

“Are You Sure Teaching Grammar Can Be Easy and Fun?”

If you think grammar is boring, you haven't used ***Easy Grammar*** and ***Daily GRAMS***. Dr. Wanda Phillips at Easy Grammar Systems has made grammar easy *and* enjoyable while insuring that students achieve *mastery learning*.

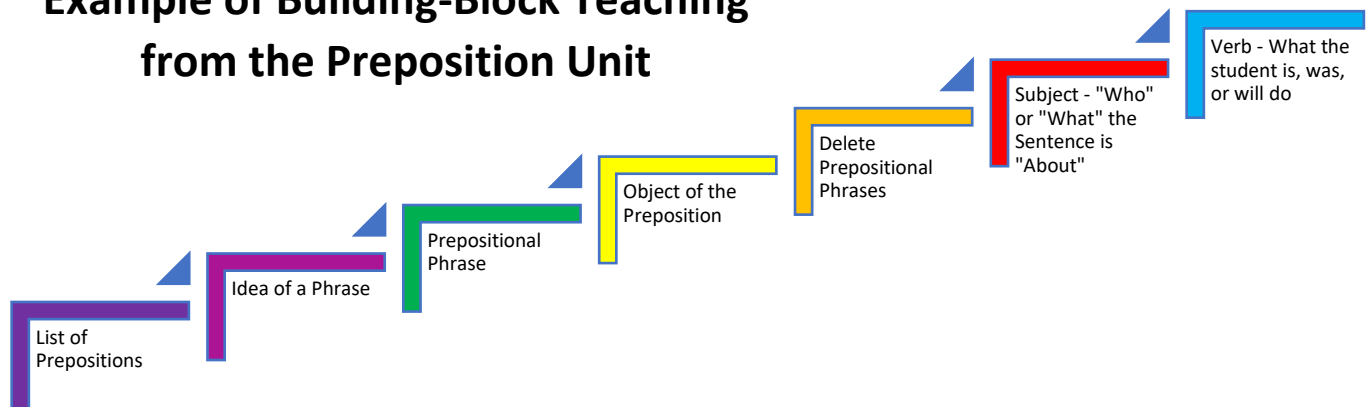
Some question if mastery learning is good. Dr. Phillips muses, “When did mastery become a controversial idea? Of course, mastery is vital for everyone to speak and to write correctly at the automatic level. A simple illustration of mastery is a young child learning to tie shoes. Showing a child how to do the components of the process, multiplied with practice, insures that the concept becomes automatic.”

Dr. Phillips makes her grammar process easy by incorporating paradigms that promote mastery learning. Concepts are broken down into the most basic understanding in a building-block, escalator paradigm. Memorable learning is used as a strategy to achieve mastery. Phillips relies heavily on interspersed learning throughout each text to apply former understanding. Kinesthetic learning along with audio/visual greatly enhances ease in comprehending; plus, it is fun. Dr. Phillips integrates audio, visual, and kinesthetic learning, adding that they fall into the realm of new brain research's study concerning how people learn.

The building-block, escalator paradigm is best understood by visualizing a escalator or a set of steps. Dr. Phillips has analyzed each concept, breaking it down to the various components called “discreet skills.” She introduces the most basic skill first.

After students learn this skill, they progress to the next step. Each component builds toward understanding the whole concept.

Example of Building-Block Teaching from the Preposition Unit



Let's look at an example. In the first unit, "Prepositions," students learn a list of commonly used prepositions (**Step 1**). Then, the idea of a phrase as simply being a group of words is added (**Step 2**). Students learn that a prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and continues to something you can usually see (noun or pronoun) (**Step 3**). Students learn that this noun or pronoun is called an object of the preposition. (**Step 4**). Phillips interrupts herself to share that this is the first time the term, *object*, appears. Although objects are not accentuated here, it's part of interspersed learning that will later be used to understand objective pronouns. In the next step, students learn to delete prepositional phrases (**Step 5**).

Ex.— In the spring, we went to Utah.
~~In the spring, we went to Utah.~~

Students learn that a word in a prepositional phrase won't be the subject or the verb of a sentence 99% of the time. Students can easily identify subject and verb, which is used to determine subject-verb agreement.

(**Step 6**): Student learn that the subject is *who* or *what* a sentence is "about."

Ex.— ~~In the spring, we went to Utah.~~
Who? *We!* ~~In the spring, we went to Utah.~~
 ~~In the spring, we went to Utah.~~

(**Step 7**): Students learn that the verb tells what the subject *is (does), was (did), or will be (will do)*.

What did we do? *Went!* **Ex.—** ~~In the spring, we~~ went ~~to Utah.~~

Dr. Phillips has found that all students successfully learn their language using the prepositional approach. “I love to diagram; however, I always had 25%-30% of my students who were confused by that procedure. In that I had 100% success using the prepositional approach, I soon gave up diagramming,” she shares, adding that even students who formerly struggled had *success* with the prepositional approach.

This brings us to memorable learning. These are learning experiences that amaze, impress, or startle students. In the “To the Teacher” pages of her ***Easy Grammar*** texts, Dr. Phillips includes strategies and ideas to embed *and* to expedite learning. Let’s see what she means by this process.

Easy Grammar texts pre-teach direct objects *immediately after* the preposition unit for two reasons. “Incorporating memorable learning,” Wanda says, “becomes more meaningful than just providing a definition. It facilitates learning *and* it internalizes more success,” Direct objects will also be needed in the next unit, “Verbs.”

Give us an idea how Dr. Phillips suggests we teach direct objects. Quite simply, she recommends throwing a soft plastic dish across the room. In fact, tossing it frisbee-style makes it more memorable.



Ex.— I threw a bowl.

What is the object I threw? Students will readily answer—a *bowl*. That’s all a direct object is. It occurs after an action verb and receives the action of the verb: I threw a **bowl**. Dr. Phillips suggests that your own ideas be used as other examples. Do you see why memorable learning experiences are not forgotten?

This is a good time to touch again on interspersed learning. The goal is to pre-teach, teach/expand, review, and apply throughout. In the verb unit, after contractions

and *to be* are taught, the concepts *to sit/to set*, *to rise/to raise*, and *to lie/to lay* are addressed. Dr. Phillips leaves nothing to chance. Students are reintroduced to direct objects and practice them briefly *again*. Then, students learn that *to set* (meaning *to place*), *to raise* (meaning *to lift*), and *to lay* (meaning *to place*) require a direct object.

Ex.— I laid my coat on a chair. (to lay = to place) What was placed?
DO
I laid my coat ~~on a chair~~.

Note that students continue to delete prepositional phrases. It helps them determine a direct object easily.

However, *to sit* (meaning *to rest*), *to rise* (meaning *to go up*), and *to lie* (meaning *to rest*) will **not** use a direct object.

Ex.— Their dog is lying by the door.
Their dog is lying ~~by the door~~.

Note there isn't a direct object (DO).

Therefore, students know they will use to lie.

Much later, students will incorporate direct objects within the pronoun unit. Nothing is left to chance; interspersed learning is used **throughout** *Easy Grammar* teaching texts.

Cumulative learning is another factor that promotes mastery. After students have completed each (parts of speech) unit-test, Dr. Phillips has included both a cumulative review and a cumulative test. The former includes concepts taught in any previous units; the latter tests these concepts. This allows for both parents and child to perceive if there are gaps in understanding. Errors can be addressed at once. This repetitive method strengthens brain synapses, providing a gigantic step toward mastery.

Dr. Wanda Phillips absolutely loves kinesthetic learning, which incorporates movement, singing, and other active modes. “The key,” she shares, “is to add **rhythm, dancing, hand movements**, etc., **while saying**. Students learn more quickly and retain what they learn. Plus, it’s fun! English doesn’t have to be all desk work.” To see her demonstrate kinesthetic learning, visit www.easygrammar.com and click on the



videos, “Ideas About Helping Children Learn,” and “Activities that Increase Learning.” (It is true that she gallops across the stage!)

Dr. Phillips learned ideas for mastery learning various places. She is quick to share that the ability to teach students how to understand and to use their language is a gift from the Lord. Her texts are secular (and conservative), but her faith started Easy Grammar Systems. She is quick to help all parents use strategies and ideas for more effectively teaching. “I think it’s, actually, a ministry that I’ve been given,” Phillips adds with a smile.



Dr. Wanda C. Phillips, author of *Easy Grammar* (Grades 1-Plus), *Easy Grammar Ultimate Series* (Grades 8-12+), *Daily GRAMS: Guided Review Aiding Mastery Skills*, and *Easy Writing* presents one-hour seminars at conferences. Although presentations are free, she is limited to the number she can present each year. Contact 602-908-8144.