Image Grammar: Painting Images with Grammatical Structures

Thirty years ago when I first started teaching English/language arts at Hudson Middle School in Ohio, a simple exchange of two letters caused our English/language arts faculty to take sides in a controversy that continues to this day.

The first letter arrived a few days after Greg Loiko, one of our social studies teachers, returned from a field trip to a veterinary hospital. One veterinarian had spent an entire morning sharing his thoughts on veterinary medicine with the students, even allowing them to watch a minor operation on a dog's stomach. Greg, appreciating this time and effort, asked his eighth-grade class if someone would volunteer to write a thank-you note.

A girl volunteered and Greg gave her some school stationery, an envelope, and a copy of the veterinarian's address. That afternoon, without checking with Greg, she wrote and mailed the letter shown in Figure 1.

Four days later, Greg received this reply:

Dear Mr. Loiko,

I want to commend your group of students for their behavior in our hospital on the day of your field trip. However, the letter I received shortly after their visit disturbed me. It represents a travesty in the teaching of our language and illustrates the lack of intelligence and lack of proficiency in the basic skills among our youth today.

Furthermore, the letter made me question the kind of guidance and formal training which our students receive in the public schools. How a student could write so poorly and yet be promoted to the eighth grade is beyond my comprehension—especially in a district like Hudson. But then perhaps your school system is not as good as people believe.

Finally, I should think that this letter should certainly be embarrassing to you since it is obvious that no teacher offered any counsel whatsoever in its writing. I certainly hope not, at any rate, because if you or any other teacher allowed this student to mail that letter with the understanding that it was adequate, then the future of education in this country is grim indeed.

Sincerely,
Dr. @@@@@@

PS: Enclosed is the note I received for your review.

You can imagine the reaction in the teacher's lounge when Greg shared these two letters. Some teachers condemned the vet for being too harsh on the school and on a girl they defended as just trying to express thanks. Other teachers criticized

Figure 1. Noden, H. and R. Vacca. 1994. *Whole Language in Middle and Secondary Classrooms.* New York: HarperCollins. p. 177. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Note: The student quotes and some of the examples in this article were taken from *Image Grammar* by Harry Noden.

Greg and made comments like, "What did you expect? The veterinarian is absolutely right. He gave hours of his valuable time to help the school, and the only thanks he got was this ungrammatical scribble, a note that no one even spent 60 seconds to proofread."

Greg, a relatively new teacher, was devastated. He realized that he should have screened the letter and, at this point, didn't know how to respond to the veterinarian. To help Greg reestablish his rapport with the veterinarian, several of his supporters gathered together and composed what they felt was an appropriate reply (see Figure 2).

Needless to say, in spite of the urging by his colleagues, Greg refused to send this note, sending his own apology instead.

Although this incident developed from a social studies field trip, it triggered a debate within our English department about how we should be teaching grammar. The positions taken by various members of our faculty revealed two opposing philosophical camps: those teachers who advocated a linguistic approach and those who

Figure 2. Noden, H. and R. Vacca. 1994. *Whole Language in Middle and Secondary Classrooms.* New York: HarperCollins. p. 179. Reprinted by permission of the author.

championed a traditional approach. Although we didn't realize it, the conflict raging in our small suburban department mirrored a similar controversy that extended across the country.

As a new teacher at that time, I was soon being recruited by representatives of each camp. Bob, a ten-year veteran and one of the leading proponents of linguistics, hoped to lure me by pointing out discrepancies in the logic of traditional grammar. He would engage me in conversations like this:

"Harry, teaching traditional grammar is like teaching astrology instead of astronomy. It has absolutely no scientific basis."

"How is that?" I would ask.

"Look at this sentence." On a piece of scratch paper Bob wrote, *The nerky rapoid snooked the gurlip with a tapit pern.* "Tell me. What are the nouns in this sentence?"

"That's easy: rapoid, gurlip, and pern." I smiled, glad to share my knowledge, even though it was an easy question.

"How do you know that rapoid is a noun?"

Taking the bait, I answered, "Well, rapoid is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea,"

"Really? Could you tell me in which category rapoid falls?"

"I don't know. It's not a real word. Could be anything."

"Then how can you say it is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea? Using your traditional definition, you are identifying it by its meaning, yet the word is meaningless."

Bob's point was powerful and made me realize that from a scientific perspective, I could be compared with the medicine show hucksters of the old West, selling my students a type of snake oil methodology. English language users recognize parts of speech from clues such as position, endings, prepositions, and determiners.

But a few days later, I found myself engaged in a discussion with Marion, a 33-year veteran and proponent of traditional grammar.

"Harry," she would say. "This linguistic stuff is a lot of hokey. Those college professors come up with these new ideas and never test them in a real classroom. Don't pay any attention to it. Just remember that Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Faulkner

all grew up on traditional grammar. What worked for them will work for your students."

As a rookie, I felt torn, in part because I respected both of these individuals. Both were outstanding teachers, loved by students and admired by colleagues. Both taught from an informed perspective of knowledge and experience, and both wanted the best possible grammar program for their students. It was difficult for me to decide which approach to use, but after vacillating from one position to the other, I decided to begin my career teaching traditional grammar since it was the grammar I knew best.

After just a few years, however, I began to realize what many researchers were saying, that teaching traditional grammar in isolation had no carryover to writing. (See Connie Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context* [1996] for a complete historical account of the research studies on grammar.) In spite of my emphasis on traditional grammar, an outside observer looking at my students' themes might assume that little or no grammar instruction was taking place. Ultimately, I began to believe that Bob was right and decided to switch to linguistics.

For the next few years, I used a linguistic approach with a focus on transformational grammar. While my students found many of the concepts of linguistics fascinating—concepts like the Great Vowel Shift, the geography of dialects, and the theories on the origin of language—the aspects of linguistics that led to improvement in student writing were minimal and ineffective. Not only did my students fail to transfer their linguistic knowledge of grammar to writing, they found transformational grammar far more difficult than traditional grammar.

Again, I felt frustrated, uncertain where to turn, so I began to seek answers from published authors. I examined their comments on grammar–writing relationships and sought out examples of their revisions, which I hoped would provide an intimate look at their art—how they selected and rearranged grammatical structures.

These explorations led to two discoveries. First, I found that writers view grammar as a method of image construction. Authors constantly describe their writing with statements such as these:

"Paint. That's the magic word. Paint pictures with words," explains Jacques. "That's the greatest advice I can give anybody. Paint the pictures with words. The pictures will appear in the imagination so the person reading it can say, 'I can see that.'"

—Brian Jacques (O'Neill, 1995, p.36)

The way you select words and organize them into whole compositions depends on the way you see human experience. If you literally do not see anything, you will of course have nothing to say.

—Leavitt and Sohn (1964, p.7)

Atoms are necessary to living things, insofar as they make up the molecules of life. Without them there's nothing. But it's the interaction of molecules, and not of individual atoms, that gives rise to the complexity of biology. Likewise, in literature it's "molecules" of words and not the individual words themselves, that impart life and vitality. We call this literary molecule the image.

—Jon Franklin (1986, p.94)

Writers see, then write what they see; writing is a visual art.

—Donald Murray (1997, p.3)

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In addition to this emphasis on image construction, I also discovered that professional writers describe image painting techniques from four grammatical perspectives: images of style, images of form, images of content, and images of convention. (See Figure 3.) While teachers have always taught aspects of style, form, content, and convention, the significant effect of images has often been overlooked.

Images of Style

With images of style, professional authors frequently advise new writers to "show rather than tell." Novelist Robert Newton Peck (1980), for example, explains this concept in *The Secrets of*

Successful Fiction:

> Readers want a picture—something to see, not just a paragraph to read. A picture made out of words. That's what makes a pro out of an amateur. An amateur writer tells a story. A pro shows the story, creates a picture to look at instead of just words to read. A good author writes with a camera, not with a pen.
>
> The amateur writes: "Bill was nervous."
>
> The pro writes: "Bill sat in a dentist's waiting room, peeling the skin at the edge of his thumb, until the raw, red flesh began to show. Biting the torn cuticle, he ripped it away, and sucked at the warm sweetness of his own blood." (p. 4)

This concept is found in almost every instructional book on fiction as well as in many of the books on nonfiction. However, few writers go one step further and break down the image techniques essential for learning how to show, rather than tell.

Guided by the perception of the writer as an artist, I began to search for the basic elements of writing, elements similar to those described by watercolorist Frank Webb (1983) as essential to the visual artist. As Webb explained, "pictures are not made of flowers, guitars, people, surf, or turf, but with irreducible elements of art: shapes, tones, directions, sizes, lines, textures, and color" (p. 9). If so, I wondered, what are the "irreducible elements" of grammatical style?

I found a partial answer in two fascinating books: Francis Christensen's *Notes toward a New Rhetoric* (1967) and Virginia Tuffte's *Grammar as Style* (1971). Both works detailed grammatical structures that the authors defined as the building blocks of grammatical style. Seeing a parallel with art, I began viewing grammatical structures as a writer's brush strokes. However, the level of complexity described by Christensen and Tuffte was well beyond the capabilities of my eighth graders. So with my students, I began the journey into art and writing with four of the simplest brush strokes: the participle, the absolute, the appositive, and adjectives shifted out of order.

Using live models, photographic images, and copies of famous paintings, I began to teach my kids to paint with grammatical structures. To insure success, I simplified the process by defining each brush stroke even further with an oversimplification and by modeling each with a classroom demonstration.

For example, teaching the brush stroke of an absolute, I simply told my students to add a noun and an "ing" phrase to the end or beginning of a sentence describing an image. I showed them a few examples of authors using this technique and then modeled the concept. Using a projected slide of a cat climbing a tree, I created a simple sentence like, "The cat scrambled up the tree." Next, I added two absolute brush strokes: "Hair bristling, claws digging into the bark, the cat scrambled up the tree."

Then, it was their turn. I asked students to create their own core sentences and paint them with original brush strokes from images I provided. I've borrowed some of the student examples I use in *Image Grammar* (Noden, 1999, p. 5–9) to show how my eighth graders used a variety of brush stroke techniques, each indicated with italic type:
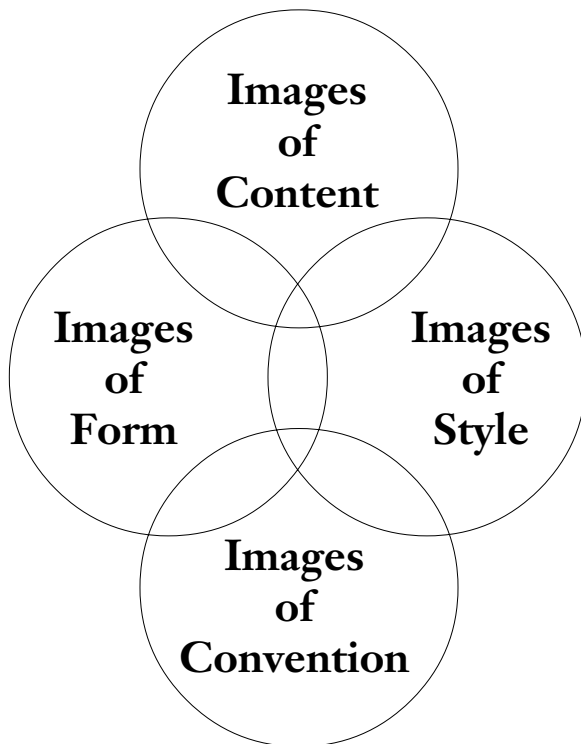

Figure 3. Image grammar: An artist's/writer's perspective

Participles

Flying through the air on the wings of a dream, the Olympic long jumper thrust the weight of his whole body forward.

—Cathleen Conry (Noden, p. 5)

Melody froze, *dripping with sweat, hoping with all her might that they wouldn't hear the noise*. A beam of light swung out into the darkness, *searching*.

—Becky Swab (Noden, p. 5)

Absolutes

Jaws cracking, tongue curling, the kitten yawned tiredly, awaking from her nap.

—Tara Tesmer (Noden, p. 7)

I glanced at my clock**,** *digits glowing florescent blue in the inky darkness of my room.*

—Jenn Coppolo (Noden, p. 7)

Appositives

The volcano, *a ravenous God of fire*, spewed forth lava and ash across the mountain.

—Ben Quagliata (Noden, p. 8)

The fish, *a slimy mass of flesh*, felt the alligator's giant teeth sink into his scales as he struggled to get away.

—Lindsey Kannen (Noden, p. 8)

Adjectives Out of Order

The boxer, *twisted and tormented*, felt no compassion for his contender.

—Chris Hloros (Noden, p. 9)

The cheetah, *tired and hungry*, stared at the gazelle, which would soon become his dinner.

—Zach Vesoulis (Noden, p. 9)

One important aspect of this approach was the blend of oversimplification and imitation. I oversimplified by giving only partial definitions, adding more refined definitions later as students became more proficient. With absolutes and participles, for example, I never mentioned "ed" forms until students felt comfortable painting simple forms.

Once students developed a skill painting single sentences, we painted paragraphs, mixing brush strokes for effect. Eighth grader Adam Porter, for example, blended several techniques in this scene from his horror story, inspired by the close-up image of a tarantula:

Then it crawled in. A spider, *a repulsive, hairy creature, no bigger than a tarantula*, crawled into the room. It crawled across the floor up onto his nightstand and stopped, as if it were staring at him. He reached for a nearby copy of *Sports Illustrated*, rolled it up, and swatted the spider with all his might.

He looked over only to see a hideous mass of eyes and legs. He had killed it. Just then, another one crawled in, *following the same path as the first*. He killed that one, too. Then another one came, and another and another. There were hundreds of them! *Hands trembling, sweat dripping from his face*, he flung the magazine left and right, *trying to kill the spiders*, but there were too many. He dropped the magazine.

> **I came to realize that the concept of grammar as an art must extend beyond the sentence to passages.**

Helpless now, his eyes darted around the room. He could no longer see the individual spiders. He could just see a thick, black blanket of movement. He started squirming as he felt their fang-like teeth sink into his pale flesh like millions of tiny needles *piercing his body*. (Noden, pp. 11–12)

Another student, Michele Leighty, intrigued with the rhythm of absolutes, created the following poem:

The Snake

Eyes darting,
lips parting,
the snake flicked its tongue.

Body slithering,
scales quivering,
its rattle beat like a drum.

Cold blood boiling,
body coiling,
the snake attacked its prey.

Feet scurrying,
paws hurrying,
the mouse could not get away.

(Noden, p. 12)

As students developed their skill of writing effective paragraphs, I came to realize that the concept of grammar as an art must extend beyond the sentence to passages. As Mina Shaughnessy explains in *Errors and Expectations* (1977), "The mature writer is recognized not so much by the quality of his individual sentences as by his ability

to relate sentences in such a way as to create a flow of sentences, a pattern of thought that is produced, one suspects, according to principles of yet another kind of grammar—the grammar, let us say, of passages" (p. 226).

So I began to help my students make a transition from sentences to passages, looking closely at the concept of form.

Images of Form

To help students "feel" grammatical rhythms, I first encouraged them to imitate the grammatical patterns of well-constructed paragraphs. This helped them to see how professionals pound a drum beat to emphasize their images. We began by imitating subtle patterns that create variety. For example, Brad Wicklund wrote this after reading a passage from Gary Paulsen's book *Brian's Winter:*

> **Just as the artist lays out the shape of a canvas, so the writer lays out the shape of prose when selecting a genre.**

> Imitation
>
> At first he didn't realize what was happening. He saw the car rumble and flash its lights, its huge engine roaring and grinding, and then in the shadow he saw a flash of red, just a touch, moving across the hood of the car. (Noden, p. 75)

Now compare that to Paulsen's passage:

> Original Passage
>
> At first he didn't recognize what was coming. He saw the moose stiffen and turn his head, his huge ears alert and forward, and then in a shadow he saw a flash of gray, just a touch, moving across to the rear of the moose. (Paulsen, 1996, p. 121)

To introduce the dramatic rhythms evoked by parallel structure, I used "fill-in-the-blank" music patterns to get students started. My approach involved three steps. First, I would select a passage, then I would extract the pattern, and finally I would have students imitate it.

Here is an example using the parallel structure pattern of Rod Serling's introduction to the television series *The Twilight Zone*, followed by an imitation created by a group of students describing a math class they enjoyed.

The Passage

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears, and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call . . . *The Twilight Zone.* (Zicree, 1989, 31)

The Extracted Pattern

The _____ Zone
There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as _____ as _____ and as _____ as _____. It is the _____ _____ between _____ and _____, between _____ and _____, and it lies between the _____ of _____ _____, and the _____ of his/her _____.
This is the dimension of _____. It is an area which we call . . . *The _____ Zone.*

The Imitation

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as acute as one degree and as obtuse as 179 degrees. It is the vast plane between simple addition and advanced calculus, between infinity and probability, and it lies between the teacher's daily cup of hot coffee and the student's daily pile of homework problems. This is the dimension of chalkboard scribbles. It is an area which we call *The Math Zone.*

In addition to imitating small passages, students can learn to craft shapes of entire works. Just as the artist lays out the shape of a canvas, so the writer lays out the shape of prose when selecting a genre. While most teachers are aware of the shape of the five-paragraph theme, many may not realize that each genre has a taxonomy of patterns on which writers rely. Robert Tobias (1993), Georges Polti (1917), and Nancy Kress (1997) are just a few of the authors who have categorized these basic plot shapes.

For example, a plot pattern called "The Contest," in which the main character struggles against a rival (person, animal, or nature), is a standard fictional pattern. Works that would fall in this category include the short stories "Lenningen Ver-

sus the Ants," "The Most Dangerous Game," and novels such as *The Perfect Storm* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. By showing students some of the common characteristics of a pattern, teachers can help them better understand how shape affects content.

Reading teachers have done this for years, teaching students shapes called "graphic organizers" to improve their understanding of nonfiction, and patterns termed "story grammar" to help them understand fiction. (Vacca and Vacca, 1996.) How beneficial have their efforts been? After reviewing a decade of research, Fran Lehr (1987) concluded, "One of the most effective ways to promote children's reading and writing skills is to help them develop a sense of story. Teachers can accomplish this through the use of story grammar" (p. 550). Examples of practical applications of story grammar can be found in almost any textbook on reading.

Images of Content

With images of content, authors identify grammatical structures that shift meaning dramatically. Examples of dangling modifiers and confusing pronoun reference fall in this category. When written carelessly, these images of content can create statements like these, taken from Richard Lederer's book *Anguished English* (1987):

> Yoko Ono will talk about her husband John Lennon, who was killed in an interview with Barbara Walters. (p. 101)

> No one was injured in the blast, which was attributed to a buildup of gas by one town official. (p. 104)

> When Lady Caruthers smashed the traditional bottle of champagne against the hull of the giant oil tanker, she slipped down the runway, gained speed, rocketed into the water with a gigantic spray, and continued unchecked toward Prince's Island. (p. 105)

Specific details—particularly nouns and verbs—also dramatically impact the content of images. The positive power of specific details can be demonstrated to students by taking a humorous paragraph and deleting all the specific details. For example, examine the following passages:

> To meet the demand it created, Sony set up the PlayStation 2 manufacturing facility. There, the PlayStation 2 work force have been making PlayStation 2 units as fast as they can.

This passage is devoid of specific images. Now see how Dave Barry created humor in the original passage with the specific details added and highlighted in italics:

> To meet the demand it created, Sony set up the PlayStation 2 manufacturing facility, *which is located in a one-car garage in suburban Tokyo.* There, the PlayStation 2 work force, *which consists of 92-year-old Mr. Mumuwama and his 89-year-old wife, Blanche,* have been making PlayStation 2 units as fast as they can, *considering the fact that they must assemble all 123,972 parts by hand, and their candles keep blowing out. Nevertheless the Mumuwamas have been cranking out these babies at the rate of nearly one per month, for a total of 11 so far, of which eight failed quality-control tests because of defects such as spiders, denture adhesive on the microchips, etc.*

> (Barry, p. B4)

The dramatic effect of specific details on content occurs in all prose but is easy to demonstrate with humor. By rewriting one-line jokes as broad generalizations, teachers can illustrate this power for students. For example, compare these rewritten general statements with the original specific examples used in David Letterman's "Top Ten Signs Your Shop Teacher Is Nuts" (1995).

General Statement: The shop teacher gives the same project semester after semester.

Letterman's Original: The shop teacher gives the same project semester after semester: Make Your Own Coffin.
  (Letterman, p. 115)

General Statement: The shop teacher says and does strange things.

Letterman's Original: The shop teacher shouts, "Watch this! You don't need a hammer if you've got a steel plate in your head." (Letterman, p. 115)

Images of Convention

Images of convention provide clarity through accepted standards. When a convention is used cor-

rectly, we barely notice it. As a result, it is sometimes easier to show students the power of conventions by examining comparative models. For example, watch what happens in the following two letters (Garb, 1975). The words in both are identical, but the choice of punctuation alters the meaning.

> Dear John:
>
> I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy. Will you let me be yours?
>
> Gloria

> Dear John:
>
> I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?
>
> Yours,
> Gloria

In addition to clarity, conventions also impact the meaning of a different type of image: a social image. If Shauna says, "We was down town," many members of our society would perceive her as unintelligent and/or uneducated. She may be neither, but this type of language prejudice is part of our societal perception. Consequently, teachers have an obligation to teach students conventions that could affect their social status.

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Thanks to the research of Hairston (1981), Connors and Lundsford (1988), Noguchi (1991), and Weaver (1996), this task has been made easier in recent years. These scholars have provided target lists of grammatical problems to help teachers focus on two main areas: those grammatical errors that are most common among their students and those that are status producing. As Noguchi (1991) explains, in a writer's grammar, "the chief aim is not to teach all the basics of grammar, but

to focus on a minimal set of grammatical categories and to use these categories to treat a maximum number of the most serious stylistic errors" (p. 34).

Since the abilities and backgrounds of students differ from community to community and classroom to classroom, teachers need to construct a target list of key grammatical problems relevant to their particular students. While all of the scholars mentioned have created excellent target lists, Douglas Cazort's list from *Under the Grammar Hammer* (1992) works particularly well as a simple guide to fashioning your own classroom objectives. Here are the first 15 targeted items from Cazort's list of 25:

15 of Cazort's 25 Most Important Grammar Mistakes

1. Wrong tense or verb form
2. Fused or run-on sentence
3. Sentence fragment
4. Lack of agreement between subject and verb
5. Wrong word
6. Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element
7. Unnecessary shift in tense
8. Missing comma in a series
9. Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe
10. Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element
11. Confusion of *its* and *it's*
12. Dangling or misplaced modifier
13. Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent
14. Wrong or misplaced modifier
15. Vague pronoun reference

(pp. 20–23)

Editing from a limited list of conventions has several benefits. First, students working from a selected list find the task of editing manageable. They have a road map for the first leg of a journey

toward competence. For the poor grammarians, knowing that they are responsible for a small number of concepts generates feelings of confidence and makes success more attainable. For teachers, a limited list not only provides a method for targeting individual or small group needs, but also works as a tool for measuring a student's progress in understanding conventions.

One strategy that is fun to use as an introduction to teaching conventions is the University of Mottsburgh Occupational Inventory of Grammatical Knowledge. This grammar-income test is one of those ideas that should have been developed, but never was. So I fabricated one: a grammar test that predicts potential income.

Without revealing the bogus nature of the test to students, I explain that their command of conventions has a direct correlation to their potential income. Science has shown, I explain, that the greater their grammatical knowledge, the greater their income. Then, I announce that I have a test that will predict their income and distribute the following instructions:

University of Mottsburgh Occupational Inventory of Grammatical Knowledge

As demonstrated in the research of Dr. Edward McCormick, an individual's habits of grammar correlate with her or his income. Test results indicate that one can predict with 80% accuracy the income of an individual based on answers to the grammar questions below. The results of this quiz will predict your potential income level, assuming your grammatical habits remain unchanged.

Instructions: Mark each sentence as "C" if it is grammatically correct, "I" if it is incorrect, or "?" if you are uncertain. Wrong answers count for a minus two. A question mark, indicating you are uncertain, only counts for a minus one. Keep in mind that errors may be of any variety: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or usage.

_____ 1. Her choice will strongly effect the outcome.
_____ 2. We have alot of work to do.
_____ 3. Mottsburgh is a busy industrial city, thousands of cars and trucks move through it every day.
_____ 4. "I suppose", she remarked "that success comes only with time."
_____ 5. The company should receive the package tomorrow.
_____ 6. Its impressive to hear what she has done.

_____ 7. She was late, however, she did make the presentation.
_____ 8. Give the book to whom?
_____ 9. When the ship arrives we can begin the journey.
_____ 10. We rafted down the grand mountain river.
_____ 11. The name of the book was "Outbreak."
_____ 12. There were four in the group: Ann, Jim, Theo, and Amanda.
_____ 13. He sings good.
_____ 14. You shouldn't lie on the wet grass.
_____ 15. He paid all the interest on the principle.
_____ 16. I wish to go irregardless of his decision.
_____ 17. He doesn't know history very well. As you can see from his answers in class.
_____ 18. He imagined that Hawking would have all the answers but he just posed more questions.
_____ 19. Spiraling in the Andromeda Galaxy, Dr. Vilhelm insists that there is alien life on the Andromeda planet called Lanulos.
_____ 20. We packed all of our luggage, then we were on ourway to the airport.

(Noden, pp. 195–96)

After students have taken the grammar test, I have them self-score it by posting this answer key:

Answer Key: 1. I, 2. I, 3. I, 4. I, 5. C, 6. I, 7. I, 8. C, 9. I, 10. I, 11. I, 12. C, 13. I, 14. C, 15. C, 16. I, 17. I, 18. I, 19. I, 20. I.

Next, I have them examine the following income chart to see at what income level their grammatical knowledge places them. Many students become depressed when they discover that their scores indicate they are unemployable.

Number Wrong	Projected Salary	Occupational Level
0 to -4	$150,000 and above	top executive
-5 or -6	$90,000 to $150,000	upper management
-7 or -8	$60,000 to $ 90,000	key personnel
-9 or -12	$25,000 to $ 60,000	semi-skilled
-13 or -18	$10,000 to $ 25,000	unskilled
-20 or more	$0 to $10,000	unemployable

However, I come to the rescue, telling my students not to despair, and announcing that over the next few days, I am going to increase their incomes by at least $50,000.

Months later, I confess to my students that I fabricated the Mottsburgh Occupational Inventory of Grammatical Knowledge, but emphasize

that the concept of the test is valid. Our language does affect the way others perceive our competence, as almost any personnel director will tell you.

Conclusion

Joan Didion once said, "All I know about grammar is its infinite power." For me, that power derives from images—grammatical images of style, form, content, and convention. It is no accident that Hemingway studied Cezanne's paintings to help shape the images in his novels, or that Bradbury spent his childhood enraptured with comic books to which he later attributed his ability to write screenplays. Images act as a doorway into the writer's art and have the power to enchant students like a pied piper into the imaginative world of grammar.

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