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Chapter 1: Background

A. Basic Introduction

Hello, and welcome to DGP! This book presents an entirely different (although quite simple) method of teaching grammar. The method is called Daily Grammar Practice (DGP). This approach will work for you, but we highly recommend that, to avoid unnecessary frustration and possibility of failure, you read the whole book. We have made lots of mistakes while working toward perfecting DGP. The advice we offer in the following chapters is intended to save you the trouble of making some of the same mistakes yourself.

Our promises to you:

1. We will keep the text part of this book short. If you teach English or language arts, you are very busy. We know this. We are teachers.
2. This book will be easy to read and to understand.
3. The program will be easy to implement in your own classroom.
4. The program is effective for all grade levels and all ability levels.
5. If you use the program correctly, you will see amazing results.
6. DGP will help YOU improve your grammar skills, too.

Now, on with the rest of the book.

B. Why It's Important to Teach/Learn Grammar in the First Place

Students (and all people for that matter) need to have a basic understanding of grammar. If you're reading this book, you agree with us so far. A few years ago, we met an English teacher who told us that students don't need grammar; they need to learn to write according to "what sounds good." That's like saying we should all play musical instruments by ear. We hope that teacher never teaches our kids.

In order to help students write better and write correctly, we must all share a common lingo, and that lingo is grammar. If your students know and understand the lingo, you can tell them to use *who* for subjects and predicate nominatives and *whom* for direct objects, indirect objects, and objects of prepositions. If they don't know grammar, they'll look at you like you're nuts! If they know and understand the lingo, you can tell them to put a comma after an adverb dependent clause. If they know and understand the lingo, you can tell them that *lie*, *sit*, and *rise* are *intransitive* (notice the mnemonic device) and that *lay*, *set*, and *raise* are transitive. That's all you have to say. How can you explain parallel structure to kids who don't know grammar and sentence structure? How can you help them with their writing at all? Okay, you get the idea.

And besides, if you're going to speak a language, you should understand how it works. It's a matter of principle.

C. How We Know Our Current Methods of Teaching Grammar Are Not Effective

How do we know we're not doing a good job of teaching grammar? Well, first of all, you're looking for help. In addition, the business world is looking for help. We recently saw an advertisement for a two-day workshop geared toward people who write business documents. The workshop promised to help these people improve their communication skills. People obviously didn't get the grammar background they needed in school. Now the business world is paying to send people to workshops. In addition, colleges want their students to be more grammatically proficient. The SAT and ACT feature a writing skills section with an emphasis on grammar. That ought to tell us something.

The best way to see that our teaching of grammar has not been effective is to look at our students. They don't remember grammar. They'll tell you that. In fact, they'll say, "We've done all this every year since the second grade." Okay, so why do you have to re-teach it every year? Because it didn't stick. It didn't go to long-term memory. Why didn't it? Two reasons: One, students don't really understand it. Two, they don't *try* to understand it because they know it will all go away once they pass the end-of-unit test, and then they won't have to worry about it again until the next year.

Also, we know that students aren't understanding grammatical concepts because they're not able to apply them. Whose fault is all of this? Middle school teachers blame elementary school teachers; high school teachers blame middle school teachers. College professors and business managers blame us all. Well, it's time to stop passing the buck and start fixing the problem.

D. Methods We've Tried and Why They Haven't Worked

If you've been teaching for any length of time (or even if you haven't but remember your own experiences as a student), you know that educators have tried lots of different ways to get kids to learn grammar. For the first two or three years that we "taught grammar," we used units that spanned two or three weeks because that's the way we were told to do it. It was very painful for us. It was painful for our students. They had "learned all that" every year since they could remember, yet they couldn't remember a bit of what they'd "learned." So we started all over again just like we had every other year. Together we got through it, and when the students had no more teeth left for us to pull, they passed their end-of-unit tests, some with flying colors. A few weeks later, we had a bunch of toothless students who had once again forgotten everything we had "taught" them about grammar.

We took a long look at all of the philosophies on teaching grammar. Here is what we discovered:

- As we mentioned before, the traditional methods of teaching grammar in isolation don't work for most students. They hold the information in their heads until they need it for the test, and then they forget about it until the next year. They do tons of grammar exercises that have no value because anyone can find the noun in a sentence if the instructions tell you to look for one. The information doesn't transfer, and it doesn't stick.

- Research and our own experiences have told us that “whole language” is ineffective. Students spend so much time looking at the forest that they don’t see the trees. Grammar overkill is a bad idea, but treating grammar like a four-letter word is a worse idea.
- Teaching grammar within the context of writing is great from a supplementary standpoint, but it doesn’t teach kids all of the basics and help them remember and apply them. The bottom line is this: You can’t apply what you don’t understand. We should still teach grammar through writing, but we must not teach it *only* through writing.
- Programs that offer a sentence to correct each day provide good usage lessons, but again, these programs don’t get to the heart of the problem or provide adequate repetition of concepts. Students still need fundamental grammar skills to understand why the sentences are wrong.
- Programs that attempt to make grammar fun, first of all, aren’t fooling many kids; more importantly, they aren’t any more effective than traditional skill and drill—they just make the process less painful.

After looking at all of the philosophies and research, we realized that what we needed was a grammar vitamin we could give our students once a day for a whole year. So we created Daily Grammar Practice (DGP), affectionately known among our students as the “daily vitamin approach to grammar.” Eat one each day, and they’re good for you and have long-term benefits. Take the whole bottle at once, and you’ll just get sick, throw up, and lose any benefits you might have otherwise received. It’s a perfect analogy! In the following box, we have used this vitamin analogy to compare the different approaches to teaching grammar:

Learning through grammar units = taking a whole bottle of vitamins at once
 Learning grammar through writing or through daily correct-a-sentence = taking random vitamins at random times but not getting a multi-vitamin every day
 Learning through whole language = eating vegetables and hoping you get what you need
 Learning grammar by trying to make it “fun” = eating candy
 Learning grammar through DGP = getting a good multi-vitamin every day

So, how do you give your students a daily grammar vitamin? Keep reading.

E. What DGP Is and Why It Works

Daily Grammar Practice is an entirely different approach that helps kids to understand and apply grammar concepts and to remember them forever. It’s not “fluffy,” and it’s not a “quick fix.” It is a simple, logical process that actually forces grammar concepts to move to long-term memory. (It’s also research-based; see www.dgppublishing.com for more details.)

Daily Grammar Practice is daily, but it also organizes concepts in a unique way. Rather than providing lessons on individual concepts (nouns, verbs, clauses, etc.), DGP requires students to work with one sentence per week. For each day of the week, students have a different task to accomplish with the week’s sentence (either on their own or with your guidance). At the beginning of each language arts lesson, you go over the day’s assignment. Students correct any errors they have made and ask any questions they may have. You explain any new concepts that the sentence presents. The whole process takes a couple of minutes, and you’re ready to move on with class.

On Monday, students identify each common noun, proper noun, possessive noun, pronoun, conjunction, preposition, interjection, and adjective in the week's sentence. Then they use an arrow to show which word each adjective describes. (See Chapter 3, Section B for list of abbreviations and sentence markings used in this book.)

Example:

^Prudy gave me a red ^Cball (on) ^Pfriday

On Tuesday, students find the action verb and underline it twice. Then they find the noun or pronoun that is doing the action and underline it once.

Example:

rudy gave me a red ball on friday

On Wednesday, students circle the purpose of the week's sentence.

Example:

declarative exclamatory imperative interrogative

On Thursday, students write the sentence with the correct punctuation and capitalization

Example:

Rudy gave me a red ball on Friday.

On Friday, students write a new sentence that includes specific criteria.

Example:

proper noun, adjective, same purpose as this week's sentence

Ashley rode her new bike on Monday.

Students learn through daily repetition—just like in the vitamin analogy. You don't have to do any other grammar exercises—ever. You may be wondering how students can possibly learn everything they need to know about grammar and mechanics with only one sentence per week. Here's why:

1. **Less is more.** They really take these sentences apart and understand every aspect of them. Thinking is required.
2. Concepts are revisited on a daily basis so that they aren't forgotten.
3. Students never work with isolated skills. The organization of DGP allows students to see how all the concepts connect.
4. The sentences they're working with aren't just random sentences. They're intentionally loaded with specific concepts at specific times. They start simple and get increasingly difficult. Concepts that students should have mastered at their grade level appear in early sentences and appear often. More difficult concepts appear later.

The DGP concept is very simple, but the progression is what sets it apart from other ily programs. Students have to know the parts of speech in order to capitalize and identify

the sentence parts. They have to know the sentence purpose in order to punctuate. And writing a similarly-structured sentence on Friday shows that students are able to apply what they're learning.

Take a look at the chart in Chapter 3, Section H. It will show you which concepts are covered at each grade level. You may feel that your students aren't ready for some of the concepts listed for your grade level, but don't worry. They will be prepared by the time those concepts come up in the sentence list. Your students won't be familiar with words like "interrogative" and "adjective," but don't be afraid to use them. Through repeated use, these words will become a natural part of their vocabulary by the fourth or fifth week of DGP. And if your students make mistakes in their Daily Grammar Practice, so be it. They will learn from their errors. By the way, if a student gives a "wrong" answer but has a valid argument in its defense, feel free to accept the answer as "correct." In grammar, there are plenty of exceptions to the rules as you know. And besides, the thought process is often as important as the answer.

Although one year of DGP gives students a solid foundation in grammar, students benefit even more from successive years of the program. The program is designed to teach students new and more advanced material at each grade level while also reviewing basic concepts to aide in retention. A student who begins DGP in elementary school and continues it each year will be able to analyze sentence structure in his sleep by the time he finishes high school.

Chapter 2: Implementation

A. How to Get Started

Start by teaching students to use their help signs (Chapter 3, Section A) as a reference. Stop doing grammar units and exercises. Continue doing mini-lessons on usage and teaching usage in the context of writing. Opportunities for usage lessons are built into the DGP sentences, but the primary aim of DGP is to provide students with a strong grammar foundation so that they can make sense of usage and writing lessons. So, we repeat, continue teaching writing and usage in context. But every day, do DGP.

You have three options for presenting DGP to your students.

- 1. Workbooks:** The workbook approach is the most teacher-friendly and student-friendly. You have to buy a workbook for each student, but the books are cost-effective and time-saving. Each workbook provides students with an introduction to the program, a list of abbreviations and markings like the one in Section B of Chapter 3, a sample of how to do the assignments, grammar help pages like those in Section A of Chapter 3, and a separate page for each week's sentence. The workbooks are designed to be inserted easily into a three-ring binder. If you choose the workbook approach, have students read the introduction together or on their own. Be sure they understand the goals of the program. Show them the sample week so that they understand exactly what you expect them to do each day. Have students write in the month and day at the top of each week's page so that they know which sentence they are supposed to be working on at all times. Then, students follow the instructions in their workbooks to complete each day's task. You can find more information about the workbooks or order workbooks at www.dgppublishing.com. For your convenience, you can also find an order form in the back of this book.
- 2. Use the sentences provided in this book:** Chapter 3, Section C provides a list of sentences for student use. Write the week's sentence on the board or on chart paper for the students to see. Post a sign showing the students how to mark their sentences, and explain how DGP works. Post copies of the grammar help signs provided in Chapter 3, Section A. Then each day, do the exercise together orally and mark the answers on the board or chart paper for the students to see. You may find it helpful to rewrite the sentence each day so that the answers don't become too cluttered. On Fridays, the students should write a correctly written sentence when they are able. (Do this as a group with first graders.)
- 3. Overheads and CDs:** Whether your students are using workbooks or notebook paper, you'll want to go over each day's task as a class. You can simply write the week's sentence on the board and mark (or have students mark) the answers. If you prefer the convenience of an overhead or LCD projector or an interactive whiteboard, you can purchase transparencies or CDs to go along with DGP. Both the transparencies and the CDs provide a separate page for each week, much like a workbook page but with larger type. CDs also include the help pages. Please note that you cannot print from the CDs, though. They are for projection use

only. You can order or learn more about the transparencies and CDs at www.dgppublishing.com. For your convenience, you can also find an order form in the back of this book.

Regardless of which method you choose, during the first week of class you may want to do a brief review of basic grammar concepts. Extensive review won't be necessary. Students will learn as they go. Although most schools are in session for more than 30 weeks per year, DGP is a 30-week program. Inevitably, you will lose a week here and there due to standardized testing, special programs, or end-of-the-year parties.

Although you and your students may move slowly through the process the first week or so, once you get into the DGP routine, you'll find that it runs itself with very little disruption to your regular classroom schedule.

B. How to Do DGP Daily

DGP should be the first thing you do at the beginning of each language arts lesson. The thought of “doing grammar” every day may seem overwhelming with everything else you have to squeeze into your lesson plans, but DGP is not overwhelming at all. Yes, it will take two or three minutes of your class time each day, but it will ultimately save time spent on grammar units and on re-teaching concepts.

As we mentioned before, during the first part of the year, you will need to do the sentences as a group. Then, as your students are able, give them a few minutes to work independently while you circulate the room. This will give you an opportunity to see which students are still having trouble with the concepts. Remember, though, that the “P” in DGP stands for practice. The attempt is more important than the correct answer.

Each day as you go over the DGP, don't just provide the answers for your students. Encourage participation by asking them to provide answers. Students usually enjoy going to the board to mark answers, or you can save time by marking the answers yourself after the students provide them orally.

Throughout the week, take advantage of teachable moments—plenty of them have been planted in the provided sentences. *Teaching Points* for the week are located at the top of each week's page. Some weeks also include *For More Practice* lessons for extra help on skills for the week. Also, be sure to discuss why a sentence is punctuated a certain way or why a word is or isn't capitalized. But don't spend too much time each day on DGP. It's a vitamin, not a blood transfusion!

C. How to Motivate Your Students to Do DGP

You've heard the old adage: You can give a student a vitamin, but you can't make him swallow it. As with anything else you do in your classroom, half the battle is just getting your students to buy into it. There are three main reasons why most kids will actively participate in DGP:

1. It's practice, so there's no pressure. Now, for some older kids, practice translates into "It doesn't matter whether or not I try as long as I put something down." But most first graders haven't reached that apathetic state yet. Also, for many kids, the practice element provides a comfort zone in which they can at least try without fear of failure.
2. DGP won't go away like a two-week grammar unit will. As one of our colleagues once pointed out, older students have learned that they're going to "do grammar" for a couple of weeks every year. If they can just muddle through it, they will be free and clear until the next year. Well, DGP doesn't work that way. They may as well go ahead and try to get it because it's going to haunt them every day of the year.
3. Finally, DGP is served in small helpings. No student is overwhelmed by one sentence per day. In fact, most of them think they're getting away with something. We heard one of our students once say to a friend from another class, "Oh, we don't have to do grammar in our class. We just do DGP."

Never underestimate the power of positive reinforcement. Two things really motivate kids to keep trying once they've begun.

1. Excitement. Truly, your students will be so excited the first time something clicks that they will want the clicks to keep on coming. We're not lying to you. Nothing inspires kids like success.
2. Stickers. We don't have to tell you that students love stickers. Give out "DGP worked for me" stickers to kids who have "eureka" moments or to kids who put answers on the board. They will wear these stickers with pride all day, and they'll be more likely to keep trying.

D. How to Monitor Student Progress

Now that your students are motivated to try, how do you ascertain whether or not the DGP is actually taking effect? If you're paying attention at all, you'll be able to tell, but in case you want some more concrete evidence, here are some suggestions:

1. **Give a pretest:** This pretest will serve two purposes. For one thing, it will show you which concepts you need to review (briefly!) before beginning DGP. Also, if you end the year with a posttest, it will show you how effective DGP has been for your students. See Chapter 3, Section F for a reproducible pretest/posttest.
2. **Monitor daily sentences:** Along the way, you can do daily monitoring while making students accountable for their practice. If you get through ten sentences in one grading period, each student can earn a total of 100 points. Deduct two points for each time a student didn't try his or her daily sentence. Keep track by putting tally marks in your grade book or by using the check sheet in Chapter 3, Section G. If your school doesn't assign grades for first graders, use an incentive such as ten extra minutes of reading time or recess if students participate in DGP each day. Monitor progress each day as you go over the day's sentence. Take an extra minute for a difficult concept. Relate one of the day's concepts to some other point you want to make about writing. Invite students to mark answers on the board each week.
3. **Stress application of concepts:** When you do a mini-lesson on usage or on some other aspect of writing, show students how the concepts learned in DGP come into play. When

talking to a student about his writing, you'll find that the student will often apply the concepts himself: "I think I need to capitalize this word because it's a proper noun."

4. **Give a DGP quiz:** Toward the end of the year, give students a sentence constructed of concepts that they should have mastered. Students will then take the sentence through a week's worth of DGP (see Chapter 3, Section E for a quiz template). Consider leaving the grammar help signs up to help students with the test—it's more important to know how to apply what they've learned than it is to memorize it all. At some point, memory will come naturally with repetition. If your school doesn't test or assign grades in the first grade, offer a special incentive for students who can correctly mark a sentence on their own.
5. **Give a posttest:** The DGP pretest in Chapter 3, Section F can also serve as the posttest, or you could use the quiz template to create a posttest. Either way, a posttest will show you exactly what the students have learned throughout the year.

E. Some Words of Caution

DGP may work like magic, but it really isn't magic at all. You must commit to the program in order to see results. You can't go skipping vitamins. You must make DGP a priority every day or you will lose the benefit of daily repetition. Your students won't make it a priority if you don't, and you know that you can't fool kids even in the first grade!

Don't let yourself get discouraged. Remember that this is their first exposure to grammar concepts, so the light bulbs won't start coming on until about week five or six. For some students it will be earlier and for some it will be later, but the bottom line is this: The first couple of weeks you won't feel like you're making any progress. Don't give up, and encourage them not to either. It will help them tremendously to know that you don't expect them to get it right away. But let them know that you do expect them to keep trying! Give them the vitamin analogy. Remind them that they won't see results until they've been taking the vitamins every day for several weeks.

The daily habit of doing DGP will take a couple of weeks to instill in your students (and maybe in yourself). But after a couple of weeks, it will become second nature to them (and to you).

Next, you must know grammar well to teach it well. Don't feel bad if you're not comfortable with grammar. You're not a bad person, but you do need to brush up before you embark on DGP. You really have to know what you're talking about when you're going over these sentences. If you're rusty, here's what you need to do: Practice on the students' sentence list. That's right. Do the work, and then check yourself against the answer keys. You'll see the program from the students' point of view, and you might learn a thing or two along the way.

Finally, you have to use the lingo in your classroom. Even when you're not going over the day's sentence, you need to throw the terminology around to help your kids see how the grammar applies to different situations. For example, if you're doing a writing lesson, discuss the importance of using adjectives and correct punctuation. Have students highlight adjectives in a piece of writing to determine whether or not they need to include more description. The more you use the terminology, the easier it will be for students to remember and apply the concepts. And when everyone in the room knows the terminology, it sure makes explanations easier.

Chapter 3: Materials

A. Reproducible Grammar Help Signs

Copy the signs on the following pages, and post them in your classroom so that students can refer to them as they work on their Daily Grammar Practice.

SAMPLE

NOUN

person, place, thing, idea

common: begins with lower case letter (city)

proper: begins with capital letter (Detroit)

possessive: shows ownership (girl's)

ADJECTIVE

describes nouns (I have a green pen.)

describes pronouns (They are happy.)

tells

Which one?

How many?

What kind?

B. Marking Guide

C

common noun

P

proper noun

CP

common possessive noun

PP

proper possessive noun

pronoun

~~interjection~~

adjective

verb

~~conjunction~~

(preposition)

Another option to marking sentences is to underline or highlight with a different color for each part of speech.

D: Answer Keys

Week One

(starting ____/____)

Teaching point for this week: Talk about the difference between a proper noun and a common noun. **For more practice:** Have students brainstorm a list of common and proper nouns. Have students use this list to write Friday's sentence.

Monday: Find each common noun, proper noun, possessive noun, pronoun, interjection, adjective, preposition, and conjunction in the following sentence. Use an arrow to show which word each adjective describes.

^P
josh likes red apples

Tuesday: Find each action verb in the following sentence and underline it twice. Then find the noun or pronoun that is doing the action and underline it once.

josh likes red apples

Wednesday: Circle the purpose of this week's sentence.

declarative exclamatory imperative interrogative

Thursday: Write the sentence with correct punctuation and capitalization.

Josh likes red apples.

Friday: Write a new sentence that includes the criteria below.

proper noun, verb, same purpose as this week's sentence

Many answers are possible, but here is a suggestion:

Mike reads books.

Week Twenty

(starting ____/____)

Teaching points for this week: Revisit the interrogative sentence. Note that without correct punctuation, it's difficult to tell whether this sentence is referring to *chocolate cookies* or *chocolate* and *cookies*. **For more practice:** Practice using conjunctions by having students think of and write about things that come in pairs or groups.

Monday: Find each common noun, proper noun, possessive noun, pronoun, interjection, adjective, preposition, and conjunction in the following sentence. Use an arrow to show which word each adjective describes.

do you want chocolate cookies and milk (for)
a snack

→^c

→^c

→^c

Tuesday: Find each action verb in the following sentence and underline it twice. Then find the noun or pronoun that is doing the action and underline it once.

do you want chocolate cookies and milk for a snack

Wednesday: Circle the purpose of this week's sentence.

declarative exclamatory imperative interrogative

Thursday: Write the sentence with correct punctuation and capitalization.

Do you want chocolate cookies and milk for a snack?

Friday: Write a new sentence that includes the criteria below.

pronoun, adjective, verb, preposition, same purpose as this week's sentence

Many answers are possible, but here is a suggestion:

Does he want strawberry ice cream for dessert?

