

KISS Grammar Curriculum: A Summary

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In my classroom, I have been using a modified version of the KISS Curriculum as part of my grammar instruction. This model was developed by [Ed Vavra at the Pennsylvania College of Technology](http://nweb.pct.edu/homepage/staff/evavra/KISS.htm) (<http://nweb.pct.edu/homepage/staff/evavra/KISS.htm>).

I use this method during the first 5-10 minutes of my class everyday to provide direct instruction to my students in grammar. We also do mini-lessons on specific grammar topics during times when they are drafting writing. When working with students on their writing, I try to avoid "marking" every error I see in grammar or mechanics. Instead, I look for patterns of error, and try to isolate one or two areas for the student to focus on in that particular piece of writing. I have found this approach to be much less frustrating (for students and me) and much more productive in terms of retention and results.

1. The students' objectives are 1) to be able to identify all of the prepositional phrases in any sentence by placing parentheses around them, and 2) to understand the concept of compounding. ["All" in the first objective excludes prepositional phrases which have clauses as their objects. Students will run into an occasional infinitive ("to" plus a verb) which will cause a little confusion. Teachers should tell students that "to" plus a verb is not a prepositional phrase, but that, since they have not studied verbs yet, they could not be expected to know that. In grading at this level, infinitives marked as prepositional phrases should be ignored.]

Compounding is a concept that students can learn in the process of finding prepositional phrases. Compounding simply means that there are more than one of a particular construction.

2. Students should be able to identify all the subjects, finite verbs, complements, adjectives, and adverbs. They should also understand the concept of ellipsis, particularly the cases of the omitted "you" in commands such as "Close the door." The subject/verb/complement pattern is the core of English sentence structure, and with prepositional phrases tucked away in parentheses, students are ready to look for these basic patterns. Two rules need to be introduced as students begin:

- 1.) The object of a preposition can NEVER be the subject of a verb.
- 2.) The complement of one verb can NEVER be the subject of another.

a. Subjects and complements should be taught simultaneously.

1. If nothing answers the question *verb + what?*, there is no complement.
2. If the complement is an adjective, then the complement is a predicate adjective.
3. If the complement is in any way equal to the subject, and the verb implies that equality, then it is a predicate noun.
4. If "to" or "for" make sense before the complement, the complement is an indirect object.
5. The complement MUST BE a direct object.

b. As they learn to identify subjects and complements, students should also be taught to distinguish nouns from pronouns.

3. If a word modifies a noun or pronoun, it is an adjective; if it modifies a verb, it is an adverb.

The young children / slowly walked / across the lawn

4. Ellipsis is simply the omission of understood words.

5. The KISS approach is to avoid, as much as possible, discussing errors such as this in class. Doing so simply spreads the disease.

6. Every student is expected to be able to identify EVERY subordinate and main clause in two or three sentences written by a typical ninth grade writer and be able to explain the function of all subordinate clauses. Simply distinguish a subordinate clause by its marker conjunction. [May or may not need to identify the type of subordinate conjunction, but if so base it on logical deduction of the function of the clause].

There are numerous other exercises that students could do with clauses. Rewrite a passage, changing as many subordinate clauses as possible into main clauses. Rewrite a passage, changing as many main clauses as possible into subordinate.

7. Instruction in the use of colons, semicolons and dashes to combine main clauses should fit naturally here.

8. Student is expected to be able to identify EVERY verbal in four or five selected sentences and be able to explain the how each verbal connects to the main sentence pattern.

When he was sleeping, he was a perfect angel.
Sleeping, he was a perfect angel.

Have students write five or ten sentences, each of which includes a verbal. Another version of this would be to require students to use and label, for example, two gerunds in a paper they are writing.

9. Nouns Used as Adverbs, Appositives, Interjections, Direct Address, Noun Absolutes, Delayed Subjects, Retained Complements.

- a. Some nouns function as adverbs, usually to indicate a spatial or temporal orientation. Ex. They drove six miles. Or -- They went fishing.
- b. Nouns and other parts of speech can also function as appositives.
- c. Interjections (may be single words or very short phrases).
- d. Direct address is similar to an interjection except that it indicates the intended audience, rather than a speaker's comment.
- e. Most texts define the noun absolute as a noun plus gerundive construction that usually functions as an adverb but may appear as a noun:

Supper having been finished, the family went to the ballgame.

What these texts leave out is that the gerundive is often ellipsed:

Hands ***being*** behind his back, Dad watched as Fred rode his bike down the street.

Interestingly, punctuation can make the difference between a compound sentence and a noun absolute:

- a.) The plane stood upright; its tail pointed back at the sky.
- b.) The plane stood upright, **its tail pointed back at the sky.**

The semicolon, a signal of a dump to long-term memory, makes "pointed" in (a) an active, finite verb. But the comma in (b) allows us to read "pointed" as a passive participle ("*having been* pointed"), thereby changing the construction into a noun absolute.