

英文法書を利用する利点-英検に合格するために

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Advantages of Using a Grammar Book:

Successful Study for the Eiken Test

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Abstract — There are no good ways to learn English grammar without efforts and time. Recent students in general seem to have a tendency to learn everything as easily as they can. They spare the trouble of using an actual paper dictionary, preferring to use an electric dictionary or even a mobile phone to look up words and phrases that they do not know. This unfavorable habit has been brought up by their way of studying in their junior high school age. They were given picture book-like and less substantial textbooks at school and very student-friendly guidebooks at a *juku*. However it surely takes time and labor to improve English, especially to acquire basic grammatical knowledge. In this paper I would like to put forward my advice through the experience of my own of using a grammar book to consolidate English grammar, citing various advantages of using it, especially for studying for the Eiken Test.

1. Introduction

In 2004 all the national colleges of technology were made to be administratively independent institutions. Along with that systemic change, each college had to establish its own mid-term goals. The Kushiro National College of Technology (hereafter: Kushiro Kosen) unexceptionally had to do the same move. The goal of the English subject in the liberal arts course was set to be the obtainment of the pre-second grade certificate on the Eiken Test during the five-year regular enrollment. In the following year (2005) two advanced courses were set up, and to graduate from each course has made it a must for students to either pass a pre-second test in Eiken or score 400 points in TOEIC.

This suddenly established goal has not

been easy for Kushiro Kosen students to attain, especially because English has long been thought to be one of mere general education subjects at the engineering college. While the Kosen students need not go through tough competitions in entrance examinations for universities, those at common high schools would normally have to rigorously study English grammar for success in entrance examinations for colleges or universities they wish to enter. For this reason Kushiro Kosen students' English ability has remained at a plateau since the end of their junior high school studies. However, the change of the administrative system and its consequent modification in the stance toward the English subject has made both the students and English teachers change their approach toward English study and teaching. In other words we have to work on English a lot more seriously in

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order to reach the mid-term goal. It is a real pressure confronting the English teaching staff to meet this goal since the levels of the students are far from enough to tackle this challenge. However, there were some cases in which there were splendid improvements in their English study. They all followed my advice: good use of a grammar book. In this paper I would like to introduce those eminent cases and how they succeeded in such a task.

2. What should be done

It is not easy at all to change the old stance and approach of the students toward English study all of a sudden. Most of them have shown reluctance about having to take on additional work loads to pass the Eiken test, which are the weekly conducted word tests and the twice-a-term practice exams for an Eiken test. I was teaching both the regular courses and the advance courses two years after the administrative change, and felt strong pressure and responsibility for training the students to succeed in an Eiken test. Especially since it is a requisite requirement for the advanced courses students to pass the test to finish their courses. I was and am always thinking how effectively I can teach English grammar to my students and how I can make it feel rewarding and enjoyable to study it. Among those unwilling students, there were some who showed high motivation and interest in improvement of their English ability and knowledge. They knocked at the door of my room to ask for advice on how to study English to improve their English. They were from both the regular courses and the advanced courses, and those in the advanced courses showed strong enthusiasm, as the attainment of the pre-second grade Eiken test is a must for the completion of the courses.

My advice is to make full good use of a grammar book, which was how I studied English throughout my school days. Every time I encountered a problem that I could not understand, I consulted the grammar book. Most grammar books commercially available

are usually categorized depending on major grammar items and provide not only detailed explanations, but also further useful information on each item. So I advised the students to do the same when they had problems with English grammar as they worked on English practice questions and tests. In addition I strongly suggested that they transcribe in a notebook the contents of the grammar book they chose, and always take a look at the notes. That task would facilitate them in understanding English grammar and help them memorize it more deeply. This work, of course, takes effort and is time-consuming, and not all the students who came to me for advice followed it. However, those who went along with my advice showed impressive progress and passed a pre-second test to be the first in the courses that succeeded in the pass of an Eiken test.

3. Actual Successful Examples

I would like to cite about three successful cases which were brought by study through the use of a grammar book.

◆ A first-year regular course student's case

A 2004 first-year female student of the Information Engineering Course admirably passed a second-grade, not just a pre-second grade test at her very first trial. She closely checked in her grammar book questions and problems that she could not solve and understand when working on the drill books that carried the questions that had appeared in the past second-grade tests.

She voluntarily started using a grammar book when she was still a junior high school student. She had already passed a pre-second grade test as a junior high school student. Her next goal is, of course, to obtain a pre-first grade test. What she has to do next is to further deepen her knowledge of grammar by sorting out her whole grammar book in a notebook and memorizing the important rules and exceptions of the grammar.

◆ A first-year advanced course student's case

A male student who was in the first year of the Advanced Course of Electronic and Information Systems Engineering, had tried a pre-second test when he was a fifth-year student in the regular course, only to fail. He was a rather diligent student and his grades were fairly good. However as I mentioned earlier, he did not need wrestle with English seriously as a Kosen student. Kushi Kosen was not yet an independent institution when he was in the regular course, so he did not necessarily have to sit for a pre-second Eiken test. He tried the test anyway, though.

Since he was an industrious and conscientious student, he worked on English very hard in order to fulfill the graduation requirement of the obtainment of a pre-second certificate. He never failed to attend the obligatory English class as a first-year advanced course student and to sit for mock exams for Eiken that were implemented four times before the real test. I gave detailed explanations on grammar necessary for Eiken and a lot of drill questions in class. He closely took notes, and looked up in his grammar book what he learned in class and the mistakes that he had made in the mock tests. In that way he improved his English knowledge by finding out correct English rules and structures to amend his mistakes. He continued this way of study for half a year. He took a pre-second test and creditably passed it at his first trial after his previous failure.

He had also sat for a TOEIC test when he was in the final year of the regular course. The points he earned were only 330 points. He tried again after he passed the Eiken test, and gained 370 points, which is not a high score. However, an increase of 40 points in TOEIC in only six months is a good improvement. He could make such an achievement because of his detailed work through the use of his grammar book.

◆ A first-year adult advanced course student's

case

There was a male student also in the Advanced Course of Electronic and Information Systems, who was a graduate of the Electric Engineering Course and came back to the college two years after the establishment of the advanced courses. He had been working in Tokyo at an elevator company, but left the job to pursue further study at his alma mater. He tried a pre-second test in the first round test of the year as a first-year student despite his two year blank time of English study. The result was, needless to say, failure. He had also placed his focus on the study of the subject of his own specialty when he was in the regular course, so English had not been his main interest of study. However, he was a sensible student and eager to pass the test while he was in the first year of the advanced course, so that he could concentrate on the study of his own specialty. He had a clear goal to go up to a post-graduate course at some university, so he wished to prepare for that as early as possible without any deterrent matters for graduation.

He did the same hard work as the male advanced course student I have mentioned in the previous section. He never missed the English classes and the practice exams. He worked on English study even harder than the student mentioned. Every time he took some kind of drill quizzes and mock tests and made mistakes in them, he looked them up in his grammar book and dictionary to find out what grammar rules and structures he did not know, and rewrote in a notebook the questions and problems that he had missed and the causes of his mistakes. He submitted the notes every time he made corrections and I checked them and made additional explanations. He continued this hard work for four months until the second round of Eiken in the year, and his efforts brilliantly bore fruit in only four months. His improvement was very fast and his knowledge of English grammar increased quickly, because of his continuous labor of studying grammar using his grammar book without feeling hesitant to do so.

4. Advantages of the use of a grammar book

The three students that I introduced in the last section cited the advantages of studying through the use of a grammar book. There are five major points.

- ★ a. Users can effectively study grammar by working on questions involving grammatical structures they have just come across.
- ★ b. User-friendly detailed explanations and many illustrative sentences facilitate deeper understanding of grammar.
- ★ c. Users can repeatedly look back at basic grammar rules and structures any time they forget or want to check them again.
- ★ d. Important and commonly mistakable items are intentionally marked so that users can take careful note of them.
- ★ e. There are expanded problems offered in each section of grammar items so that users develop further their grammar knowledge by practicing those problems.

I would like to add another two points to these advantages. One is that users can learn by reading many example sentences used in each grammar item regarding what situations or contexts the basic grammar rule is applied in. It is important to learn there is a suitable situation or context when a certain grammatical rule or sentence is applied. The other point is that there are many useful English words and phrases used in explanatory sentences. It is a value-added point. Moreover there is further advanced information on certain grammar items in addition to basic descriptions. This is quite an incentive for higher-level English students.

5. Conclusion

I made full use of a grammar book myself all through my school days, and even now refer to it at times. I am certain that the students cited in the previous section could consolidate knowledge in basic English necessary for Eiken by repeatedly checking grammatical rules and constructions in their grammar books. Fairly many students have come to me for advice on how to improve their English power or how to pass an Eiken test. I give the same advice, but only a few have followed it. Those who have put it into practice could produce results. They actually realize the practicality and effectiveness of the use of a grammar book.

There are numerous grammar books available and they are relatively affordable, so it can be said that they are a good and substantial self-study literature in terms of both cost and content. It surely takes time and labor for students to use a grammar book, finding the sections and pages of the book that they need to look up. However, it is definitely worthwhile to do so, since it brings evident results.

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