Articles on Teaching Grammar

Fifty Years of Stupid Grammar Advice, Geoffrey Pullam, Chronicle of Higher Education, April 2009,

“It’s sad. Several generations of college students learned their grammar from the uninformed bossiness of Strunk and White, and the result is a nation of educated people who know they feel vaguely anxious and insecure whenever they write "however" or "than me" or "was" or "which," but can’t tell you why.”

Teaching Grammar Doesn’t Lead to Better Writing, Dennis Barron, Chronicle of Higher Education, May 2003,

“I do have colleagues who still fail papers that contain more than three grammatical or spelling errors, and I have students who argue that they deserve a higher grade because their papers had no "mistakes." But focusing on grammar sends the wrong message to students, and it will also misdirect the teaching-to-the-test industry.”


“There is an extent to which scornful condemnation of “bad grammar” is one of today’s last permissible expressions of elitism. Here’s one way we know. Notice how much meaner it sounds if someone says that they won’t hire someone who can’t do algebra, despite math not being required in the job beyond elementary calculations. Even with an additional argument along the lines that algebra trains the brain in precision, it sounds arbitrary – as if deep down the person just has a thing about math.”

Why American Students Can’t Write, Robert Pondiscio, Atlantic Magazine, September 2012

“Let me hasten to add that there should be no war between expressive writing and explicit teaching of grammar and mechanics. It’s not an either/or proposition. Kids are more likely to become engaged, thoughtful writers if they feel comfortable and competent with language.”

http://harpers.org/archive/2001/04/tense-present/
Tense Present, David Foster Wallace, Harper’s Magazine, April, 2001

“A dialect of English is learned and used either because it's your native vernacular or because it's the dialect of a Group by which you wish (with some degree of plausibility) to be accepted. And although it is the major and arguably the most important one, SWE is only one dialect. And it is never, or at least hardly ever, anybody's only dialect. This is because there are — as you and I both know and yet no one in the Usage Wars ever seems to mention — situations in which faultlessly correct SWE is clearly not the appropriate dialect.”