

# Abingdon English Department's Pocket Guide to Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling



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ABINGDON

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## 1. Parts of speech

Words in the English language can be classified into **parts of speech** according to the function they perform in the sentence.

**1.1 Verb** – this expresses the action or state of being/ emotion ('to run', 'to love', 'to eat').

**Subject** – the thing doing the verb e.g. *He went to the shops.* 'He' = *subject*.

**Object** – The object is usually short for the direct object of the verb, like 'prep' in 'I did my prep for the teacher.' 'Teacher' is the indirect object, because it is indirectly affected by the verb.

**Verb Tense** – this tells us about time.

*Examples:*

*He started early – simple past tense*

*They will arrive at noon – simple future tense*

*I go to Abingdon School – simple present tense*

A **finite** verb is one that has been given a tense (showing when it happened) and subject (someone doing it).

**Non-finite verbs** are the verb forms that do not show a distinction in tense. They include infinitives and –ing forms e.g. *Seeing the ordinary as extraordinary is something we like to do* or *Many people like to relax with a cup of tea.*

**Infinitive** verbs are in their root form and have no tense or subject e.g. to be, to love, to go.

**Imperative** verbs give commands e.g. *sit down* at once, *get out* your pens, *enjoy* your meal.

**1.2 Noun** – a thing or entity, such as an object, person, place, or idea ('table', 'Jim', 'Abingdon', 'patience', 'appointment').

**Concrete nouns** are things you could touch or observe with your senses e.g. chair, town.

**Abstract nouns** are ideas or concepts e.g. justice, patience, endurance, hatred.

**Proper nouns** are things that are unique – there is just a single, specific one of them. The names of particular places and people are the most common examples of proper nouns e.g. Abingdon, Jacob, Christmas, England.

**Common nouns** are the general class of thing e.g. dog, city, country, school.

**1.3 Adjective** – describes what a noun is like ('black', 'heavy', 'sunny').

**1.4 Adverb** – describes how a verb (or adjective, or other adverb) is done e.g. when, where, or how it occurs ('quickly', 'easily', 'uncertainly', 'suddenly'). They often end in the suffix '–ly'.

**1.5 Pronoun** – a word that stands in for a noun (I, he, she, it, they, we, you).

**1.6 Preposition** – a word to do with place or position (to, across, under, behind, in).

**1.7 Conjunction** – a word that connects together words, sentences, phrases, or clauses (and, or, but, so, for, either, whether, because, however). It is sometimes called a connective.

**1.8 Interjection** – a part of the sentence that stands alone and expresses a strong emotion or reaction (gosh, hello, how wonderful, ouch).

**1.9 Determiner** – a determiner is a word that introduces a noun, such as *a/an, the, every, this, those, or many* (as in *a cat, the cat, this cat, those cats, every cat, many cats*).

The determiner *the* is known as the **definite article** and the determiner *a* (or *an*) as the **indefinite article**.

**Possessive determiners** – words like *my, our, your, his, her, its, and their* are known as possessive determiners. They come before nouns and indicate ownership of the noun in question, as their name suggests. They are sometimes called possessive pronouns or possessive adjectives.

*My leg hurts.*

*James sold **his** business.*

*Bring **your** children with you.*

## **2. Sentences, phrases and clauses**

### **2.1 What is a sentence?**

A sentence is a group of words that makes complete sense, contains a main verb, and begins with a capital letter. It is a complete unit of grammatical meaning.

*Examples of sentences:*

*Oliver plays rugby.*

*He likes football.*

*The man walked down the road and into town.*

*It will be a very large meal.*

All of your work should be written in sentences. Sentences always end with a **full stop**, or occasionally an exclamation mark or question mark. They must always end with one of these punctuation marks.

### **2.2 What is not a sentence?**

A group of words is not a sentence when it is grammatically incomplete because it is missing one of the required elements, such as a main verb, and so does not make grammatical sense.

*Examples of non-sentences:*

*Because we want to leave early.*

*I left without.*

*Too early.*

*Giving up too easily.*

In each of these examples, we either do not have a main verb (e.g. ‘too early’ and ‘giving up too easily’) or we do not have a grammatically complete unit of meaning (e.g. ‘because we want to leave early’ – because we want to leave early, what? This makes us expect a reason.)

**\*\*Special note.** Some people find it confusing that we call a sentence like ‘He likes football’ a complete unit of meaning because we don’t know who ‘he’ is, or similarly why we say ‘It will be a very large meal’ is a complete unit of meaning because we don’t know what ‘It’ is. However, as long as we have a **pronoun** such as he, she, they, or it then it is *grammatically* a complete unit of meaning and therefore we do have a sentence.

### 2.3 Breaking the rules for effect.

In the work of published authors and sometimes in your own writing, you may come across instances when these rules are broken for effect.

#### *Examples*

*The room was a complete bombshell. Utter chaos.*

*This was a man. A machine. A unit of fear.*

It should always be clear that the rules are being broken for effect, however, and you should be very careful to choose the times you do this so it does not look like an error on your part.

**2.4 What is a clause?** A **clause** is a group of words containing a verb which forms part of a sentence.

#### *Examples*

1. *They arrived early because everyone was really excited.*

= two clauses: 1. ‘they arrived early’ 2. ‘because everyone was really excited’.

2. *The man wanted to sneeze and he got out his handkerchief.*

= two clauses: 1. ‘the man wanted to sneeze’ 2. ‘and he got out his handkerchief.’

**NB: every clause has a verb (‘arrived’, ‘excited’, ‘wanted’, ‘got out’)**

**2.5 Types of clause.** Clauses can be divided into two types:

1. **Independent or main** clauses – these make sense on their own, and have a subject and a finite verb in them.
2. **Dependent or subordinate** clauses – these need another part of the sentence to make sense.

#### *Examples*

1. *Independent or main clauses:*

- *It was hot*
- *I eat a lot of bread*
- *The tree is very old*

2. *Dependent or subordinate clauses:*

- *Because of the amount of rain we’ve had*
- *Even though they were really keen to start*
- *Running down the hill*

**2.6 Subordinating conjunctions.** Here is a table of the conjunctions we most commonly find at the start of subordinate clauses. You can use these to help you create more varied and complex sentences.

Area of meaning	Subordinating conjunction	Example
Comparison	as if, as though, like	He looked at me as though he liked me.
Concession	although, though, if, even if, whereas	Although she irritates me, I still like her.
Condition	if, unless, in case, as long as, supposing	Supposing you were given the money, what would you do?
Contrast	whereas, while, whilst	I enjoy watching films, whereas you don't.
Area of meaning	Subordinating conjunction	Example
Exception	except	I like all sports, except tennis.
Place	where, wherever	You can eat wherever you want.
Preference	rather than, sooner than	I'll stay here rather than go home.
Proportion	as...so, the...the	The more I train, the more I improve.
Purpose	to, in order to, so as to	I walked faster in order to be on time.
Reason	to, in order to, as	I switched the computer off as it was over heating.
Result	so, so that	I turned the temperature up so that it would cook properly.
Time	after, as before, since, until, when, while	He turned up after you left for work.

**2.7 Types of sentences.** We classify sentences according to the number and type of clauses that are present. There are three types of sentences.

1. **Simple sentences.** These have just one independent/main clause in them.

*Examples:*

- *The grass is greener on the other side.*
- *We often go to France.*

2. **Compound sentences.** These have two or more clauses in them and all of the clauses are independent/main. The clauses are joined together by what we call 'co-ordinating conjunctions; the main examples of these are **AND, SO, BUT, OR** (which you can remember by the acronym 'ASBO').

*Examples:*

- *The rain has been very heavy and we have decided not to go out.*
- *He is very good at music and he is also good at sport but his mother doesn't want him to get injured so he doesn't play as much as he would like.*

3. **Complex sentences.** These have two or more clauses in them and are a mixture of independent/main clauses and dependent/subordinate clauses.

*Examples:*

- *If you'd like to learn the guitar this term, you will need to sign up for lessons.*
- *Teachers often spend whole evenings marking even when they are very tired.*

## 2.8 Phrases.

A phrase is a small group of words that forms a meaningful unit within a clause. There are several different types, as follows:

**Noun phrase** – a noun phrase is built around a single noun, for example:

*A vase of roses stood on the table.*

*She was reading a book about the emancipation of women.*

**Verb phrase** – a verb phrase is the verbal part of a clause, for example:

*She had been living in London.*

*I will be going to college next year.*

**Adjective phrase** – an adjective phrase is built around an adjective, for example:

*He's led a very interesting life.*

*A lot of the kids are really keen on football.*

**Adverbial phrase** – an adverbial phrase is built round an adverb by adding words before and/or after it, for example:

*The economy recovered very slowly.*

*They wanted to leave the country as fast as possible.*

**Prepositional phrase** – in a prepositional phrase the preposition always comes at the beginning, for example:

*I longed to live near the sea.*

*The dog was hiding under the kitchen table.*

### 3. Capital letters

**3.1 Capital letters at the start of sentences.** Every sentence should start with a capital letter. There are no exceptions to this rule.

**3.2 Capital letters for proper nouns.** We give capital letters to any proper noun. This means the name of a specific, unique entity. We give capitals to all the main words that are part of the name.

*Examples: John Smith, Abingdon School, Oxford, Easter, London Wasps, The Magna Carta, Oxford City Football Club, The Vale of the White Horse.*

**3.3 Capital letters for titles.** We give capital letters to all the main words in titles, including in books, films, and pieces of work. Small words (such as of, the, a, an) are not given capitals unless they are the first word of the title.

*Examples: The Formation of Oxbow Lakes, The Importance of Being Earnest, Inception, The Uses of Capital Letters.*

**3.4 Capital letters for subject names.** Subjects which have names derived from proper nouns should have capital letters e.g. *English, Latin, French, German*. Other subjects do not need capital letters e.g. *history, geography, maths*. However, people do sometimes use capital letters for these, and it is acceptable as long as the capital letter use is consistent. If the subject forms part of a proper noun/name, however, it will of course become capitalised e.g. *The Abingdon School History Film Club*.

**3.5 Abbreviations.** When you abbreviate a word or phrase, you should use capitals e.g. *GCSE, TV, BC*.

**3.6 The pronoun 'I'.** Whenever you use the pronoun 'I' to represent yourself, you must use a capital. There are no exceptions to this rule.

### **3.7 Common confusions.**

1. Common nouns used as names. People are often tempted to write 'My Mum' or 'My Dog', thinking that, because it is a specific, unique entity, it is a proper noun. However, 'mum' and 'dog' are not those entities' names and so you should not use a capital letter. The exception to this is if or when the common noun is used as their name e.g. *I hated the fact that Mum was always late* or *We named him Dog because we couldn't think of another name for him.*
2. Importance. Some people are tempted to use capital letters just to suggest that something is important e.g. *You must always do your Homework* or *At the school, Football is a popular sport.* This is wrong. Football and homework are not proper nouns and they should not be given a capital letter.

## **4. Commas**

The comma is a much misused piece of punctuation. This is partly because there are several different situations in which the comma is the correct piece of punctuation to use. The trick is to identify those situations so as not to use the comma in places where it really should not be.

The following are some of the situations in which a comma should be used:

### **4.1 To separate the elements in a list of three or more items.**

*I need to buy milk, bread, eggs and cheese.*

There is some debate about whether or not to include a comma to separate the last two items in the series e.g. whether to write '*bread, eggs and cheese*' or '*bread, eggs, and cheese*'. Both are acceptable. Putting in the final comma is known as using an 'Oxford comma'.

### **4.2 To separate a subordinate clause from the main clause when the subordinate clause comes first in a sentence.**

Use a comma to separate a subordinate clause at the start of a sentence from the main part of that sentence.

*Given the appalling rain, Michael was lucky not to catch a terrible cold.*

*As the evening drew to a close, the children wandered home.*

### **4.3 To separate parenthetical elements (asides) or subordinate clauses within a sentence.**

A comma is used to set apart parenthetical elements in a sentence or subordinate clauses contained within main clauses. The parenthetical element or subordinate clause (also known as an aside) is part of the sentence that can be removed without changing the essential meaning of the sentence – it is just adding extra information.

*Sam, the most intelligent pupil in the class, was always on time for school.*

*The Thames, one of the greatest rivers in Great Britain, passes right through the capital city.*

It is important that the aside is opened and closed with a comma. A common mistake is to omit the second comma.



#### 4.4 Commas are used to separate out words or clauses that are separate from the main part of the sentence.

Commas are used to separate phrases and words that come before, within, or after another part of the sentence. As above, these words or phrases could be removed without changing the essential meaning of the sentence.

*In truth, there are not many houses for sale around here.  
It is, indeed, too hot to sit outside.*

#### 4.5 Commas are used for typographical reasons to separate dates and years, towns and counties etc.

*His home was in Streatham, East London.  
My father was born on March 13, 1949.*

#### 4.6 Commas are used to separate several adjectives.

*The old, ramshackle, dilapidated house had a charm of its own.  
That rather dull-looking, badly-dressed, clumsy man is actually a university professor.*

#### 4.7 The comma splice.

The comma splice is one of the most frequent mistakes made when using a comma. The comma splice occurs when a comma is used to connect two independent clauses (see section 2.4). In this example the two clauses make sense on their own. Connecting them with a comma is incorrect: *Jim usually gets on with everybody, he is an understanding person.*

If you have two independent clauses that need to be separated, you have several choices:

1. You can make them into two sentences using a **full stop**. This is probably the easiest solution but may not be the best in terms of style.

*Jim usually gets on with everybody. He is an understanding person.*

2. You can use a **semicolon**. In our example, using a semicolon suggests a link between the two clauses without stating that link specifically.

*Jim usually gets on with everybody; he is an understanding person.*

3. You can introduce a **conjunction** to connect the sentences. By doing this, you make the connection between the two more explicit.

*Jim usually gets on with everybody because he is an understanding person.  
Jim usually gets on with everybody as he is an understanding person.*

## 5. Apostrophes

The apostrophe is used for several different functions.

### 5.1 The apostrophe of contraction.

One use of the apostrophe is in contracted words, which have been joined together and shortened with letters taken out. The apostrophe is used where a letter or letters has/have been taken out.

*He is = he's*

*I am = I'm*

*They have = They've*

*It is = It's*

*I would = I'd*

*Let us = Let's*

*She has = She's*

*Who is = who's*

\*\*Be careful when contracting 'would have' into 'would've' – a common mistake is to write 'would of' and you should avoid this.

**Special note:** The word 'it's' should only ever have an apostrophe in it if it is short for 'it is' or 'it has'. It should never have an apostrophe in it for any other reason, even if you think there is a relationship of possession.

Examples: *'It's been a hot summer' = It has been a hot summer.*

*'The television is on its stand' = its isn't short for 'it is' or 'it has' and there is therefore no apostrophe. It is a possessive 'its', but these do not ever carry apostrophes.*

## 5.2 The apostrophe showing possession.

The second use of the apostrophe is to show possession – that something belongs to someone or something else.

Here are some examples:

*He loved Madrid's winding streets.* (The streets belong to Madrid.)

*I'm interested in Tim's point of view.* (The point of view belongs to Tim.)

*The building's foundations were well built.* (The foundations belong to the building.)

**Tip:** If you're not sure if an apostrophe of possession is needed, see if you can rearrange the phrase to include an 'of'. For example, Madrid's winding streets can be rearranged as 'the winding streets of Madrid', while Tim's point of view can be rearranged as 'the point of view of Tim'. If you can rearrange to include an 'of', then an apostrophe of possession is needed.

2. If the possessor is a plural ending in s, the apostrophe needs to come after the s.

*The teacher was always losing her pupils' books.* (There are many pupils who have books.)

*The monks' meals were served in a cold and damp dining room.* (There are many monks.)

*I can never understand the politicians' obsession with spin.* (There are many politicians.)

3. This also happens with names that end in s.

*James' shoes are in the corner.*

*Jesus' disciples included James and Matthew.*

You will sometimes see people also put an s after the apostrophe in these cases (e.g. James's shoes are in the corner) and both are acceptable. The only exception to this rule is proper nouns that are Latin or Greek in origin.

*Odysseus' adventures spanned many miles and many years.*

*Pythagoras' theorem has baffled generations of school children.*

## 5.3 Mistakes with apostrophes.

1. A very common mistake is to put apostrophes in every time a word ends in s even if there is no relationship of possession.

*Oxford contain's a lot of lovely old building's and street's.*

*You can have pea's with your meal.*

2. A second common mistake is to put the apostrophe in the wrong place for singular and plural words. This can completely change the meaning of the sentence.

*The pupil's uniform was very smart.* (one pupil)

*The pupils' uniform was very smart.* (lots of pupils)

3. The last mistake is to use apostrophes with possessive determiners (also called possessive

adjectives or possessive pronouns – see 1.9). These words, *its, his, hers, whose, theirs* **do not carry possessive apostrophes** e.g. *The cat likes its food. The book is hers. Whose is this pencil?* If you write ‘it’s’, it **MUST** be short for ‘it is’ or ‘it has’, and if you write ‘who’s’, it **MUST** be short for ‘who is’ or ‘who has’.

## **6. Semicolons**

The semicolon is a great punctuation mark. Using it shows your sophistication and will allow you to express your ideas and opinions with more subtlety and precision. We use it in the following ways:

**6.1 In complicated lists.** The semicolon can be used to sort out a complicated list containing many items, many of which themselves contain commas.

*Example:*

*The meeting today was attended by Mr Lewis, City Councillor, Dr Jones, the local GP, Mrs Smith, a lawyer, and Jo Thomas, the Chair.*

In a list like this where the ‘items’ are more than one word long, the semicolon can help make things a lot clearer:

*The meeting today was attended by Mr Lewis, City Councillor; Dr Jones, the local GP; Mrs Smith, a lawyer and Jo Thomas, the Chair.*

**6.2 Separating closely related independent clauses.** The semicolon is also used to connect two closely related independent clauses.

*Example:*

*Charlie always ate big meals; he got terribly hungry.*

The two clauses here are closely connected but the link has not been made explicit.

They could have been separated by a full stop.

*Charlie always ate big meals. He got terribly hungry.*

They could have been connected by a conjunction.

*Charlie always ate big meals, but he got terribly hungry.*

If you are going to use a semicolon to connect two clauses, it is very important that the two clauses are both independent. That means that each clause has to be able to stand alone and make complete sense without the other, or in other words, that each part could be a sentence in its own right. If either one cannot stand alone, a semicolon **cannot** be used.

## **7. Colons**

The colon has a number of functions:

**7.1 To introduce an idea.** The colon introduces an idea that is an explanation or continuation of the one that comes before the colon. The colon can be considered as a gateway inviting the reader to go on.

*Examples:*

*You don't have much choice: you will need to re-do the work.*

*There is one food that I couldn't live without: pizza.*

You will see that you have some idea of what will come after the colon.

**\*\*Important note.** The clause that comes before the colon must be independent: it must stand alone and make complete sense on its own. If the initial clause cannot stand alone and make complete sense, you should **not** use a colon. This example would be wrong, for instance: *I will: try my best for the whole year.*

**7.2 To introduce a list.** You need to be careful doing this; many people assume that a colon *always* comes before a list but this is wrong. As above, the clause before the colon must make complete sense on its own.

*Examples:*

*The cake contained some delicious ingredients: chocolate, syrup, butter, and hazelnuts.*

*The cake contained chocolate, syrup, butter, and hazelnuts.*

In the first sentence, the clause before the colon has a subject and main verb and makes complete sense on its own ‘*The cake contained some delicious ingredients*’. In the second sentence there shouldn’t be a colon because ‘*The cake contained*’ is not an independent clause.

**7.3 Style.** A colon can add emphasis and punch to an idea.

*Examples:*

*The one thing we all love is success.*

*There is one thing we all love: success.*

Both these examples are grammatically correct, but the second gives more emphasis. You can choose which you prefer.

## **8. Punctuating speech**

There are two ways of putting speech into your writing. The speaker’s words can either be reported, or they can be quoted directly in what’s called direct speech.

### **8.1 Reported speech.**

In reported speech, the actual words are not usually quoted directly. They can be rephrased in your own words and there is no need for any extra punctuation.

*Examples:*

*The 156 pupils in the year said that the main reason for choosing a subject was that they thought they would do well in it.*

*The athletes said how pleased they had been to win medals.*

### **8.2 Direct speech.**

This is when you put the actual words that a person speaks into your writing. There are a number of rules to follow in laying out and punctuating.

1. The words that are actually spoken should be put in inverted commas.

*‘He’s done really well, you know.’*

Nowadays, people generally use single inverted commas but it is acceptable to use double ones: *“He’s done really well, you know.”*

2. Whenever a new speaker says something, you need to start a new paragraph:

*‘He thinks it’s a good idea,’ said Toby.*

*‘I think so too,’ I replied.*

3. There must be a comma, full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark at the end of a piece of speech. It should go before the speech mark.

*'Can I join you?' she asked.*

*'Wait there!' he called.*

*'You're running late,' he said.*

*'I thought you'd be ready by now.'*

4. If the speech follows the attribution, where we find out about who is speaking, you should use a comma to introduce the piece of speech, before the first speech mark:

*Luke replied, 'If you like.'*

5. If the direct speech is broken up by an attribution, you need a comma (or a question mark or exclamation mark) to end the first piece of speech and a full stop or another comma before the second piece (before the speech marks):

*'You're on to something,' he said. 'This isn't right.'*

*'Looking back,' she said, 'we could have done better.'*

*'Yes!' he cried. 'I can't believe we've done it!'*

## **9. Other pieces of punctuation**

There are a number of other punctuation marks that you can use, and they can help add clarity, variety, and style to your work.

**9.1 Brackets.** These are sometimes called **parentheses**. They are used around parts of the sentence that give additional information that could be removed or is just as aside. You can generally use commas in place of brackets, but brackets may make it clearer. Avoid overusing them.

*Examples:*

*The school shop (which you probably visited when you came in the summer) opens today at noon.*

*Jenny Lewis (who always makes pizza) should be around this evening.*

**9.2 Dashes.** These can be used as follows:

1. In pairs, to separate information that is not essential to understanding the rest of the sentence (a bit like with brackets).

*Examples:*

*Thousands of people – like the ones you have seen on the film – are now at risk of serious famine.*

*My friend – is she over there by the table? – would like to see you.*

2. To show a break in a sentence where a comma, semicolon, or colon could also be used.

*Examples:*

*One thing's certain – he still needs to improve a lot.*

*Things have changed since last time we came – mainly they are changes for the worse.*

Dashes are especially common in informal writing, but it's probably best to avoid overusing them in formal writing – commas, semicolons, and colons can generally be used in their place.

**9.3 Ellipsis.** This is the proper name for a 'dot, dot, dot'. It is used when a sentence trails off, to give suspense, or to show that something is missing.

*Examples:*

*'What the...?' exclaimed Paul, as he saw what was happening.*

*But Laurie had always been afraid of dark places...*

**9.4 Exclamation mark.** This shows that something is said with emotion or emphasis. The main thing to say about these is that they should not be overused. One or two in any piece of work will be more than enough, and they are not appropriate in formal writing.

## **10. Paragraphing**

The key point to take on board is that all written work needs paragraphs. As soon as you are writing an answer or a piece of more than a few sentences, you need to start considering paragraphs.

### **10.1 Paragraphs in analytical/essay writing.**

- You must have paragraphs to separate out the different ideas in your writing. Paragraphs should not just be random breaks in your work when you feel a gap is needed. They should clearly show where the divisions or steps in the ideas behind your work fall. They show how you are organising your thinking across a whole text.
- Introductions and conclusions have particular functions and should be separate paragraphs.
  - The introduction should lead the reader into your piece by giving an idea about what you are going to write about and why it is an interesting or puzzling topic. The introduction should not be vague; be specific and avoid just repeating words from the question or title.
  - The conclusion should give a clear summary of what you have said in your work, and should give the reader a clear idea of what they should go away thinking. It is often a good idea to refer back to the introduction in your conclusion. Do not merely repeat the introduction or leave things unresolved.
- Each paragraph should have the same basic structure
  - A topic sentence – summarises and introduces the idea of the paragraph. It is like a mini-introduction to your paragraph.
  - Detail/development – sentences in the middle of the paragraph that give further explanation and take your ideas further
  - Rounding off – a sentence that draws the paragraph together.
- Connectives. You should make regular use of connectives to join together ideas both within and between your paragraphs. This will help show how your ideas link together and will make your work logical. Connectives include therefore, in contrast, because, however, on the one hand, on the other hand, thus, hence, although, in conclusion.

**10.2 Paragraphs in narrative/descriptive writing.** You also always need to use paragraphs when you are writing more creative pieces – descriptive writing or narrative (story) writing, for example.

- **In this type of writing, you can use the TiP ToP rule.** This says that you should start a new paragraph for a **change of Time, Place, Topic, Person**.
- In more creative pieces of work, you can also use very short paragraphs for effect and impact.

# 11. Spellings

## 11.1 Strategies for learning spellings.

It is difficult just to learn how to spell words in isolation or just by trying to remember the order of the letters. Here are some strategies you can use to make remembering spellings easier:

1. **Phonetic pronunciation.** This means finding a way to pronounce the word that emphasises the bit you tend to get wrong. Example: pronouncing 'definitely' 'def- **finite**-ly' will help you remember the 'i' in the middle of the word.
2. **Mnemonics.** Come up with a memorable sentence to help you remember the word. Example: diarrhoea. Dash In A Real Rush Hurry Or Else Accident.
3. **Divide up.** Split up the word and remember each part individually. Example: separately. Sep-a-rat-ely. We have 'a rat' in the middle of the word, and the town of Ely on the end.
4. **Letter count.** Work out how many of each letter is in the word. Example: accommodation – two 'c's, two 'm's, and two 'o's.
5. **Rules.** Learn a rule to help you remember. Example: disappoint and dissatisfy. The rule is that with prefixes (e.g. 'dis') we just add them to the base word without any change. This is why dis+appoint has just one 's' while dis+satisfy has two 's's.
6. **Morphology.** Think about the shape of the word, and focus on parts of the word that go above and below the line. Example: rhythm: the shape of the middle of the word is 'high – low – high' with the ends being 'small' letters that stick the middle ground.

Then...**Test yourself.**

1. Look, cover, write, check. You'll probably have used this method before.
2. Get tested by someone else. Ask someone at home or a friend.

## 11.2 Common misspellings.

Here are 100 words that are commonly misspelled, together with a way that you may use to help you remember it. Check your work against this list often as it is by picking up on words that you tend to get wrong and correcting them that you will improve.

1. acceptable	Just remember to accept any table offered to you.
2. accidentally	Remember the 'tally' of accidents being kept.
3. accommodate, accommodation	two 'c's, two 'm's
4. achieve	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>
5. acquire	Hear the hard 'c' before the softer 'quire'
6. across	one <b>c</b> – ' <b>a (single) cross</b> '
7. address	two 'd's
8. alliteration	two 'l's, no other doubled letters
9. a lot	This must be written as two words. Always.
10. apparently	<b>-ent</b> not <b>-ant</b> . Think of the <b>parent</b> in the word.
11. argument	No <b>e</b> after the <b>u</b> . Maybe it got argued out of the word.
12. basically	ends with <b>-ally</b>
13. beginning	double <b>n</b> before the <b>-ing</b>
14. believe	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>
15. benefit	Hear the 'nef' in the middle. No doubled letters.
16. business	begins with <b>busi-</b>
17. calendar	The middle 'e' is surrounded by two 'a's
18. character	See the 'act' in the middle.
19. committee	double <b>m</b> , double <b>t</b> , double <b>e</b>

20. commit/committed	Notice that the 't' gets doubled in 'committed'.
21. colossal	Just one 'l' – 'colo'.
22. completely	ends with <b>-ely</b>
23. conscience	Pronounce as ' <b>con science</b> '.
24. conscious	<b>-sc-</b> in the middle
25. definitely	<b>-ite-</b> not <b>-ate-</b> . Think of ' <b>finite</b> '
26. desperate	Like a desperado
27. diarrhoea	Learn by mnemonic: dash in a real rush hurry or else accident.
28. different/difference	Make sure you pronounce the 'er' in the middle of the word so you don't miss out the 'e'.
29. disappear	one 's', two 'p's
30. disappoint	one 's', two 'p's
31. embarrass	two 'r's, two 's's
32. environment	<b>n</b> before the <b>m</b>
33. exceed	Not 'excede' – 'e's together.
34. exhilarate	You need to hear the 'h'.
35. existence	ends with <b>-ence</b>
36. experience	Apart from the middle 'i', all the vowels are 'e's in this word.
37. finally	two 'l's
38. foreign	<b>e</b> before <b>l</b>
39. forty	begins with <b>for-</b>
40. friend	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>
41. government	<b>n</b> before the <b>m</b>
42. grammar	Not 'grammer' – all 'a's
43. grateful	Don't let the word 'great' into this word – think of a fire grate.
44. immediately	ends with <b>-ely</b>
45. independent	ends with <b>-ent</b>
46. intellectual	Not 'inter' – hear the 'tell'.
47. interesting	Hear the 'inter' at the beginning.
48. interrupt	two 'r's
49. knowledge	remember the <b>d</b>
50. liaise, liaison	remember the second <b>i</b> : <b>liais-</b>
51. maintenance	Hear the 'ten' in the middle of the word, and the 'ance' at the end.
52. medicine	Hear the 'i' in the middle of the word.
53. metaphor	Notice the 'ph'.
54. misspelled	It needs a double 's' and doesn't end 'spelt'.
55. necessary	one <b>c</b> , two <b>s's</b> (never eat cake, eat salmon sandwiches and remain young)
56. no-one/ no one	Either is acceptable but 'noone' isn't.
57. noticeable	remember the middle <b>e</b>
58. occasion	two 'c's, one <b>s</b>
59. occasionally	Hear the 'ally' at the end of the word.
60. occurred, occurring	two 'c's, two 'r's
61. occurrence	two 'c's, two 'r's, <b>-ence</b> not <b>-ance</b>
62. onomatopoeia	Divide up 1. Ono 2. Mato 3. Poeia (it's got the start of 'poet' in it...).



63. opportunity	Hear 'por' not 'pur', and remember to double the p.
64. persistent	ends with <b>-ent</b>
65. piece	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>
66. possession	two <b>s</b> 's in the middle and two at the end
67. precede	i.e. to come before. The 'd' comes before the final 'e' here.
68. preferred, preferring	two 'r's
69. privilege	Remember two 'i's and two 'e's in that order. There is no 'd'.
70. proceed	i.e. to continue. The 'e's are together here, unlike in 'precede'.
71. pronunciation	Hear the 'nun' in the middle of the word.
72. pursue	Hear the 'pur' like a cat. The spelling 'persue' is wrong.
73. publicly	No 'ally' here because the route word is 'public' not 'publical'.
74. really	two 'l's
75. receive	<b>e</b> before <b>i</b>
76. recommend	Just one 'c'
77. referred, referring	two 'r's
78. relevant	Hear the 'ant' on the end of the word.
79. repetition	Think of a 'pet'. Do not put a 'pit' in this word.
80. resistance	ends with <b>-ance</b>
81. restaurant	Imagine an 'ant' dining in a restaurant.
82. rhythm	No vowels in this word!
83. semicolon	All one word.
84. sense	Ends with <b>-se</b> , the same way it starts.
85. separate	<b>-par-</b> in the middle
86. sentence	The vowels are all 'e's. Pronounce it so you can hear the 'ten'.
87. simile	There is no 'ie' on the end. Hearing the 'mile' at the end may help you remember this.
88. successful	two 'c's, two 's's
89. surprise	begins with <b>sur-</b>
90. symbol	Not to be confused with the musical 'cymbal'. Hear the 'ol' at the end.
91. tendency	ends with <b>-ency</b>
92. therefore	ends with <b>-fore</b>
93. thorough	It has the word 'rough' on the end, and you need to remember the 'o' that makes it different from 'through'.
94. through	It consists of 'th' added to the word 'rough'.
95. tomorrow	one <b>m</b> , two 'r's
96. unfortunately	ends with <b>-ely</b>
97. until	one <b>l</b> at the end
98. weird	<b>e</b> before <b>i</b>
99. wherever	one <b>e</b> in the middle
100. writing	just one 't'

### 11.3 Homophones.

These are words that sound the same but are spelt differently and mean different things. They are easy to confuse.

Homophones	Definitions
<b>bare, bear</b>	The adjective <i>bare</i> means “naked.” A <i>bear</i> is an animal.
<b>brake, break</b>	A <i>brake</i> stops a car. The verb <i>break</i> means “to crack, split or destroy”. The noun <i>break</i> means a gap or interruption.
<b>complement, compliment</b>	<i>Complement</i> means “to complete or go with.” <i>Compliment</i> is an expression of admiration or praise.
<b>counsel, council</b>	<i>Counsel</i> as a noun means “advice” and as a verb, means “to advise.” A <i>council</i> is a group that advises.
<b>die, dye</b>	<i>Die</i> is a verb meaning “to stop living”, while <i>dye</i> is used to change the color of something.
<b>lead, led</b>	<i>Lead</i> is a present tense verb meaning “to guide.” <i>Led</i> is past tense of the verb <i>lead</i> . The noun <i>lead</i> is the metal.
<b>loose, lose</b>	<i>Loose</i> means “free or untied”. <i>Lose</i> means to “misplace” or “fail to win.”
<b>morning, mourning</b>	<i>Morning</i> refers to the first part of the day. <i>Mourning</i> means “showing sorrow.”
<b>our, are</b>	<i>Our</i> is when something belongs to us. <i>Are</i> is the verb: ‘they are running’.
<b>past, passed</b>	<i>Passed</i> is always a verb, the past tense of <i>pass</i> . <i>Past</i> can be used as noun, an adjective, or as a preposition.  A motorcycle <i>passed</i> our car. (verb) I cannot forget the <i>past</i> . (noun) In my <i>past</i> life I was a dog. (adjective) He drove right <i>past</i> the house. (preposition)
<b>peace, piece</b>	<i>Peace</i> is the opposite of war. <i>Piece</i> is a section or part of something.
<b>Practice, practise</b>	<i>Practice</i> is the noun e.g. I go to football practice while <i>practise</i> is the verb e.g. I need to practise spelling and handwriting.
<b>principal, principle</b>	<i>Principal</i> is an adjective meaning “primary” or a noun referring to the person who leads a school. <i>Principle</i> is an idea or doctrine.
<b>right, rite, write</b>	<i>Right</i> is the direction opposite of left, and is also used in talking about legal entitlements e.g. Human Rights. <i>Right</i> also means “correct or proper.” It is also the opposite of wrong. <i>Write</i> is a verb meaning “to record in print.” <i>Rite</i> is a ritual or ceremonial act.
<b>sight, cite, site</b>	<i>Sight</i> means “the act of seeing.” <i>Cite</i> means “to quote or refer to.” A <i>site</i> is a location or position.
<b>stationary, stationery</b>	<i>Stationary</i> means “not moveable.” <i>Stationery</i> refers to paper and envelopes use to write letters.
<b>their, there, they’re</b>	<i>Their</i> is a possessive pronoun indicating ownership. <i>There</i> is an adverb that refers to where something is. <i>They’re</i> is the contracted form of they are.
<b>to, too, two</b>	<i>To</i> is the preposition that can mean “in the direction of.” <i>Too</i> means also or is an adverb meaning “very or excessive.” <i>Two</i> is the number 2.
<b>ware, wear, where</b>	<i>Ware</i> means “a product to be sold”. <i>Wear</i> means “to have on one’s body.” <i>Where</i> is to do with the place or situation something happens.

#### 11.4 Irregular plural and singular forms in words derived from Latin and Greek.

A number of English words are derived from Greek and Latin, which means that they form their plurals according to Greek and Latin rules rather than English ones.

<b>Derivation</b>	<b>Singular form</b>	<b>Plural form</b>
<b>Greek</b>	Criterion Phenomenon Stigma Basis Thesis Ellipsis Hypothesis	Criteria Phenomena Stigmata Bases Theses Ellipses Hypotheses
<b>Latin</b>	Alga Larva Vertebra Fungus Radius Stimulus Alumnus Medium Datum Memorandum Matrix	Algae Larvae Vertebrae Fungi Radii Stimuli Alumni Media Data Memoranda Matrices

### 11.5 Your own dictionary.

Word	Your own strategy to remember it
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## **Grammar and Punctuation Self-Assessment**

Use this table to assess yourself at the start of the year and then at the end of each term.

**How good is your understanding of the following aspects of grammar and punctuation?**

Score yourself 1-4 as follows:

1= I get really confused about this and I'd like to work on it.

2= I understand but I'd like to practise this some more.

3= I'm good but I do sometimes make mistakes.

4 = I'm an expert and I rarely make mistakes!

	<b>Start of year</b>	<b>Michaelmas</b>	<b>Lent</b>	<b>Summer</b>
Parts of Speech				
Sentences, Phrases and Clauses				
Capital Letters				
Commas				
Apostrophes				
Semicolons				
Colons				
Punctuating Speech				
Using Paragraphs				