



# English: Grammar and Encouragement

## What if a grammar lesson were also about affirming each other?

Natalie wanted to use her grammar lesson on complex sentence structures to give her class the opportunity to encourage and affirm each other.

"I taught complex sentence structure in the usual way, but the demonstration examples I used at the beginning were positive about members of the class:

*James, who is a good soccer player, regularly helps clean up.*

*Cheri, who has a lovely smile, brightens up the classroom.*

"I asked the class whether they noticed anything about the content of the sentences I used. I paired students by putting names in a hat and then asked them to write their own affirming complex sentences in order to build each other up. They created sentences using the same skills as previously taught, but this time we thought about each other's strengths. I asked students to focus on real strengths and ways in which each person contributed to the community, not just on superficial compliments. We talked about the difference between loving encouragement and flattery. When we knew what we wanted to say, we used our new skills to create complex sentences about that person.

"I gave the students a blank, folded card in which to write their sentences. I wrote my sentence in a card for another member of the staff.

"We practiced more standard complex sentences and then took a few moments at the end of the lesson to decorate our cards and deliver them. A student delivered my card to a member of the staff."

## What's going on here?

Natalie **saw** her grammar lesson as a place to encourage students to affirm each other.

She **engaged** students in focus with empathy on the way sentences affected other people, not just their form, and in using their skills to encourage others.

Natalie **reshaped her practice** by choosing her examples carefully, making connections between language learning and values (encouragement), creating an opportunity for students to apply the key idea (making cards), and shaping interactions (working in pairs). She also modeled what she taught (made a card herself).

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Natalie was helping students to focus on others and offer them encouragement. Encouragement involves awareness of others and offering praise, comfort, and support. Selfishness can blight the development of encouragement, since we often view **love** and praise as finite commodities, as if there is only so much to go round: if you get love or praise, will there be enough for me?

## What difference does it make?

This lesson could contribute to changing children's focus from themselves to others because they have to be aware of others in order to offer encouragement. It also seeks to strengthen their sense of worth through receiving love from others. Natalie's lesson also tells a different story about relationships: she has begun to challenge the mindset that sees praise love and similar experiences as rationed commodities.

## Where could we go from here?

Natalie went further with encouragement. The class "encouragement board" had a pocket for each student, with that student's name. At the end of the day, any student who wished to encourage another class member with something they had noticed during the day could record this on a paper star and place it in that class member's pocket: "I really liked it when you cheered me up after I fell on the playground today." Nat checked to make sure that certain students did not go too long without receiving anything, adding

comments such as “I thought you tried really hard in art even though you thought it was difficult.”

## Digging deeper

God is called the “God of all encouragement” ([2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)). The Apostle Paul called on people to encourage each other and build each other up ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#)). Encouragement means focusing on others and being unselfish in praise. Often, what people do and are goes unnoticed, and people who exercise a ministry of encouragement make a point of noticing. Barnabas in the New Testament was called the son of encouragement ([Acts 4:36](#); [Acts 11:23](#)) because he encouraged others.

*One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement... . It is easy to laugh at men's ideals; it is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word. William Barclay*

Encouragement can be exhorting others to be and to do what is right. It can involve helping or comforting others in times of suffering and distress. The Bible talks of weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice ([Romans 12:15](#)). The Bible recognizes that we all need regular encouragement and a sense that we are valued by others, and this is something we can do for each other ([Hebrews 3:13](#)). Christians draw encouragement from God, not just from each other ([1 Samuel 30:6](#)) and one name for the Holy Spirit is the Comforter ([John 14:16](#)) — the God who comforts and encourages.



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