

Grammar Tip #9: How to help your students use contractions more naturally

NOTICING DIFFERENCES (high beginner to low intermediate)

Do your students ever write the way they speak or speak the way they write? Students who are comfortable with routine spoken interactions like asking directions, exchanging personal information, or responding to basic questions often think that writing is just speaking written down. On the other hand, students who start learning English in more traditional settings with lots of grammar and vocabulary rules may transfer a more formal writing style to their conversations, even at the lower levels. Either way, the results can be awkward, unnatural-sounding language. That's why it's important for students to understand how conversation and writing are different. The following activity raises awareness of how and when to use contractions, an important part of using English appropriately.

MATERIALS: Make a copy of the table in Step 3 for each student.

STEP 1: Have students work in pairs. Ask them to think about how speaking and writing in English are different. After 1-2 minutes, have students compare their lists with another pair.

STEP 2: Make a chart like the one below in your classroom. Elicit answers from your students. Have students come up and add their answers to the list or add them yourself.

I talk about...	I write...
my family how I feel	homework stories

STEP 3: Give each student a copy of the table below. Ask different students to volunteer to read the conversation and the paragraph.

Conversation	Writing
Ted: Aren't you going to the movies? Lisa: No, I'm at home. I don't feel good. Ted: Oh, no! What's wrong? Lisa: My head hurts. I'm resting. Ted: I hope you're better soon! Lisa: Thanks, I'll be fine in a bit.	My mother is a nurse. She works at a hospital. My mother helps people. She makes people feel better. I am very proud of her.

STEP 4: Have students do the following tasks individually or in pairs.

1. Underline all the contractions.
2. Which has contractions, the conversation or the writing?
3. How would the paragraph change if you said it to your friend? Rewrite the paragraph to make it sound like spoken English and then read it aloud.
4. What did you change?
5. Write a rule to help you and your classmates remember when to use contractions.

STEP 5: Have students compare their answers. Then review the answers as a class. If you have time, make a list of when it's appropriate to use contractions and when it's more appropriate to use full forms on the board.

VARIATION: For more practice, create similar conversation and writing sample pairs for Step 3. For higher levels, consider transcribing student conversations, using student writing, or having your students create conversations using a list of contractions that you're studying or reviewing.

NOTE: We've included some relevant charts from the **Grammar and Beyond Essentials 1** Student's Book for reference.

[Click here to download contraction charts.](#)