

## ENGLISH LEARNING MADE EASY

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### Abstract

There are many grammar books available in market and number of rules given in these books. English teachers face a huge task to explain all the rules to the students especially when it is a short course. Even non literature students, like engineering students, need to learn grammar techniques and methods to crack competitive exams. We, as English teachers, can help these needy students by making easy associations and simplifying grammar rules Kenneth Ward Church argues, “It is common practice in linguistics to classify words not only on the basis of their meanings but also on the basis of their co-occurrence with other words.” (p22)

### INTRODUCTION

Learning English for some is necessity, for some it is passion and for some it is like no other option. English is lingua franca and needed in national and international fields especially in Asian countries where people prefer this language than other regional language. For adult and aged beginners, it needs persistent hard work. In writing, grammar plays a vital role. Market is flooded with grammar books filled with rules and repeated examples.

I remember the example of VIBGYOR from my childhood. We could recall the colours of rainbow in sequence with the help of this mnemonic. Human mind works efficiently on made associations and image perceptions. Church continues, “Word association norms are well known to be an important factor in psycholinguistic research, especially in the area of lexical retrieval. Generally speaking, subjects respond quicker than normal to the word nurse if it follows a highly associated word such as doctor.” (p23)

Another scholar, Paula Jullian suggests,

“Meaning association is a key aspect to Semantics. These mental connections may go from very basic facts and relations (synonyms - antonyms) to very advanced and sophisticated analogies which set the ground for figurative language and metaphors.” (p239-247)

In addition to that she points, “we all make our own matches, based on personal experience, which bring into play non-linguistic associations.” (p239-247)

This refers to our personal associations that we make when we go first time somewhere remembering a building, temple etc. so that while coming back we may not forget our way. It is

not only applicable in general life, but has a pivotal role in learning and teaching too. I am going to present some associations which may help teachers and learners when it comes to learn English and become effective writers. I call these methods easy methods which have helped me and my students. As Beverly Ann Chin argues, “However, while students may be effective speakers of English, they need guidance to become effective writers.”

Teaching English grammar from last three years, I noticed, while checking work and answer sheets of students, that most of the mistakes are in subject verb agreement of present indefinite and confusion to choose between has/have and was/were according to the subject and spelling errors especially by engineering students. I have added easy technique for conditionals and reading passages. Lots of questions, in competitive exams these days, are framed from the above said topics.

First method is about subject verb agreement. What we teachers generally teach in class about tenses is rules and rules. For Present Indefinite the rules of when and why this tense is needed are explained and structure of the tense is written on board or shown through PPT. And there are many rules in the explanation of this tense. Same happens in present and past continuous and present perfect tense.

Shaughnessy in one of the texts explains that the superior grammar instruction is that which gives the maximum output by investing minimum of our time. Further, she suggests teachers not to narrate and explain much of grammatical terms as it may overlap and confuse the information communicated.

### Tenses

Now, see this technique. After briefly explaining the definition of the tense, we need to tell students in a very simple way about subject verb agreement. The questions in competitive exams are not about rules but about the practical application of the tenses and grammar. So, focus must be on practical application from the point of competitive exams.

In simple words, when Subject is Singular ie She, He, It, Name, s/es, does, is, was, has is used with or as main verb. In other words, if we make Singular subjects ie SHE, HE, IT, NAME a mnemonic, it will be **SHIN**. It means if subject is **either of SHIN**, then

Subject>Singular	Pre.Simple	Pre.Conti.	Past cont.	Pre.Perfect
She, He, It, Name	Use of s/es/does	is	was	has

For Plural subjects no use of s/es, and use of do, were, have is applicable. You might have noticed that all the above stated words Subject, Singular, **SHIN**, s/es, is, was and has either start with or end with alphabet ‘s’. So, we can make an analogy and in one go we can end the confusion of students regarding use of s/es, is/are, do/does, was/were and has/have in Simple Past, Present Continuous, Past continuous and Present Perfect tenses.

We can make our teaching interesting by relating grammar with facts. For instance, rather saying we use verb’s second form in positive Past Simple tense, we can assert that positive Past Simple tense is the only tense in history of grammar which takes verb’s second form. It will dawn in the mind of learners quickly.

### Spellings

Another obstacle faced by students, especially engineering students is spelling errors. They may be confused with as simple as principle and principal, stationary and stationery and 8 out of 10 students may misspell lieutenant due to its pronunciation. Here, we can make our own associations which are easy for all to understand and most importantly to remember. It can be given colour of humour.

Pair	Meaning	Difference in spelling	Association
<b>Principal</b>	Head, guide	<b>pal</b>	Pal means friend who guides us like principal
<b>Principle</b>	<b>Rule</b>	<b>ple</b>	Ending of word and meaning is similar ( <b>le</b> )
<b>Stationary</b>	stagnant	<b>a</b>	Here letter <b>a</b> is common
<b>Stationery</b>	Tuck shop	<b>e</b>	Going to tuck shop to buy an eraser

In first pair of Principal and principle, where one means head and other rule, it is to be noticed that principle and its meaning rule is same spelled and rhyme at the end. In the second pair of stationary and stationery, the only difference in the spelling is alphabet ‘a’ and ‘e’. We can make association of tuck shop and eraser with stationery. In confusion of spelling, student can recall that he is going to tuck shop to buy an eraser and eraser starts with letter ‘e’. So, stationery is **the** correct word for a stationery shop. Another example is the spelling of the word lieutenant. 8 out of 10 students and undergraduate level spell it in correctly as they may be confused with its pronunciation of sound ‘f’ in it. We can provide a simple analogy by breaking the word in an interesting way.

For instance, Lie-u-tenant and here a student can remember it easily that a tenant is lying and owner catches him/her saying ‘lie-u-tenant’. These are the few examples only. One can make one’s own analogy and association to remember difficult words’ spellings and meanings.

### Reading

In reading passages, the conventional method to find answers was to first read the passage and then read questions and again returning to passage to find answers. Today, in competitive exams, time is the key. Students can’t afford even the wastage of 2-3 minutes during exam. So, to save time, first go through questions rather than reading passage. By reading questions, 25% of the picture about what the passage is all about will be clear, as mostly relevant information is asked in the form of questions in reading passages. Another benefit is that the reader will come to know what he is supposed to find in the passage. Then underline the verbs in questions and read the passage. Any word similar to verb underlined will immediately strike to the mind of the reader which may lead to the solution of the questions he/she has read earlier.

### Grammar

Conditionals may be confusing for an engineering and non-literature student. But the questions related to conditionals are asked in even the exams like GATE, Cognizant recruitment drives. Conditionals (if clauses) have a condition and a result in a sentence. These are explained in following way in Wren and Martin High School Grammar.

Conditionals : type 1 (open condition)

If-clause Simple Present -- Main clause Will shall can may +plain infinitive

1. If you study hard -- you will get a first class.
2. If it rains -- we shall postpone our picnic...

Conditionals of this type tell us that something will happen if a certain condition is fulfilled. The condition may or may not be fulfilled.

Conditionals : Type 2 (Improbable or imaginary condition)

If-clause Simple Past (Subjunctive) -- Main clause would/should/could/might + plain infinitive

1. If you studied hard -- you would get a first class.
2. If I were you -- I should not do that ...

Conditionals of this type are used when we talk about something which we don't expect to happen or which is purely imaginary.

Conditionals : Type 3 (Unfulfilled condition)

If-clause Past perfect Main clause would/should/could/might + perfect infinitive ,

1. If you had studied hard -- you would have got a first class.
2. If I had tried again -- I should have succeeded...

Conditionals of this type say that something did not happen because a certain condition was not fulfilled. (p354)

After explaining basic conditions, it can be taught in an easy way. Let's see it in a different way.

Conditional	Condition	Sequence/Result
1 <sup>st</sup>	V1	Will+V1
Example	If he comes to party,	I will dance.
2 <sup>nd</sup>	V2	Would+V1
Example	If he came to party,	I would dance.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	V3	Would have+V3
Example	If he had come to party,	I would have danced.

In simple words, in 1<sup>st</sup> conditional, there is 1<sup>st</sup> form of verb in condition; in 2<sup>nd</sup> conditional, there is 2<sup>nd</sup> form of verb in condition; and in 3<sup>rd</sup> conditional, there is 3<sup>rd</sup> form of verb in condition. Moreover, in first and third conditional, even resulting sentences are having same number of verb forms respectively.

### Conclusion

The above stated are some of the techniques to learn quickly by making associations and this quick learning can be viewed as long term resource. We can make our own associations which can be personal or regional or at an international level. These should be for easy understanding but there is no shortcut to success than hard work. These techniques are only few examples. Many teachers and learners around the world make these types of associations on their own. The primary focus must be the benefit of learners whichever way they understand the concept. I conclude with the words of scholar Beverley Ann Chin, where the writer asserts, "Rather than strive to teach all grammatical concepts to all students, teachers should prioritize and provide instruction on the grammatical elements that most affect their students' ability to write effectively."

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