

**Dr. Cornelia Gerhardt**

**c.gerhardt@mx.uni-saarland.de**

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Teaching grammar using an inverted classroom, blended-learning Moodle course

Many students at German Anglistik departments choose their studies because they want to become English teachers or study English literature. Only a tiny minority realizes that studying English includes studying linguistics. When teaching grammar at undergraduate level, it becomes apparent that some students have a sound knowledge, especially those who had French (the first L2 in this region) or Latin at school. Others, however, do not even command the most basic terms. For this reason, English linguistics at Saarland University started teaching grammar (Biber et al. 1999) in an inverted classroom, blended-learning Moodle course that allows students to work at their own pace.

After an introductory session, for the remainder of the term, the class meets fortnightly, i.e. a self-study week is followed by one with a classroom session. During the self-study the students will:

- Read a chapter / study a topic with the help of
  - Biber et al. 2002
  - a 22 page “summary” and an 8 page list of examples
  - a glossary of grammar terms that is linked to any use of the terms within the learning environment
- Do online exercises in Moodle
- Fill in a worksheet to hand in with instructor

The worksheet is only accessible after the online exercises have been passed successfully. There is a didactic progression from more straight-forward, easy tasks in the online exercises to more complex questions on the worksheets. In the ensuing classroom session, the instructor discusses the worksheets and problematizes the concepts.

This class unites access to a teacher who can (re)explain concepts and, importantly, reassure students during their learning process with a low-threshold, non-intimidating self-paced self-learning environment. The students’ feedback indicates that they believe they have to study harder (more) than in comparable introductory classes, but they also find the classroom sessions more interesting and believe they come to a longer-lasting and deeper understanding of the matter.

Biber, Douglas, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad and Edward Finegan. 1999. Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Harlow: Pearson.

Biber, Douglas, Susan Conrad and Geoffrey Leech. 1999. Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Harlow: Pearson.