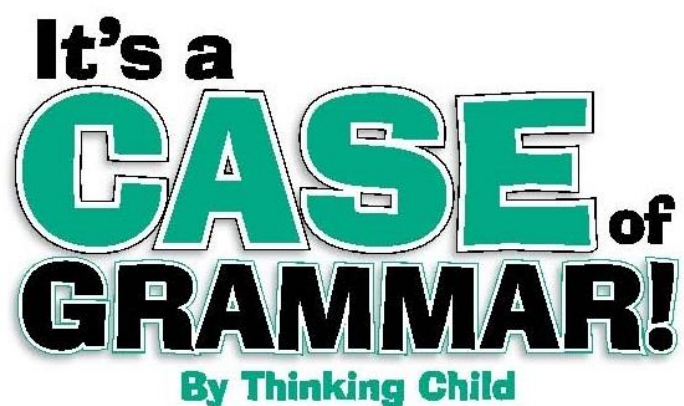




**Teacher Guidance
and
Glossary**

An Overview of Grammar

It's a Case of Grammar!

Teacher Notes

Introduction: What is grammar?

As you might expect, there are differing views about what exactly grammar is. And there are different 'grammars' influenced by the person studying the language, what they're focusing on, and how they choose to describe it.

That might sound strange as we're often told (by our own teachers or by public figures or the media) that grammar is simply the 'rules of language', and is somehow therefore 'set'. But this is where we find different ways of thinking about grammar:

Older approaches use what's known as **prescriptive grammar**. This sees grammar as a set of rules dealing with the syntax and word structures of a language. It's **prescriptive** because it seeks to outline the language as certain people think it *should* be used - rules that must be obeyed!

The problem with this approach is that it only deals with how some people think language ought to be used, rather than how it actually is used. 'Incorrect' language then becomes demonised, with some people even linking 'bad' grammar to society's ills: sometimes even issues as serious as crime on the streets and a reason for poverty!

Prescriptive grammar ignores the fact that children live in a world where grammar exists in many forms: formal and informal, where they encounter texts (spoken and written) in Standard English as well as many other forms of dialects and Non-Standard English – where the so-called 'rules' are broken all the time.

Modern linguistics (the study of language) takes a slightly different approach, known as **descriptive grammar**. Linguists study all aspects of language to **describe**, rather than prescribe, how it's used.

Descriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language as it is actually used by speakers and writers. We need to remember that, as teachers, we are teaching a fairly complex subject area to primary school aged children and continually finding ways to make the connection between spoken grammar and written grammar in all its forms – including Standard English. The linguist David Crystal summed up a way in which children can understand grammar:

‘Grammar is the study of how we make sentences’

And in practical terms, this largely covers what we focus on with children, particularly in the primary phase. We also look at how grammar affects word structures, such as tenses or affixes. And we consider how grammar secures the cohesion of a whole text. But understanding sentences, playing with them, changing them and manipulating them to achieve particular effects, is the bread and butter of grammar learning.

When studying language, whether it’s a professor of linguistics or a child in the classroom, we have common ways of talking and thinking about language. We look at ‘chunks’ of meaning, from the smallest to the biggest ‘chunks’:

WORDS



Words convey meaning, but this is often only clear when they work with other words. Groups of words working together, in grammatical terms, are called:

PHRASES



Phrases work together to form the next ‘level up’ when talking about sentences:

CLAUSES



A clause contains a subject and a verb so it contains a ‘complete’ idea. We can also then call it a simple sentence, so the next ‘chunk’ to study is:

SENTENCES
