

# Using Grammar

## What is grammar?



Grammar in language is a set of rules and examples that encompass:

- Syntax : The way in which we order words to create phrases, clauses (i.e. a group of words that contain a subject and a predicate) and sentences.
- Word structures (morphology) - e.g. adding an 's' to the word 'dog' to create the plural 'dogs'.

Children first learn how to use grammar in their spoken language and then at school will be taught how to formulate written sentences using appropriate punctuation and grammatical elements, such as tense, word order and the use of word classes - e.g. nouns (naming words), pronouns (e.g. I, me, mine, my, you), verbs (action/doing words), adjectives (describing words) and adverbs (describes a verb - e.g. slowly). By teaching these elements children learn that their words are intended to be read and understood and that this is easier to do if it is

grammatically correct, accurately spelt, well-punctuated and neatly written.

## **Why is grammar important?**

The use of correct grammar is important because it is the main feature within both our spoken and written communication that allows us to have our messages clearly understood. Using incorrect grammar can lead to sentences being meaningless and the message unclear, which in turn can lead to misinterpretation by a communication partner. Using correct grammar makes listening and reading easier for others to understand and can make the communication process more enjoyable.

As a child gets older grammar becomes an important process as they learn how to communicate their thoughts and ideas in written form. With a good understanding of the different grammatical components of language, a child is able to express themselves clearly and establish good foundation skills for written documentation in later years (e.g. writing school essays, job applications or creative writing). Grammar also helps children expand their vocabulary by helping them to develop more interesting ways of presenting information.

## **What are the building blocks necessary to develop grammar?**

- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of language.
- **Expressive language (using language):** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas. In order to be able to write sentences with correct grammatical formation, a child first needs to be able to use the grammar appropriately in their verbal communication. Children learn how to use different grammatical components at different stages of their language development.

## How can you tell if my child has problems with grammar?

If a child has difficulties with grammar they might:

- Struggle to get their message across.
- Be misunderstood frequently.
- Be asked to repeat what they have said.
- Sound immature for their age.
- Not understand information presented in both spoken and written format.
- Have difficulties answering questions.
- Struggle to retell an event in the appropriate sequence.
- Confuse tenses (e.g. talks about what has happened yesterday in the present tense).

## What other problems can occur when a child has grammar difficulties?

When a child has grammar difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Receptive language (understanding):** Comprehension of language.
- **Expressive language (using language):** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.
- **Literacy:** Reading and spelling
- **Writing:** Writing sentences that clearly depict one's thoughts and ideas.
- **Story telling:** Using language to tell a story or retell an event.
- **Planning and sequencing:** The sequential multi-step task/activity performance to achieve a well-defined result.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.
- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.

## What can be done to improve grammar skills?

- **Model:** When the child says something that is grammatically incorrect, model to them the correct way of saying the sentence (e.g. child: “Me want to go home” adult: “I want to go home”).
- **Games:** Develop games that require the child to repetitively use a correct grammatical formation (e.g. when working on the pronoun “I” you could get your child to request parts of a game, such as a puzzle: “I want the apple please”, “I want the car please”).
- **Focus** on one grammatical component at a time to avoid overloading the child with too many new concepts.

## What activities can help improve grammar?

- **Story Books:** Read books help model correct grammar use.
- **Play:** In play ask the child what is happening, what just happened or what might happen next (e.g. adult: “What is the baby doing?” child: “The baby is sleeping”; adult: Makes teddy jump and asks, “What did Teddy just do?” child: “Teddy jumped”; adult: “What will the dog do next?” child: “The dog will go to sleep”).
- **Telling Stories:** Encourage the child to tell you the story in a book using the pictures. The child will usually produce a simple sentence which will enable you to model the correct grammar if it is said incorrectly. The more the child practices telling the same story the more they will pick up on your models and improve their grammar in their story telling.
- **Pronouns:** When a child is learning about the pronouns ‘he/she’, explain to the child that “He is a boy and she is a girl”. You can then find pictures of boys and girls doing different actions and say a sentence about each picture (e.g. “He is jumping” or “She is laughing”).
- **Pronoun ‘I’:** When helping the child to learn how to use the pronoun “I” engage the child in different requesting activities where they have to ask for items (e.g. Mr Potato Head, puzzles, snack time, choosing a DVD, posting blocks).
- **Sentence Construction:** Make up simple sentences (e.g. The boy rode his bike) Cut the sentence into individual words and encourage the child to sequence the words in the correct order to make a sentence.

## **Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with grammar in my child?**

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with grammar difficulties is important to:

- Enable a child to be able to cope better in the kindergarten and school environment as they will be better equipped to follow instructions.
- Enable a child to be a more active participant in classroom activities.
- Enhance a child's vocabulary and ability to communicate with others.
- Improve a child's creative writing.
- Improve a child's reading comprehension skills.
- Improve social interactions as the child will develop a more age appropriate way of speaking and be more easily understood by their peers.
- Encourage the enjoyment of literature because the child will better understand what they are reading.

## **If left untreated what can difficulties with grammar lead to?**

When children have difficulties with grammar, they might also have difficulties with:

- Constructing essays and completing written exams at a higher education level.
- Completing research projects as the child may have difficulties understanding the information they are reading.
- Writing job applications.
- Understanding written text and university course material.
- Being explicit in verbal communication.
- Low self-esteem and at risk of bullying because speech sounds immature for their age.
- Poor social interaction skills as their speech sounds immature for their age.

## What type of therapy is recommended for grammar difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with using grammar, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

If there are multiple areas of concern (i.e. beyond just using grammar) both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy may well be recommended to address the functional areas of concern. This is the benefit of choosing Kid Sense which provides both Occupational Therapy and Speech Therapy.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

