

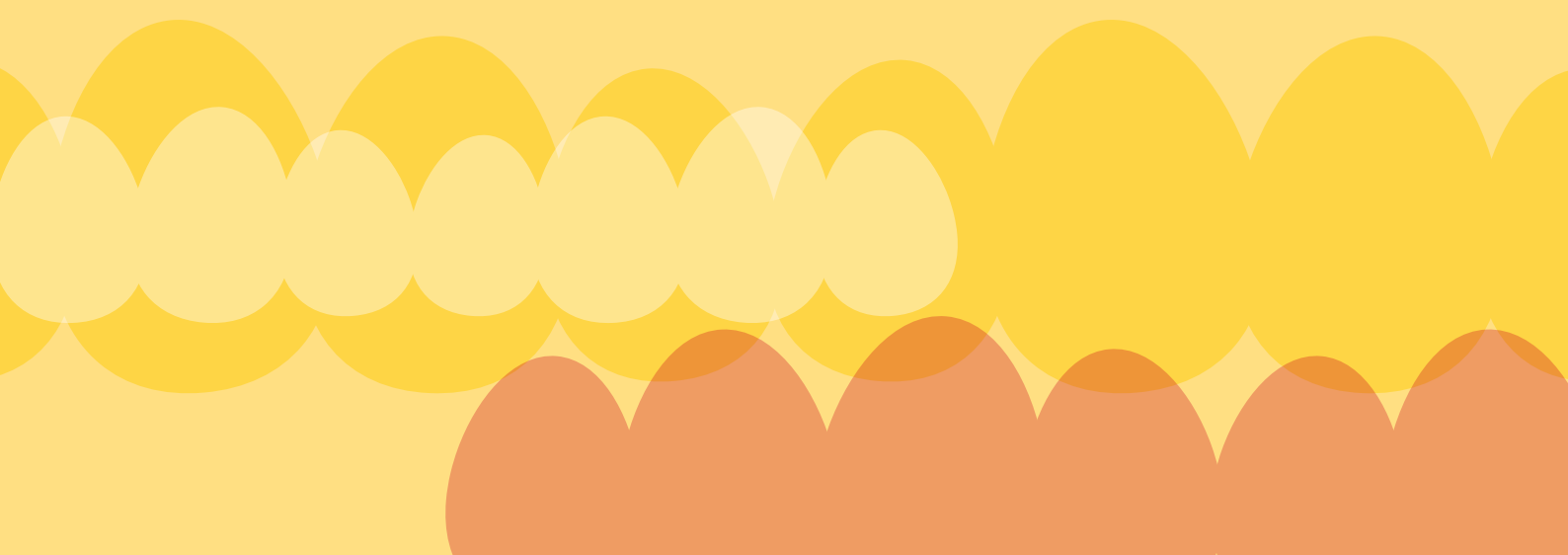


# **READING EGGSPRESS GRAMMAR PROGRAM**

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*“Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language.”* (Crystal, 2004, p9)

Many Anglophone nations question whether learning about grammar forms a useful part of an English language program. Larsen-Freeman (2009) asserts that this could be in part due to the lack of consensus on a definition for grammar (p.518). Her analysis sets a pedagogical definition as “a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints” (p.521).

In their short history of grammar, Hudson & Barton (2002) note that learning grammar can be traced back thousands of years to the Babylonians. Since then there have been discussions and many research studies evaluating the strengths of different approaches to teaching grammar. Central to all of these studies is evidence that it is beneficial to explicitly teach grammar as a core part of an English language program (Myhill, 2005; Andrews, 2005; Cullen, 2012). However, Ellis and Shintani (2014) note that no single pedagogical approach can claim priority as the most effective teaching model. There are calls for a shift in emphasis from whether or not to teach grammar, to the type of teaching that presents the greatest potential for student success (Clark, 2010).

Learning about grammar features and structures is important because it empowers users to recognise nuances in the English language and to evaluate patterns of language and meaning (Crystal, 2004; Denham & Lobeck 2005; Derewianka, 2008; Hancock, 2009; Jones, Myhill & Bailey, 2013). However, the process of learning about and using grammar is complex. This is because humans have complex ideas and so need a complex system and terminology to explain those ideas. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** considers grammar as a resource for making meaning of and analysing texts. The program teaches explicit terms and provides practice exercises that enable effective use of those terms. In looking at the role of grammar in uncovering the effectiveness of texts (Hancock & Kollin, 2010), the **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** helps users find ways to better understand the nuanced meaning of texts, and, conversely, to express themselves in more meaningful ways.

## Grammar as a system of language

Grammar knowledge is fundamental to language learning as a whole (Crystal, 2004), as it enables users to consider how language works. In addition, it provides a shared corpus of terms to talk about the different features of the language, and to help users evaluate word choices to critically analyse texts for layered meaning. Being able to use grammar allows a user to apply structure and meaning to written text (Derewianka, 2008).

Linguists point to moving beyond seeing grammar simply as a set of formal rules to be learned to where grammar is viewed as the system of a language. Conceptualising this shift would see grammar teaching and learning as necessary for “the practical purposes of communication” (Hudson & Barton, 2002, p. 7). Lindsey Thomas, a literacy consultant, has called for a change in terminology where “grammar” would be replaced with “understanding language” to ensure its accessibility to teachers and students (Brown, 2014). The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** is built on this premise; its key aim is to help children understand how the English language system works.

## Dimensions of pedagogical grammar

In recognising grammar as a system of meaning-making, it is useful to explore grammar across three different continuums: form (description), meaning (explanation), and usage (pragmatics) (Crystal, 2004, Derewianka, 2012; Droga & Humphrey, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2003, 2009). Form explains the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of grammar, while meaning and usage explain the ‘why’ (Crystal, 2004).

Understanding the interaction of these three dimensions enriches the users’ comprehension of language as a means of communication (Bourdieu, 1991) and helps them bridge the gap between theory and practice. This important observation is evidenced in the **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** in the choice to provide students with the metalanguage for grammar first. This essential first step is part of a teaching progression aimed at giving students the ability to discuss language choices and more accurately express the nuanced reasons that guide these choices.

## Teaching and learning sequences

In his research, Thornbury (1999) identified that an explicitly taught rule-driven approach was of benefit to learners.

Each lesson in the **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** begins with a short video that explicitly describes a component of grammar using a deductive or rule-driven approach. The video explains the purpose of a grammatical feature and also gives students the terminology to help them explain why it is used. The content covered by these videos has been developed in consultation with national curriculum documents and is comprehensive. The online activities that follow each video allow students to reinforce their understanding of the grammatical feature in an engaging way. At the completion of each lesson students and teachers are given timely feedback to assist with measuring gains in grammatical awareness.

## Strategies

### *Teaching grammatical metalanguage*

Depending on the job a word is doing, it can be assigned to a word class or part of speech (Clark, 2010; Wainwright & Hutton, 1992). Knowing this metalanguage is helpful as it gives users the tools to discuss different elements of language. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** identifies each word class and teaches words within these word classes. The program recognises that in asking students to critically assess their own writing they need terms such as noun, verb and adjective to discuss improvements. With its progressive sequence of lessons from grades 1 – 6, the **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** builds on students' knowledge so that they can understand more complex grammar, language and texts.

### *Metacognition and grammar*

Metacognition, put simply, is thinking about one's thinking. In regards to grammar teaching, it helps evaluate the impact and significance of word choices (Myhill, Jones, Lines, Watson, 2012). On a word level it acts as an important teaching tool to demonstrate to users the processes of proficient users. As the English language has evolved, it has often created several words with similar denotations but very different connotations (Wainwright & Hutton, 1992). Metacognition at the word level is useful in guiding users to choose their words carefully; for example, being able to recognise and use emotive language for effect (Myhill et al., 2012). There are a number of activities in the **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** that address metacognition, particularly the video sequence at

the beginning of each lesson. These show students how proficient grammar users manipulate the language and give useable examples for students to follow.

### *Sentence and text awareness*

In their research focused on creating a pedagogy of grammar instruction, Richards and Reppen (2014) provide a broad range of strategies and suggestions for achieving grammatical gains in language. A key suggestion is to look at sentence features and text awareness. To achieve this, they outline the benefits of using software where jumbled sentences can be rebuilt. This rebuilding forces students to consider the coherence of sentences and allows them to enact their grammatical awareness. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** uses sentence restructuring as a way of developing sentence and text awareness in students.

## Technology and grammar

Richards and Reppen (2014) outline the multitude of ways technology can support the learning of grammar in a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. They point to the value of programs that provide interactivity and support the processes in grammar of decision-making, monitoring and evaluation. The use of iPads and other tablet devices closely aligns to students' digital culture thus using them is a way to connect to students' classrooms (Goodwin, 2012). The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** acknowledges the benefits technology-supported teaching offers students and teachers. Lessons can be repeated and students can progress at their own pace, thereby enabling teachers to personalise their instruction and target specific skills.

## Motivation, engagement and achievement

The terms motivation and engagement refer to students' approaches to tasks and are significant contributors to academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Motivation refers to the way a student behaves, the beliefs they have in their own abilities and their capacity to overcome challenges (Martin, 2003). Engagement is a multifaceted term that incorporates thoughts, behaviours and actions anchored in personal circumstances (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). Engaged students not only take pride in their academic successes but also take the additional step of making the conscious decision to integrate new learning into their everyday lives (Newmann, 1992). Goodwin (2012) observed in lessons integrating meaningful iPad usage that there was exceptionally high student engagement. It

was hypothesised that the use of digital technologies for digital natives increased motivation, increased student engagement and in turn produced higher levels of academic achievement.

Motivation is complex so educators recognise a balanced program provides intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to propel students towards achievement (Harackiewicz & Hidi, 2000; Hidi, 2000; Lepper & Henderlong, 2000). The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** recognises these principles and is designed to connect with students. It uses exciting and appealing visual displays in a context that connects grammar learning to their everyday lives, the texts they read and the writing they do. Acknowledging the place of interactive games for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, the program uses short, exciting games between difficulty levels to provide the intrinsic motivation to continue through the lesson sequences. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** registers that extrinsic motivation can also help students to achieve their personal best with multiple reward systems and praise built in at every level. The program provides instant feedback on successful learning and a levelled lesson structure that supports all learners with variety and increasingly challenging question types. Detailed reports also identify any areas of weakness so that students can improve their learning progress.

## Conclusion

Pedagogical and linguistic research supports the teaching and learning of grammatical features as fundamental to language learning. This research acknowledges the challenges of teaching grammar, but stresses its importance in all areas of language acquisition. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** is adaptive software that individualises difficulty levels for students as they progress through sequences of carefully developed activities. The online activities reflect both pedagogical research as well as national curriculum documents to ensure they meet benchmarks to propel students forward in their learning. Assessment and timely feedback is integrated into the program to ensure teachers can accurately report on gains and tailor teaching to address areas of concern. It aims to motivate students through a variety of inbuilt features and in doing so strives for individualised personal best achievement. The **Reading Eggspress Grammar program** provides teachers with a systematic program of lessons that helps students use and understand the role of grammar in our language.

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