

Grammatically Speaking

by Michelle Jackson

How to Teach Possessive Adjectives

Possessive adjectives (my, your, his, her, its, our, their) are used to modify the noun that immediately follows them. We can use them with objects to communicate possession. (E.g., *Their house is on the corner.*) We can also use them to communicate a relationship. For example, the sentence *His bank is efficient* does not mean he owns the bank, but that he has an established affiliation with that place of business.

The form of these adjectives is constant in English, meaning that they do not change to match the noun they modify. (E.g., *Her dog is small. Her dogs are small.*) The challenge in producing these possessive adjectives comes with selecting the correct one that corresponds to the pronoun. (E.g., *I have a brother. My brother is tall.*)

Here is an activity to help beginning students produce possessive adjectives orally and in written form.

Materials Required

- List of objects (see below)
- List of properties (see below)
- Doc cam, chalkboard, white board, or printed copies to display the 2 lists
- A dictionary for each group of 3 students
- 1 piece of paper for each group of 3 students
- Writing utensils for all students

Timing: 30 minutes

Step 1

Inform students that you're going to practice using possessive adjectives and that these words come before a noun to demonstrate possession. (2 minutes)

Step 2

Show students a list of objects readily visible within your classroom (e.g., backpack, pencil, lunchbox, shirt, socks, shoes). Show students a list of properties that could be used to identify or describe the aforementioned objects (e.g., color, size, shape, texture). (3 minutes)

Step 3

Call on students individually and have them create a sentence by selecting an object and a property from the lists. (E.g., My backpack is big. Her backpack is small.) Continue until all students have a chance to participate. (15 minutes)

Step 4

After students have had an opportunity to practice possessive adjectives orally, inform them that they will now practice the same skill in writing. Break students into groups of three or four. In their group, students will work together to write six sentences that contrast one group member's object of choice with another's (e.g., bedroom, apartment/house, neighborhood, bicycle/moped, pet, sibling). Have students underline the possessive adjectives in each sentence and reference the dictionary as needed. (10 minutes)

Optional Extension

After groups compose their six sentences, each group could share their writing with the class. The class could then vote on the group that wrote the most creative, interesting, or grammatically accurate sentences. This would allow for more speaking and listening practice in addition to Steps 1–3 above.

While the above activity incorporates speaking and writing, it could also be used to check reading comprehension. Rather than have students speak and write about themselves and their classmates, they could contrast characters or place settings in the assigned reading. By writing about what they have read, students strengthen their comprehension and draw connections between their realities and the realities of others.

Additionally, using the reading as a backdrop for discussion and conversation provides a context in which to apply and use grammar concepts.

Happy teaching,
Michelle

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