

Instructional Strategies for Grammar Cloze Test in Chinese Junior High Schools

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How to cite this paper: Yang, G. R. (2025). Instructional Strategies for Grammar Cloze Test in Chinese Junior High Schools. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 1(1), 69-75. ISSN Print: 3104-4263; ISSN Online: 3104-4271.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/IJED.9010>

Published: 2025-07-21

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Abstract

Grammar close test, as an essential component of junior high school English learning, serve not only as a key means to assess students' language foundation but also as an effective approach to cultivate their comprehensive language skills. Based on the senior high school entrance examination questions from Nanchong City between 2021 and 2025, this paper systematically analyzes the test design patterns and core assessment points of grammar close test and explores corresponding teaching strategies. The research indicates that teachers should guide students to enhance their problem-solving abilities from multiple dimensions, including contextual analysis, word form conversion, and logical reasoning, while integrating grammar knowledge into practical language use to avoid rote memorization. Through scientific training methods, students can not only improve their test-taking skills but also strengthen their language sensitivity and autonomous learning abilities. Future teaching should further explore the integration of grammar close test with other language skills to help students bridge the gap from knowledge accumulation to skill development, laying a solid foundation for life-long English learning.

Keywords

Grammar close test; Teaching strategies; Junior high schools

1. Introduction

The junior high school stage is a critical period for students' English learning and a golden phase for developing language proficiency. During this time, students need not only to consolidate their foundation but also to enhance their comprehensive language literacy through scientific training. As an important question type in the senior high school entrance examination, grammar close test comprehensively assess students' vocabulary application, grammar mastery, and discourse comprehension, serving as a significant indicator of their practical English proficiency. Therefore, how to employ effective teaching strategies to help students master the techniques for solving grammar close test while improving their comprehensive language application skills has become a vital topic in junior high school English teach-

ing.

This paper takes the grammar close test from Nanchong City's senior high school entrance examinations from 2021 to 2025 as examples, combining the distribution of test points and question design patterns to explore how junior high school English teachers can systematically guide students in mastering problem-solving methods for grammar close test. These methods include core skills such as contextual analysis, word form conversion, and tense judgment. Furthermore, the paper discusses how grammar close test can enhance students' practical English application abilities, foster logical thinking in language learning, and develop autonomous learning skills, thereby truly achieving the transition from exam-oriented to application-oriented learning.

2. Current Problems

2.1. Impact of Examination Reform on Grammar Learning Approach

The English testing format of Nanchong's senior high school entrance examination underwent reform in 2019, which eliminated multiple-choice questions while increasing the number of cloze test items (from 10 to 15) and raising the score allocation for writing tasks (from 15 to 25 points). Multiple-choice questions had traditionally served as a crucial means of assessing grammatical knowledge, requiring students to analyze sentence structures, tenses, voices, and other grammatical rules to select correct answers. However, with the removal of this question type, some students mistakenly assumed grammar had become less important, consequently relaxing their efforts in learning and reinforcing grammatical knowledge. Although cloze tests and writing tasks also involve grammar, students tend to focus more on vocabulary and overall comprehension while neglecting grammatical details. This reform has, to some extent, diminished students' emphasis on grammar, leading to a weakening of their grammatical foundation.

Furthermore, some students begin neglecting grammar study as early as seventh grade, believing that memorizing vocabulary alone suffices for test-taking and even high scores. This "vocabulary-first" misconception gradually reveals its shortcomings by eighth grade. In seventh grade, where grammatical content remains relatively simple (e.g., simple present tense, noun plurals), some students do achieve satisfactory test results through rote memorization of words and fixed expressions. This short-term "success" misleads them into thinking English learning requires only vocabulary memorization, causing them to overlook systematic grammar study (Chen Xiaotang, 2013). As the curriculum advances to eighth grade, introducing more complex grammatical structures like non-finite verbs and attributive clauses, students relying solely on vocabulary memorization face significant challenges. For instance, in cloze tests, even when recognizing all vocabulary options, they may select incorrect answers due to inability to determine sentence components (e.g., whether a noun or adjective is required).

2.2. Deficiencies in Problem-Solving Skills

Firstly, students lack holistic comprehension of discourse structure. Many immediately attempt to fill blanks sequentially without first skimming the entire passage to grasp its main idea. This "missing the forest for the trees" approach prevents accurate understanding of narrative logic and emotional progression, resulting in frequent errors on questions requiring contextual analysis (Yang, Feng, 2020). For example, when encountering questions where pronoun referents can only be determined by subsequent context, they often misinterpret due to insufficient global reading awareness.

Additionally, students demonstrate notable weaknesses in lexical application. While able to memorize basic word meanings, they struggle with collocations, polysemy, and contextual meanings. This is particularly evident in items testing phrasal verbs (e.g., "take off") or fixed expressions (e.g., "be responsible for"), where error rates remain high. More concerning is their generally poor ability to differentiate near-synonyms, such as distinguishing usage among common verbs like "say," "tell," and "speak."

Moreover, systematic problem-solving strategies are markedly absent. Most students lack methodical approaches, frequently resorting to intuitive guessing when encountering difficult items. They seldom employ basic tactics like "easy-first" or "content-before-function words," nor effectively use elimination methods. Their thinking appears particularly constrained when addressing questions requiring cultural knowledge or life experience (Guo Min, 2018). Finally, most students merely check answers after practice without establishing systematic error analysis procedures. Recurring mistakes across different exercises reflect inefficient learning, as seen in persistent confusion between contrastive and causal conjunctions.

3. The analysis of Grammar Cloze Test content

The English cloze test in Nanchong's high school entrance examination has consistently followed a "7+3" pattern from 2021 to 2025: 7 blanks with word prompts (focusing on lexical transformations) and 3 blanks without prompts (emphasizing function words), demonstrating clear patterns and targeted assessment objectives.

3.1. Non-promoted Section

From the table 1, it can be seen that prepositions primarily assess logical relationships and fixed collocations. For example, besides (2021) tested additive relationships, while of (2023) examined adjective phrase structures—all within curriculum standards. This necessitates systematic review of common prepositional usage in junior high English. Articles, though limited to a/an/the, often incorporate special pronunciation cases (e.g., a university) or fixed expressions (e.g., the + superlative) to increase discriminative difficulty. Students must master these exceptions. Con-

junctions focus on basic logical relationships (e.g., contrast with but/although, coordination with and), requiring contextual analysis of textual flow and emotional tone. Collectively, these areas evaluate both foundational grammar and discourse comprehension, demanding targeted practice to address frequent errors like prepositional misuse or article omissions.

Table 1. The non-prompted test points over the past five years

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Prepositions	besides	without	of	without	against/on
Articles	the	the	a	a	an
Conjunctions	but	if	although/though	and	and

3.2. Promoted Section

Through a systematic classification of prompted items in Nanchong's senior high school entrance examination over the past five years (as shown in Table 2), we have identified distinct patterns and systematic characteristics in the grammar close test. Statistical analysis of the 2021-2025 test papers reveals that while maintaining relatively stable distribution patterns, the examination committee has implemented subtle adjustments to ensure comprehensive assessment and effective differentiation.

Table 2. Analysis of test point types

Types		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Transformations		2	2	2	2	2	10
Singular noun/plural		1			1	1	3
Verb tenses	Simple present		1	1			2
	Simple past	1					1
	Present perfect				1		1
	Passive voice		1	1		1	3
Comparatives		1	1	1		1	4
Non-finite verbs		1	1	1	1	1	5
Pronouns			1	1	1	1	4
Cardinal/ordinal numbers					1		1
Others		1					1

The data demonstrates that word class conversion, as a fundamental testing point, appears consistently with two items annually, totaling ten questions over five years

and accounting for one-third of all items. This reflects the examination designers' emphasis on accurate linguistic transformation skills. These questions typically require students to flexibly convert among nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (e.g., changing the verb "protect" to the noun "protection"), assessing not only knowledge of word formation but also the ability to apply grammatical categories contextually. Although noun number questions appear less frequently (three instances in three years), they exhibit an intermittent testing pattern.

The distribution of verb tense questions demonstrates careful design, covering four core tenses during this five-year period: simple present, past simple, present perfect and passive voice. Notably, passive voice questions appear most frequently (three times), aligning perfectly with key teaching priorities in junior high English. Similarly, comparative forms maintain consistent testing frequency (four occurrences), primarily focusing on adjective and adverb comparisons while omitting superlatives thus far. These questions demand not only mastery of form changes but also understanding of comparative logic in context.

Non-finite verbs, as a crucial yet challenging grammatical element, appear annually (five total questions), highlighting their significance in the examination system. The assessment mainly distinguishes between infinitives (to do) and present participles (doing), requiring students to accurately analyze the relationship between non-finite verbs and their logical subjects, as well as their syntactic functions. Pronoun questions also show stable frequency (four occurrences), testing various types including personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns. Although numeral questions only appeared once (2024), their potential incorporation of irregular forms (e.g., "twelfth") or fixed expressions (e.g., "in one's fifties") warrants attention for future Test Preparation.

The overall trend demonstrates a "dual emphasis on fundamentals and competence" in the prompted section. On one hand, basic elements like word conversion, noun numbers and pronoun usage maintain high frequency to ensure comprehensive coverage; on the other, more challenging elements like non-finite verbs and passive voice effectively differentiate students' grammatical proficiency. This approach satisfies both the fundamental requirements of compulsory English education and the selective function of entrance examinations. Importantly, while covering a wide range, all testing points strictly adhere to curriculum standards without exceeding requirements, providing clear guidance for teaching and revision.

4. Cloze Test Answering Techniques

According to the current problems and analysis of the content, the key strategies of grammar cloze test involve following tips :

4.1. Context Construction and Text Deconstruction Methodology

The core of solving cloze tests lies in developing systematic contextual analysis skills.

This ability requires three stages of progressive training:

- a) Beginner Stage: Focus on building a lexical network by identifying keywords and their co-occurrence relationships to grasp the basic semantic field of the text.
- b) Intermediate Stage: Develop logical relationship recognition, emphasizing transitional, causal, and progressive connectors to clarify intra- and inter-sentence connections.
- c) Advanced Stage: Activate cultural schemata, guiding students to link text content with prior background knowledge for deeper comprehension.

In practice, adopt the "Three-Pass Reading Method":

- a) First pass: Skim for main ideas.
- b) Second pass: Analyze in detail to solve specific problems.
- c) Third pass: Verify overall coherence to ensure answer appropriateness.

Note that contextual analysis is not static but a dynamic interaction between reader and text, requiring continuous adjustment. Teachers can use visual tools like mind maps or semantic networks to externalize implicit thought processes, fostering stable problem-solving patterns.

4.2. Question Pattern Analysis and Test Point Prediction

A thorough understanding of the proposition patterns is the key to improving the efficiency of problem-solving. Firstly, it is necessary to establish a database of examination points distribution. By making a vertical comparison of the real questions from previous years, the high-frequency examination points and their presentation methods can be summarized. Secondly, it is important to master the setting rules of the distractors. Common interference methods include near-synonym confusion, similar forms, and logical misplacement. It is necessary to cultivate students' sensitivity to identifying "traps". In actual problem-solving, the "three-step prediction method" can be adopted: predict the type of examination point based on the position of the blank, determine the direction of transformation based on the prompt words, and verify the rationality of the options by referring to the parallel structure. For example, the blank at the beginning of a paragraph often tests discourse connectives, verb prompt words should give priority to considering the changes in tense and voice, and adjectives and adverbs often involve comparative degrees. Teachers should guide students to make personalized "examination point heat maps", ranking the high-frequency examination points by priority, and achieving the maximum score benefit within a limited time. At the same time, special attention should be paid to those words that have special usages in specific contexts. Such examination points can effectively distinguish students of different levels.

4.3. Error Management and Targeted Improvement

Effective management of mistakes is a crucial guarantee for continuous progress. First, a scientific classification system should be established, marking the mistakes

in multiple dimensions based on their nature (grammar, logic, culture, etc.) and severity. Secondly, "mistake gene modification" should be implemented, which involves three steps: redoing the original question, variant training, and creating new questions to completely eliminate knowledge blind spots. At the operational level, it is recommended to adopt the "four-step analysis method": accurately describe the characteristics of the mistake, deeply analyze the cause of the mistake, find the relevant knowledge points, and design targeted training. For example, for common preposition collocation mistakes, one should not only memorize the correct form but also understand the semantic relationship within and reinforce the cognition through a large number of example sentences. Teachers can organize "mistake seminars" regularly, allowing students to share their own mistake cases and improvement experiences, forming a positive learning community. Most importantly, mistake management should be incorporated into the daily study routine, maintaining continuous reflection and improvement rather than cramming before exams.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported and guided me throughout the process of completing this work. I owe my deepest thanks to my advisors, for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insightful suggestions. Their expertise and dedication have been a constant source of inspiration.

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