

**Mulroy, David. (2003) *The War Against Grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.**

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*Betty's comments:*

In this slim volume, Mulroy analyzes how the lack of grammar instruction in U.S. school curricula has adversely affected native-speaker students' ability to use English as best they could, principally, he argues, because students lack an understanding of what language is and lack concepts (not rules but concepts) of grammar, such as subordination or coordination.

In my experience, there is nothing more difficult than trying to explain where a period goes to a student who has no concept of grammar. And I've found that students who can't understand how a sentence is put together also can't readily see how one sentence relates to another, nor how the sentences in a paragraph relate. I've found that students with little or no concept of grammar have difficulty with academic reading, have difficulty seeing beneath the surface of the words to the complexity of the ideas expressed in complex, interrelated language structures.

One aspect of grammar teaching, I believe, is giving students the concept that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear, and write intelligible. Without grammar, we'd have only caveman grunts or whistles, single words, pictures or scribbles, and body expressions to communicate. Grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric. One of the reasons I begin the blue book with the entire English verb tense system is to demonstrate that language has grand and wonderful patterns — is not random — and that grammar is not just "rules."

At any rate, Mulroy makes some excellent arguments for the teaching of grammar to anyone who uses language — which is, of course, everyone.

*Notable quotes:*

Sentences always have and always will consist of clauses with subjects and predicates and of words that fall into classes fairly well described as verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Individuals who understand these concepts have a distinct advantage over others where the use of language is involved — and that means everywhere. (p. 118)

People who work with foreign languages are well aware that obstacles to comprehension are generated as least as often by grammatical difficulties as by the meanings of individual words. (p. 81)

*What are your views on the teaching of grammar to native speakers as well as to non-native speakers? Weigh in on [Teacher Talk](#).*