Revitalizing Grammar Instruction for High School Juniors: Toward a Contextual, Student-Driven, and Minimalistic Method

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This research is a product of the graduate program in English at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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Revitalizing Grammar Instruction for High School Juniors:

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BY

Heather L. Lindenmeyer

THESIS

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore best practices in grammar instruction for high school juniors. Practicing English teachers have been engaging in the great grammar debate for years, essentially arguing if and how grammar is best taught. Thoughts on teaching grammar greatly differ in the professional community, but most scholars call for a middle ground to be sought in the great grammar debate. In other words, very few scholars think traditional methods that isolate grammar instruction from the writing process are best, but even fewer scholars call for teachers to entirely rid their curriculum of all grammar instruction. I conclude that effective grammar instruction is three-tiered: it is contextual, or directly tied to any unit taught; it is student-driven, or reflective of each student group’s specific needs; and it is minimalistic, or slim in the number of skills that should be taught in one school year. In the second chapter, I identify the target student group, my own high school juniors, and its needs, using text from student essays to show the variety in student ability when it comes to grammar usage. I also identify how the ACT and Common Core Standards serve as baseline tools for the junior-level English teacher in determining what juniors need in terms of instruction. Though the ACT is not the only standardized test juniors across the nation take, it is nationally recognized by all colleges and universities and is heavily used in the Midwest. The Common Core Standards are currently used in nearly all states. In the third chapter, I outline how grammatical instruction can follow the aforementioned three-tiered method by explaining how the instruction can coincide with basic units taught in a junior-level English class. I include appendices of assignments and rubrics that will aid junior-level teachers in assessing students on the subject of grammar.
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What value does correct grammar have in our society? Is correct grammar a lost art? In what grammatical skills do my students need to improve the most? Questions like these (and many more) have flooded my mind each time I have sat down to meticulously plan lessons before the start of each school year for the past nine years. As a secondary English teacher, I have found that one question, however, seems to trump all of these other questions in determining how I teach the way I teach: Is teaching grammar even necessary when I am not seeing tangible improvements in student work?

Fast forward into the actual school year. In years past, I would use traditional methods in teaching grammar. I would create neatly-designed PowerPoint presentations outlining all of the rules my students needed to know to successfully use commas or semicolons or make their pronouns and antecedents agree or correctly use affect and effect or utilize parallel structure or any other of the several grammatical skills I have attempted to cover. I would pass out worksheets. I would administer what I deemed to be challenging exams that I wrote myself that covered the rules from the PowerPoint presentations. Essentially, I was teaching grammar in the way I was taught grammar as a student. But is this way effective? Can we expect our students to be able to apply the rules we teach them to where it really matters – in their writing – when our lessons occur outside of the writing process?

I know I am not in the minority when it comes to how I question and tweak my methods of grammar instruction; most English teachers have questioned their practices in teaching grammar. A simple perusing of the articles found in the English Journal written by practicing educators, for example, shows that teachers are really invested in discovering both if
should be taught and *how* it might be best taught. Discovering best practices in grammar instruction is of utmost importance in that knowledge of grammar can shape our students into better communicators, which will help them in nearly all facets of their future lives. For teachers of high school juniors, discovering best practices in grammar instruction holds an even greater importance. During the junior year, most teachers prepare their students to take standardized tests like the ACT and SAT that will ultimately determine students’ college prospects.

In a literature review provided in Chapter 1, I will show how said authors are currently discussing or have discussed grammar instruction. In most of the scholarly work written on grammar instruction, authors will focus on one aspect of teaching grammar. Ultimately, through the analysis of both current trends and foundational scholarship on this subject, I have created a three-tiered grammatical instruction method. I will define the specific needs of the target audience of students (high school juniors) in Chapter 2, including college preparatory curriculum through the Common Core State Standards and standardized testing preparation. Since I have taught in the state of Illinois that has required students to take the ACT, I will reference the ACT in specific lesson ideas provided, though this information could be easily adapted to meet the needs of students taking another standardized test like the SAT. I will outline in Chapter 3 how the three-tiered method of grammar instruction that is contextual, student-driven, and minimalistic can be applied to basic units taught at the junior level.
Chapter 1

Defining Grammar

Nothing gets most secondary English teachers as charged as engaging in the great grammar teaching debate. Should grammar be taught in the classroom? If so, how should it be taught? If not, how do students learn to communicate clearly? What rules, if any, should students know? These questions just touch the surface of the complicated debate in which English teachers have been engaging for many years. And most educators may align themselves with both sides, depending on the subtopic at hand within the larger debate. Needless to say, the debate is multi-faceted and, therefore, complicated.

One of the complications within the grammar debate lies in how educators define the term grammar. Grammar is a term educators use, yet the term itself is as complicated as the grammar teaching debate itself. It is important, then, to first define the term grammar and examine what past methods research has shown in how it is taught. Doing so can help shape more informed opinions to be shared in the great grammar debate and aid English teachers in sculpting the best methods in grammar instruction. Since the term grammar encompasses many different meanings, it is of utmost importance that instructors themselves understand the different denotations of this complicated term.

Outlining and Applying Patrick Hartwell’s Five Grammars

Several scholars cite Patrick Hartwell’s five-part definition of grammar outlined in the 1985 “Grammar, Grammars and the Teaching of Grammar,” though Hartwell adapted W. Nelson Francis’ 1954 model (Hartwell 109). Hartwell extends Francis’ three grammars out to five. Grammar 1 is defined as “the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings” (109). In most cases, though Grammar 1 has such a profound impact on students’ speaking and writing capabilities, we secondary instructors tend to
not be as concerned with Grammar 1 because skills in acquiring Grammar 1 are intact and highly functioning when a child reaches the ages of five or six (109). Grammar 2 is defined as “linguistic science,” essentially “the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns” (109). Hartwell notes how the principles associated with Grammar 2 have been in place long before they were studied, “just as gravity was in full operation before Newton’s apple fell” (109). Since Grammar 1 seems to come naturally to native speakers at a young age and Grammar 2 is synonymous with linguistics, a subject not typically taught at the secondary level, secondary instructors become increasingly more interested in students’ Grammars 3, 4, and 5.

Grammar 3 refers to language decorum, essentially expressions of “bad grammar,” like ain’t (109). A simpler term for Grammar 3, as Hartwell notes, is “usage” (109). The term usage is often seen on writing assignment rubrics, and students are told some of the sections of their standardized tests assess their usage. In fact, the ACT student website, a page targeted toward students preparing for this standardized exam typically taken in the junior year, uses the word mechanics alongside usage and provides the following examples as skills associated with usage/mechanics: punctuation, or “conventions of internal and end-of-sentence punctuation, with emphasis on the relationship of punctuation to meaning”; grammar/usage, or “understanding of agreement between subject and verb, between pronoun and antecedent, and between modifiers and the word modified, verb formation, pronoun case, formation of comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; and idiomatic usage”; and sentence structure, or “relationships between and among clauses, placement of modifiers, and shifts in construction.” Though the ACT is not the only nationwide standardized test utilized, it is important to examine how the ACT defines the term usage, as thousands of English teachers nationwide are being asked to prepare their
students for this exam. At the very least, the way ACT defines *usage* can serve as one common
definition teachers can adopt for such a complex term.

Hartwell defines Grammar 4, citing Karl W. Dykema in 1961, as “‘school grammar,’” or
rules that attempt to teach students how to use language effectively (110). One example of a
grammar rule taught in school that Hartwell provides (citing David Bartholmae) is adding an –s
to make a noun plural (120-121). Martha Kolln extends Hartwell’s definition of Grammars 3 and
4 by defining them as “grammar in connection with curriculum . . . also referring to mechanics,
to punctuation, and spelling, the details of proofreading” (26). In her book *Grammar to Enrich
and Enhance Writing*, Constance Weaver uses the phrase “traditional school grammar” to
describe Hartwell’s Grammar 4, which she defines as “the grammatical descriptions and
prescriptive rules that have been taught in schools for centuries and that have changed
surprisingly little over the years . . . traditional grammars are known for their prescriptive rules
stating what writers allegedly should and shouldn’t do” (12-13).

Grammar 5 refers to writer’s grammar, or “grammatical terms used in the interest of
teaching prose style” (110). Hartwell provides the following as an example of a skill learned with
Grammar 5: “active manipulation of language with conscious attention to surface form” (125).
Joan Berger, a middle school English teacher in suburban Chicago, provides ample examples of
Grammar 5 in her article “Transforming Writers through Grammar Study,” some of which
include the usage of “adverbial clauses, absolutes, and participial phrases,” which allows
students to “weav[e] their ideas together in effective prose” (53). Ultimately, when most scholars
examine Hartwell’s grammars, they overwhelmingly focus on the latter three, as they form what
most instructors commonly refer to as *grammar* when the term *grammar* is used. To establish
commonality, then, when discussing *grammar*, I will be referring to the practices of teaching
usage, “school grammar,” and writer’s grammar, since most scholars are referring to these three practices when using the term *grammar* to discuss what is being taught in the classroom in terms of grammar instruction.

*Examining Foundational Research in Grammatical Instruction: The Braddock and Elley Studies*

Now that a definition of the word *grammar* has been established, we can examine past research on grammar instruction with more purposeful direction. Nearly all scholars who discuss “past research” reference two foundational studies, one in 1963 and another in 1979. Before approaching the overarching subject of the great grammar debate, we must examine the studies themselves.

Though formal grammar instruction was studied and frequently discussed prior to the dates associated with the studies referenced here, the first widely-referenced study on formal grammar instruction came in 1963 via Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer (105). In their 1963 text *Research in Written Composition*, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer reference the Harris study, which examined the effectiveness of formal grammar instruction in middle-school-aged students (Braddock, et al 70). Interestingly enough, all scholars who reference the Braddock, et al study reference the same direct quote (or portions of it) published in the 1963 *Research in Written Composition*:

> In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practices in composition, even a *harmful effect* on the improvement of writing. (Hartwell 105)

Though none of the scholars who reference the 1963 study explain how this conclusion that continues to impact grammar pedagogy was made, I, an English instructor myself, wanted to
know more about the study. In other words, I wanted to know more about what shaped such impactful findings, and none of the scholars delved into what shaped this conclusion. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer examined the Harris study in which students in London, ages twelve to fourteen, were in one of two groups, one group receiving formal grammar instruction and the other receiving direct grammar instruction (70). The authors define formal grammar instruction as the teaching of grammar rules that occurs separately from the writing process, while the group receiving direct grammar instruction worked with grammatical concepts while writing (70). Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer go into great detail about the Harris study, most likely to establish credibility in their conclusions, and this credibility is rightfully deserved.

The harmful effect phrase referenced in the Braddock, et al study is widely used in scholarly works discussing grammar instruction; in fact, Kolln “blames” it “for starting grammar’s free fall” (27). Because of the Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer conclusion, Kolln contends, English instructors began to abandon the teaching of grammar (27). Hartwell even begins his aforementioned foundational article in this way: “For me the grammar issue was settled at least twenty years ago with the conclusion offered by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer” (105). So both Kolln, an advocate of grammar instruction, and Hartwell, who staunchly disagrees with Kolln, point to this study as one that has a dramatic impact on how grammar has been taught in schools since its release in 1963. However, if Kolln’s and Hartwell’s opinions on their conclusions are indicative of what impact this study has had on grammar instruction since 1963, it seems as if we may be giving much bearing on one particular study and not examining similar studies to see overarching patterns in student learning amongst several similar studies.
Another study referenced nearly as frequently as the 1963 study referenced by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer is the three-year Elley study (1976-1979) in which 248 students in Auckland, New Zealand, in “eight [separate] classes of average ability” (Elley, et al 7) received instruction from a total of three different teachers (7) in “transformational grammar,” much like the direct method referenced in the Braddock study; another in traditional grammar, or grammar instruction isolated from the writing process; and the third received no grammar instruction (Hartwell 106-107). The ultimate conclusion after three years was that the “formal study of grammar, whether transformational or traditional, improved neither writing quality, nor control over surface correctness” (106-107). However, Elley, et al, also note the following:

[N]o clear recommendations can be made about the kind of program which might have a striking impact on the composition skills of secondary school pupils. Such a research exercise would seem to require either a more intensive, longitudinal study of the writing development of individual children, or a programme developed from a completely new set of theoretical proposals about the nature of children's language growth. (20)

Conclusions associated with both studies (Braddock, et al, and Elley, et al) make English instructors question why we even need to teach grammar at all. They signify “gloom and doom” for proponents of grammar instruction.

Interpreting the Research and the Implications of Interpretation

Understanding the foundational research is different from examining how the research has been interpreted over the years. The differing interpretations of these studies, it seems, has fueled the great grammar debate and widely differing practices in grammar instruction. One group of scholars seems to interpret the results in the Braddock and Elley studies by indicating that grammar instruction is needed, though not in the traditional, formal method. As Susan Losee Nunan explains, in reference to both the Braddock and Elley studies, “students who are taught
grammar through a direct, traditional approach (i.e. worksheet, grammar textbook exercises, and so forth) do not show a significant difference in their ability to construct compositions” (71). Nunan, though, goes on to assert, “We must teach grammar, but we must teach it in a different way than in the past” (73). John Mellon similarly uses the findings to “defend the teaching of grammar . . . he argued that the study shows that teaching grammar does no harm” (Hartwell 107). Some scholars like Anthony Petroskey, author of “Grammar Instruction: What We Know,” agree with the conclusion of both studies, rendering the teaching of grammar completely unproductive, while others, like Janice Neuleib and Kolln have criticized the experiments eliciting the findings, especially in the Elley study, with Neuleib especially questioning “whether the findings could be generalized beyond the target population” (107). Kolln also expresses discontent with the wording found in the conclusion of the Braddock study in that it “refers to a method of teaching grammar rather than to content. It refers to grammar being taught in isolation from writing” and does nothing to prove that grammar taught in the context of writing is ineffective (Kolln 27). It seems as if the conclusions from the conclusions of these two studies have sparked the most controversy. How instructors have responded to such conclusions varies as much as the interpretations of the conclusions themselves; while some have chosen to ignore the studies’ findings and teach grammar in the traditional method, others have chosen to forgo teaching grammar in its entirety. Most secondary instructors especially, however, have been trying to find success in the middle, essentially moving away from the traditional structure but still emphasizing instructional value in the subject of grammar.

Several grammar pedagogy scholars have shaped differing conclusions from the two foundational studies (Braddock, et al, and Elley, et al), and those conclusions have shaped the way grammar is taught in secondary schools. The differing conclusions have also shaped a
sizable debate amongst teachers, and that debate lies in this loaded question: Do students even benefit from grammar instruction? Most scholars who reference one or both of the foundational studies argue in favor of the teaching of grammar on several grounds.

*Arguments in Favor of Grammar Instruction*

Grammar instruction may provide more to students than just simple clean-ups of their essays; it may actually aid them in communicating more effectively. Undoubtedly, providing students with tools to effectively communicate is one of nearly every English educator’s top goals. Alvin Brown, an instructor in both a community college and private business school, states teachers have to teach the basics of grammar before subjecting students to instruction in reading and writing. “[P]roper grammar and punctuation are the building blocks to comprehension of literature, the very foundation upon which rests the classics and all forms of writing. The teaching of such fundamentals should not be regarded as ‘evil necessities’ or as second-class subjects” (Brown 99). To some who support grammar instruction, this pedagogy can go beyond the teaching of basic fundamentals; it can also unlock ways students can communicate more clearly and in a more sophisticated manner. Nunan, citing Harry R. Noden, explains how “grammar is an artist’s tool: Writing is not constructed merely from experiences, information, characters or plots, but from fundamental artistic elements of grammar” (72). The type of grammatical instruction Nunan explains here seems starkly different from standard, formalized grammar instruction. She goes on to explain: “The most important reason to teach grammar hits at the heart of what teachers hope to accomplish: to give students the tools by which to think with greater breadth and depth and act independently on those thoughts” (72). All English teachers, regardless of opinion on this matter, seek to help students think independently and more deeply, and grammar advocates point to this type of instruction as a means to this end we all share.
But what if within grammar instruction lies more than just the development of critical thinking and utilization of concepts in student writing? What if grammar instruction helps students climb the socioeconomic ladder? Nunan, a grammar instruction supporter, states, “Social convention and status, equivalent to choosing to burp or not to burp at a formal dinner, dictate that we dare not send students into a world that views grammar and proper speech in this way without the necessary tools to succeed” (72). Ed Vavra, author of “On Not Teaching Grammar,” concurs: “The rules of usage are the result of social conventions . . . Violating these rules is like going to a formal party dressed in dirty work clothes. Educated listeners (or readers) will react negatively” (33). Nunan says this form of elitism that forms when correct grammar is stressed does not need to be viewed as harmful to society. She believes we can use grammar instruction to empower our students instead of complain about its hurtful and unrealistic implications. She states, “Grammar rules are fixed and must be learned because patterns of speech reflect education, class, even morality” (Nunan 71). Though some may not see the connection between grammar knowledge and proper speech, Nunan uses a 1981 Maxine Hairston study to support her claim. In her study, Hairston showed various types of “professionals” sixty-five sentences, all of which had “various errors” and asked them to “rate the mistakes based on their perception of the ‘seriousness’ of the error” (72). Nunan concludes: “Her results support what our brief history of grammar reveals: We still view grammar and its rules with the same sense of inviolability that those in the eighteenth century did” (72). With this conclusion, Nunan is pinpointing the importance grammar knowledge has in our society and how a lack of this knowledge affects the professional world.

Even those who do not directly support grammar instruction cannot deny the phenomenon that “correctness” has become in our society. One such instructor, Kenneth
Lindblom, succinctly states, “English teachers have a reputation for making people feel bad about themselves. Inevitably, the source of that bad feeling seems tied to attitudes about grammar and spelling” (94). Where does this deep-seeded need to be correct originate? Lindblom pinpoints that this excessive need for language correctness is deeply rooted in history, citing statements dating all the way back to 1874 in which errors in grammar and spelling were identified as “universal evil[s]” (96). These statements, originating from Albert Stetson, one of Illinois State University’s first composition instructors, were actually supported by the State of Illinois Board of Education at the time (Lindblom 96). Supporting Nunan’s conclusion on the societal importance of grammatical correctness outlined over 130 years after his foundational assertions, Stetson states (on the subject of grammar): “Students from ‘cultivated parents’ receive correct training in language, but the children of working-class parents pick up habits that must be ‘unlearned’ in English class” (Lindblom 96). In 1874, the State of Illinois Board of Education identified “laxness” in grammar and spelling “betrayed a weakness in character or a moral lapse” (96). Nunan asserts these (as Lindblom calls them) “draconian” assertions about grammar, though however harmful, are alive and well in our current societal perceptions: Essentially, if one possesses keen grammatical skill, he or she will advance farther professionally and gain more respect socially than one who has inferior skill. Weaver says the importance of being correct originated much farther back in history; it “reached its peak during the Middle Ages. Grammar became the chief subject of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), studied intensively because it was considered the foundation of all knowledge” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 18). Weaver also notes how the importance placed on learning grammar for the sake of correctness carried throughout history past the Middle Ages as a means “to enable the lower classes to move up to the middle class, in manners as well as income” from the eighteenth
century, most notably seen with the wild success of Lindlay Murray’s 1795 *English Grammar* text that sold “an estimated 15.5 million books during the first decade of the nineteenth century” all the way into present day (18). Weaver uses historical references to show readers how grammar instruction has carried over into generation after generation, and since it has, we must not take its importance in society lightly, where Lindblom’s aim seems to be pinpointing the need to be correct as a detriment to our society. Though Lindblom does not support extensive grammatical instruction, even he cannot deny grammar’s societal implications, which Nunan and Brown, among others, believe should be developed, cultivated, and explored in the classroom.

Many English teachers also argue for grammar instruction to prepare students for the ever-so-vitally-important standardized test. Though those who do not support grammar instruction, like Peter Elbow, say “rules” get in the way of students’ writing abilities (Kolln 26), we cannot deny certain “rules” appear on standardized tests, nor can we deny that in the future, and perhaps even now, administrators will tie student performance on standardized tests to teacher evaluation. More importantly, though, it is commonly known college-bound students must attain certain ACT or SAT scores to pursue future collegiate plans. Standardized test scores also affect school funding. Though our primary goal as professionals is certainly not (and should not be) standardized test preparation, we must admit it does have some bearing on what we teach, being that so much rides on such a test: Scores affect students, instructors, and schools alike. The ACT Student website, for example, assures students that “rote recall of rules of grammar aren’t tested,” yet identifies that the test covers “punctuation, grammar and usage, and sentence structure”; in fact, the website also states that fifty-three percent of the test questions cover usage and mechanics, while the remaining forty-seven percent tests students’ rhetorical skills. Since over half of this important test asks students grammar-related questions, English
educators teaching students who will take the ACT owe it to their students to at least invest some time in assessing what students do and do not know in the field of grammar and aiming to help them in that acquisition of knowledge. Instructors teaching students who will take other standardized tests like the SAT can invest time in similar assessment practices that follow their specific tests.

In connection to the idea of teaching grammar for standardized test preparation, some English teachers hold fast to the teaching of grammar simply because it has always been taught. Not many teachers would identify grammatical mistakes as “universal evils” like Stetson (Lindblom 96), but many teachers see grammar’s value as second to none, simply because it has been a foundational unit of study for so many years. Brown states, “While the presentation of most subjects has drastically changed in the last fifty years, English grammar is still taught basically the same way” (99). Traditional grammar instruction seems to be a comfort zone many teachers are not willing to step out of. Though we professionals may know the way in which grammar is taught must change, most likely, students and parents will not see the need for change. David Gold ran into such a problem when he and a colleague attempted to change grammar curriculum at a private high school. In Gold’s “‘But When Do You Teach Grammar?’ Allaying Community Concerns About Pedagogy,” he outlines the extensive efforts he and his colleague, making up a two-person English department, attempted to teach grammar, usage, and mechanics “rhetorically, in the context of students’ writing, not as separate ‘formal’ subjects” (43). Soon after their “radical” plans came to fruition, parents started to question the two educators. “Some parents were concerned that we were not devoting time to formal grammar exercises (for example, sentence diagramming) . . . This fed our frustration, for we did not share their sense of crisis” (Gold 44). Gold says that through exercises tied to student writing, students
did indeed learn grammar, mechanics, and usage principles (44). But parental concerns arose, which led administration to question these teachers’ practices, though Gold had taught at the collegiate level prior to teaching at the private high school (44). Ultimately, Gold went back to college-level instruction to have more freedom in curricular practices (45). Interestingly enough, however, was how the parents knew so much about pedagogical practices in English. Basically, parents rejected Gold’s and his colleague’s techniques because they were vastly different from grammatical drills and exercises done at the middle school students attended prior to the high school (44). Students at Gold’s high school were taught using formal exercises at the middle school level (44). Here we see that perhaps it was the parents’ concern about vastly differing practices that created controversy for Gold and his colleague, thus further perpetuating that the great grammar debate is still alive and well, even within the same district and perhaps, in other cases, the same school.

Critical Viewpoints of Grammar Instruction

Grammar instruction skeptics have just as many reasons for denying its importance in the classroom as grammar supporters do for keeping it in the curriculum. It is first important to note that not many scholars are staunchly against grammar instruction in itself; in other words, few scholars reject the importance grammar instruction has on student development. However, most scholars who discuss the drawbacks or pitfalls teachers face when teaching grammar find fault in traditional grammar instruction, or how grammar is traditionally taught in schools, essentially criticizing the rules associated with Hartwell’s Grammar 4. Several scholars poke holes in rules typically taught in secondary English classrooms, one reason being the inconsistencies in the rules and another being the lack of carry-over “rules” have to student writing. Taking a strong stance against Grammar 4 in its traditional form and citing John C. Hodges and Mary S. Whitten’s 1982 Harbrace College Textbook, Hartwell states:
The advice given in ‘the common school grammars’ is unconnected with anything remotely resembling literate adult behavior . . . In order to get the advice ‘as a rule, do not write a sentence fragment,’ the student must master the following learning tasks: recognizing verbs, subjects and verbs, all parts of speech, phrases and subordinate clauses, main clauses and types of sentences. (120)

When we teach students rules, we assume they know a great deal not only about language use itself but grammatical terminology, which is terminology that most likely does not serve the students much good in their pursuit of becoming better writers. Hartwell goes on to note:

The school grammar approach defines a sentence fragment as a conceptual error - as not having conscious knowledge of the school grammar definition of *sentence*. It demands heavy emphasis on rote memory, and it asks students to behave in ways patently removed from the behaviors of mature writers. (I have never in my life tested a sentence for completeness, and I am a better writer - and probably a better person - as a consequence.) (120)

Deborah Dean’s recent analogy of “rule knowledge” to writing aligns well with Hartwell’s criticism of school grammar: “[M]ost writers - even students - can do more with written and spoken language than they can explain grammatically. I don’t think that’s a bad thing. I can drive a car, but I can’t name the parts of an engine. And I know lots of articulate people who can’t tell a gerund from a present participle, but they use them both frequently and effectively” (24). Some scholars like Peter Brodie also question grammatical rules that are so rigid. Brodie shows how rules, especially those in the *usage* category, are not actually rules but rather preferences. Therefore, when students travel from English classroom to English classroom as they get older, they are actually learning what each individual teacher prefers. Speaking from personal
experience, I can say that explaining to a student that you disagree with another teacher’s hard-and-fast grammatical principle is one of the hardest conversations to navigate through in this particular professional setting. Brodie states, “I am struck by how many of [my students’] uninherited rules seem designed to dull their writing (as well as dampen their ardor)” (77). Some rules Brodie uses as examples to illustrate his points are not splitting infinitives, never ending sentences with prepositions, never beginning sentences with the words and or but, or not using personal pronouns in formal essays (77). “Not only do all these negative injunctions have a negative effect on the aspiring writer, but they are all - except where they spare us absolute gibberish - wrong” (77). Technically, as Brodie suggests, there is no usage error committed when a student uses you or I in an essay; if teachers are not careful, students can be overridden with rule following, ultimately afraid of making mistakes, which can stunt writing development.

Grammatical rules are often too complex for the basic knowledge students really need to grasp to reach their goals in English class, as Anthony D. Hunter suggests in “A New Grammar That Has Clearly Improved Writing.” “[S]cientific [grammars] like descriptive, structural, generative, and the like, are too technical for use in teaching” (102). Sometimes even simple rules students learn, relearn, and review year after year are contested, as Weaver points out, using the items in a series comma as an example (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 21). She shows how the Writer’s Choice: Grammar and Composition textbook for seventh graders instructs students to “use a comma after each [item in a series], including the item that precedes the conjunction” but how the Associated Press Stylebook, used by journalists around the world, instructs writers to “use commas to separate items in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series” (20-21). When the same rule in two different authoritative grammar texts is different, which are students to follow? Those skeptical of putting so much
emphasis on grammar instruction in the English classroom may see this disparity as one more reason to de-emphasize instructional time in grammar.

English teachers are not only teaching grammar for the entire year; they are also asked to instruct students in the areas of writing, reading, and speaking. Therefore, some teachers do not wish to spend ample time in the teaching of grammar simply because several other units await them and must be taught. As Brown notes, one opinion commonly held by grammar skeptics is that “literature and current writings are what’s truly significant” in terms of what should be taught in the English classroom (99). Richard Haswell, author of “Minimal Marking,” developed his own system of minimal marking, one in which he does not correct student surface (grammatical/usage) errors but simply places a checkmark in the margin in which the error occurs and has students correct their own papers, to allot class time into other composition-related tasks he deems more important. Hartwell notes in his article that Haswell sees “his students correct 61.1% of their errors when they are identified with a simple mark in the margin rather than by an error type” (121). Essentially, then, one could gather that Haswell’s students are learning how to correct grammatical errors without too much formal instruction. Haswell states, “The ultimate value of this method for me is that it relegates what I consider a minor aspect of the course to a minor role in time spent on marking and in class, while at least maintaining and probably increasing the rate of improvement in that aspect” (Haswell 603). If Haswell, like other English instructors, deems correctness of minor importance, he must want to emphasize other topics, and unfortunately for English instructors, especially those who teach basic courses in which all aspects of the subject (literature, writing, public speaking) must be covered, too many units fight for our professional attention.
Like proponents of grammar instruction do in their scholarly work, grammar instruction skeptics raise the issue of grammatical correctness determining one’s respect and worth in society. While those who favor grammar instruction may say that using language correctly empowers students to propel themselves into higher social ranks, those against grammar instruction think this “correctness” obsession actually perpetuates a society of bias and prejudice. As Lindblom and Patricia A. Dunn state, “[I]f we teach standardized, handbook grammar as if it is the only ‘correct’ form of grammar, we are teaching in cooperation with a discriminatory power system, one that arbitrarily advocates some language-use conventions as inherently better than others. And this is simple social indoctrination” (44).

Establishing a Middle Ground: Toward a Three-Tiered Grammatical Instruction Method

Most scholars who have recently written about grammar instruction do not find staunch allegiance to one side of the great grammar debate or the other. Many are quick to criticize the traditional grammar teaching method (isolation from the writing process) but agree that students should receive some type of grammar instruction. In examining current scholarly literature on the topic, I have come to discover three main components most who write about this subject advocate for: teaching grammar in context of both literature and writing, ensuring grammar lessons are student-driven, and cultivating a less-is-more pedagogy in which the number of grammar skills taught is minimal.

Tier One: Contextual Grammar Instruction

The concept of teaching grammar in context is often associated with Constance Weaver, professor emerita of English at Western Illinois University, who has written four books on grammar in the teaching of writing, according to the author information provided in her newest book, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*. Since the publishing of her first book in 1979, *Grammar for Teachers*, Weaver has been asserting that “grammar is not only inherently
connected to the teaching of writing, it is, broadly construed, the *essence* of writing” (Weaver, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* xii). To Weaver, teaching grammar in context means “the teaching of grammar should occur throughout the writing process. . .[it] has a natural place within all writing phases, from planning through revision and editing, in preparation for ultimate publication” (xii). Vavra, a teacher at the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, concurs with the notion that grammar instruction must be tied to writing in order for it to resonate with students. Using the cart/horse analogy likening grammar to a horse and written communication to the cart, Vavra explains how he is convinced that traditional grammar instruction is unsuccessful because it separates grammar from how it is supposed to be applied: through the written word, especially. “Teaching ‘grammar’ doesn’t work because instruction is focused on individual rules, on exceptions and on individual simplistic sentences. In practice, if not in theory, grammar often fills the cart. And the cart is disconnected from the horse” (33). In order for the cart and horse to work together as a functioning machine, Vavra explains how English teachers must aid students in making the connection between grammatical concepts learned and their own writing: “We must help students to identify - in their own writing - the various grammatical constructions about which we talk” (35). Many scholars, like Vavra, Lindblom, and Weaver stress that grammar is “more than correctness” (Weaver, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* xii) in that grammatical instruction should infiltrate all parts to the writing process instead of a quick clean-up before the paper is submitted. As Weaver explains, “We [including contributor Jonathan Bush] encourage teachers to focus on writing and, in the process, guide students in using whatever grammatical options and features will make their writing more interesting and more appreciated by their audience” (3). Examples of teaching grammar in context will be outlined in Chapter 3.
Other scholars have opened up Weaver’s definition of “grammar in context.” Paul E. Doniger, teacher of English, theater, speech, and debate at The Gilbert School in Winsted, Connecticut, also teaches grammar in the context of literature. Doniger explains his process and his rationale for this type of context:

In the process of working with students, I often find that they encounter problems in their understanding of texts because they have misread or not understood the grammatical context. When this happens, I have to both teach the grammar that they are missing and show how it is relevant to the text. In doing so, I must be careful not to fall into the old trap of ‘drill and kill’ traditional grammar lessons. (101)

Doniger provides examples of texts he uses and processes he walks students through within the process, which will be explained further in Chapter 3, which will outline a grammar instructional plan for grade 11 teachers. Mary Ehrenworth, a staff developer and teacher of writing in the New York City public schools, also looks to literature to provide enriching lessons in grammar. In “Grammar - Comma - A New Beginning,” Ehrenworth stresses how important it is for students to see and emulate examples found in literature that use grammar correctly as opposed to reading their own work (or their peers’ work) in which grammar is used incorrectly: The focus should be on how grammar has meaning, not how grammar is incorrect (91). Citing Weaver and Harry Noden, author of Image Grammar, Ehrenworth states how both Weaver and Noden start with the notion of grammar as a transformative agent in the writing process . . . This means that we teach how authors use fragments in powerful ways in their writing. We don’t teach that fragments are wrong. We show how and when they are writing. . . We seduce the students into grammar. We let grammar seduce us. We assume that it is, in
fact, seductive, and we search out those writers who manipulate and exploit grammatical structures in their writing. (91)

A far cry from basic traditional grammatical teaching practices in which the teacher corrects student mistakes, the method Ehrenworth outlines focuses on how to use language and grammatical knowledge to the betterment of student writing. Like Doniger, Ehrenworth provides examples for her readers in which she shows how students have adapted grammatically unique sentences derived from classic literature to enhance student writing, providing both the samples from the literature and the samples from the students who were taught to emulate the structure outlined for them in the literature. Weaver, who focuses much of her scholarly writing on tying grammar instruction to writing units, also sees the value in analyzing remarkable examples of written work to teach grammar effectively: “Grammar to enrich students’ writing - options for adding detail, structure, voice/style, and fluency - is partly learned through extensive, authentic reading and is most readily taught and learned in conjunction with literature and authentic writing” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 7). Here we see that the grammar instruction Weaver describes is not Hartwell’s traditional school grammar (Grammar 4) but actually style and usage.

Tier Two: Student-Driven Grammar Instruction

When one grasps the concept of teaching grammar in context, one could most likely gather that this type of teaching method works best when it is student-driven. From year-to-year and class-to-class, it is difficult for educators to determine what each target group needs in terms of grammatical concepts before witnessing what the students need by reading their writing samples. For example, if students in one particular class are struggling with comma usage, it would not be in good practice to work on voice and style without building upon basic knowledge. When students are taught on the subject of grammar in a traditional method, they are
usually taught using textbooks and worksheets. Admittedly, many secondary English teachers have so much to cover in terms of number of units in a general English classroom, and textbooks and worksheets provide them with materials that they do not have to create. However, textbooks cannot predict what each student, class, or entire grade needs. Therefore, as many scholars/practicing educators like Weaver, Bill Gribbin, Carol A. Rose, and John A. Skretta note, grammar instruction should be student-driven, or directly applicable to the needs of the students the teacher is currently instructing. As Weaver explains, grammar textbooks really are limited resources for teachers and students: “Grammar instruction should not be limited to the scope and sequence found in a textbook series, but should build on students’ developmental readiness” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 7). As both Gribbin and Rose point out, teachers should put away the textbooks, look first to what students already know, and build upon what vast knowledge they have. Gribbin, a former secondary English teacher and current Dean of the School of Communications at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, explains, “The ‘facts’ our students do not know about grammar are miniscule in comparison to the vast amount of data on their native language they intuitively possess” (58). Gribbin’s point ties quite nicely to Ehrenworth’s method in focusing not on correctness but on the power of language and how students can use grammatical knowledge to similarly use language in a powerful way. Rose, who admits her background in business education fuels her traditionalist opinions on grammar instruction, believes some grammatical rules should be taught, but in order to determine what rules should be taught, she says teachers must “start by surveying the class. See what they already know. Break down the components to those which they will most need” (96). Therefore, in using Rose’s method, English teachers would assess students prior to teaching grammar units to determine students’ inherent needs. Like Gribbin and Rose, Skretta, who was a practicing
secondary English teacher when he wrote “Why Debates about Teaching Grammar and Usage ‘Tweak’ Me Out,” says we cannot deny the wealth of grammatical knowledge our students already have (67). Like Ehrenworth, Skretta thinks grammatical instruction should be approached by both students and teachers in a positive, constructive attitude (as opposed to a teacher-is-all-knowing approach) in which grammar is something in which students already possess a foundation:

If you are tired of being a Grammar Cop, turn in your gun and badge and start celebrating language with your students . . . Go forth and teach grammar; teach students to realize the staggering wealth of linguistic competence and grammatical strategies they already possess, and challenge them daily to add to this bounty through authentic explorations in literacy. (67)

In addition to stressing the importance of positive interaction between students and teacher, Skretta challenges his readers to consider how we learn best - and it is not through constant correction. A student commented to Skretta, “I would like to be rewarded for what I know rather than always being punished for what I don’t,” a comment that has shaped Skretta’s student-driven outlook on grammatical instruction (67). No one can deny the difficulty that may ensue when English teachers set out on the mission to deviate from traditional grammatical instructional methods; it is quite difficult going into a school year not exactly knowing what grammatical units will be taught. When administrators throw differentiated instructional methods (meeting the needs of different learners within the same classroom - more on differentiated instruction in Chapter 3) into the teacher evaluation process, teachers may seem overwhelmed. However, if our end goal is to have students learn what they previously did not know (a common-sense goal all teachers have), why plan and prepare ahead of time, only to find students
already know that particular concept or struggle with something much more basic and pressing? Student-driven instruction will ensure student needs are being met.

Part of making any type of instruction student-driven is staying current, being aware of and knowledgeable about trends specific to our field. In a broader sense, change is an inevitable part of education, and just as the shift in learning standards has swung from individualized state standards to the Common Core State Standards adopted in nearly all fifty states, grammar instruction has and will continue to shift. Newer trends in grammar instruction include providing students with the knowledge that language is ever-changing and that what may be an acceptable use of grammar directed at one audience may not be an acceptable use for all audiences. Though I will discuss the Common Core State Standards in more detail in Chapter 2, it is important to note the wording in one of the standards and how it reflects the need to keep our grammar instruction current. The first standard in the language/literacy portion (for grades eleven and twelve) of the English Language Arts Common Core Standards notes that students should “demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when speaking and writing and or speaking [and] [a]pply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested” (Common Core Standards). Newer scholarship echoes the need for grammar instruction to pull away from the rigidity of “correctness.” As Dean states, “We need to shift perspectives from the narrower ones that may represent our own education or training, and we will need to continue to shift perspectives to adapt to the wonderful ways that language works in all aspects of our students’ worlds” (26). With the understanding that our perspectives on what is correct need to be shifted comes the issue that sometimes good writing breaks conventional grammatical rules. Edgar H. Schuster states the following:
As English teachers, we bear the responsibility of offering young writers guidance - of teaching them stylistic ‘rules,’ if you will. But as thoughtful writing teachers, we are also responsible for observing what effective writers actually do, and if that contradicts the rules we’re teaching, then the rules must be overruled. Otherwise, our students will come away from our classes with misconceptions about good writing. (71)

In every grammatical lesson we plan, it is important, then, to note how the flexibility in what seems correct or incorrect is real. Teachers have to show students that the way in which we are instructing them provides general guides for using whatever type of grammar is at hand and that there are exceptions to most every rule, given the context of the writing or audience. Staying current with trends in writing and grammar help instructors develop lessons that are student-centered in that these lessons will teach the students to adapt to changing audiences and evolving language usage.

Tier Three: “Minimal” Grammar Instruction

Once teachers determine what grammatical concepts need to be taught, the question then shifts to how many grammatical concepts should be taught within a school year. When it comes to grammar instruction, most scholars, especially Weaver and Haswell, advocate taking a less-is-more approach. One of the founding principles outlined in Weaver’s Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing focuses on this minimalist concept: “Instruction in grammar itself is minimal; application of grammar to writing is maximal” (26). In other words, when instructors focus on a few grammatical units but frequently apply the concepts within the few units, instructors will see better results. Haswell also seems to possess the “less-is-more” mentality in his courses, though for different purposes. To Haswell, less is more means less instruction, allowing more time for students to focus on correcting their own individual errors to gain maximum individual benefit: “Long ago Comenius put it best: the more the teacher teaches, the less the student learns” (604).
If teachers are overwhelmed at the task of essentially starting from scratch each year with student-driven instruction, they can find some relief in the “less-is-more” approach; instead of teaching twenty concepts, focusing on five or fewer (and just immersing students in those five rules, tying them to whatever is being learned in the class at any given point) might generate better results.

Limitations of the Three-Tiered Method

The three concepts I discussed above – contextual grammar, student-driven instruction, and a minimalist mentality – are strong foundational blocks that will help educators deviate from traditionalist methods into more successful instructional endeavors, but as with any instructional methods, drawbacks are lurking and must be addressed. I have already addressed the starting-from-scratch drawback to student-driven instruction but noted how that may be remedied by the third foundational concept (the less-is-more mentality). However, other problems in the teaching of grammar still exist; one cannot think this three-tiered instructional method is without flaw. Contextual grammar and student-driven instruction will require instructors to have a strong grammatical knowledge base that some teachers admit to not having. Scholars like William Murdick, Stephen Tchudi, and Lee Thomas say teacher education programs are likely to blame, and if research demands that we deviate from the traditional grammatical instructional method, then teacher preparatory programs must follow suit in their efforts to prepare their teacher candidates. Murdick, author of “What English Teachers Need to Know about Grammar,” calls for changing “the college- and graduate-level teacher preparation programs that define the knowledge base of the American English teacher” (44). Too often, Murdick notes, teacher candidates are taught to teach “uncomplicated matters, such as . . . punctuation on the basis of sentence structure” (38). Like Murdick, Tchudi and Thomas believe change is needed at the college level. Instead of teaching teacher candidates to instruct using various textbooks that
seemingly cater to individual grade levels (that often repeats lessons, even as students travel from grade level to grade level each year), Tchudi and Thomas “proposed that secondary teachers might initially introduce parts of speech grammar in the middle school and review it occasionally in the senior high years. This treatment would be a far cry from the annual voyage through ‘grammar’ advocated by the typical textbook series” (52). Practicing teachers cannot do much to change how teacher candidates are currently being taught but can impact student teachers by showing them new methods that stray from the traditional grammatical instructional ones in hopes that these new teachers will follow suit and perhaps even raise questions when asked about the effectiveness of teacher-education programs at their respective universities.

Yet another hole in the aforementioned three-tiered system is the notion that some grammatical rules simply need to be taught for varying purposes, including the need for students to know and understand terminology and concepts before using such concepts in their writing and for standardized testing preparation. As Weaver, a foundational source on the contextual grammar concept, admits, “a few grammatical concepts, such as subject and verb, may be best taught in separate lessons, perhaps right before a lesson on punctuating sentences or on making verbs ‘agree’ with their subjects” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 5). Weaver provides only one example here. Teachers should use discretion and balance when to teach “rules” prior to contextualizing a grammatical concept through writing or reading. Rose, as aforementioned, is a believer in the teaching of grammatical rules but for a different purpose, using the following analogy: “Few would deny the fact that without the necessary structure all consistency would disappear” (96). Whereas rules define the traditional grammatical instructional method, rules need to enhance a new grammatical method a teacher pursues and should be used sparingly so as not to overwhelm, disengage, or (even worse) confuse students.
Unfortunately, the three-tiered method, in all of its seeming effectiveness and answers it provides to many of the grammar instruction skeptics, fails to explain why standardized tests like the ACT are not contextual, student-driven, or minimalistic in what they require our students to do. Lindblom actually likens standardized test preparations to traditional grammatical instructional methods: “Students engaged in time-consuming and energy-sapping exercises-for-exercises’ sake and were assessed by acontextual methods based on something other than a desire to help students improve their effectiveness as communicators. Sound like most current standardized-exam preparation to you” (96)? Even Weaver, who seems to have more of a vested interest in grammar instruction than Lindblom, calls to eliminate tests that ask students questions about grammar isolated from any writing task (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 23). Even so, much as I discussed before on the subject of rules, a bit of standardized test preparation, for example, may have to be taught outside of the context of writing, as the test asks questions of students outside the context of writing. Standardized test preparation instruction could be student-driven in that instructors could focus on the concepts assessed on the test that their students still cannot grasp (and not focusing on the concepts on the test that the students seem to grasp fairly well). Likewise, teachers will have to use the student-driven instruction method of assessing what students know to see if the less-is-more principle should still be applied. The benefit of less-is-more in standardized test preparation seems to be the same as Weaver describes it: “instruction in grammar itself [should be] minimal” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 26). However, depending on what the target group does and does not know, it may be difficult to follow a “five or fewer” rule when determining what grammatical concepts must be taught to best prepare for a standardized test. As in many cases in education, there is no one-size-fits-all method, and English teachers must use discretion when deviating from following the
three-tiered grammatical instruction method, if that method is the one the teacher has chosen to follow.
Chapter 2

*Defining the Target Student Group and Its Needs*

In keeping with the three-tiered grammatical instruction method outlined in Chapter 1, I would like to focus more on the aspect of student-driven instruction. Grammar instruction, as many contextual grammar scholars like Weaver note, should be adapted to each grade level and each individual student group. In other words, an English teacher may teach junior-level English year after year, yet will most likely teach different grammatical skills each year, depending on the needs of the particular student group. After teaching this particular level so often and by talking with the teachers who work with students in the grades leading up to the junior year, the junior English teacher may have a general idea of the skills she may cover; however, it is up to that teacher to determine what exact skills must be covered after she begins assessing that particular group’s needs herself.

I will focus my analysis in this chapter and my curriculum planning in Chapter 3 on junior-level students. These students will especially benefit from grammatical instruction for a few purposes: one, they will take at least one standardized test (like the ACT); and two, at this level, the classes they take become more college- or career-preparatory in nature, depending on students’ goals. In most secondary schools, juniors are also given more choice in the courses they take as opposed to the often required courses at the freshman and sophomore levels. However, especially in smaller schools, students are offered either one basic English course each year or one course with a remedial, regular, and advanced tracking system. Regardless of the English courses students choose to take in the junior year, the level of importance the junior year holds is high.
The Standardized Test and Its Importance in the English Classroom

The standardized test (like the ACT) and Common Core Standards both serve as baseline tools for junior-level English teachers to use when determining what grammatical concepts students should be learning. In terms of the ACT, at present, twenty-two states (Illinois included) “are using ACT testing and instructional improvement programs statewide to improve the college and work readiness of their students” (“ACT and Statewide Testing”). All colleges and universities in the United States accept ACT scores, and twenty-seven states see more than fifty percent of their graduates take the ACT each year (“The ACT Test”). Though the ACT is widely administered nationwide, junior-level English teachers should closely examine what concepts are covered on whatever standardized test is administered in their state, one example being the SAT. However, since the sample students referenced in this study take the ACT, I will be closely examining that particular exam.

The English portion of the ACT “is a 75-question, 45-minute test covering punctuation, grammar/usage, and sentence structure (in the area of usage/mechanics) and strategy, organization, and style (in the area of rhetorical skills)” (The ACT). One challenge ACT preparation poses for the junior-level English teacher is that the ACT test structure does not cater to the contextual grammar format, as I mentioned in Chapter 1. On the ACT English test, students must read “five prose passages, each one accompanied by multiple-choice test questions. Some questions refer to underlined portions of the passage and offer several alternatives to the underlined portion. Some questions ask about an underlined portion, a section of the passage, or the passage as a whole” (The ACT). Students, then, are not asked to apply their grammatical knowledge in any other way than answering multiple-choice questions; therefore, junior English teachers may have to determine effective ways to prepare students in ways that
deviate from one of the tiers (contextualizing grammar) within the three-tiered grammatical instruction method. Teachers of juniors must also have working knowledge of the ACT writing test, which is a “30-minute essay test that measures your writing skills--specifically those writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses” (The ACT) that was required of all students in Illinois in April 2014. Some colleges and universities require students to take this test portion, which accounts for one-third of a student’s English test score (the other two-thirds coming from the student’s multiple choice score); the ACT website offers a search tool for teachers and students to determine what schools require a score on this test. Though the test does not put as much focus on grammar as the English test, test tips provided on the ACT website do instruct students to “if possible, before time is called . . . correct any mistakes in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling.” One can gather that grammar and usage slip behind content and organization in terms of priority on this test; however, it seems as if the writing test serves as a starting point in testing students on grammatical knowledge in a contextualized way.

Instructors who incorporate standardized test preparation into their yearly curriculum should stay current in their knowledge of major changes associated with this test. To use a personal example, I have taught for nine years and have already seen four changes in the way Illinois’ junior-level students have been tested: first, only the multiple-choice portion was offered in the English section of the ACT; next, the ACT writing test was required of all students; then, the ACT writing test was no longer required for all students (only of students who were attending colleges that required the writing test score); and finally, last year, the ACT writing test was again required for all students. Even another change is on the horizon as states like Illinois look to administer other standardized tests, like the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for
College and Careers (PARCC) assessment (to be explained later in this chapter). Although the ACT was a requirement of all juniors in Illinois as part of the Prairie State Achievement Examination taken in late April 2014 (“Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE)”), the ACT portion of the PSAE will no longer be a requirement of all students in 2015 (Rado). “The exam - a critical requirement for getting into most colleges and given free to high school juniors - will become ‘optional’ for the first time in nearly 15 years, with districts given the choice to administer the ACT” (Rado). Though the ACT test will not be a high school requirement next year, it remains a requirement for admission into colleges and universities. “College-hopeful students who are not given the free ACT [as part of the PSAE] at their schools may be required to pay to take the exam elsewhere” (Rado). Since it is currently so widely accepted by colleges and universities, the ACT will still hold a great deal of importance to many juniors, and in April 2014, Illinois State Superintendent Christopher Koch said, “I do think [a change in standardized tests Illinois juniors take] is [in] the right direction, but at the same time, we feel we’d like to keep the ACT close by. I think we need to see how this new test works and . . . check [students’] performance against the ACT” (Lester). Some leaders of school districts in Illinois are also wary of placing so much importance on a standardized test like PARCC when the ACT is such an instrumental part of college admission. David Schuler, superintendent of Township High School District 214, says, “That test [the ACT] is an opportunity to change people’s lives by allowing people to dream.” Again, instructors need to stay up to date in the standardized testing trends essentially so they can best meet the needs of their students. As an instructor of Illinois juniors, I would choose to keep ACT preparation as part of my curriculum, even if my district decided not to administer the test, since so many of my students are college-bound and will need to take this particular test since scores on the PARCC assessment are not currently accepted for college
admission. As Kerry Lester notes, many students even take the ACT multiple times to achieve their desired scores for college admission and scholarship opportunities. As more changes to standardized testing requirements are made and teachers poll their students on the students’ future plans, teachers can ultimately determine how to best meet the needs of their students by keeping the ACT preparation intact or phasing it out.

The Common Core Standards and Grammatical Instruction

The Common Core Standards can also help junior-level English teachers determine what grammatical concepts are important to teach. In fact, it seems as if the standards are meant to be foolproof for secondary English instructors in determining what they must teach in terms of grammar; one whole section of the standards, entitled Language, is outlined for grades eleven and twelve, among other grade levels (Common Core Standards). Generally speaking, the Common Core Standards essentially serve as nationwide indicators of what should be taught in classrooms to best prepare students for college or career, and these standards must be examined closely, as forty-three of the fifty states (also the District of Columbia) “have adopted” them (Common Core Standards). The “how” these standards are taught is up to individual educators themselves, but the standards essentially help educators nationwide have common concepts to teach to better serve our student population. Though the Language section of standards encompasses more than just grammatical knowledge students should master, the first three standards within this section are specific to grammar study. The Common Core Standards website offers this rationale for teaching grammar to teachers (and any other audience, including parents and administrators): “To build a foundation for college and career readiness in language, students must gain control over many conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics as well as learn other ways to use language to convey meaning effectively.” In
accordance to this rationale, the following Anchor Standards directly related to grammar are identified for grades eleven and twelve:

**Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 1:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 2:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 3:** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. *(Common Core Standards)*

In examining more of the rationale, teachers, among other audiences, can see how the writers of the Common Core Standards themselves seem to be advocates of contextual grammar: “The inclusion of Language standards in their own strand should not be taken as an indication that skills related to conventions, effective language use, and vocabulary are unimportant to reading, writing, speaking and listening; indeed, they are inseparable from such contexts” *(Common Core Standards)*. As I mentioned before, the ACT and Common Core Standards are in no way the only two models the nation’s teachers examine when determining what concepts (grammar included) to teach their students. Instructors need to evaluate the needs of their own students based on many factors, including region. As I have taught in Illinois and have recently moved to Iowa, for example, I would currently choose my focus on the ACT and Common Core Standards. If I was still in Illinois, I would choose to invest more time in analyzing the PARCC assessment and eventually begin building test preparation curriculum aligned to that particular assessment.
But only time will tell how long these particular entities (among other standardized tests) and which particular entities will have so much power in curricular planning.

**PARCC: A Potential Assessment Tool and Curricular Guide of the Future**

One up-and-coming assessment tool, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for Colleges and Careers (PARCC) assessment, will be ready for administration to students in the PARCC states in the 2014–2015 school year (PARCC). The PARCC test will replace the ACT portion as part of the required PSAE administered to Illinois juniors starting in April 2015 (Common Core: Real Learning for Real Life). These computer-based assessments “are aligned with the new, more rigorous Common Core State Standards [and] ensure that every child is on a path to college and career readiness by measuring what students should know at each grade level” (PARCC). At present, fourteen states, including Illinois, make up the partnership (PARCC), so these assessments do not yet have the nationwide presence the ACT and Common Core Standards have. One advantage the PARCC assessment seems to have over the ACT in terms of curriculum preparation for junior-level English teachers is its alignment to the Common Core Standards. If teachers are already using the Common Core Standards to develop grammatical lessons, for example, then it seems as if there would be no additional test preparation needed: Students would (in theory) already be prepared to take the PARCC assessment if their teachers are aligning their lessons to the Common Core Standards. However, more research needs to be done on this new assessment tool to ultimately determine how it will impact curriculum. Also, teachers in PARCC states need to keep in mind that scores on the PARCC assessment are not yet accepted by colleges and universities for admission: “The ACT and SAT will still be the primary college entrance exams” (Common Core: Real Learning for Real Life).
In this latter section of Chapter 2 and all of Chapter 3, I will be examining junior-level student writing samples I have collected to help us move toward the practical utilization of the three-tiered grammatical instruction method. I obtained permission to collect and use these samples from my building principal and district superintendent. Next, I sent permission slips home with students, who, along with their parents, signed, giving me permission to use student writing in this thesis. The samples of writing are from students in a small, rural Midwestern public high school, with a student enrollment near 400, in which I taught. These particular students were enrolled in my English III course, a class required of students to graduate. This course is a basic English course that requires me to teach several “sub-concepts,” including grammar, writing, literature, public speaking, and vocabulary; in other words, this course does not fully focus on composition. At this particular school, students could opt to take Applied English III, English III, or Honors English III. Therefore, we can see how the students enrolled in English III may be quite varied and diverse in terms of ability. For example, I have students in this course who just missed the grade point average requirement to enter the honors course and students who received teacher recommendations to take the English III course after two years in applied, or remedial, courses. In examining and analyzing these writing samples, I want to stress that not all juniors write in this particular fashion or that the grammatical problems that will be identified later are the grammatical problems all juniors have. I want to show how student-driven instruction works; in analyzing these samples, I am able to identify the needs of this particular group of juniors. Their needs are different from last year’s juniors’ needs and will probably be different from next year’s juniors’ needs in terms of grammar instruction.
Examining Student Writing to Develop Group-Specific Grammatical Curriculum

Perhaps one of the most challenging (and, at times – being perfectly honest – frustrating) caveats to student-driven instruction is the concept of differing student abilities. One could imagine that the range of ability is that much greater in a regular English course, a course that seems to be a catch-all for students who are not in an honors or remedial (applied) course. My English III course was no different. Here are three samples of student text, originating from literary analysis essays assigned after students read the novel *Frankenstein*, that show the vast range of ability in terms of application of grammatical concepts, most specifically comma usage:

**Text 1**
The monster at first does not realize what he has been doing, he did not realize he was causing trouble or harm, he was not taught anything by Victor but once he loses his trust with humans he uses his knowledge and what he has learned to seek revenge on humanity and mainly Victor for abandoning him, making him ugly, not making the companion, and lying.

**Text 2**
Eventually with the way he was being treated by humans made him angry and he started to hate all humans, leading to killing almost any human he saw.

**Text 3**
Even though the monster was treated poorly before, he thought he’d try again with this family, hoping they’d be different.

It is a struggle to understand where thoughts break in Text 1 due to the lack of commas and the presence of a run-on sentence; it is quite easy to see that Text 1 has originated from a student with little understanding of comma usage. Text 2, on the other hand, lacks commas as well, yet it is mostly comprehensible, representative of quite average writing. Text 3 shows mastery of comma usage, setting off two subordinate clauses from the main independent clause. All of these samples came from students in the same section of English III.
Now that the varying of ability has been established, I would like to venture back to the three-tiered approach defined in Chapter 1: grammar instruction that is contextual, student-driven, and minimal (in amount of skills but fewer skills in depth). The student-driven tier is best achieved when the teacher can analyze the students’ writing at the beginning of the school year. In analyzing the student samples in the group I am sharing here, I identified three main grammatical concepts in which this student group needs further instruction: comma usage, colon usage, and agreement in pronoun and antecedent. I identified such concepts by reading through student writing once without assessing. I then wrote down (as I read through) grammatical errors I noticed in each paper. After I had written the grammatical error down on the paper, every time I saw the error again, I would place a tally next to the error. The top three to five errors made would then be the three to five grammatical concepts I would choose to focus my efforts on with this student group. The amount of time a teacher wants to spend on the three to five grammatical concepts is entirely at the teacher’s discretion; that is essentially how the student-driven tier of grammar instruction works. For example, if I were to notice that the majority of my students were mastering these three to five concepts, as evidenced in their writing (note the use of the conceptual grammar approach), then I may move on and assess a new set of writing samples. However, I have yet to teach a student group who has fully mastered the three to five grammatical concepts I identified as needing improvement at the beginning of the school year. English teachers will have their own unique experiences in the classroom, and again, student-driven instruction calls for teachers to make pedagogical decisions different from the ones made by their colleagues.

If we examined the three samples of text above once more, we can see the first two texts lack commas in key spots, hindering readability, though the second text is not nearly as severe in
number of comma errors made. But as we can see by examining text 3, not all students are struggling with comma usage. The range in ability calls for differentiated instruction, which will be further explained in Chapter 3 with accompanying lesson plans.

Another error made quite frequently in this set of student essays was in colon usage. Some students struggled in using colons prior to lists, yet other students used colons dividing independent clauses (in which the second independent clause expands upon or explains the first clause) with ease.

**Text 4**
An example of losing innocence would be: Once one already messed up or made a bad choice, he or she may not realize it at first, but eventually that person might realize all they have done and feel sorry for those affected and even for themselves.

**Text 5**
In the book, people are judged by their appearance and by the way they look: whether it’s Victor’s creation because he looks like monster or even Victor himself seeming crazy because he speaks of a monster he created.

**Text 6**
In today’s society people isolate themselves for various reasons: they don’t want to be judged, they are scared of other people, and they think that they have no one anymore.

In talking with my colleagues who teach the lower-level grades, I have realized that colon usage was not stressed or explored in great detail in those courses. Therefore, I can gather that using colons other than for listing is a relatively new concept for this student group. Text 4 shows a student incorrectly using a colon to introduce a list, yet in Texts 5 and 6, one can see students experimenting with colon usage in new ways, though the colon placed in Text 5 is incorrectly placed in between an independent clause and a fragment, while the colon is placed correctly in Text 6. But research shows when students test out newly-acquired grammar skills in their
writing, they are apt to make more errors. According to Nunan, referencing Mina Shaughnessy, “It is not unusual for people acquiring a skill to get worse before they get better and for writers to err more as they venture more” (74). William Strong agrees and identifies the presence of more grammatical or syntactic errors as evidence of “risktaking” (73).

The last grammatical skill I found I should spend time teaching is the concept of pronoun/antecedent agreement. And this error came out of yet another usage concept. Several students in this course wanted to use the second-person pronoun you, and I wanted them to explore new ways to communicate the same idea without the informal connotation you awkwardly provides in a formal essay. Therefore, we discussed using alternate wording to replace you like people, someone, some, one, etc. However, as a result, I noticed a drastic increase in the instances of pronoun/antecedent agreement errors. As Shaughnessy states, since my students were “acquiring a [new] skill,” as their teacher, I could expect to see a shift in error from the usage of you to errors in pronoun/antecedent agreement (Nunan 74). I should also mention that though there were several pronoun/antecedent agreement errors, not all came via correcting the usage of the pronoun you.

Text 7
Isolation not only hurts a person but their family as well.

Text 8
Has anyone ever dreamed of creating a monster with random parts; do you think society would accept this creature?

In Texts 7 and 8, we can see the glaring errors in pronoun/antecedent agreement, with the singular antecedent person in Text 7 with the plural pronoun their and the shift in voice from third-person anyone to second-person you in Text 8, two different problems that ensued when
students tried to get rid of the *you* pronouns, though one *you* was left in Text 8. As the instructor examining these student samples, I would be making note of the varying facets of pronoun/antecedent agreement I would need to cover. It makes sense to combat these usage problems at this time in their grammar education since these junior-level students are beginning that transition into more academic writing as their curriculum becomes more college-preparatory in nature.

**Text 9**

Has a person ever lost innocence?

**Text 10**

Imagine a world where everywhere a person goes, society judges him or her causing that person to never want to go out in public and hate his or her existence.

Technically, no pronoun/antecedent agreement errors exist in Texts 9 and 10. However, simply replacing the word *you* with a *person* is not always the best choice, as the sentence in Text 9 is awkwardly worded. I would also make a note to discuss with the class about avoiding the *his-or-her* construction by using plural antecedents after examining Text 10. Though like Text 9, it is not grammatically incorrect, it could be improved for better clarity.

**Text 11**

A ride on an emotional roller coaster; that is exactly what a reader will experience as he/she dives into the classic work of Mary Shell[e]'s *Frankenstein*.

**Text 12**

It has become easy to get wrapped up into and spend more time busying one’s time with a subject or activity that involves no outside interaction with others.

Texts 11 and 12 show correct pronoun and antecedent agreement, and I would most likely use these two sentences as examples to show the class when approaching this lesson. Though Text
11 utilizes the *he/she* construction, it is only found once as opposed to multiple times in Text 10. In chapter 3, I will further discuss using student samples when teaching grammatical skills. On another note, I especially like how Text 12 pretty much avoids using an antecedent to the word *one* so as not to make the error in the first place. I would like to explore that “avoidance” with students through imitation exercises.

Yet another aspect in student-driven grammar instruction to consider is the severity in error. Would I teach pronoun/antecedent agreement had nearly all students constructed their sentences like the one labeled Text 10? Most likely not. Teachers have to make prudent decisions in what they deem are glaring errors. Minor errors (or awkward construction) may not impede reading; therefore, they may not be worth the investment of valuable class time, especially if one is following the less-is-more mentality and only choosing a few concepts to teach. It should also be noted that several scholars referenced in Chapter 1, like Gribbin and Skretta, would have reservation in developing student-driven instruction based on what students *do not* know as opposed to building off what they *do* know. Personal preference and teaching style come into play here; I have found success in helping students improve their errors, yet I can see how rewarding students’ background knowledge would foster a more positive learning environment. Whichever way an instructor chooses to approach the determining of grammatical skills to be taught (by building on student successes or improving student errors), information can be gathered by examining student writing for better insight.
Applying the Three-Tiered Grammatical Instruction Model: Getting Started

As was previously determined, research shows that grammar instruction needs to fulfill three tiers: It should be student-driven in terms of type of instruction and lesson topics, contextual in that students should see that grammar is not separate from reading or writing, and minimal in that teachers should not seek to overwhelm their students in the number of concepts they cover within one school year. Putting this three-tiered model into practice takes some planning on the front end, though instructors will need to do a considerable amount of planning as the year goes on after teachers have determined what skill set in which the students need the most amount of work. As the year progresses, teachers will also need to evaluate what their students need: are the students thriving when working with one particular skill but struggling with another? Is the student group as a whole grasping all of the concepts that were determined as needing improvement at the beginning of the year? Do new grammatical skills need to be introduced due to overall mastery of the skills that were identified as weaknesses at the beginning of the year? Each student group presents its own set of challenges, and every school year will be different. What is most important, though, is the teacher’s understanding that no “one-size-fits-all” approach to grammatical instruction has been proven to be successful. All of the methods discussed below also adhere to the Common Core Anchor Standards for Language/Literacy, as referenced in Chapter 2:

Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Anchor Language/Literacy Standard 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (Common Core Standards)

Teachers should start assessing their students’ grammatical skills as soon as possible. One way to do so is to assign a writing assessment. I have started nearly all of my classes in this manner for several years. However, calling it a writing assessment may present challenges. As we know with high school students, wording is key, and I like to explain to students that this writing assignment serves as a means of initial communication between student and teacher. I am also honest with them in that I communicate that I am gathering information on their grammatical abilities, among other writing skills, like organization and coherence.

Another aspect to the writing assessment teachers should consider is providing class time to complete the assignment. How students perform in class will give the teacher a better indication of students’ true abilities as writers. When a teacher allows students to work on this type of assignment outside of the classroom, students may seek help from other individuals, which will cloud the teacher’s ability to assess what students truly know about grammar. I offer students at least two class periods to complete the assignment. Though in-class writing assignments have their limitations, including putting time pressure on students (with perhaps even more pressure and challenges placed on students with writing and language disabilities), they are not unlike the writing assignments required of them on some standardized tests and even in future college in-class essay exams. More importantly, though, paying attention to the task at
hand (determining what students do and do not know in terms of grammar), the instructor will want to get the truest sense of what students struggle with the use of resources like parents, other students, and various computer programs that will catch errors for them.

It is equally important for the students to understand that this particular writing assignment is a low-stakes assessment, meaning what they produce is not going to be heavily assessed using strict guidelines or detailed rubrics. I often make this writing assessment a credit/no credit grade: If students turn in fully-finished copies, they receive full credit. If they do not, they do not receive any. However, with the considerable amount of class time offered, most students turn these types of assignments in with little difficulty. Teachers must also understand that the way in which they read, mark up, and assign a grade to this assignment is quite dissimilar to the way teachers would normally assess student writing. I have had most success when my comments really have nothing much to do with the writing itself, when I simply respond as a reader. When students tell teachers about themselves in these types of pieces, teachers can really establish strong rapport by simply commenting in a caring manner that essentially establishes conversation. As Richard Straub suggests, “Comments that create real dialogue on the page . . . allow students to see value in what they have to say” (374). Some teachers may choose to tell students about assessment practices prior to the students turning in the writing assessments, yet other teachers may want to inspire students to create their best work by leading them to write as if they were being assessed beyond a credit/no credit system. The most important component that must be communicated is that the teacher will be taking a closer look at grammatical skill exhibited in this assignment.
It is common practice for writing teachers to start with narrative, “tell about yourself” writing assignments, as it is commonly known that since students are well-versed on the particular subject matter (themselves), the struggle to further research a topic that may be somewhat unfamiliar is removed from this beginning-of-the-year assessment. Many writing topics would work for this type of assessment; however, when I work with upperclassmen, I like to provide a topic in which students can reflect on their future. See Appendix A for a personal statement writing assessment, along with attached informal rubric, if the teacher chooses to assign a grade to this particular assessment. However, a credit/no credit assessment technique may work better to take the pressure off students at the beginning of the school year since the teacher has not yet taught the students much that can be assessed.

Once instructors receive the writing assessments from students, it is now time for them to determine which skills in which students need further instruction. Teachers need to develop a system for examining the writing and ultimately determining where instruction is needed. For years, I have used a system in which I read each essay once and make at least one “conversating” written comment on each student’s work. As I read through each essay, I try to identify the one to three main grammatical problems this particular student does not seem to grasp. After reading each essay, I write down the problems I am noticing in each paper on a separate sheet of paper of my own. Once I have already written the particular skill down, if I come across another essay in which the particular skill seems to be problematic, I will place a tally mark next to where I have written the particular problem down on my sheet of paper. After this seemingly informal assessment, I identify three to five grammatical skills that I need to cover both based on how many tally marks each grammatical skill gets and the severity of the errors made. Teachers have to weigh how important fixing such errors would be to student writing as a whole. For example,
if a usage error like *affect* versus *effect* has more tallies than sentence fragments, the instructor may want to pursue lessons that eliminate sentence fragments simply because sentence fragments impede readability much more than minor usage errors. These skills will serve as my starting point in my three-tiered grammar instruction for the school year. Now the planning will begin.

**Differentiating the Grammatical Instruction for Maximum Student Benefit**

English teachers at all levels need to consider best practices in not only *what* should be taught but *how* material should be taught. Though the Common Core Standards outline what students should be able to do in the corresponding grade levels, the standards give teachers creative license in *how* the standards should be taught. One such pedagogical movement that has gained popularity nationwide is the differentiation movement. Differentiation, which is generally described as personalized instruction, is not a new concept, however. In 1953, *Educational Leadership* published an entire issue titled “The Challenge of Individual Difference,” which was devoted to this educational practice (Snyder). Over the years, differentiated instruction has found its way into thousands of classrooms, regardless of grade level, due to teachers and educational leaders, including administrators, buying in to the set of beliefs it was founded upon, as defined by former public school teacher, differentiation specialist, and University of Virginia professor of educational leadership Carol Tomlinson:

- Students who are the same age differ in their readiness to learn, their interests, their styles of learning, their experiences, and their life circumstances.

- The differences in students are significant enough to make a major impact on what students need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn it, and the support they need from teachers to learn it well.
• Students will learn best when supportive adults push them slightly beyond where they can work without assistance.

• Students will learn best when they can make a connection between the curriculum and their interests and life experiences.

• Students will learn best when learning opportunities are natural.

• Students are more effective learners when classrooms create a sense of community in which students feel significant and respected.

• The central job of schools is to maximize the capacity of each student. (6-7)

In examining these core principles that drive differentiated instruction, we can see how differentiation opposes standardization, meaning it may be difficult for the junior-level English teacher, for example, to use differentiation to teach standardized concepts like Common Core Standards and prepare students for a standardized test like the ACT. In fact, as Tomlinson notes, “[b]y definition, differentiation is wary of approaches to teaching and learning that standardize. Standard-issue students are rare, and educational approaches that ignore academic diversity in favor of standardization are likely to be counterproductive in reaching the full range of learners” (7). Trying to reconcile standard-based practices or tools like the Common Core Standards with differentiation techniques may seem daunting to many teachers. However, it is important to keep student needs in mind when planning effective instruction. We can keep the Common Core Standards and standardized test guidelines as our common goals, yet how we craft instruction to meet these goals can be student-driven and differentiated.
If junior-level English teachers set out to discover what their students specifically need in terms of grammar instruction, they have actually begun the differentiating process. By allowing their instruction and lesson plans to be directed by student needs, they are successfully implementing differentiated instruction without too much effort. But most teachers want to take differentiation a step further. It all depends on each teacher’s comfort level with differentiation. Some may want to implement differentiation based on student ability level, while others may want to infuse students’ individual interests into the process of planning a unit. As an instructor, I am most comfortable at this point in my career integrating differentiation with grammar instruction by ability level. At times, I will assign groups in which students are at varied levels of ability (in a group of three, for example, one would find a high achiever, an average achiever, and a low achiever), and in other instances, I will assign groups in which all students within the group have similar abilities (all high achievers, for example). The initial writing assessment discussed above would help the junior-level English teacher begin to figure out ability levels, though it is important to note that achievement levels cannot be concretely determined by one writing assignment alone. Throughout the school year, teachers should be assessing how students are improving in the grammatical areas defined as needing improvement at the beginning of the year. Perhaps some students the teacher has deemed average in ability may quickly improve and become high-achieving students, for example. In the following sample units, I will show how to differentiate instruction by grouping based on similar or different ability levels, though teachers can utilize differentiation using other grouping factors, like student interests, as Tomlinson explains in the defining of the differentiation core set of beliefs mentioned above.

After the instructor has determined the grammatical skills in which the student set needs the most improvement, the time comes for the instructor to plan total immersion grammar
instruction, meaning the class will learn and practice grammatical principles in each unit taught in the English classroom. I like to rationalize that there are no “grammar units,” but grammar practice should be found in each unit. Typical units taught in the junior English classroom include writing units, literature units, and standardized test preparation units.

Making a Contextual Grammatical Component through All Writing Stages

As previously discussed, contextual grammar requires the students to apply the grammatical skills they are working with in the context of each unit, regardless of the unit topic. Though it may seem simple to connect grammar skills to writing, it is important to note that it does take some preparation on the instructor’s part. For my writing units, I like to contextualize in the drafting, editing, and final draft assessment stages. As Weaver notes, it is best to let grammatical instruction in the various stages of writing happen naturally so as not to disrupt (but rather enhance) the students’ writing: “We teachers occasionally interrupt students while they are writing and teach a mini-lesson on mechanics when the need arises. But we are not accustomed to teaching the use of effective language structures in the context of students’ own writing” (Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing 57). The first step to contextual grammar in a writing unit is to allow the students to have time to draft in class while the instructor is present. This time facilitates great grammatical lessons on the fly, which may be somewhat intimidating for teachers who like structure. I have found mirroring exercises to be effective in the drafting process, and Weaver suggests using student work as examples. At this point in the grammatical component to writing unit, there is a bit of unpredictability. In a mirroring activity, students will attempt to imitate effective sentences (in whatever concept on which an instructor is focusing). In this case, for example, I would look for effective sentences that correctly use colons. These sentences would generate from student work, if at all possible. Weaver explains how to
“naturally and easily” contextualize grammar through a drafting process: While I (as the instructor) am “walking around the room answering questions and offering praise,” I would take time to find students “spontaneously producing” sentences that correctly used colons (57), much like Text 6 referenced in Chapter 2:

In today’s society people isolate themselves for various reasons: they don’t want to be judged, they are scared of other people, and they think that they have no one anymore.

After discovering a sentence like Text 6, I would “write the sentence on the board and interject a brief mini-lesson showing the other writers in the class how they too can use [the colon similarly]” (57). At this point, I would show how the writer effectively used a colon to introduce a list. Here it may be important to also teach a bit of grammar terminology (for example, dependent clauses and independent clauses), as some scholars referenced in Chapter 1 suggested. At this point in the particular context, I would discuss how the independent clause naturally leads into the colon and the list with the lead-in phrase for various reasons. It is also important to have back-up sentences ready, as it is probable the instructor may not stumble upon a sample student sentence. After my mini-lesson, I would then ask students to get into groups to “mirror” this sample sentence. Essentially, the students would use the subject of their papers for content in creating sentences that similarly (and correctly) use the colon. This mirroring exercise would be assessed by the instructor orally; the groups would be required to share their answers via reading them aloud or writing/typing them on the board.

Differentiating the Grammatical Component: Sample Groupings

As referenced at the beginning of this chapter, differentiation strategies would be used throughout the contextual grammar exercises. I suggest instructors vary grouping styles so students do not anticipate what they (both students and instructors) are doing and the grouping
methods the instructors have. One benefit for grouping in similar ability levels is that the instructor would know quite easily which groups need the most guidance. Another benefit would lie in the instructor’s ability to vary how much work each group would have to complete. For example, an instructor may require groups of students who struggle with colon usage to construct three mirroring sentences, whereas a group of students who have nearly mastered colon usage may have to construct five mirroring sentences using varying “signal phrases” to introduce each colon. Teachers must remember that what works for one student group will not necessarily work for another; the key principle that will aid each instructor to effectively differentiate is to devise differing tasks for each group that will effectively challenge each group. Differentiated groups are not always formed based on ability level. For instance, I have grouped students based on common interests, as Tomlinson suggests (6). In a research writing unit, for example, one research topic I have used in the past involves the students researching a career of their choice. For a mirroring exercise, it may make sense, then, to group students who are researching similar careers together, as one of the goals the students would have in completing this mirroring exercise is to incorporate the sentences they construct into the drafts of their papers. In constructing these sentences together, students may be able to share pertinent research while working on the grammatical skill at hand.

The Grammatical Component in the Revision Stage: More Mirroring and Identification Exercises

As students move from drafting to revising, the stakes should get higher in terms of assessment and difficulty. This point in a writing unit may be a good time for teachers to evaluate student need (prior to assessment). Do students need more mirroring exercises to fully master this particular grammatical skill? Am I ready to move students to the next phase in the grammatical component of this writing unit? If students are in need of extra practice via
mirroring exercises, the instructor could require the students to turn in a number of sentences that correctly use the colon, for example. Appendix B (see attached) is a sample assignment students could complete. Differentiation can be used here based on number of sentences required, although varying the number of sentences required is only one differentiation strategy. It may be helpful, albeit a bit time-consuming, to write students’ names on the worksheets along with the number of sentences the students would be required to complete or differentiated requirements based on student ability. For example, it may overwhelm a student struggling with colon usage to write five mirrored sentences, whereas it may not challenge a student who has nearly mastered the skill. The instructor may require the students who grasp the particular concept to experiment with different lead-in phrasing before the colon, for example.

Once students have written effective mirrored sentences using the colon and those sentences have been incorporated into the paper, students may be ready to move on to identification exercises. Students would trade papers with their peers and would read their peers’ papers, specifically looking for colon usage at this point. This exercise could coincide with peer revision exercises that focus on content and would most likely come after a content revision since surface errors are not nearly as detrimental to the focus of an essay when compared to problems associated with content. In these particular identification exercises, students would evaluate if their peers are correctly using colons. At times, I have required students to use a set number of colons to ensure they are practicing the skill we have been developing in class. Therefore, prior to the identification exercises, I would have communicated to the students how many colons should be present in the essay. After that expectation has been established, I would ask students to evaluate how colons are used in the essays they are reading. If the colons are used correctly, I would ask students to explain why they think they are correctly used. If they are not
used correctly, I would ask students to help their peers correct the sentences. Depending on class size, the teacher could assess the students orally by walking through the classroom and asking each student what he or she has discovered in the paper. Students may also be asked to read aloud sample sentences with correct colon usage. Depending on specific needs, this exercise could also be assessed a bit more formally. The instructor would require the peer reviewer to write down a set number of sentences in which colon usage was attempted. Students would then have to write down the sentences (any set number depending on class and individual student needs) and either explain why the sentences correctly use colons or show how the sentence could be revised and colon usage corrected. Not only would the concept of colon usage be reinforced, students would also be getting help with colon usage prior to turning in the final draft.

Assessing the Grammatical Component

Since the final draft of any paper serves as the student’s best effort, it makes sense to assess grammatical skill at this stage, even if the grammatical skill has been assessed prior to the final draft stage. In most cases in which I am assessing an essay for both its content and its grammar, I will build a grammar component in an assessment rubric (See Appendix C.). In the final draft stage, students will be assessed in how they effectively use colons. Since this assessment has been preceded by several practice exercises (and perhaps even a few lower-stakes assessments), students would either receive full credit for properly using colons or no credit for improperly using colons. Some instructors may choose to award a point or two per attempt at using a colon; the assessment stage is where the teacher can again express creative license in setting assessment guidelines more in line with his or her pedagogical principles.
Developing a Student-Centered and Minimalistic Grammatical Component: How Much is Too Much?

Writing units, especially researched-based ones, can be difficult to teach in themselves without the infusion of a grammatical component. Several of the junior groups I have taught over the years have struggled with basic research concepts, as they had not previously completed a research project of the magnitude that I was requiring. In that case, I would still teach grammar alongside research concepts and writing fundamentals; however, instead of focusing on three grammatical skills, I may choose to focus on one skill. Instructors need to exercise careful judgment in determining what their student groups can handle, and just like the units that we teach will vary year to year, so will the number of grammatical skills per unit our students can handle. It is really not about how much material we can muddle through; great success can be found in students mastering one skill as opposed to being average in the utilization of three skills, for example. I thought it best to use the student group I referred to in Chapter 2 as the sample student group for the sample grammatical components I would discuss in this chapter. Based on classroom observations (in-class work, previous student writing samples, and etcetera), I only chose to teach one grammatical concept per major essay. However, what works for my student group may not work for all other student groups; some students may need to be challenged with more than one grammar skill to be stressed per writing unit. The skill I chose to stress was the correct usage of the colon. Here I am establishing two of the three tiers of the three-tiered approach: I am practicing the “less is more” concept by focusing on one grammatical concept, and I am ensuring my instruction is student-driven. By analyzing previous writing examples, I am choosing to focus on a skill my students need to improve. I am also professionally evaluating how much grammatical instruction my students can handle in this already-challenging unit of research paper writing. Soon after determining how many skills I
should cover and *what* skill(s) to cover, I would ensure my grammatical instruction follows the expectations of the third tier: making grammar instruction contextual.

*Implementing Grammar Instruction in a Sample Novel Unit*

For most teachers, connecting grammar instruction to writing seems like a logical concept. Students exercise their grammar usage when communicating; therefore, when they write, they will, in theory, be practicing the grammatical skills we have been working on in class. But contextualizing grammar outside of a writing unit takes a bit more planning on the part of the teacher. Most teachers of a general English course require their students to read at least one novel. Therefore, it may be helpful, then, to use a typical novel unit to show how grammar can be contextualized outside of a writing unit. As we all have witnessed in practice as educators and have most likely read or heard about in various professional development endeavors, reading has a profound positive intellectual impact on students. Citing Arthur N. Applebee and Stephen Krashen, Weaver notes:

Students who report reading more tend to be better writers. The differences are most noticeable in writing style. Both of us [Weaver and co-author Jonathan Bush] have had students who were effective writers though they had never had any instruction in grammar. They have claimed, and we agree, that their effective use of grammatical constructions derived from their wide reading. On the other hand, we, our students, and even researcher Stephen Krashen all note that even voracious readers do not necessarily learn concepts like subject-verb agreement or conventional punctuation through reading, though they do learn ways to put words together effectively. (*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* 33)
Just as students come into our general English courses at varying ability levels, they also come into our courses with varying “tolerances” for reading. I have had students who would rather read the entire class period and risk failing assignments because reading is so pleasurable to them in the same class as students who struggle to finish a chapter in a novel by its assigned due date. Weaver notes here that even the readers who pore through novel after novel need guidance in grammatical instruction, though some of their grammatical skills may be subconsciously learned through the reading process. And perhaps, if teachers skillfully navigate this type of grammatical component in a fictional reading unit, students who are struggling readers can use grammatical rules and skills learned to become better readers and writers.

*Introducing Grammar while Introducing Literature: Skill Practice and Identification Exercises*

Most students are still required to read classic works in their English classes. A common complaint teachers often get about canonical literature is the “boring” factor, so some teachers have sought to move away from teaching the literary classics. However, the Common Core Standards, though not explicitly, seem to advocate teaching some classical literature through their supplemental text suggestions list, titled Appendix B (*Common Core Standards*). Though the Common Core State Standards do not require teachers to teach certain texts, several of the texts suggested for grade eleven, for example, are classical works, including Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (*Common Core Standards*). More importantly, though, the authors of the Common Core Standards want to ensure students are being age-appropriately challenged when it comes to reading levels, and classic texts often present that challenge: “The Common Core State Standards include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards” (*Common Core Standards*).
One text I have often used at the junior level is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, as it has proven to adequately challenge my students but has an intriguing plot line to keep them (mostly) interested. Classic literature like *Frankenstein* often also presents grammatical challenges to students as they encounter longer sentences with different syntax than they would in contemporary literature. Perhaps examining the grammatical structure of some sample sentences in the novel would aid students in both understanding the grammatical skill at hand and the events in the novel.

Below are two sentences found in Letter 1, the opening “chapter” of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*:

Sentence 1
“I arrived here yesterday; and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare, and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking” (Shelley, letter 1).

Sentence 2
“But, supposing all these conjectures to be false, you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine” (Shelley, letter 1).

Using these sentences and my target student group as examples, I would choose to discuss comma usage at this stage in the novel, after I had already identified comma usage as a skill in which my students needed improvement and determined how the novel we are reading can work as a teaching tool in terms of grammar. I would read these sentences with the students. As a class or in differentiated groups (based on any of the factors previously discussed), I would ask students to break down the important parts to each sentence, essentially defining all of the messages being conveyed in each sentence. After determining the meaning present in each
sentence, we would then move the conversation to discuss comma placement. In the first sentence, we would discuss the placement of the semicolon after *yesterday* and the comma after welfare, essentially analyzing why she chose what she chose punctuation-wise and what function it is serving. In the first sentence, for example, perhaps the semicolon creates a more abrupt break in thought when compared to the comma used later in the sentences. The semicolon, in other words, creates a stronger break to clue the reader that the thought being expressed in front of the semicolon is different from what is expressed after, expressing a *major* break in thought as opposed to a *minor* break in thought with the comma placement after *welfare*. I would then ask them to examine Sentence 2 using the same principles discussed above. We would discuss if the semicolon/comma usage in Sentence 2 reflects the theory we discovered in Sentence 1. If it does not, we could rewrite the sentence by changing the punctuation to hear how it might have been written today. We would probably even review when a semicolon is warranted and when a comma is to be used.

The challenge that sometimes comes along with teaching grammar through classic literature is that the author may not adhere to guidelines for correct usage that students are being taught. But here the teacher can create teachable moments. Now, to some, rewriting a classical piece of literature is more than frowned upon. How I choose to approach this dilemma, however, is to explain to my students how writing styles evolve over time. Shelley’s sentence structure is not *poorer* than what we are used to in our contemporary world; it is just different. Sometimes when students are allowed to work with the language they are reading and paraphrase it themselves, they understand the ideas being expressed more clearly. One of the biggest goals we teachers have in teaching a novel unit is a strong foundation of comprehension for all of our students, and by working with the grammatical structure and meaning of the sentences, perhaps
students may come to a better understanding of Walton’s thoughts expressed here. *Frankenstein* is just one example of a classic novel that can be utilized, and the above sample sentences are used to show how I would meet the needs of the students in my target group. Instructors would have to determine what novels or literary pieces best meet the needs of their student groups and also determine which grammatical skills could be best contextualized to the literature chosen.

After working with a few sample sentences like the ones listed above, instructors could assign their students the challenge of finding a decided-upon number of sentences in each assigned reading section in which they see the semicolon/comma pairing used in a similar fashion. Depending on the level of progress at this point, the instructor could decide to assess students in their knowledge of comma function or to simply offer another practice opportunity. This identification exercise could be repeated as many times as needed.

*Mirroring Exercises*

Classic literature often stands the test of time for several reasons, and one such reason is often the author’s unique writing style. As described in the writing unit, the students could complete mirroring exercises, though this time they would not be mirroring a peer’s work but rather the work of the author whose novel they are currently reading. In my case, I would choose to guide my students in writing more complex sentences using multiple commas and one semicolon. After discussing the functions of semicolons and commas, the students could generate their own sentences using this punctuation for the purposes discussed in class.

Some practicing teachers like Doniger and Mary Ehrenworth have used classical literature to either elicit discussions on writers’ grammatical styles or to emulate writer style through mirroring exercises. When adding a grammatical component to his literature unit,
Doniger used a lesson on the fragment to discuss how fragments are acceptable (and even powerful) in literature but may come across as erroneous on the writer’s part in “formal, academic writing” (102). He showed his students the following opening paragraph in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*: “A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State’s motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY” (102).

Doniger began his discussion by asking students to identify subjects, then look for verbs (102). When students realized no verbs were present, the class, with Doniger’s guidance, discussed how meaning can be derived without verbs (102). Ehrenworth took her grammatical component in a literature unit a step further, asking students to emulate the use of parentheses in Nabokov’s *Lolita*, using the following sample sentence: “My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three” (92). As Ehrenworth explains, “We talked first about the parentheses, and the students imagined what ‘picnic comma lightning’ might imply. Then we noticed the way the sentence was set up, so that it told something about the mother and suggested something in its tone” (92). In using the concept of the mirroring exercise, then, after said class discussion, one of Ehrenworth’s students found a fresh, stylistic way to communicate an idea:

Student notebook entry: My mother couldn’t keep me when I was twelve.

Prompt/Model: My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three.

New student writing: My not-so-loving mother felt unable (welfare, the projects) to keep me when I was twelve. (Ehrenworth 92)
We see here how the student’s new sentence conveys more meaning in a much more stylistic way. The same can be said for comma and semicolon usage as well. With a little bit of guidance on the instructor’s part, the students could explore new ways to use commas and semicolons to convey different meanings and separate differing thoughts.

In terms of assessing the mirroring exercise, it would be fairly simple for the instructor to use the template outlined in Appendix B to accompany the grammatical component in the novel unit, with only a few minor changes needed to better fit the task at hand. Also, in my case, I chose to assign a literary analysis essay to assess my students’ knowledge of *Frankenstein* at the end of the unit. In my rubric, then, I could very easily include a component like the one outlined in Appendix C to assess my students’ correct usage of commas in their essays. In concluding the discussion of how to add a grammatical component to a typical novel unit, we can see that the component follows the three-tiered method: It stays contextual in that the material came from the novel we were reading. It stays student-driven through the initial analysis and periodic, follow-up analysis of skills students are still needing to improve. It stays minimal as well; here I have described one grammatical component that accompanies what has proven to be a difficult text for my regular juniors to read, though, as discussed previously in the writing unit section, it is up to the instructor to determine how many grammatical components students can handle within the construct of the overarching unit at hand.

*Standardized Test Preparation*

With the completion of one or more writing units and one or more novel units, the instructor begins to think about the year coming to a close. Many of our students, however, are thinking about taking an important standardized test. Therefore, junior-level English teachers must consider teaching a standardized test preparation unit at this point in the year. That unit
may focus on the ACT, the SAT, perhaps even the PARCC assessment: Instructors need to meet
the specific needs of their students. Opinions on “teaching to the test” vary. Some junior-level
English teachers scoff at the idea of preparing students for standardized tests inside the
classroom, while others start preparing their students at the beginning of the school year through
various test prep exercises. I have found that most of the colleagues I have networked with in my
own buildings, through professional development workshops, and through taking master’s
courses see both sides to the test preparation battle. It may make some instructors uncomfortable
to “teach to a test,” yet so much rides on such tests for the students that it seems inappropriate to
avoid even some preparation. As Weaver notes in *The Grammar Plan Book*, “As caring and
responsible teachers, we can’t just ignore the tests. They are a reality and, sadly, a factor by
which not only our students but also we - and our schools and school systems - will be
evaluated” (65).

*Maintaining the Three-Tiered Approach*

Using the three-tiered grammar instruction model may make planning a standardized test
preparation unit much easier. First, the grammatical instruction will be contextual in this unit
when the instructor assesses students’ needs when it comes to the standardized test at hand.
Much like the process the instructor would have completed with the writing assessment
discussed at the beginning of chapter 3, the instructor needs to determine what types of questions
or the subjects covered on the specific test at hand, like the ACT, that are giving the student
group the most trouble. The easiest way I have found to determine where students need to
improve on the ACT is to give a practice ACT. I pass out a copy of a past ACT English test and
have my students take the test. If instructors cannot locate tests to give their students, they can
use a website, March2Success, which is administered by the U.S. Army. This website includes
practice ACT tests that are automatically scored when the students are finished testing. The website will also show students the specific questions they missed and correct answers for all questions missed. If I have my students take the test on paper, then I will usually score the test for them. This score serves as a baseline to mark improvement during and after the ACT preparation unit. Once all of my juniors have taken the same practice ACT test, we determine together the top five missed questions. The topics covered in these top five missed questions then serve as the focus in my ACT test preparation unit. It has been my experience over the years that even the students who score the highest scores on the practice tests still miss at least one or two of the top five missed questions; in fact, I have never had a student who answered all five of the top five missed questions correctly. Therefore, the instructor can rest assured that the topics of this unit are helping all to improve their grammatical skills for this important test and beyond, in future writing endeavors. By administering a pre-test to students, the instructor has ensured the grammar instruction is student-centered as opposed to teaching the same grammatical concepts year-in and year-out, even if one student group may not need further instruction in those areas.

Since the standardized preparation unit would be taught in the second semester, closer to the time of the test, which is administered (or will be offered in 2015) to juniors in late April in Illinois, perhaps the student group would be ready to discuss new grammatical skills, as the three to five skills the instructor would have identified at the beginning of the year would (hopefully) be mastered by most by the end of the school year. It has been my experience in teaching an ACT preparation unit that the skills that are giving the students the most trouble are ones that students have not typically studied much in previous courses or in the junior-level course. In other words, the instructor must be prepared to aid in the development of five new skills in this unit. Again, though the instructor must do yet more planning on the front end in yet another unit,
it may be somewhat of a consolation that the instructor has done such a good job in developing
the other three to five skills throughout the school year that the students no longer need
assistance in those areas.

Once the instructor has determined the top five skills needing improvement based on the
most commonly missed questions, it is time to go over the questions with the students as a class,
using pedagogical creative license here in determining if this instruction will be done with the
class as a whole or in groupings. Once the teacher has gone over the questions missed on the
initial pre-test, it would be time for the teacher to locate a second and a third past practice test,
the second to use in skill development and the third to use for post-testing purposes. Again, the
March2Success website is a useful tool if hard copies of the ACT tests cannot be located. The
instructor would then locate the questions in the second test that correspond with the skills that
need to be covered. One sample skill that may need further development (again, depending on
the needs of the individual student group) is following parallel structure. The teacher should then
locate the parallel structure questions present in test 2 and ask the students to answer them. Once
the class has determined with the correct answer is indeed the best one, the students could be
challenged in two other ways while still using test 2. In keeping in line with exercises the
students would have previously done in the school year, the instructor could ask the students to
complete an identification exercise, locating other questions in the test that ask about parallel
structure, for example. Below is an example of one such question, found on the ACT student
website:

I grew up with buckets, shovels, and nets waiting by the back door; hip-waders hanging
in the closet; tide table charts covering the refrigerator door; and a microscope was sitting
on the kitchen table.
The phrase *was sitting* is underlined: Here the students are to determine if *was sitting* is parallel with the other verbs in the sentence (indicating no change) or if choice G (*would sit*), choice H (*sitting*), or choice J (*sat*) are parallel (*The ACT*). Once the question is located and the correct answer (H) is discussed, the students could then move on to mirroring exercises. Using the correct sentence as an example, students could be asked to write sentences using a similar parallel structure as outlined in the sample sentence above. Below is the corrected sentence to be “mirrored”:

I grew up with buckets, shovels, and nets waiting by the back door; hip-waders hanging in the closet; tide table charts covering the refrigerator door; and a microscope sitting on the kitchen table.

How much time the instructors want to spend on each of the five skills is at their discretion. I have found that some skills can be worked on in one day, while others need more practice. Depending on my student group, then, I may choose to complete mirroring exercises as part of an in-class activity or an extended, assessed activity, paired with an ACT writing prompt that will help students prepare for the writing portion as well as practice their skills needed to be successful on the multiple-choice English portion.

For standardized tests that include a writing portion, below I will show how the mirroring exercise in this ACT preparation unit could coincide with preparation for the writing test. Even if a writing portion is not required, the mirroring exercise could pair up with another writing unit, such as a persuasive writing unit. Once the instructor has finished instruction in the areas in which students needed the most improvement, it would be a good time to assess the students. I would suggest spending at least one class period discussing the ACT writing portion and reading sample rubrics and student essays. After the students understand what is expected of them in the
writing test, the instructor may assign an in-class prompt in which the student answers a sample ACT writing prompt in the form of an essay (similar to what would be written on test day) and incorporates sentences in which the skills coinciding with the English test are shown as being mastered in the essay. Appendix D is a student handout that explains such an assignment. The particular assignment outlined in Appendix D covers yet another grammatical skill that commonly needs improvement: pronoun-antecedent agreement, as defined in Chapter 2 as a skill my particular student group needed to improve. As with all the appendices, Appendix D could be easily modified to comply with the parallel structure example given above. The amount of time given for this assignment would depend on the abilities of the student group. It may be best for the instructor to time the students so they get used to writing an essay in the thirty minutes allotted. Students could then be given extra time to revise and incorporate the sentences in which they show they have correctly used the grammatical concepts previously taught. The teacher could then assess the quality of the essay as one grade and the utilization of the grammatical skills as another or combine the two grades using a rubric like the one shown in Appendix C. By keeping this particular standardized test preparation unit contextual, student-driven, and minimal, teachers are maximizing their students’ chances at being successful on such an important test.

**Overall Conclusions**

Most scholars have shown that *some type* of grammar instruction is necessary, though traditional methods may be ineffective. Foundational studies like those by Braddock, et al and Elley, et al show that traditional grammar instruction isolated from any context has little to no impact on student writing. As referenced in Chapter 1, most scholars denounce traditional grammar instruction but still see a need for grammar’s place in the English curriculum based on several factors, including the need for students to improve their ability to communicate more
effectively in their current and future societal and professional endeavors and the need for teachers to prepare their students for standardized tests. Those scholars critical of grammar instruction are typically critical of the rule teaching that is often associated with grammar instruction, mainly because rules and knowledge of grammar terminology do not usually help students communicate more effectively. To these scholars cited in Chapter 1, rules and terminology often get in the way of the students working with the actual skills they need to be working with in order to become more grammatically fluent. Newer research propelled by the implementation of the Common Core State Standards shows students need to adapt to changes in language and understand that grammar “rules” are always evolving.

Research discussed in the previous chapters shows grammar should be contextual, student-driven, and minimal. Contextualizing grammar requires teachers to do a bit more planning to connect grammatical principles to anything students are learning. Making grammar instruction student-driven requires teachers to consider their target student groups and their specific needs. Teachers must also make decisions to differentiate instruction to best meet the needs of individual students with unique strengths, struggles, and learning styles. Minimal grammar instruction requires instructors to really focus in on what grammatical concepts in which students need the most improvement and determining strategies to help students master those skills by the end of the school year. As research has shown, students reap more benefits by developing a strong understanding of a few skills as opposed to a more minimal understanding of several skills. By simply contextualizing grammar, the instructor would have some success in applying grammatical knowledge to the unit of study at hand. By simply creating grammar units that are student-driven, the teacher would help students in skill development that directly applies to the needs of the specific student group. By simply minimizing the number of grammatical
skills taught, the teacher can spend a great deal of instructional time ensuring those few skills are masterfully developed. But when grammar instruction is contextual and student-driven and minimalistic, teachers may have greater success. Combining all three of these facets into all grammatical instruction helps the teacher best meet the needs of the specific target group most effectively.
Works Cited


Nunan, Susan Losee. “Forgiving Ourselves and Forging Ahead: Teaching Grammar in a New


Appendix A: Personal Statement Writing Assessment

Task:
You will be writing a one-page, typed, double-spaced personal statement. **No handwritten personal statements will be accepted.** These pieces are often asked for when students apply to college. Basically, a personal statement is a written piece that “sells” you to a certain school. The personal statement allows the reader to get to know you on all levels: personal, academic, professional, etc. By reading it, your audience will have a better understanding of what makes you unique. As part of your target audience you should be considering, I will be looking forward to getting to know you a bit better and understanding what skill set you have as a writer.

Here are some questions to consider when writing the personal statement (taken from Purdue OWL’s website - http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/):

1) What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?

2) What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?

3) What are your career goals?

4) Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?

5) Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?

6) What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?

7) What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
Appendix A continued: (Accompanying rubric for teacher to use if desired)

Personal Statement Rubric

Name ____________________________________________

Development /25
- Essay is interesting to read, extends beyond a “run-of-the-mill” essay
- Essay includes several examples to help the reader get to know the writer
- Essay includes personal, professional, and academic details about the writer

Organization /15
- Essay includes an attention getter
- Essay includes some type of thesis statement near the beginning
- Essay incorporates transitions so sentences and ideas flow together well

Correctness /10
- Few grammatical/usage errors exist
- Paragraph is typed and double-spaced

TOTAL PERSONAL STATEMENT SCORE /50
Appendix B: ENGLISH III Colon Usage Mirroring Exercise

**Directions:** Read the following sample sentence. Note its colon placement and “lead-in” phrasing. Using your research paper topic as a subject (for your content), write sentences below that use colons similarly to the way the sample sentences uses a colon.

**SAMPLE SENTENCE:** In today’s society people isolate themselves for various reasons: they don’t want to be judged, they are scared of other people, and they think that they have no one anymore.

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOU:** (Instructor indicates below what each student is supposed to complete.)

1. Mirrored sentence 1:

2. Mirrored sentence 2:

3. Mirrored sentence 3:

4. Mirrored sentence 4:

5. Mirrored sentence 5:
Appendix C: Career Research Paper Rubric (colon portion of rubric referenced in Chapter 3 in bold)

**Task:** You are to write an expository essay in which you explain how to establish a career in your choice of career field, starting from high school. You are allowed to use “I” since you are involved in discussing why it fits you, yet you should not use “you.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT/ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>___/170 pts.</th>
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<tr>
<td>___/10 Essay is organized in a way that flows chronologically according to the career plan of the student.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/50 Essay has transitions between paragraphs and between topics covered within the paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/10 Introduction paragraph effectively establishes the focus of the essay.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>___/10 Conclusion paragraph effectively wraps up the student’s main points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___/10 Essay follows the expository (informative) genre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/10 Content is purposeful to the target audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/50 Content fits within the chosen paragraphs and strengthens the focus of the paragraphs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>___/20 Essay effectively blends writer’s own voice with researched facts</td>
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**MLA CITATION**

<p>| ___/10 Works Cited Page is written in 12 pt. font Times New Roman, double-spaced, is in alphabetical order, and incorporates reverse indentation. |              |
| ___/10 Works Cited Page entries follow MLA-style format. |              |
| ___/10 Works Cited Page includes 3 different sources that are referenced in the essay. |              |
| ___/30 Essay utilizes 3 sources of information, both on Work Cited page and in the essay. |              |
| ___/30 Parenthetical citations are written correctly throughout the essay and reflect what is written on the Work Cited page. |              |
| ___/20 Essay includes at least four direct quotes, cited in MLA-style. |              |
| ___/20 Paraphrases are cited correctly in the essay. |              |</p>
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<th>CORRECTNESS</th>
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<td>___/10 Essay includes no spelling errors.</td>
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<td>___/10 Essay follows basic punctuation rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/10 Essay is written in clear, complete sentences (no fragments or run-ons).</td>
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<td>___/10 Essay avoids the use of “you.”</td>
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<td>___/10 Essay follows agreement principles.</td>
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<td>___/50 Essay includes colons used effectively in at least five separate sentences.</td>
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<th>FORMATTING</th>
<th>___/25 pts.</th>
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<td>___/5 Essay is written in 12-point, Times New Roman font</td>
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<td>___/5 Essay is double-spaced (with no unnecessary added spacing).</td>
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<td>___/5 Essay’s margins are 1 inch on all sides.</td>
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<tr>
<td>___/5 Personal heading information and title is in correct format.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>___/5 Page numbers are correct according to MLA format.</td>
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| TOTAL SCORE                                     | ___/425 pts. |
Appendix D: ACT Agreement Writing Assignment

Directions: Read the following prompt and write a paragraph responding to the prompt. Your paragraph may be hand-written.

In your paragraph, you must underline five sentences in which your pronouns agree with their antecedents. At least THREE of the five sentences you underline must use indefinite pronouns (anybody, each, either, everybody, everyone, neither, no one, nothing, one, something, both, few, several, etc.).

PROMPT (taken from a sample ACT Writing test):

Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

In your essay (paragraph), take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.