

The 2-Part Grammar Solution:

How to Teach Grade-Level Grammar While Closing the Writing Gap

Why Grammar Instruction in 4th & 5th Grade Feels Impossible

If you teach grammar in 4th or 5th grade, you've probably experienced this exact frustration: You look at your standards and see that you need to teach modal auxiliaries, correlative conjunctions, and perfect verb tenses...

...but your students are still writing: *"Me and my friend went to the park and we played soccer and it was fun and then we got ice cream and then we went home."*

So you try to integrate grammar into writing because that's what all the best practices say to do.

But when you sit down to grade their writing, you realize that nothing has changed. They're still using run-ons, fragments, and inconsistent tenses in their writing. They still don't seem to know when to use commas, capital letters, or even periods.

And you're left thinking, *How am I supposed to teach my students to use correlative conjunctions when they don't even recognize where one sentence ends and the next one begins?*

The real issue? The grammar standards are moving forward whether or not our students are ready for them.

That's why the advice to "just integrate grammar into writing" doesn't always work at this level—because the skills our students actually need don't always match what we're required to teach.

The 2-Part Grammar Solution: A Better Way to Teach Grammar

Instead of forcing students to use advanced grammar skills in their writing before they've mastered the basics, I teach grammar in two distinct ways:

The Grammar & Language Block

- A dedicated 15-minute grammar lesson most days that ensures students are still learning grade-level grammar skills

Writing-Based Grammar Instruction

- A few times a week, I target the grammar mistakes that are actually showing up in student writing and teach those skills when students need them.

This two-part approach ensures that students:

- ✓ Don't fall behind in grade-level grammar expectations, further widening the gap.
- ✓ Get grammar practice that they're able to apply in their writing to actually move the needle and make it better.
- ✓ See the value of grammar because it's no longer abstract to them or something far beyond what they're actually writing.

Let's dive into how this works!

Part 1: The Grammar & Language Block:

Explicit Grammar Instruction in Just 15 Minutes a Day

Grammar instruction does not need to take over your entire class period.

I kept my explicit grammar instruction short, focused, and structured with a daily 15-minute Grammar & Language Block. This ensured my students received direct instruction on grade-level grammar standards..

This approach allows students to get consistent, skill-based practice in an efficient, manageable way.

What This Looked Like in the Classroom

Day	Focus	Activities
Monday	Introduce the skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick lesson, model examples, guided practice
Tuesday	Review & practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More practice, optional grammar homework, possible exit slip
Wednesday	Continue practice & assess readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exit slip to check for mastery
Thursday	Differentiate instruction based on exit slip results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If most students have mastered the skill: Centers, stations, task cards, partner activities• If most students still need practice: Whole-group reteaching• If only a small group struggles: Small-group reteaching while others work in centers
Friday	Assessment & targeted reteaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick review, assessment, and small-group support for struggling students

Part 2: Writing-Based Grammar Instruction:

Teaching Grammar in Writing—With Purpose and Intention

We've all heard the advice: "Grammar should be embedded into writing instruction."

And while that sounds good in theory, the reality is that simply integrating grammar into writing isn't enough.

If we want grammar instruction to actually improve student writing, we need to be purposeful and intentional.

Instead of starting with a grammar skill and trying to fit it into writing, we should start with student writing and determine what grammar skills will help them improve.

Some approaches to integrate purposeful grammar into writing instruction:

<p>Whole-Group Mini-Lessons (When Most Students Need the Skill)</p>	<p>Example: Students Are Writing Short, Choppy Sentences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Step 1: Identify the Writing Struggle: Students are writing in short, repetitive sentences that lack flow.✓ Step 2: Determine the Grammar Skill That Will Help: Using phrases to enhance sentences (prepositional phrases, ordering adjectives, appositives).✓ Step 3: Practice the Skill: Review examples of prepositional phrases and discuss how they add details.✓ Step 4: Apply It to Writing: Students go into their drafts and expand 3–5 sentences by adding phrases that improve fluency.
<p>Small-Group Lessons (When Most Students Need the Skill)</p>	<p>Example: Small-Group Lesson on Capitalization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Step 1: Identify the Writing Struggle: A handful of students aren't capitalizing proper nouns in their writing.✓ Step 2: Determine the Grammar Skill That Will Help: Capitalization rules for proper nouns.✓ Step 3: Practice the Skill: We quickly review capitalization rules and correct a few sample sentences.✓ Step 4: Apply It to Writing: Students highlight places in their writing where they should have used capital letters then fix them.
<p>Individual Writing Conferences (When One Student Needs It)</p>	<p>Example: A Student Struggles With Run-On Sentences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Step 1: Identify the Writing Struggle: A student's writing is full of long, unstructured run-ons.✓ Step 2: Determine the Grammar Skill That Will Help: Sentence boundaries—what makes a complete thought, how to recognize a run-on.✓ Step 3: Practice the Skill: I model how to identify a run-on and demonstrate ways to fix it (periods, conjunctions, semicolons).✓ Step 4: Apply It to Writing: The student goes through their draft and fixes 3–5 run-ons using a strategy we discussed.

Bringing It All Together:

The 2-Part Grammar Solution

We've all been told that grammar should be embedded into writing. But the reality is that if we want grammar instruction to actually make a difference, we need to be intentional about how we teach it.

That's why The 2-Part Grammar Solution works:

- **The Grammar & Language Block** ensures students get explicit, structured instruction on grade-level grammar skills—without it taking over writing time.
- **Writing-Based Grammar Instruction** helps students improve their writing by focusing on the grammar skills that actually matter in their drafts.

By separating grammar instruction into these two distinct parts, students get:

- ✓ Grade-level grammar instruction that keeps them on track without widening skill gaps
- ✓ Targeted grammar lessons that make their writing stronger
- ✓ A structured, purposeful approach that makes grammar instruction more effective

How to Start Using This Framework Right Away

If you're ready to shift your grammar instruction to something more effective, structured, and practical, here's how to start:

Step 1: Add a 15-Minute Grammar & Language Block to Your Routine

- Decide which days you'll teach explicit grammar instruction (most days of the week).
- Use a clear structure: Introduce, practice, check for mastery, differentiate, assess.
- Keep it short and focused—just 15 minutes a day.

Step 2: Use Student Writing to Guide Writing-Based Grammar Lessons

- Look for patterns in student writing—what grammar struggles are holding them back?
- Decide which grammar skill will improve their writing.
- Teach that skill in a mini-lesson, small group, or conference.
- Have students apply the skill immediately to their writing.

Step 3: Be Flexible and Responsive

- Adjust instruction based on student needs.
- Don't force grade-level skills into writing if they're not developmentally appropriate.
- Don't skip foundational skills just because they're not in your grade-level standards.

Final Thoughts:

Teaching grammar in 4th and 5th grade doesn't have to be frustrating or feel like an impossible balancing act.

When you separate explicit grammar instruction from writing-based grammar instruction, you create a system that is:

- ✓ **Efficient**—Grammar instruction stays short and structured.
- ✓ **Practical**—Students actually use grammar to improve their writing.
- ✓ **Effective**—Students finally apply what they learn instead of memorizing rules they never use.

By following this framework, you'll start to see real growth in your students' grammar and writing skills—without sacrificing one for the other.

Have You Heard the News?

Grammar has been added to All-Access Reading!

All-Access Reading now includes a growing collection of grammar resources for teaching, practicing, and reviewing a variety of 4th and 5th grade grammar and language skills.

Click here to learn more or join the membership today!