

Teaching Policy for the Native Part of the SEG English Program



Hi, my name is Mark. I'm the head native teacher here at SEG. I'd like to tell you about the native part of the English program.

Our main goal is to produce students who can communicate successfully. Communication is about more than speaking. If you want to communicate well, you have to understand other people. When you are communicating, there is no time to stop and think about grammar rules or dictionary explanations.

Research shows that we learn to speak by listening. But not all listening is the same. We need to listen because we actually **want to understand**. Many students practice saying dialogues over and over again for years, but they don't learn to speak. **If we provide lots of interesting and interactive input, students will naturally start to speak when they are ready.**

We also **develop students' writing ability**. We focus on writing as communication rather than writing as pattern practice. Students express their real ideas and opinions in writing. Eventually, they are able to write their own stories and essays.

When students start at SEG, their English level is low. How do we have **meaningful communication** with them? We do it through **characters and stories**. But we don't tell stories, we **ask** stories. The teacher asks questions, and the students give ideas for the story. Stories are personalized to the students and every class makes a different story. **This personalization creates a lot of student interest.**

Our approach is very different from the way grammar is taught in almost all Japanese schools. **In school, students often learn abstract rules or formulas.** They're given a pattern like **have+pp+for+period of time = a situation which was true in the past and is still true now**. Then they study some exceptions or

some conditions for using the formula. Then they are tested on whether they can remember and use the grammatical formula correctly.

Unfortunately, we can't learn languages this way. There are thousands of rules to learn, if not more. Every lesson students are given more and more formulas, exceptions and conditions. But many students can't even say basic things fluently. This is because students have not been learning English, they have been learning **about English**. Speaking and understanding English is an **ability**. We don't learn languages the way we learn history or chemistry.

In our program, we don't give students grammatical formulas. We teach phrases. For example, if the class decides that a character lives in Paris, I can ask "How long? How many years?" Maybe the class decides on 7 years. So I can then say "Ok, he has lived in Paris for 7 years." We then contrast "He **lives** in Paris" with "He **has lived** in Paris **for** 7 years". We haven't taught a formula, we've taught a phrase that has natural grammar in it. And students can easily understand the meaning because of the context.

This is important for cases where English and Japanese are different. 東京に住んでいる。十年間東京に住んでいる。The verb form is the same in Japanese, but it's different in English. It will take students some time to get used to this.

We introduce most of the major grammatical patterns in Chu1. In Chu2, we review these basic patterns, add more advanced patterns, and begin to focus more on vocabulary building. We continue making stories together, but we also begin to use TV shows and scenes from films. By the end of Chu3, students are able to study a complete film and read sections of the junior novelization.

When students move into the high school program, they are ready to begin working with TED talks and articles from news sources like the BBC. **They also move from creative writing to academic writing and they are able to move from discussing their daily lives or imaginary characters to discussing social issues and academic topics.**

Thank you for reading this article and I hope we'll see you at SEG.