruction was not that it was misguided, but that it was unfinished. Having learned to spot prepositional phrases, we may not have learned why doing so could improve our discourse. How can we use our ability to identify grammatical structures such as prepositional phrases in our own reading and writing? We may have learned that the object of a preposition must be in the objective case, and that the object of a preposition is never the subject of the sentence. This knowledge helps us solve some usage problems, but that is not its main value. Knowing how to discern the subject and verb can help us read dense prose. When reading dense prose, the reader needs strategies. That done, the reader sees prepositional phrases for what they are: Beyond that, knowing about prepositions helps writers add sentence variety, as they learn not to begin sentence after sentence with the subject. Beginning a sentence with a prepositional phrase can set the stage for the action, but we have to be judicious: Sometimes, that prepositional phrase can be distracting or redundant. As modifiers, prepositional phrases can be movable, and their placement affects meaning, rhythm, and emphasis. The novice writer who has difficulty fleshing out a topic can do well to consciously add more prepositional phrases. Selecting standard pronoun case, creating purposeful variety in sentence structure, adding detail and dimension, and eliminating redundancy are some good reasons for being able to recognize prepositional phrases. If we think of grammar instruction as building an awareness of language choices available to the careful writer, then we view such instruction in two phases: Too often, the application phase does not happen. When it does not, the recognition phase seems to lack practicality. Thus does grammar instruction fall out of

favor. Grammar instruction applies only to the editing phase of the writing process. When people operate under this myth, they are confusing grammar with usage and mechanics. As such, they are not essential to the real intellectual work of the process, although no one should minimize their importance. The point is that we should not limit our understanding of grammar to the surface features of usage and mechanics. Along with diction and rhetoric, grammar unlike usage and mechanics is organic to the crafting of sentences and text. Writers with an awareness of grammar can make informed choices about how word order affects meaning. We can make our students better writers if we teach them to use grammatical knowledge consciously as they match their syntax to their intentions. We understand the power of graphic organizers in both reading and writing for many learners. We teach students to map their ideas as a prewriting strategy. We teach them to make Venn diagrams to show similarities and differences, and flowcharts to express sequence. Sentence structures are patterns. We can think in terms of certain grammatical templates, containers, that work well for certain types of ideas. Parallel structure and compound sentences or simple sentences with compound constituents are good containers for like elements bearing equal importance. Complex sentences are good containers to use when we need to show the backgrounding and foregrounding of elements that do not bear equal importance. Sentence structure selections occur in the drafting and revision stages of the writing process, as the writer searches for the clearest, most efficient way to express thoughts. Many writers have an intuitive sense of what kinds of containers work best with what kinds of ideas. Indeed, there is much to be said for using one of the many versions of graphic organizers along with sentence structure templates. The writer can then look at a branch diagram or a cluster, decide how the ideas are related, and then consider an array of syntactical containers to suit them. In fact, we already make intuitive grammatical choices as we compose our thoughts. Those intuitive choices may or may not be the best ones for the purpose. By building awareness of sentence and textual structure, we can increase our chances that our message is clear, efficient, and graceful. There are many ways to make our classrooms boring. We can fail to make any connection between grammar and journalism, grammar and advertising, grammar and novels, grammar and drama, grammar and music, grammar and poetry. These are ways to make grammar boring. The sonneteer works within a strictly prescribed structure, choosing that structure because it is the best container for particular ideas. The sonnet form is not constraining but liberating: The format frees the writer from decisions about rhythm and rhyme scheme. Because of the structure, half the work is done. Why would learning any kind of writing, much less creative writing, be detached from the fundamentals? Knowledge of structure is not a hindrance, but a guide that enables, rather than impedes, creativity. We picture fill-in-the-blank workbooktype questions in which there is one right answer. The book that you have in your hands is an extremely useful, in fact indispensable, tool for the teaching of language. However, any grammar text is most effective when used along with, not in place of, literature and student writing. It might seem that students would naturally make the crossover from what they learn in grammar exercises to their own language use, but such is not necessarily the case. As teachers, we have to make that crossover happen very deliberately, pointing out structures that students have learned and how those structures are used to make meaning in authentic contexts. Thus does grammar instruction transcend the practice exercises that illustrate targeted concepts. Everybody loves language; children and teenagers love it especially, because they are in the process of defining their own culture by laying claim to words and expressions all their own. When we invite students to analyze their own neologisms, grammatical idiosyncrasies, and dialectical styles, we enliven grammar lessons immeasurably. Another way to make grammar instruction interesting is to let students discover how language changes right before our eyes. Movies and novels set in various pockets of the English-speaking world are museums of linguistic anthropology. Analyze the language of a movie set in New Orleans and compare it to the language of a movie set in Los Angeles. There are many ways to make our classrooms interesting. Our love of the subject is contagious. Contrary to myth, a good grammar lesson can invite a lively discussion about ambiguities in meaning and the best way to express thought in a particular context. It can even ignite a discussion about social power structures, prejudices, and immigration. This is not boring stuff. Grammar

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applies only to English classes. Every teacher wants students to be better readers. A law student told me recently that she was glad that she knew something about grammar, because she needed it to read complex materials in her courses. She found that by mentally pulling out the subject and verb, she could follow the lines of technical text. Needless to say, grammatical knowledge of the English language is essential for learning another language. What about science, math, social studies, the arts? All teachers love words. The biology teacher is fussy about the difference between osmosis and diffusion. Getting students to make fine distinctions is an important part of teaching students to think like scientists. Teachers want to give away the words of their subject areas the way grandmothers want to give away food.

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