

# LIKING ≠ LEARNING:

## TRIVIAL EFFECT OF A “SENTENCE-OF-THE-DAY” INTERVENTION ON COLLEGE STUDENTS’ DETECTION AND CORRECTION OF GRAMMAR USAGE ERRORS

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### RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

- Since the 1950s, the consensus perspective in English has been that instructors should not devote explicit instructional time to grammar,<sup>1</sup> the rationale being that efforts to teach grammar do not work<sup>2</sup> and may even be harmful.<sup>3</sup>
- However, complaints about grammar usage have been voiced repeatedly since the late 1800s,<sup>4, 5</sup> and rates of grammar usage errors have not improved over time.<sup>6</sup>
- Further, studies have shown that professionals find grammar usage errors bothersome,<sup>7</sup> and that people make negative skill and character judgments about writers who commit grammar usage errors.<sup>8</sup>
- Because students’ grammar usage errors might affect how other people view them, I attempted to improve students’ grammar usage by implementing interleaved practice<sup>9</sup> through “sentence-of-the-day” grammar usage sessions. By introducing and then reintroducing key grammar usage errors over the course of 10 weeks, I aimed to increase students’
  - ability to identify and correct common grammatical usage errors; and
  - self-perceived ability to construct grammatically correct sentences

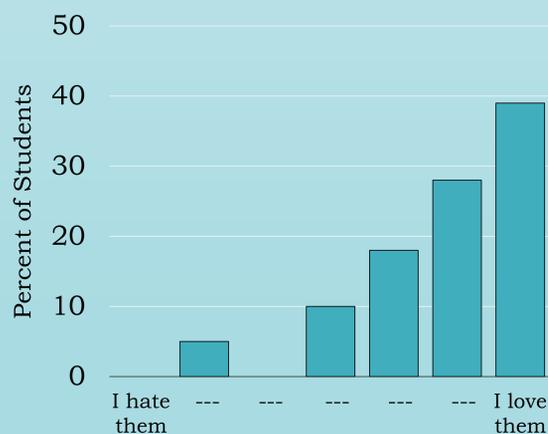
### SAMPLE, MEASURES, AND PROCEDURE

- Table 1 provides a summary of the measures completed by each group.
- Each Sentence Test included 20 sentences. Students were asked to find the grammar usage error in each sentence and correct it by editing the sentence.
- The two sentence tests covered the same types of errors but the specific sentences were different for the two tests.
- Students evaluated themselves on 15 specific skills that are emphasized in both courses (e.g., “identify confounding variables”), with one in particular the focus of this study: “Write grammatically correct sentences.” Ratings of self-perceived skill were on a seven-point scale (*I can’t do this yet* to *I can do this well*).
- Students in the intervention group engaged in 20 sentence-of-the-day grammar usage practice sessions on the marker board (e.g., “One of these participants’/participants questionnaires has/have doodles all over the place.”). Practice was interleaved, such that over the 20 sessions, students had between two and six exposures to 10 common grammar usage errors (e.g., plural vs. possessives, subject-verb agreement, past tense vs. past participle, and comma splice).
- Students in the intervention group rated the sentence-of-the-day exercises on a seven-point scale (*I hate them* to *I love them*).

Table 1: Summary of Measures Completed by Each Group	Intervention Group (n=38)	Control Group (n=38)
<b>Time 1 (Week 1)</b>		
Sentence Test	X	
Self-Perceived Skill	X	
<b>Intervention (Weeks 2 thru 10)</b>		
Sentence-of-the-Day Grammar Practice	X	
<b>Time 2 (Week 11)</b>		
Sentence Test	X	X
Self-Perceived Skill	X	X
Evaluation of Sentence-of-the-Day Grammar Practice	X	

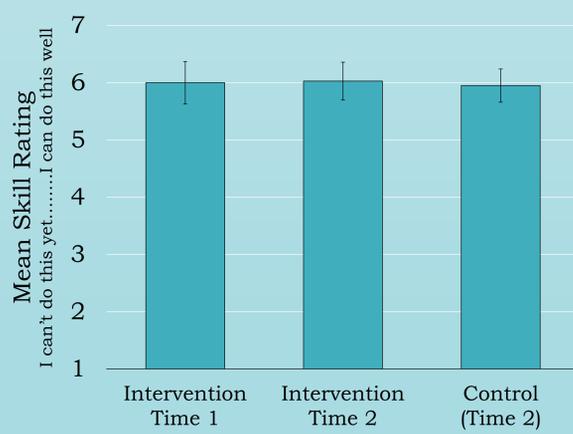
### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding 1:  
Students liked the sentence-of-the-day grammar sessions.



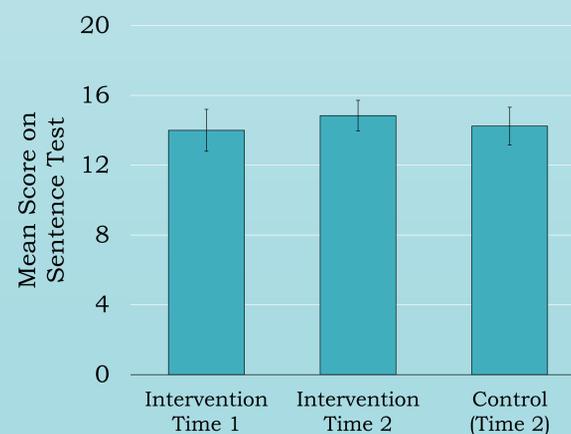
As shown above, most students reported that they enjoyed practicing with grammar usage. Two students who did not enjoy it scored above 90% on the first sentence test and told me in private that they felt they didn’t need the extra practice.

Finding 2:  
Students rated their grammar skills highly (at both time points).

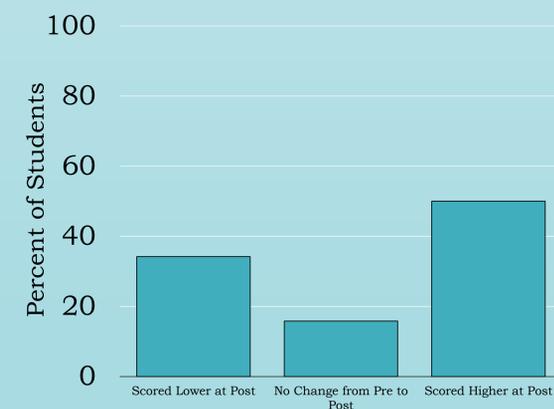


Students in both conditions rated themselves as skilled at writing grammatically correct sentences. Actually, on the first assessment, intervention students’ top self-rating (of 15 skills) was on grammar. There was little room for improvement, then, from Time 1 to Time 2.

Finding 3:  
The effect of grammar practice on students’ sentence test performance was weak, at best.



Students in the intervention group performed reliably better on the second sentence test than on the first,  $t(37)=2.07, p=.046$ . However, the effect was weak ( $d=0.34$ ), and the intervention students did not outperform the control group on the second sentence test,  $t(74)=-0.86, p=.391$ .



Intervention students’ performance on the second sentence test was highly correlated with their performance on the first,  $r(37)=.74, p<.001$ . However, more intervention students improved (50%) than got worse (34%) from Time 1 to Time 2.

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