Grammer, Good Writing, and Classroom Management

A little quiz:

1. Studying grammar makes students better writers.  
   - True  - False
2. Few students recognize their grammatical errors in writing.  
   - True  - False
3. Grammar worksheets and exercises have little effect on students’ writing abilities.  
   - True  - False
4. Most grammatical problems in writing are random and due to students’ carelessness.  
   - True  - False
5. Students who speak different American English dialects commonly have less knowledge of grammar.  
   - True  - False
6. Nearly all of the errors that ESL students make are due to differences between the grammars of their native language and “standard English” grammar.  
   - True  - False
7. Students learn to apply grammatical rules best by going over their own writing with a partner and making corrections.  
   - True  - False
8. All students tend to make the same types of grammatical errors.  
   - True  - False
9. By the time students reach high school, they’ve learned all the grammar they can.  
   - True  - False
10. It’s more effective for students to work on grammatical issues in their writing when they reach the editing stage of a written project.  
    - True  - False

Some Approaches to Teaching Grammar

The sequential grammar system:

First step: Have students put parentheses around prepositional phrases (helps students—especially ESL students—to identify right or wrong preposition)

Second step: Have students label subjects, verbs, and simple complements. (helps students correct errors in subject-verb agreement)

Second step: Have students identify subordinate clauses (helps students eliminate fragments, run-ons, and comma splices—N.B. supply students with a “common errors” sheet)

Third step: Have students identify gerunds (helps students eliminate dangling and misplaced modifiers)

Minimal marking:
Supply students with a “common errors” sheet. When you (or a peer) goes over a student’s draft, you (or the student’s partner) writes in the number of the error in the margin to the left of the lines where errors appear. You (or the partner) return(s) the draft to the student, and she goes over her draft, identifying the errors and correcting them.

Reflection exercises:
Following a writing assignment’s completion, ask students to list or identify in writing three or four grammar issues that they discovered they have problems with, copying down an example (both the error and the correction) in a grammar log they keep during the year. As follow-up, students may be asked to help other students in a later writing assignment, to find those same errors.

Parting Thoughts

What other kinds of interactive activities do you already do—or could you come up with—to raise students’ awareness of “Standard English” grammar?
Looking back at my early school years, school always seemed to be a positive experience.

Going to a new school can be quite intimidating for a young child. I experienced this firsthand. When I moved from a fairly large town (Elmhurst) to a very small town known as Hinckley. As a new student in the second grade at Hinckley Elementary School I was very unsure as to how I should approach the new school year in a territory that I was very unfamiliar with. I remember being very nervous that day as I walked into Mrs. Kohler’s second grade classroom. But deep down in my heart I knew that everything would be alright.

While walking through the doorway that hot August day I was immediately approached by my teacher. I remember seeing the bright smile on her face as she welcomed me with open arms into her classroom. As the year went on I had a deeper understanding of the teaching profession and the passion that Mrs. K had toward her career. That year I also realized what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, I want to pursue a career in teaching. Its my goal to become a teacher just like Mrs. K. Because of her dedication, passion, and respect for the field of education. I know that this is the right path for me.

Ever since I took a step in the second grade classroom that year, I have gained more appreciation for teachers in general, I realize that there was more to the teaching world than what meets the eye. Not only do teachers assign homework, grade tests, plan agendas but they also needed to have an inspiration to teach children. They need to be dedicated, persistent, patient, responsible and most of all they must love working with children. While sitting as a student in Mrs. K’s classroom I saw that Mrs. Kohler displays all of these characteristics and so many more. It has been a goal of mine ever since to obtain and refine these attributes that my teacher displayed so well.
Most writers habitually repeat 3 or 4 common types of errors. This list can help you edit your own work. Go through the list, identify editing problems in your drafts, and make corrections:

1. **Missing comma after introductory element**: Frankly I don’t know. (Frankly, I don’t know.)

2. **Vague pronoun reference**: If they took both of them, they will be stranded. (If Jerry and Ann took both of the cars, their parents will be stranded.)

3. **Missing comma in a compound sentence**: She walked but I drove. (She walked, but I drove.)

4. **Wrong words**: There costing us a nominal leg. (They’re costing us an arm and a leg.)

5. **Missing commas with nonrestrictive element**: Jo who’s the boss quit. (Jo, who’s the boss, quit.)

6. **Wrong/missing verb ending**: Yesterday, he walk the dog. (Yesterday, he walked the dog.)

7. **Wrong/missing preposition**: Lloyds of London is over at Union Street. (Lloyds of London is on Union Street.)

8. **Comma splice**: I came to the bank, the robber had just left. (When I came to the bank, the robber had just left.)

9. **Missing/misplaced possessive apostrophe**: Those boys mom asked about this semester’s report. (Those boys’ mom asked about this semester’s report.)

10. **Unnecessary tense shift**: Cary was laughing so hard she slips and falls. (Cary was laughing so hard, she slipped and fell.)

11. **Unnecessary pronoun shift**: If someone tries, you’ll succeed. (If someone tries, she will succeed.)

12. **Sentence fragment**: The boat drifted away. Because he didn’t tie it to the post. (The boat drifted away because he didn’t tie it to the post.)

13. **Wrong tense/verb form**: If I saw the police, I would of drove slower. (If I’d seen the police, I would have driven slower.)

14. **Lack of subject-verb agreement**: One part of her chores are done. (One part of her chores is done.)

15. **Faulty parallelism**: She plans to renew her gym membership, is going to work out, and will meet us there. (She plans to renew her gym membership, work out, and meet us there.)

16. **Non-agreement between pronoun/antecedent**: Each person prefers their own chair. (Each person prefers her own chair.)

17. **Unnecessary comma(s) with restrictive element**: The play, Othello, moved him. (The play Othello moved him.)

18. **Fused sentence**: I liked the book I cried at the end. (I liked the book. I cried at the end.)

19. **Misplaced/dangling modifier**: We saw the whales using binoculars. (We used binoculars to see the whales.)

20. **Its/it’s confusion**: It’s a redbird in its nest. (It’s a redbird in its nest.)

21. **Quotation mark confusion**: He ordered me to “move it”. I replied, say “Please”. (He ordered me to move it. I replied, “Say ‘Please.”

22. **Hyphens in compound adjectives before a noun**: This worn out jacket is my favorite one. (This worn-out jacket is my favorite one.)

23. **Unnecessary apostrophes**: When she went to school in the 70’s, she earned two BA’s and took two specialized GRE’s. (When she went to school in the 70s, she earned two B.A.s and took two specialized GREs.)

Adapted from Lunsford & Connors, *Everyday Writers, 1997*
“I’m working on this run-on sentence that has no subject-verb agreement and ends with a dangling participle. It’s going to blow Mrs. Anderson’s mind.”

http://alejandroyegros.com

Misplaced modifiers, dangling participles... she fought them all, son.

Wow.

At the Tomb of the Unknown Grammarian