

Grammatically Speaking

by Michelle Jackson

How to Teach Third Person Singular Present Tense

English is an interesting language in terms of its verbs. It's the only language that uses "do" in order to form questions (e.g., **Do** you eat chocolate?) and responses (e.g., Why, yes I **do**!). It has a long list of phrasal verbs, each with slightly nuanced meanings (e.g., eat up vs. eat out). And, while its simple present tense remains relatively bare in terms of inflection (e.g., I eat, you eat, we eat), the simple present s/he conjugation contains an "s" (e.g., she eats, he nibbles, she tastes, he ingests). It is this particular conjugation that will be our focus for this lesson.

Students must practice identifying and producing this verbal form. One way to ensure this practice is to write a group story.

Materials Required

- Doc cam and writing utensil
- 1–2 sheets of blank paper
- Dictionaries or vocabulary lists for each student

Timing: 30 minutes

Step 1

Tell the class you are going to write a story together. Brainstorm the name of a character the story will focus on. The goal is to write about what that character does every day. For example, students might write about the daily life of a 5-year-old child, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, a mad scientist. This prompt will encourage students to use the third-person singular, simple present in every sentence. (5 minutes)

Step 2

Once you have decided on a character, brainstorm the first sentence with the class. Ask students: "What is the first thing that Chancellor Merkel does after she wakes up? Write the sentence on the doc cam (e.g., After Chancellor Merkel wakes up, she gets out of bed.) Have students identify the verb. Then circle it and note that it ends in an "s." (5 minutes)

Step 3

The teacher then calls on each student who identifies the verb in previous sentence and determines if it is appropriately conjugated with the present tense "s" (e.g., gets). Then the student adds another sentence to the story, orally, while you write it on the doc cam.

The next sentence in our example story might be: *After she gets out of bed, she walks to the kitchen.* Step 3 repeats until all students have had a chance to contribute to the story. (20 minutes, allow 1 minute per student)

Optional Extension

The assignment could further support your curriculum if you ask students to write about a character in an assigned short story, play, or novel. Other requirements could be placed on the sentences (e.g., every sentence must have one adjective or one vocabulary word from a particular chapter), which will allow for more creativity and more opportunity to push the description forward. Also, if you save the story, you can revisit it when you introduce other verbal forms and have students change the conjugations.

Happy teaching,
Michelle

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