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# Getting a Grip on Grammar



Dee C. Konrad

Illustrated by Vickey Bolling

Good Year Books

## Dedication

*"The last thing that we find in making a book is to know  
what we must put first." — Blaise Pascal*

With sincere gratitude, I salute two specialists in the publishing of books:  
Laura Layton Strom and Roberta Dempsey. Their encouragement and patience  
are appreciated!

This book is dedicated to four little "grammar grippers":  
Alexander Royse Konrad, Zachary Lawrence Robbins, Julia Barnes Konrad,  
and "Baby Yet to Be Named" Robbins

May they and all the children who grapple with the English language move to  
an understanding of its beauty.

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# Foreword

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**T**his workbook is intended to supplement standard textbooks and classroom instruction. It seeks to enhance the development of language skills and deepen appreciation for language itself.

One of the main objectives of this workbook is to help reinforce the relationship between students' lives and the language students use to interpret or describe their lives. Language confers power on its users. Our job as educators and parents is to help students fully realize this power—an exciting and, at times, a formidable task indeed!

Various strategies are provided here for parents' and teachers' use. Ideally, educators and families work together in a strong system of mutual support that inspires students to develop grammatical skills as they explore the structure and beauty of language. In all cases, parents and teachers are encouraged to praise the correct responses of students and clarify the incorrect responses. Encouragement is like honey for the busy student bee.

The variety of tasks in this workbook should provide ample opportunities for learning for all your young readers and writers. However, additional activities and practice that you provide can be valuable investments of time and effort for these young learners.

Sound instruction at this time in students' lives, grades 4–6, is crucial. If students can identify, understand, and internalize the basics of the English language, they have an invaluable tool—one that will undergird their futures, both in further schooling and in their personal lives, and help ensure their success.

# How to Use This Book

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## The Goals of This Book...

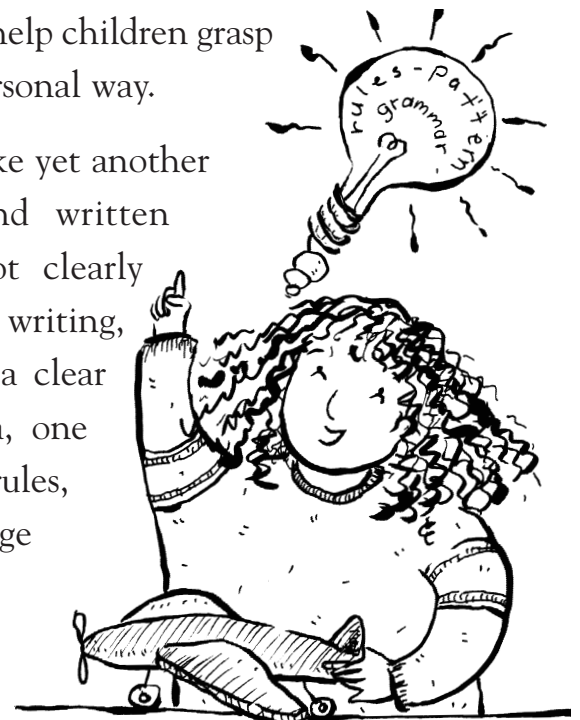
### What They Are and How They Are Met

The goals of this workbook are several:

- *to clarify the importance of grammar and its usefulness in students' lives;*
- *to further students' knowledge of and facility with specific grammatical rules;*
- *to promote an interest in language itself;*
- *to provide opportunities for positive writing experiences;*
- *to build skills that ensure greater success in many academic areas.*

How does this book work toward these goals? To begin, it strives to show a connection between written language and other pursuits in a child's life that have a particular structure or order. For example, in games—soccer, basketball, chess, etc.—rules govern the activity. In building model airplanes or cooking, rules in the form of a pattern or a recipe must be followed to obtain good results. To a broad extent, we can use the idea of rules or patterns to help demystify grammar. For each class or each child, teachers or parents are encouraged to find similar examples that help children grasp the concept of language structure in a personal way.

Further, be sure to use this book to make yet another connection—that between spoken and written language. When spoken words are not clearly formulated, meaning is lost. Similarly, in writing, if one uses words backward or without a clear relationship among them or to an idea, one cannot be understood. Following the rules, then, in both spoken and written language leads to understanding, to the important communication of ideas, whatever they may be. Clear communication is the



primary goal for students. How can they learn to write in such a way that they present their ideas—imaginative or factual—in precise and pleasing language? Both theory and practice will bolster the learning process.

The eleven units into which the book is divided can be used on an ongoing basis or can be reserved for special sessions. At home, they can serve as a discrete course of study or can supplement traditional school texts. Note that each unit moves from identification of the rules for a particular subject—say, prepositions—to internalization of those rules.

The **Pre-Test** and the **Post-Test** provide a valuable form of evaluation. The **Pre-Test**, given prior to this grammar study, will reveal to the student (and the parent or teacher) what the student knows and what he or she needs to work on. It sets personal goals for each child. The **Post-Test**, given at the completion of this course of study, will reveal the student's progress. If desired, a similar test might also be administered midway through the course.

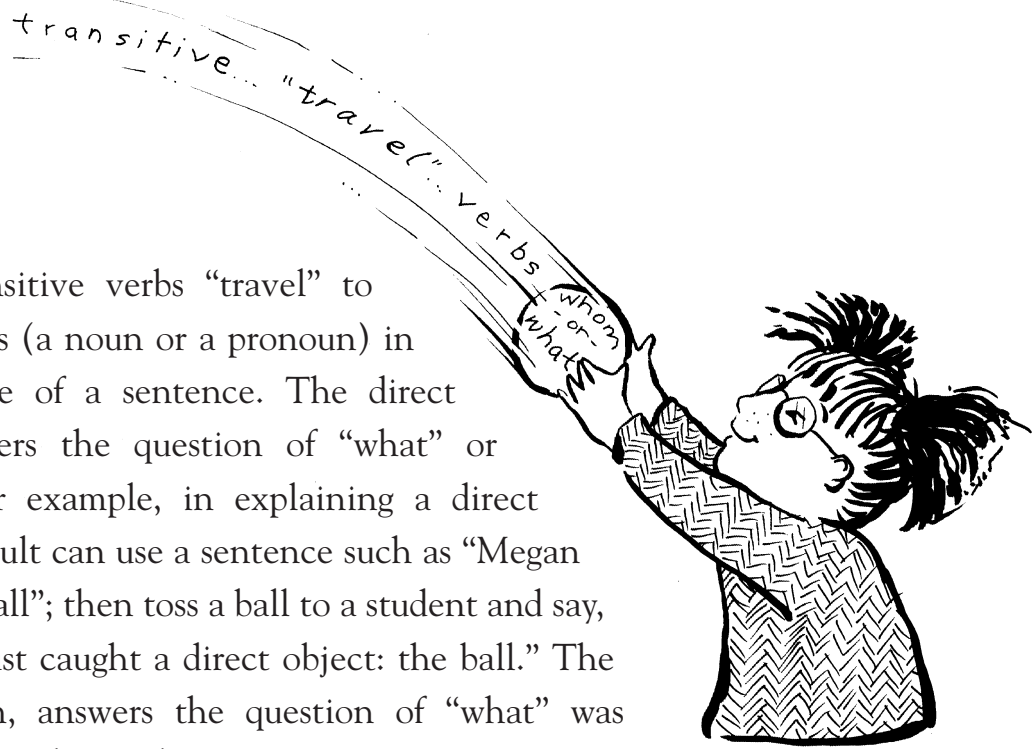
The short rhymes in the form of **Clues** that appear at the beginning of each activity incorporate rules of grammar in a light, easy-to-remember way. These small kernels of information and gentle reminders are meant to supplement other lessons or texts in some cases and to stand alone in others.

Of course, teachers or parents can extend the grammatical point under review or even discuss with students the meaning and application of the theory behind the rule. For example:

*Theory:* Transitive verbs connect differently to certain words in the predicate of a sentence than do other verbs. The connection clarifies the meaning of the sentence. Transitive verbs are primarily action verbs that affect the nouns or pronouns serving as direct objects of the action.







*Rule:* Transitive verbs “travel” to direct objects (a noun or a pronoun) in the predicate of a sentence. The direct object answers the question of “what” or “whom.” For example, in explaining a direct object, an adult can use a sentence such as “Megan caught the ball”; then toss a ball to a student and say, “You have just caught a direct object: the ball.” The ball, a noun, answers the question of “what” was caught and is a direct object.

In the classroom, connections to another textbook or lesson can easily be made. Similarly, parents at home can draw on other books or resources for young students to enhance the relevance of each unit’s information. Such reinforcement is a guiding principle behind this book. Repetition serves to aid understanding; multiple opportunities for creativity maintain student interest.

The context of the activities, drawing as it does on subject matter, will be relevant to almost any child’s life. The aim in each case is to clarify grammar usage with simple, interesting material. The pattern of each activity—with its opening **Clues** (and examples), the **Discovery** section, and the free-writing or identification **Create** section—will quickly become familiar to students and thus comfortable for them. The brevity of each activity should appeal to young students whose attention spans may be limited. It is hoped that the emphasis on search and discovery, a “treasure hunt,” will encourage students to be adventurous in a linguistic sense.

Further, review pages offer opportunities for concentration on the subject of each unit.

Having students use colored underlining is another strategy used in this book to separate one part of speech from another. Experience has shown that



color helps some children remember parts of speech. Even the choice of a different color emphasizes the point.

**Review Sheets** toward the end of many sections offer opportunities for concentrated review of the subject matter of those sections. Further, **Special Reviews** (Cumulative) positioned at the end of groups of units test students' ability to draw together information learned up to that point.

The **Portfolio Pages** that conclude each section serve a dual purpose. They are a helpful indication of students' successful internalization of the rules of grammar. Further, the finished portfolios, which might receive separate evaluation, can be a source of true pride for each student, since they will represent his or her best efforts from the workbook. Consider presenting the portfolios at a special time—perhaps at a parent-teacher conference.

Even the results from the Pre- and Post-Tests could be included in the portfolio; they could further demonstrate the student's progress.

Note that the format of the activities makes them appropriate for competitive group use, a concept today's student understands well. Contests are fun and teach cooperation as well as gracious winning and losing. Several variations can be devised for the classroom or home. For example, in the classroom, teams of two or three students might work together on some of the activities. Points could be given on the basis of the number of answers during a timed session. After a designated period (two weeks? three weeks?), a small reward might be presented; the contest might last the entire semester, with a certificate or small plaque awarded each team at the end. Colored ribbons could indicate first place, second, third, etc. Alternatively, perhaps a book could be the first prize, with lesser prizes for the remaining teams. The parent at home can also rely on a system of rewards, perhaps using a calendar to mark points for a stated period of time. The student working at home might be in competition with himself or herself and/or the clock, each time attempting to best his or her past performance.

At the back of the book, an **Answer Key** is provided for all Discovery sections in each unit. The teacher or parent will need to decide how and when to use these keys. Many children will benefit from checking the answers themselves, building a sense of independence and responsibility in the process. Some keys might be made temporarily off-limits so that the activity functions as a test; others, particularly those for the first pages of a unit, might be “free range.” However you decide to use the keys, they should never be a crutch, only a way of determining whether the student has mastered a unit, page by page.

Included as a final page is a **Certificate of Achievement** to be copied and awarded to each student at the end of the semester or school year. It will provide closure and give students a sense of accomplishment at having mastered new skills. That feeling, accomplishment, reflects the serious intent of this book—that is, to help our students in *Getting a Grip on Grammar*.



# Tips for Teachers and Parents

**I**n this section, teachers and parents will find additional strategies for teaching the materials covered in each unit of the book. Some of the suggested activities will work best at school; others can be adapted for home practice. A number of the activities are appropriate for any unit of language. Use them, add to them, have fun with them, help students with them!

## Tips for working with nouns...

1. Ask students to prepare a list of nouns by finding rhyming words: for example, *pans*—*cans*.
2. In a timed contest, have students write a list of names of items seen in the classroom (or in a room at home).
3. For each child, prepare small envelopes with nouns (cut from colored paper). Have the children match the nouns to items in the room or in their possession.
4. Have students choose a noun and then describe it so that other students can guess the noun.
5. Ask students to look in children's magazines, newsletters, cartoons, etc., for proper nouns. After a designated period of time, reward the one who has found more proper nouns than any other student.

This same activity can be used for common nouns.

6. Ask students to write the names of as many animals—or foods or toys—as they can remember. In so doing, they become more aware of the broad range of this part of speech.

Try this activity as a timed contest.

