Software Evaluation: Grammar for the Real World

Title: Grammar for the Real World
Publisher: Knowledge Adventure
Content Area: English Grammar
Grade level(s): 5-9 grade, or for ages 10 and up.
Hardware Required:
  Macintosh: PowerMac; OS 7.5.1; 16 MB RAM; 4x CD-ROM; 256 color graphics
  Windows: 98/95; Windows XP compatible. 16MB RAM; 486 66 MHz or faster; 256 Super VGA graphics; 4* CD ROM drive; Windows-compatible sound card; Mouse and hard drive; 640*480 resolution.
Cost Information and Pricing Options Available:
  Price information not on discs. Price of this software listed on the World Wide Web range from $60 to $600, depending on whether it is a network-based or multi-user software.
Software Functions: Instructional Games
Objectives: Develop the learners’ grammatical and writing skills.

Appropriateness of Content for Audience  4/5
--Richness of Content/Skills Trained
  There are five exercises in all in the software, including recognizing common word usage errors, recognizing parts of speech, adding punctuations, choosing sentences with correct grammar, and building paragraphs. These exercises range from local area skills such as vocabulary and spelling to global level issues such as organization. A merit of those exercises is that errors the user is asked to identify and edit are frequently occurring mistakes. But while the skills covered are quite comprehensive, the software does not offer too much practice for each skills.
  Apart from the games, there are also written grammar instructions that users can access by clicking a “HELP” button. The instructions are not as comprehensive as a good grammar book, but are helpful for user to play the games.

--Difficulty Level
  Difficulty levels vary depending on the exact exercise the users choose. The paragraph building game, for instance, is a lot more demanding than the recognizing parts of speech exercise. The designers may intend to allows users to develop their skills step by step, but the main menu does not identify which exercises are trains more fundamental skills and should be tackled first.

--Other features
  One particular exercise in the software asks the user to identify whether a particular sentence that the “host” utters is grammatical, and to edit the sentence if necessary. This exercise integrates listening, reading and writing skills and appears to be not only interesting, but also suitable for EFL/ESL students. Most other exercises do not rely much on audio cues.
Presentation; Appeal  4.5/5

The program does not take excessive time to load. This software creates a virtual Hollywood environment in which the user goes in for intern opportunities. The cartoon-like characters will be appealing to young learners. A pity is that those lovely characters do not speak too much. In other words, the games are mostly “silent”.

Feedback/Interaction  4/5

For most exercises in the software, the users will get feedback only after they think they have completed the task and submitted their work. The user’s “boss” will point out the remaining mistakes and prompt for improvement. On the whole, the feedback information is brief and effective. But the software does not offer too much help when the user is unable to tackle a problem himself.

User friendliness  5/5

The software is easy to install and to use. It also allows the user to look for instructional help or to return to the main menu any time. However, if a written user’s manual can be provided in addition to the information included in the disc, it might make things even easier for parents and students.

Recommended Use

The software is suitable as complementary grammar practice materials for primary and secondary school classrooms. Learners can also use them at home. However, because the software does not assume a systematic tutorial function, the software cannot be the primary material that teachers or learners can rely on for improving grammar skills.

(Evaluated by Yi Xu, 2005.)