

GRAMMAR GALLERY®

The Research Basis

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The Teacher Writing Center

March 2022

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Suggested citation: Stathis, R., and Gotsch, P. (2022). *Grammar gallery: The research basis*. Ruidoso, NM: The Teacher Writing Center.

Grammar Gallery is a web-based program designed to support teachers delivering explicit grammar instruction. The program was introduced in 2011 with the goal of providing educators of English learners with the teaching tools and background information they need to help students master key grammatical concepts that are vital in achieving academic language proficiency. While the program has always included reading and writing activities in addition to a focus on oral language, the program authors subsequently expanded the original Grammar Gallery program over the past decade to include a much greater emphasis on reading and writing. This reflects the changing composition of today's classrooms. A recent national survey of educators revealed that 72% of respondents teach general education, 53% special education, 42% students from low-income households, 39% English learners, 30% students who have experienced trauma, and 28% students with dyslexia (ReadWorks 2021). These responses reveal what today's teachers already know – there is a tremendous overlap in the composition of their classrooms. They are teaching general education to students who are also English learners, from low-income households, and/or receiving special education services. This reality requires teachers to diversify instruction, and this calls for instructional materials that facilitate that delivery.

In response, the authors of Grammar Gallery have fully integrated all four language domains as well as the Language, Reading, and Writing strands of the Common Core State Standards.

¹ English language development (ELD) is also referred to as English as a second language (ESL) and English to speakers of other languages (ESOL).

The program reflects best practices in education as well as the most current research into how students achieve academic language proficiency. (See, for example, Irby 2018.) Both strands—best practices and current research—support the concept that effective English language development (ELD)¹ programs should emphasize all four domains of language and provide explicit instruction of language usage and grammar. This paper highlights the research basis of Grammar Gallery.



Explicit Instruction of Functions and Forms

While meaning remains a critical part of language learning, current research reflects a broader theory of what constitutes language. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) influenced the shift toward a stronger emphasis on explicit language instruction by connecting the way people use language (e.g., its function) with the grammar (i.e., the form) they need to use in the communicative process. Recently, most language researchers have stressed the critical need for English learners to acquire academic language, the dimension of language that is not automatically developed but must be

taught (Cummins, 1984; Hakuta, 2001). As Fillmore (2003) observes, “no one is a native speaker of academic language.” Positing that social language emerges through continued exposure to the target language, Cummins (1989) strongly advocates teaching discrete language skills at the outset of language instruction as a bridge to the development of academic language.

“No one is a native speaker of academic language...”

Scarcella (2003) also emphasizes the importance of instruction in social language, academic language, and grammar so that English learners develop the high levels of communicative competence necessary for success in school and beyond. Dutro and Moran (2003) suggest that only through meaningful practice will students internalize the structures for fluency and automaticity. “Practice makes perfect” applies in language teaching and learning if the practice is meaningful, purposeful, and productive. The research coalesces around a central idea—language learners need direct language practice and support and guidance to develop the social and academic language critical for success in the classroom as well as the work world. These goals are consistent with the precepts of the Common Core State Standards initiative, which were fully implemented in 2014-2015.

The most recent research suggests that explicit grammar instruction is critically important to address the needs of a growing population of “long term English learners”—English learners who have been attending U.S. schools for more than six years and are still not proficient in English (Menken & Kleyn, 2009; Gedney, 2009; Clark, 2009; Olsen, 2010). Grammar Gallery was specifically designed to

support meaningful, purposeful, and productive language instruction and practice.



Supporting Teachers Delivering Explicit Grammar Instruction

While current educational research and practice emphasize the importance of providing English learners with explicit instruction in the rules of grammar—essential if students are to achieve higher levels of academic language proficiency—many teachers today developed their expertise during an era when grammar was not explicitly taught, and many instructional programs do not provide teachers with the information and strategies they need to teach grammar confidently and effectively to their students. Grammar Gallery addresses this issue by providing specific, easy-to-access information about grammatical forms and ways to teach them effectively. The teaching strategies in Grammar Gallery are based on decades of educational research and best practices.

Grammar—A Definition

Dictionary definitions of *grammar* often refer to it as the study of language as a system of words that demonstrate some apparent regularity of structure (morphology) and arrangement into sentences (syntax). Sometimes, the definition includes the pronunciation of words (phonology), meaning of words (semantics), and history of words (etymology). Some definitions

emphasize grammar as a system of rules in a language. In simplest terms, grammar encompasses the rules that govern the way our communication system works. However, this definition begs the question: Do people need to know the rules of grammar in order to communicate? Consider the following sentence:

She want pen blue.

While this sentence contains two grammatical errors—lack of subject-verb agreement (*she-want*) and incorrect adjective placement (*pen-blue*)—most English speakers know or can figure out what the sentence is trying to communicate: A female wants a blue pen. In this case, then, incorrect grammar usage does not impede communication. However, students who communicate with these types of grammatical errors on a consistent basis will struggle in the classroom and eventually in the workplace. Moreover, as grammatical errors are repeated over time, they become fossilized and increasingly difficult to change. In this sense, incorrect grammar usage seriously compromises a student’s ability to access, let alone succeed, in many occupations. This disadvantages students from pursuing college study, which opens the door to a broad range of higher paying jobs.

“Knowing” Grammar and “Knowing About” Grammar

Teaching grammar is a means to teaching communication. A central premise of Grammar Gallery is that it is more important that students understand where to place an adjective in a sentence rather than to be proficient in defining an adjective, adjectival clause, or adjectival noun. By making it to this point in the paper, you have demonstrated that you know about

grammar—you have mastered English vocabulary, syntax, voice, mood, tenses, and other dimensions of the English language simply by understanding what you have read so far. Like most educated English-speaking adults, you know the statement “I are going to the store” is incorrect usage. If you know and can articulate *why* that construction reflects incorrect usage—the subject and verb do not agree—you know about grammar. Clearly, teachers need to know grammar and know about grammar because they are responsible for helping students learn how to communicate using both social and academic language. Educators who work with English learners, in particular, find that their knowledge of grammar is tested daily—every time students ask for an explanation of a grammatical concept or unfamiliar term, teachers must provide a coherent and comprehensible explanation.



Grammar’s Place in the Curriculum Historically

From the earliest days of American education, grammar was at the forefront of the curriculum. Before the American colonies were united into one country, schoolchildren in America had textbooks with names such as *A New Guide to the English Tongue* (1740) and *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (London, 1758). American-

produced grammar books entered the market in the late 1700s with titles such as Daniel Webster's *Plain and Comprehensive Grammar* (1784) and Lindley Murray's *English Grammar, Adapted to Different Classes of Learners* (1795). These grammar books were predominately prescriptive. They offered seemingly immutable grammatical rules that students were expected to memorize and practice. Often these rules read like a list of things a parent would tell a child not to do, focusing on what to avoid. Moreover, these grammar books tacitly reinforced the idea that only certain styles of English were worthy of study; in other words, some styles of English were inherently better than others.

These grammar books emphasized diagramming sentences and analyzing language using specialized terms and figures. All of this was aimed ostensibly at teaching students to write and speak more effectively, but too often it resulted in making many students hate and fear English. In a sense, studying grammar became an end in and of itself, rather than a means to more effective communication. Still, this instructional approach to grammar was an important aspect of the curriculum through the 1950s. By the 1960s, however, educators had increasingly begun to question the effectiveness of the "drill and kill" approach, and the pendulum began shifting to the other extreme with the curriculum providing no explicit grammar instruction. For the next three or four decades, grammar was definitely out of favor. As an English professor observed in the 1980s, "No English teacher would be caught dead diagramming sentences today."

Grammar's Place in the Curriculum Today

Over the past several decades, educators, particularly English language development educators, have come to appreciate that

grammar instruction has an important role to play in helping students speak and write English more effectively, i.e., with greater clarity and less ambiguity. The approach most modern grammarians take is descriptive. Descriptive grammar looks at ways a language such as English is actually spoken or written rather than ranking one style of English as better than another. According to Teschner and Evans (2007), "an utterance is grammatical if a language's native speakers routinely say it and other native speakers of that language are able to understand it."

Stathis and Gotsch (2008) examined ESL/ELD teacher attitudes toward and perceptions of grammar instruction. Their survey found that most ESL/ELD teachers believe that English learners should receive direct instruction in the rules of grammar and writing conventions. However, slightly more than half of the respondents said most ESL/ELD teachers do not have the grammatical knowledge and writing skills to provide this kind of instruction. This pointed to the need to provide teachers who are delivering explicit grammar instruction with background information about grammatical forms, an approach that is firmly embedded in Grammar Gallery.

"... grammatical forms are taught to show students how they can perform specific language functions."

Because grammar is the fundamental organizing system of language, contemporary educators emphasize that teachers of English language learners must have a strong grasp of grammatical concepts and terminology as a

means to teach English. Dutro and Moran (2003) describe a systematic approach to ELD instruction in which grammatical forms are taught in order to show students how they can perform specific language functions: “Grammar is taught through the lens of meaning and use. For example, we teach past tense verbs so students can retell, comparative adjectives so they can compare, and the conditional tense so they can hypothesize. Thus, functions connect thinking and language use and provide the context for language instruction.”



Olsen’s 2010 research focuses on long term English learners (LTELs), a population of students that comprise upwards of 60% of the English learners in California. She defines LTELs as “students who enroll in the primary grades as ELLs and arrive in secondary schools seven or more years later without the English skills needed for academic success, and having accumulated major academic deficits along the way.” Menken and Kleyn (2009) also looked at LTELs with a specific focus on what schools can do to meet their needs. They emphasize the importance of teaching language skills to LTELs through the use of academic content. They cite the example of incorporating instruction on comparatives to help students master academic language structures required to compare objects and ideas. Clark (2009) identifies the elements of a successful program for ELs, including

LTELs, as one that provides specific instruction in discrete grammar skills. This recent research underscores the importance of explicit grammar instruction in providing an effective instructional program for English learners.

Language Functions and Forms English Learners Need to Know

Increasingly, ELD educators understand the importance of balancing authentic communication with direct instruction in English grammar. While ELD educators have not yet reached unanimous agreement as to the most appropriate scope and sequence for grammar instruction, they have coalesced around the following concepts:

1. It is important to delineate and describe a sequence of language functions (i.e., the purposes for which language is used) and language forms (i.e., the grammatical structures of language) that English learners should be taught as part of their ELD program of study.
2. The general framework of language functions and forms begins with a focus on concrete nouns, simple tenses, and sentence structures that allow student to communicate basic needs and then continues in an upward spiral to progressively more abstract vocabulary, sophisticated tenses, and complex sentence structures that facilitate highly refined student expression.

Integrating Oral Language, Reading & Writing

Grammar Gallery’s core content is located in the Main Gallery where each topic and grammatical form/function includes three lessons—**Introduce** (focusing on *oral language*),

Reinforce (focusing on *reading*), and **Expand** (focusing on *writing*).

The screenshot shows the Grammar Gallery website interface. At the top, it says 'GRAMMAR GALLERY' and 'The Nation's Premier Web-based Grammar Program'. Below that is a navigation menu with links like 'Getting Started', 'Main Gallery', 'Student Gallery', 'Support Materials', 'Special Topics', 'Contact Us', and 'Contact'. The main heading is 'MAIN GALLERY'. Below that, it says 'Get exclusive Treaties and Language Activities in our monthly e-news. Sign! Sign-up here!'. The main content is a table titled 'LANGUAGE LEVEL 1: EMERGING'. The table has two main sections: 'GRAMMATICAL FORMS' and 'LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS'. The 'GRAMMATICAL FORMS' section has columns for 'TOPICS' (People, School, Transportation, Parts of the World, Animals, Numbers & Shapes, Family Life) and various grammatical forms like Nouns, Verbs, Prepositions, etc. The 'LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS' section has columns for various functions like Name, Name, Contrast, etc.

Even though researchers (Brown, 1994) have identified listening and speaking as the language tools students most often use, these domains are often missing or treated superficially in many ELD programs. Grammar Gallery emphasizes oral language, providing educators with many opportunities to help English learners develop their speaking and listening skills with specific attention on vocabulary development, reflecting research underscoring the importance of this stand. (See, for example, Gibson 2016.) This attention recognizes that oral language is an important component in the development of an English learner's full language proficiency. Moreover, since the oral language skills of listening and speaking precede the development of the written language of reading and writing, the four language domains are closely connected.



One study shows that children's early listening comprehension influences their reading comprehension (Biemiller, 1999). Other research looks at the linkage between students' ability to grasp complex grammatical structures and the organization of oral discourse presented. The findings suggest a strong linkage between these abilities and students' ability to apply these concepts successfully (Bailey & Moughamian, 2007; Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001).

Students who have many opportunities to use, practice, and refine their oral language are better able to achieve high levels of academic success. In addition, they must have access to formal error correction. Native speakers find their language models, opportunities, and correction of errors at home as they are growing up. These all occur very naturally. For example, when a young child mispronounces a word (e.g., says *gat* instead of *cat*) or makes a statement that includes a grammatical error (e.g., *we seed a dog* instead of *we saw a dog*), the adult native speakers in the home correct the errors. Or when a young child has trouble decoding a word while reading a story or misspells a word when labeling a picture, the adult steps in to provide help and correction. English learners rarely have access to such opportunities. Instead, they rely on their English language development teacher to model good usage and correct language errors.

When building reading and writing skills, students follow a similar process. They must have access to models of good usage and many opportunities to revisit and use the language in relevant and authentic ways. In terms of writing, Chinn's (2000) research looked at the role of grammar in improving student writing. After reviewing the relevant research, she concluded "it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety, and usage in the context of

writing than to approach the topic by teaching isolated skills.” And Baker et al. (2014) pointed to the importance of providing regular, structure opportunities to develop written language skills. These approaches are consistent with the way in which Grammar Gallery organizes and presents grammatical content in the context of reading and writing.

At the same time, the program also acknowledges what current research tells about instructional processing. For example, Wong (2004) points out the importance of presenting one concept at a time, focusing on meaning, moving from sentences to connected discourse, using oral and written input, and asking learners to apply their new learning. These considerations are built into the Grammar Gallery program.

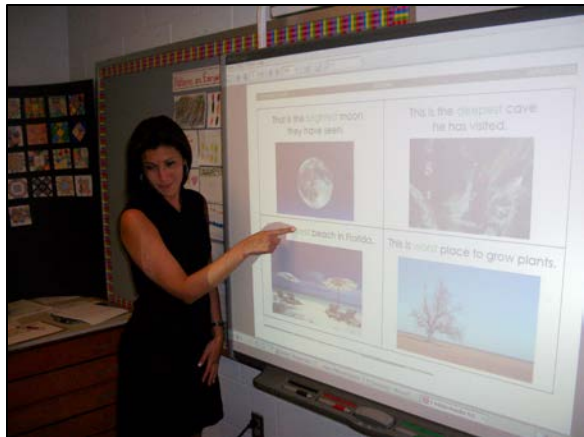


The classroom is the setting where students can practice what they are learning. Grammar Gallery provides the springboard for discussion about language forms and functions and helps the teacher convey subtle aspects of language. These aspects include such topics as the culturally appropriate distance between speakers of the same language, physical gestures, voice tone and volume, and non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, as well as the appropriate use of formal and informal language, register, and writing tone. All of these aspects of communication impart meaning as part of the communication process. The

classroom is the laboratory for English learners to experiment with language.

Grammar Gallery and Verbs

Understanding the English verb system is key to English learners' achievement of high levels of oral and written discourse, and many ELD programs do not pay specific attention to this important part of speech. Gentner (2006) explains that this lack of attention may result from the fact that verbs are not as “transparent” as other words, especially concrete nouns. Gentner also suggests that the meanings of verbs are more linguistically shaped than the meaning of nouns, particularly concrete nouns. And, of course, learning the English verb system is very challenging because students must deal with many irregularities in forming verbs for the different tenses. All students—native speakers as well as those learning English as another language—require instruction in order to master the assortment of tenses, the irregularity of many English verb forms, the auxiliary and modal systems that are specific to English, phrasal verbs, and other unique features of English, including expressions of condition and uncertainty. While Scarcella (2003) acknowledges that young native English speakers are challenged by the irregular present, past, and past perfect forms, they have opportunities in school to study them and support at home to reinforce their learning. However, if English learners fail to grasp the concepts implicit in forming irregular past tense and present perfect, they are at a great disadvantage when they come across these new verb forms in the textbooks they are expected to read and comprehend. Scarcella also notes that verbs provide a way to express time, an aspect of English that often baffles English learners (2003).



Grammar Gallery focuses on verb tenses in each of the five language levels because verbs are the key to the meaning of sentences. Consider, for example, the following: *a cat the dog*. This string of words includes two concrete nouns, but these nouns don't offer many clues to meaning in the absence of a verb. Did the cat *chase* the dog or *play with* the dog or *taunt* the dog or *cover before* the dog? In the absence of a verb, the nouns are one-dimensional and denote only the simplest, most superficial meaning. Verbs bring meaning to communication. In this respect, it's instructive to note that verbs are the only part of speech that can form single-word sentences and express a complete thought: "Wait!" "Don't!!" "Help!" Each of these one-word imperatives contains a complete thought.

Traditionally, educators have identified 12 verb tenses in English. Usually these tenses are arranged from the most common to the most sophisticated. While educators have not reached unanimous consent as to the specific order of these verb tenses, most agree on the relative sequence of the tenses along a continuum that ranges from most common to most sophisticated. As one example, Celce-Murcia and Larson Freeman (1983) arrange the 12 traditional English tenses according to the following sequence:

1. Simple present
2. Present progressive (or continuous)
3. Simple past
4. Past progressive
5. Simple future
6. Future progressive
7. Present perfect
8. Present perfect progressive
9. Past perfect
10. Past perfect progressive
11. Future perfect
12. Future perfect progressive

Many state standards reflect a similar sequence. In addition, educators who advocate systematic ELD and explicit grammar instruction also follow this general sequence. In addition to addressing these tenses at the appropriate language level, Grammar Gallery also provides instructional resources on other verb-related forms (such as modals, the conditional, and the passive voice) that are important for English learners to master. This is critically important as Clark (2009) points out that the "overt teaching of verb tenses—almost nonexistent in most traditional public school English language development programs—is typically the anchor" of the effective ELD programs he studied.

Selection of Vocabulary in Grammar Gallery

Grammar Gallery includes a listing of target vocabulary for each language level. In identifying the target vocabulary in the program, the authors consulted a number of sources, including published lists of frequently used words (Kress, 2008; *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008; Fry & Kress, 2006), Bloom's taxonomy of verbs (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), academic vocabulary lists (see, for example, Marzano & Pickering, 2005), and a cross-section of state and national ELD

standards. Each reading in the Grammar Gallery program includes a focus on academic vocabulary, including activities to help students develop and refine their understanding and use of academic vocabulary.


Academic Vocabulary Focus

This reading includes important academic vocabulary words.

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning(s)	Used in a Sentence	Other Forms
federal	adjective	having to do with the central government	Cities look to the federal government for help after natural disasters.	federation (noun), federally (adverb)
to recover	verb	to regain something or return to a former state	I was shocked when the earthquake hit my town, but I quickly recovered and started helping the injured.	recovery (noun)

The federal government helps people recover after tornadoes, earthquakes, fires, and other natural disasters.

Why do you think the federal government helps people recover after natural disasters? What other people or organizations help people recover?



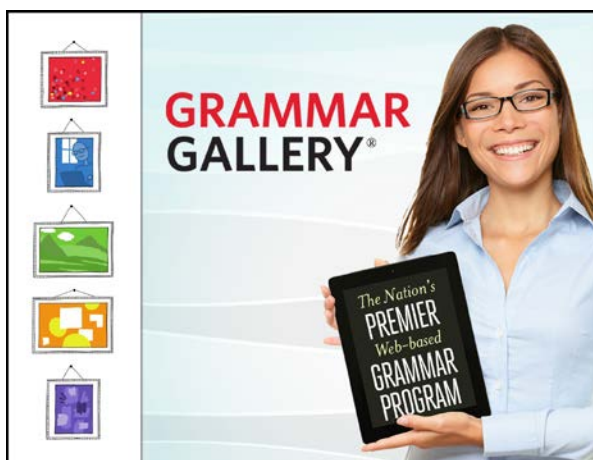
Other Research Considerations

Taught out of context, grammar instruction is ineffective and likely to repel students rather than help them to progress. Like other content, grammar instruction needs to be couched in meaningful contexts, which includes appropriate student support. For example, teachers should make effective use of visuals that are engaging and appropriate for students. They should involve students in learning experiences that encompass whole class instruction, small group instruction, collaboration in pairs, as well as independent work. In addition, research suggests that the instruction should emphasize the skills that students can transfer to other academic contexts as well as to other aspects of their lives (Rockett, 2009; *Language Magazine*, December 2009). In terms of visuals, Grammar Gallery incorporates high-quality photographs representing real life and real people as a way for students to infer meaning and make connections between what they are seeing and the oral and written language they need to express their understandings.

With regard to collaborative learning, Long (1983) asserted more than 30 years ago that students must negotiate meaning as an important aspect of their acquisition of English. He advised that the collaboration needed to have both purpose and meaning to ensure linguistic and academic development. This kind of meaningful, purpose-driven collaborative learning could include a broad array of activities such as sharing information, analyzing problems, and coming up with solutions. Subsequent educational research (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997; Marzano et al, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 1999) reaffirms the important of effective collaborative learning in promoting English development.

Grammar Gallery—An Innovative Program for Today’s Teachers

By tapping into this current research, Grammar Gallery provides an effective and efficient way to help teachers understand and relay key grammatical concepts that are critical to student achievement of academic language proficiency. Grammar Gallery is organized by language level, topic, language function, and grammatical form. Teachers may use resources from lower language levels to review or reinforce forms with students at higher language levels.



Each Grammar Gallery Lesson Includes:

INTRODUCE

Lesson Plan: A four-step, 20-minute lesson plan

Overview Charts: Photographs and text the teacher uses to present the target topic, function, and form

Sentence Frames: Large sentence frames for whole-class oral practice

Now You Try! Student worksheets for collaborative oral language practice

Teacher Talk: An explanation of the target grammatical form

REINFORCE

Lesson Plan: A four-step, 30-minute lesson plan

Reading: An engaging fiction or nonfiction reading integrating the target grammatical form

Think Critically: Questions that help build and refine students' close reading skills

Academic Vocabulary Focus: A chart and activities that highlight important academic vocabulary words in the reading

Comprehension Check: Questions that assess students' knowledge of what they read and prepare them for standardized tests

EXPAND

Lesson Plan: A four-step, 30-minute lesson plan

Writing Rules Resource: A student-friendly reference for the target writing rule

Writing Practice Worksheet: Student worksheet for writing practice

Sample **Introduce** Materials – focus on oral language

The collage displays four main components of a lesson plan:

- Lesson Plan:** A document with a table of contents and detailed steps for a 20-minute lesson.
- Overview Chart:** A grid of images and text. One image shows a road with the text 'The road goes through the neighborhood.' Another shows a group of birds with the text 'Many different kinds of birds live in this habitat.' A third shows a boat with the text 'The boat is sailing around the pond.'
- Sentence Frames:** Two frames with illustrations. The first shows a boat with the text 'The boat is sailing the _____ the _____.' The second shows birds with the text 'Many different kinds of birds live _____ this _____.'
- Student Worksheet:** A form with a header and several sections, each with an illustration and a blank line for student input.

Every Introduce lesson also includes "TEACHER TALK," an explanation of the target grammatical form, including what it is, how it's used, examples, how to help students practice it, and special notes.

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By simply clicking on the desired resource, teachers can use Grammar Gallery to introduce, reinforce, or expand instruction on specific grammatical forms and functions. Teachers find Grammar Gallery very easy to use. This is important feedback from users because research indicates that ease of use is a critically important variable in whether teachers actually use the new technology. Yuen and Ma's research (2008) found that perceived ease of use was the sole determinant to the prediction of intention to use. Additional research related to this issue with specific focus on Grammar Gallery is anticipated. Because Grammar Gallery is delivered electronically, the authors are able to respond quickly to new research findings targeted at making the program even more effective.

About the Authors

Grammar Gallery co-authors **Roberta Stathis** and **Patrice Gotsch** have worked collaboratively in the development of educational materials for the last 25 years. Their backgrounds combine classroom experience with extensive writing and publishing of instructional and assessment materials. Their special focus on the needs of English language learners and their teachers has resulted in the publication of academic articles, books, and innovative English language development programs and supplemental materials.

Roberta Stathis, Ph.D.

Dr. Stathis is an educator and writer based in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She is the co-author of numerous English language development programs as well as textbooks, nonfiction books, and dictionaries designed for English learners. Dr. Stathis has taught English learners in the United States and abroad. In addition to her ongoing work on Grammar Gallery, she teaches high school in New Mexico where she is highly qualified to teach secondary TESOL, English language arts, and social studies. She also serves as faculty advisor to the school newspaper and as advisor to the honor society on campus. Dr. Stathis holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology and social sciences (1975) and a master's degree in education (1985) from California State University, San Bernardino. She earned her doctorate in education (1989) from the Claremont Graduate University in California.

Patrice Gotsch, M.A.T.

Ms. Gotsch is an educator and writer based in Alexandria, Virginia. She has overseen the development of a wide range of publications designed for English learners and their teachers, and also has co-authored and edited several comprehensive ESL programs, books, and articles. She has taught English learners in the United States and abroad, and currently serves as a Lead Teacher for an ESL program in Northern Virginia. Ms. Gotsch received a bachelor's degree in speech communications (1992) from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. and a master of arts in teaching degree with a specialization in TESOL (1998) from the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont.

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