

If you had to choose only one grammar reference book to bring to class, which book would you choose and why?

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To have to carry several grammar reference books around with you is impractical. Choosing one is difficult. I have devised three evaluative criteria to rate five grammar reference books. These specific evaluative criteria were constructed to create a rating system that would ultimately suit my teaching needs. By evaluating all five books against these three criteria I should be able to choose the book which is most practical.

The three criteria are as follows:

1. How suitable is the text for a wide range of learners?
2. Are the examples in tables, charts and illustrations clear and easy to follow and comprehend? Is the depth and quality of the exercises enough to provide value? Does it include pedagogical suggestions for students?
3. Are the index and appendix well organized, comprehensive and easy to use? Does the text have a user-friendly organizational framework?

The five grammar books to be evaluated are:

1. *Fundamentals of English Grammar* by Betty Schramper Azar
2. *Understanding and Using English Grammar* by Betty Schramfer Azar
3. *Explaining English Grammar* by George Yule
4. *Systems in English Grammar: An Introduction for Language Teachers* by Peter Master
5. *The Grammar Book* by Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman

I have chosen to evaluate each book against the different criteria. This will also help to compare and rate each book against the others. This rating will ultimately help decide which book should be chosen as the book to bring to the class.

#### Range of learner suitability

*Fundamentals of English Grammar* by Betty Schampfer Azar is designed for beginning to lower-intermediate students. This fact may be somewhat limiting if one is going to use only this book. However, it is focused on fundamental key structures which would be useful in any teaching situation. It starts with the simple present in chapter 1 and moves to quoted speech and reported speech in chapter 13. Finally, it covers “using wish” and “if” in chapter 14, the final chapter.

The next book is *Understanding English Grammar* by Betty Schampfer Azar. This is generally aimed at intermediate to advanced students. This book similarly starts with verb tenses and moves from the simple tenses to future perfect progressive in chapter 1. It then covers modal auxiliaries and then passive voice / passive speech in chapters 2 and 3, continuing with conditional sentences in chapter 10, the last chapter. This book clearly explains grammar points using easy-to-understand examples. However, it does not cover enough of the basic structures to be of sufficient value to beginner learners. This somewhat detracts from the value and versatility of the book as a whole.

The next book is *Explaining English Grammar* by George Yule. This book covers a wide range of structures typically attempted in all learner levels from beginners to advanced students. It begins with a very thorough introduction and overview of the basic forms and meanings. Attention to specific forms begins with articles in chapter 2 and tense and aspect in chapter 3. It concludes with direct and indirect speech in chapter 10, the last chapter of the book. This book does a good job of systematically addressing the form, structure and context of the different grammatical structures. For this reason I would have to rate this particular book very highly in regard to the first criterion.

The next book is *Systems in English Grammar* by Peter Master. This book is also very useful for beginner and intermediate students. The book is also divided into

units and chapters. Chapter 1 and 2 cover words and groups of words. This makes up unit 1. Unit 2 deals with verbs and tenses. It also deals with the auxiliary system. The last unit, unit 5, deals with sentence combining and the compliment system.

The final book is *The Grammar Book* by Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman. This book would be very helpful for teaching advanced students but not as helpful for lower level students. This detracts considerably from the value of the book if it is going to be the only book used for the rest of my teaching career. The book starts with an introduction in chapter 1 and goes into grammatical metalanguage in chapter 2. The vastness and scope of this massive book even seem a bit daunting. Because of these facts this book would rate the lowest in this criterion.

Tables, charts and illustrations and depth and quality of practice exercises

In *Fundamentals of English Grammar* the charts are very simple and easy to understand. They are also accompanied by illustrations which help to explain the different grammar points. There are also many easy-to-follow diagrams of specific points included in the charts. This would be very useful for a teacher tasked with explaining complicated elements of language to students of all levels. The charts and diagrams in chapter 1 are clear and easy to understand. It also should be noted that these helpful charts and diagrams appear throughout the text and are accompanied by clear explanations. Although there are few pedagogical suggestions for students, there are sufficient exercises to provide an in-depth understanding of the structures.

*Understanding and Using English Grammar* has a similar chart and diagram system, which is very helpful for students to grasp concepts not easily gleaned from text alone. However, unlike *Fundamentals of English Grammar*, the charts and diagrams do not appear throughout the text. The exercises do, however, provide depth and a further understanding of the structures. There are also few pedagogical suggestions for students. Overall, both *Understanding and Using English Grammar* and *Fundamentals of English Grammar* rate about the same in this criterion.

The charts and diagrams in *Explaining English Grammar* are a bit sparse and confusing to say the least. The charts specifically are on the abstract side and not as clear as they could be. The exercises are not as long and comprehensive as in other

books, resulting in a lower rating comparatively. There are a number of illustrations that, while they do bring some well needed, light hearted comic relief, do not do much in the way of helping students understand a particular grammar point. The extensive glossary is extremely helpful and makes up for what is lacking in the charts. *Explaining English Grammar* does give very helpful teaching ideas and some pedagogical suggestions. This helps to raise its overall rating in the second criterion.

The charts, tables and diagrams in *Systems in English Grammar* are very extensive and helpful. The table of terms on pages 34 to 36 is especially extensive and comprehensive. Out of all the books this is most likely the most useful. The overall rating for this book is the highest compared to the other books regarding charts, tables and diagrams. The exercises are the most extensive and comprehensive of all the books. This gives *Systems in English Grammar* the highest rating in terms of quality and value in this area. This book also gives many teaching ideas and pedagogical suggestions. This helps to boost its rating to one of the highest overall regarding the particular criterion.

*The Grammar Book* does have creative diagrams and ample charts and tables, but again some are vague and unclear. However, the chart on pages 409 to 411 seems to do a good job in dealing with prepositions, space, time, degree and idiomatic usages. Overall, this book rates relatively highly in regards to number of charts and diagrams but relatively lowly in terms of clarity. The teaching suggestions are very thorough and helpful to students and teachers alike. This book earns a high rating for pedagogical suggestions and teaching ideas. The number of exercises compared to the amount of material covered is proportionately small. The rating for this aspect of the criterion is very low compared to the other books.

#### Index and appendix organization

*Fundamentals of English Grammar* has a very standard and straightforward index. The book has an overall user-friendly organizational framework. There are five dealing with issues such as irregular verbs and preposition combinations. Appendix five even includes a guide for correcting compositions. The rating is average for this book regarding the last criterion.

In *Understanding and Using English Grammar* the approach regarding the index is the same as in the other books. This book includes three appendices. The third appendix is also a guide for correcting compositions like in the other book. Appendix 1 primarily contains supplementary grammar units. The framework for both these books is very similar so the rating is going to be the same for both.

As previously stated *Explaining English Grammar* contains a glossary. This acts as a replacement for an appendix. The index is also very similar to the above mentioned books. The book has an overall user-friendly organizational framework and earns an above average rating in this area. This is further boosted by the usefulness of its comprehensive glossary.

*Systems in English Grammar* scores highly in the final criterion. Due to its systematic approach to the material it has a very clear and straightforward framework. This makes it very easy to use. The appendix is also comprehensive and contains a standard index.

*The Grammar Book*, on the other hand, does not seem to have a very user-friendly layout. In fact, one almost needs a user guide to navigate through the vast index. It does have two indexes, one for names and the other for topics. The two indexes are only more confusing. The appendix simply contains “suggested” answers to the chapter exercises. This book gets a low rating in the last criterion.

## Conclusion

In examining and evaluating the five books using three criteria I was able to rate all of the books against the others. The book that continued to rate highest was *Systems in English Grammar*. This book consistently rated highest compared to the other books in the three criteria. For this reason I would choose it if I could choose only one for the rest of my teaching.

## References

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