

Teaching lexis, learning grammar

Find out how a lexical approach to grammar can help your students become more fluent more easily.

Almost all modern English language teaching materials claim to have communicative goals. However, under closer scrutiny, much of the material available has been developed with a (hidden) grammar agenda. So, we might find that material supposedly about "The world of work" is actually being used as a vehicle for teaching the simple past, for example.

There are many reasons for these grammar-biased teaching and learning phenomena. Much undoubtedly has to do with the way we were taught and learned languages at school, with the result that both students and teachers often feel safest in a familiar grammar-based learning environment.

The lexical approach

The lexical approach to learning and teaching means venturing beyond the grammar comfort zone.

The lexical approach quite simply means that the main focus of language learning is on learning words in context, in so-called 'lexical chunks'. Grammar becomes a part of the journey, but not the end in itself. It's this approach that you will find in *Great!* It's an approach that puts grammar

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on the backseat and has real communication as a goal.

It's fun, it's enjoyable and it works!

A (present) perfect example

The copymaster opposite is adapted from page 119 of *Great! A1*. Students can already talk about things in the past using the simple past. They have already learned to use *ago*.

Warm-up tasks: Students look at and identify the cities in the photos (task 1a).

Key: a. Warsaw b. Paris c. Rome.

Students then do task 1b in pairs. To check the lists, you can ask students to spell city names to each other, give the name of a city they think no other pair has, etc. Take the opportunity to use the key phrases as often as possible in response to students' ideas:

"That's an interesting city, I've never been there!" or "I've been to ... 3 times – and you?" etc.

Students then complete task 2a and compare answers in class. Ask students to make more sentences by asking things like: "How would you say 'Ich war noch nie in London'." / "Ich war vor fünf Jahren in Rom?" etc. Make sure students use the structures in the sentences given! When you're satisfied that students have practised enough examples, ask them to complete task 2b in writing. Check answers in class by asking questions like: "Which city did you visit last year?" / "I've never been to Warsaw, and you?"

Now teach the lexical chunk "Have you ever ...". Start by writing the phrase *Have you ever* on the board and having your class repeat it in chorus. Repeat at least 3 times.

Now add *been to London?* and practise again at least 3 times in chorus, until students have memorized the question as a chunk. Now write *Yes, I have!* and *No, I haven't!* on the board and do the same. Finally ask each student in your class the question, changing the city as you wish, and eliciting a Yes/No answer. If you want, ask stronger students to take over and ask the question.

Now ask students to complete tasks 3a and 3b and check in class.

Finally students mingle and practise an easy real-life dialogue based on the speech bubbles in 3c.

By the end of this easy session your students will be able to chat fluently about places they have been in a real life context – using the present perfect – perfectly!

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Great to teach!

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Have you ever ... ?



1a What are the capital cities in the photos?

- _____
- _____
- _____

1b In pairs. How many more capital cities can you name in two minutes?

Tip

Cities and countries

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2a Read the sentences and work out the meanings. Tick the sentences true (T) or false (F) for you.

- | | T | F | |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I went to Warsaw last year. |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I've never been to Poland. |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I went to Paris when I was fifteen. |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I went to Rome two years ago. |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I've been to Rome loads of times. |
| 6. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I've never been to Madrid. |

2b Change the places in 2a. Make the sentences true for you. Then tell your class.

- I went to _____ last year.
- I've never _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3a Have you ever been to ... ? Look at question 1. Then complete questions 2 to 6.

- Have you ever been to Egypt?
- _____ been to Bombay?
- Have you ever _____ Canada?
- _____ Venice?
- _____ London?
- _____ ?*

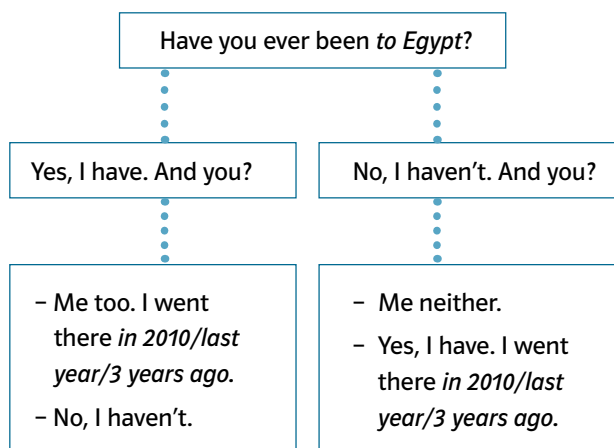
*You choose the place.

3b Write your answers to the questions in 3a.

✓ Yes, I have. • ✗ No, I haven't.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3c Ask others in class.



Grammar check

have been (present perfect)

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