

The shape of English grammar by Simon Mumford

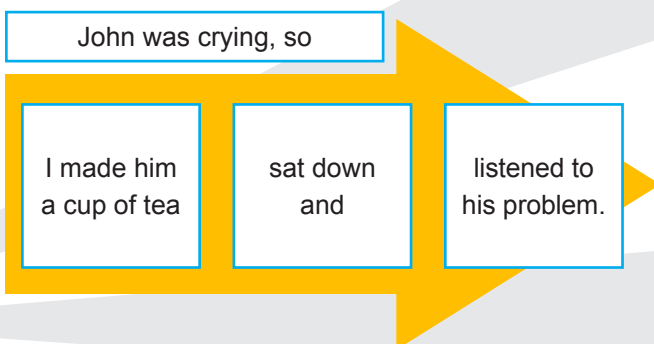
Age: Young adults, adults
Level: Intermediate
Time: Approx. 45 min
Aim: to revise seven grammar points: past continuous vs simple; definite / indefinite / zero articles; modal verbs; contrasting with *although*; defining vs non-defining relative clauses; *for* vs *since*; embedded *that* clauses
Key skills: speaking, reading, writing
Materials: one copy of the worksheet and key for each student

Introduction

Diagrams are frequently found in grammar books. However, there is much more potential for presenting grammatical information in a visual way. This lesson illustrates seven grammar points with diagrams. Students should be familiar with these grammar points before doing this lesson.

Procedure

1. Draw the diagram below on the board. Explain that this represents the sentence *John was crying, so I made him a cup of tea, sat down and listened to his problem.* Past simple (the boxes) is contrasted with past continuous (the arrow).



2. Give out the worksheet and explain that each of the grammar structures in the table is represented by a diagram.

3. Put students in groups and ask them to match the structures and the diagrams. Point out that there are five grammar points but six diagrams, i.e. one diagram is not used. Emphasize that different interpretations are possible. Walk around and give help if necessary.

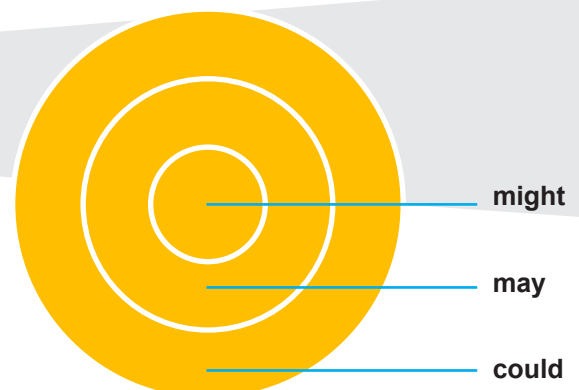
4. After ten minutes hold a round-up session. Ask different groups for their interpretations. Alternatively, put students in different groups and let them explain their interpretations of the diagrams to each other.

5. Give out the key, which provide the solutions and explanations. Allow time for students to read through the explanations and ask any questions they have. Note that students may have different interpretations that are equally valid.

6. Point out that there is no grammar structure provided for diagram 2. Put students in groups and ask them to think of a grammar point that would fit this diagram. They are not allowed to use the structures already used in the lesson, so suggest that they look in their coursebooks / grammar references to find a suitable grammar point. Ask them to write their explanation in the space provided in the key.

7. Hold a round-up session for students to report their suggestions for grammar points for diagram 2, or let them swap worksheets and read each other's ideas. Finding a grammar point to match the diagram is quite a demanding exercise, so give students credit for the effort they make. Finally, give the solution provided below, but stress that there is no one correct answer, i.e. students' solutions may be equally valid.

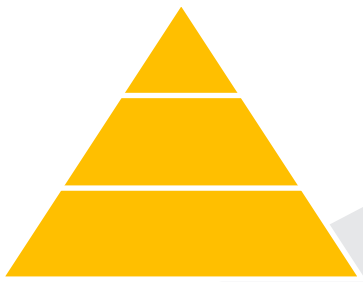
- Possible solution for diagram 2: *could, might, may*. The inner circle is *might*, the middle circle, *may*, the outer circle is *could*. *May* has a similar meaning to *might*, but represents a greater possibility, and is therefore shown as a bigger circle. The same is true for *may* and *could*.



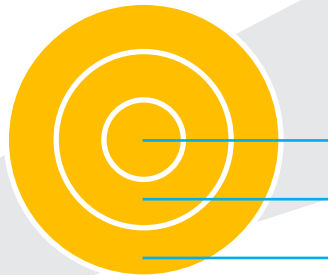
Match the grammar structures in the table to the diagrams below.

grammar structure	example
defining vs non-defining relative clauses	<i>The place where I used to live is beautiful. That's my old house, which I sold last year.</i>
contrasting with <i>although</i>	<i>Although he's old, he's active.</i>
embedded <i>that</i> clauses	<i>He said that he was sure that it was wrong.</i>
definite, indefinite and zero articles	<i>I fed the cat. I saw a cat. I like cats.</i>
<i>for</i> vs <i>since</i>	<i>for five years vs since 2006</i>

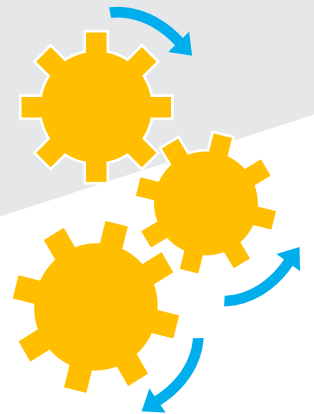
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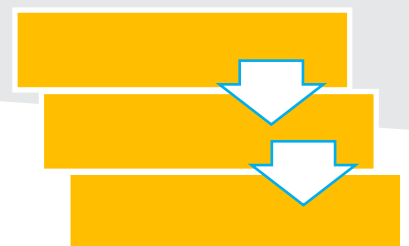
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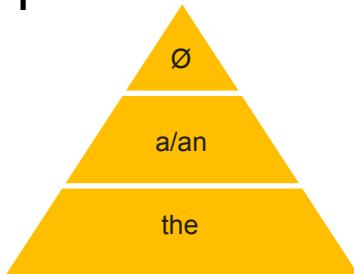


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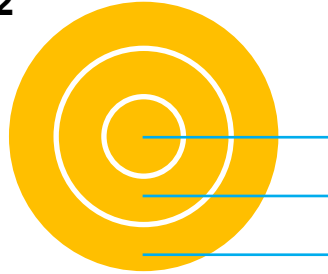


Match the grammar structures in the table to the diagrams below.

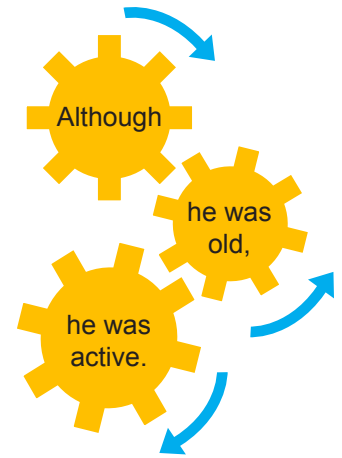
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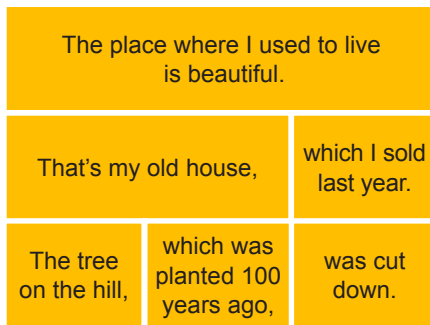
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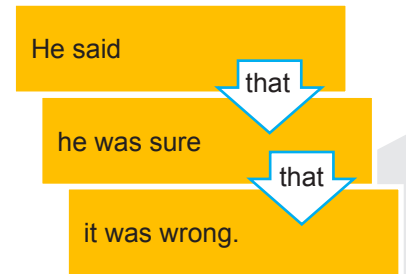


Diagram 1 represents the three types of articles. The top level represents the zero article, e.g. *I like cats* (= all cats), the middle level, the indefinite article, e.g. *I saw a cat*. (= one cat, but not defined), and the bottom level, the definite article, e.g. *I fed the cat* (= the cat I own). As the articles get longer, they are further down the pyramid. The top of the pyramid is the most general, the bottom is the most specific.

Diagram 3 represents the following sentence: *Although he was old, he was active*. The word *although* 'drives' the sentence, because it controls the two clauses. The clauses move in opposite directions, showing their contrasting meanings.

Diagram 4 illustrates the difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses. The first sentence is defining. The clause is an important part of the sentence so it is shown as one block. For non-defining clauses, the information is not essential to the sentence, so it is separated by commas. This 'extra information' clause is shown as separate from the main clause in the diagrams. Non-defining relative clauses can come at the end of the main clause (as in the second sentence) or in the middle (as in the third sentence).

Diagram 5 represents the difference between *for* and *since*. The arrows represent the time period from two different points of view: *for* starts from the present and looks back five years, *since* starts from a point five years in the past and looks forward to the present.

Diagram 6 shows embedding. *That* clauses are embedded in other clauses, i.e. they are separate clauses which are part of a longer clause. The sentence has two *that* clauses. This diagram shows these at different levels.

Diagram 2 has no explanation. Can you think of a grammar point that would fit this diagram? It must not be one of the forms already used in the lesson. Write your explanation below.
