

## FOREWORD

Welcome to *Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind!*

This innovative grammar program takes students from basic definitions (“A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea”) all the way through detailed analysis of complex sentence structure. The student who completes this program will have all the skills needed for the study of advanced rhetoric—persuasive speech and sophisticated writing.

### WHAT MAKES UP THE FULL PROGRAM

*Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind* is a four-year program. Students who finish all four years will have a thorough grasp of the English language. No further grammar studies will be necessary.

The nonconsumable *Core Instructor Text* is used for each of the four years of the program. It contains scripted dialogue for the instructor, all rules and examples, and teaching notes that thoroughly explain ambiguities and difficulties.

There are four *Student Workbooks* with accompanying *Keys*. Each consumable workbook provides one full year of exercises and assignments. Each corresponding key gives complete, thoroughly explained answers. The student should aim to complete one workbook during each of the four years of study.

All rules and definitions, with accompanying examples, have been assembled into a handy reference book, the *Comprehensive Handbook of Rules*. This handbook will serve the student for all four years of study—and will continue to be useful as the student moves through advanced high school writing, into college composition, and beyond.

### HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Language learning has three elements.

First: Students have to understand and memorize rules. We call this “prescriptive learning”—grasping the explicit principles that govern the English language and committing them to memory. *Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind* presents, explains, and drills all of the essential rules of the English language. Each year, the student reviews and repeats these rules.

Second: Students need examples of every rule and principle (“descriptive learning”). Without examples, rules remain abstract. When the student memorizes the rule “Subjunctive verbs express situations that are unreal, wished for, or uncertain,” she also needs to memorize the example “I would not say such things if I were you!” Each year, the student reviews and repeats the *same* examples to illustrate each rule.

Third: Students need *practice*. Although the four workbooks repeat the same rules and examples, each contains a completely new set of exercises and writing assignments, along with a Key providing complete answers.

The combination of *repetition* (the same rules and examples each year) and *innovation* (brand-new practice materials in every workbook) leads the student to complete mastery of the English language.

## HOW TO USE GRAMMAR FOR THE WELL-TRAINED MIND

When you first use the program, begin with the *Core Instructor Text* and the *Student Workbook 1/Key to Student Workbook 1* set. Keep the *Comprehensive Handbook of Rules* on hand for reference.

During this first year, you shouldn't expect the student to grasp every principle thoroughly. Simply go through the dialogue for each week's lessons (there are four lessons per week), ask the student to complete the exercises, check the answers, and discuss any mistakes.

Some students may need more than one year to complete *Student Workbook 1*; the exercises increase in complexity and difficulty from Week 20 on. That's absolutely fine. Feel free to take as much time as necessary to finish this workbook.

When *Student Workbook 1* is completed, go back to the beginning of the *Core Handbook* and start over, this time using the *Student Workbook 2/Key to Student Workbook 2* combination. You'll go over the same dialogue, the same rules, and the same examples—with an entirely fresh set of exercises for the student to practice on. This combination of repeated information along with new and challenging exercises will truly begin to build the student's competence in the English language.

Follow this same procedure for the third and fourth years of study, using *Student Workbook 3* and then *Student Workbook 4*, along with their matching keys.

Regular reviews are built into the program. Every three weeks the student takes some extra time to do six exercises reviewing what was covered in the three weeks before. After Week 27, the reviews double in scope: twelve exercises review the material all the way back to the beginning of the course. These reviews, beginning with Review 9, become one week's work each. During review weeks, students should try to do three exercises per day, and then should go back and review the rules and principles of any exercise in which they miss two or more sentences/ examples.

## BRINGING NEW STUDENTS INTO THE PROGRAM

Because each workbook makes use of the same rules and examples, if you are teaching more than one student (or in a classroom or co-op setting), you may bring new students in at any workbook level. If you've already completed *Student Workbook 1* with your student or class, you may bring a new student in with *Student Workbook 2* the following year. The workbooks cover the same essential material. Occasional exercises in the third and fourth workbooks may have more ambiguity or challenge than the corresponding weeks in the first and second workbooks, but this should not present a major challenge; a student could also begin with *Student Workbook 3* or *4*.

It is *highly* recommended, however, that students who complete the later workbooks first go back and finish the earlier workbooks as well. The program is designed to take four years, no matter where the student begins.

## IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

As you teach, keep the following in mind.

- Language is a rich, complicated tapestry. It is occasionally logical, and sometimes irrational. Mastering its complexities takes time and patience. Don't expect the student to master—or even completely understand—every principle the first time through. Do your best, but be willing to accept imperfect learning the first couple of times through the program. The repetition and practice will eventually bring clarity. Be diligent—don't abandon the curriculum because of frustration! But accept confusion as a natural part of learning the more advanced language concepts.

- Always prompt the student for answers if she becomes confused. This is not a test. It is a learning process. Give as much help as necessary.
- From Week 19 (halfway through the course) on, the student is encouraged to read sentences out loud. Reading out loud is an important part of evaluating your own writing. Do not allow the student to simply read silently—help him develop this skill by following the directions to read aloud.
- Take as long as you need to finish each lesson. As noted above, it's perfectly acceptable to take more than one year to finish a workbook (particularly the first time through). The earlier lessons are shorter and simpler; they increase in both complexity and length as the book goes on. But especially in the later lessons, don't worry if you need to divide a lesson over two days, or take more than one week to complete a week's worth of lessons. In subsequent years, the student will go much more quickly through the earlier lessons, giving you time to stop and concentrate on areas of challenge later on.
- The first time through, ask the student to complete each exercise. In subsequent repetitions, however, you adjust the student's workload in the earlier (and simpler) lessons so that you can spend more time on the later exercises. If the student remembers and understands the concept, ask her to do the first four or five sentences in the exercise. If she completes them correctly, skip the rest of the exercise and move on. This will allow you to customize the program to each student's strengths and weaknesses.
- In my previous grammar and writing programs, I have recommended that students answer all questions in complete sentences. This is essential practice for younger students. However, older students who are writing fluently AND have already had plenty of practice answering in complete sentences do not need to keep this up. As material gets more complex, complete sentence answers simply become too long and unwieldy.

If, however, you are working with a struggling writer, you may wish to ask her to answer in complete sentences rather than following the script as written. So, for example, where the instructor text reads:

Instructor: What gender do you think the word *grandfather* has?

*Student: Masculine.*

Instructor: What gender does *grandmother* have?

*Student: Feminine.*

you may instead ask the student to answer:

Instructor: What gender do you think the word *grandfather* has?

*Student: "Grandfather" is masculine.*

Instructor: What gender does *grandmother* have?

*Student: "Grandmother" is feminine.*

## ABOUT DIAGRAMMING

*Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind* uses diagramming exercises throughout.

Diagramming is a learning process. The student should think of the diagrams as experimental projects, not tests. He should attempt the diagram, look at the answer, and then try to figure out why any differences exist. Expect these assignments—particularly in the second half of the book—to be challenging. Give all necessary help, using the key, and don't allow the student to be frustrated. Always ask the student to diagram with a pencil (or on a whiteboard or blackboard), and expect him to erase and redo constantly.

Also remember that diagramming is not an exact science! If the student can defend a diagram, accept it even if it's different from the key. To quote a 1914 grammar text: "Many constructions are peculiar, idiomatic, and do not lend themselves readily to any arrangement of lines" (Alma Blount and Clark S. Northup, *An English Grammar for Use in High and Normal Schools and in Colleges*).

## A FINAL NOTE

Whenever possible, *Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind* quotes from *real* books (novels, histories, science books, biographies, and more). This shows how grammar works in the real world.

However, just because I quote from something doesn't mean it's appropriate for your child to check out of the library. I quote from books that contain profanity, sex, and death. Whether or not your child is ready to read the entire thing is a family decision.

