

“Nothing to it. Just pull the grammar out of your learner’s language” Yeah, right.

Home tutoring is learner-centred. How then to choose language points to work on, in a way that will help your learner and maintain your sanity?

Let’s look at a few examples of places to start and ways to proceed.

First example – it’s just grammar in context

Learner: I can’t talk about the past

Tutor: *(thinks to self) Wonderful! A clear directive! Where on earth do we begin? There are so many past tenses, and irregular verbs....*

Tutor: *(on a quick-thinking day)* OK. I’ll tell you three things I did last week and then you can tell me. OK? *(quickly chooses the most common tense and 3 regular verbs)* I walked home from the shops. I worked in the garden. I baked a chocolate cake. Listen carefully once more, specially to the ends of the words.
Now tell me. What did you bake?
Is that helpful for you?

OR

Tutor: *(on a not quick-thinking day)* OK. Let’s start next week. Then I’ll tell you some things I did and you can tell me. OK? *(rushes home to look up resources re past simple tense, or phones the resource coordinator)*

Second example: Is it grammar or is it communication?

Learner: What I need to do first?

Tutor: In a sentence, “I need” is fine. In a question, we add “do”. What do I need to do first? Try saying that, it sounds a bit funny. ...

Learner tries this out

*Tutor then deals with the **content** of the question (What **does** the learner need to do first?) Comes back to the grammar later (that day, next lesson, whatever) – maybe by modelling “What do we need to do first in this game?” “It’s my turn. What do I need to do now?” “Your turn. You ask me: What....”*

Third example: Who needs the grammar?

Learner: Someone phone me to ask questions and I don’t know what should I say.

I'd go with the content of this question. Telephone marketing is common, and so are other situations when one needs to say "No". The key point is that in English we usually soften a negative response like "No" with "Sorry" or something similar.

Tutor: Yes, that's quite hard. How about saying.....(*rapidly works out a few variations on the pattern of*

"Sorry, I can't..." (help you, talk now, come tomorrow)

"Sorry, I don't..." (have time, understand English, watch TV)

And, role plays those. Much more useful than a session on indirect questions!

🌈 You have more examples, comments, questions? Splendid. Email Dorothy T, or phone Elaine. We'd love to hear from you.

dorothy.thwaite@englishlanguage.org.nz