



Literacy and Language Grammar Bank

For the new National Curriculum from September 2014

The *Literacy and Language Grammar Bank* is a reference tool for teachers who wish to consolidate their knowledge of grammar.

It helps teachers gain a thorough understanding of the basics of English grammar, preparing them to teach grammar concepts with confidence.

It covers all the grammar and punctuation concepts in the National Curriculum from Years 2–6 that children will be tested on in the Year 6 English Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Test for 2016 and beyond. Some useful literary devices and terminology used in the *Literacy and Language* programme, e.g. *metaphor*, *onomatopoeia* have also been included.

Each grammar concept has an explanation for teachers with examples. For some of the more complex grammar concepts there is also:

- information on ‘Common errors and how to avoid them’
- ‘Advice’ giving tips on usage
- a simple explanation for children with examples.

The entries are listed alphabetically.

The Grammar Bank is a resource for teachers – is not intended that it is used to teach grammar to children. This is done in context and through writing in the Units of *Literacy and Language*. In addition, for ease of explanation, the Grammar Bank occasionally refers to concepts beyond those which children are required to know. Teachers should refer to the National Curriculum grammar appendix which explains when the grammar concepts should be introduced and the grammar terms that children should learn in each year.



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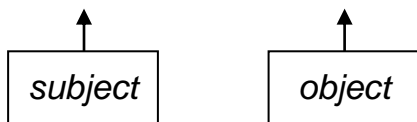


Active and passive voice

In an **active** sentence the subject does the action, often to an object. The verb is said to be in the 'active voice'.

For example:

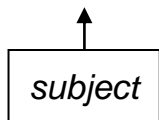
The referee blew the whistle.



In a **passive** sentence, the subject is having something done to it. The verb is said to be in the 'passive voice'.

For example:

The whistle was blown by the referee.



Explanation for children

In an active sentence, we learn about who has done something, before we learn about who it has been done to.

In a passive sentence, we learn about what or who has had something done to them, before we learn who has done it.

Advice

The active voice is used most commonly in writing, but the passive voice is used when the writer wants to:

- withhold or conceal information at first
- build suspense
- emphasize what happened, rather than who did it.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Excessive use of the passive voice can make a text sound very stilted and awkward. Encourage children to use mainly the active voice, unless they want to create specific effects, as described in the 'Advice' section.

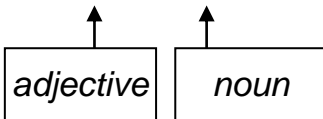


Adjective

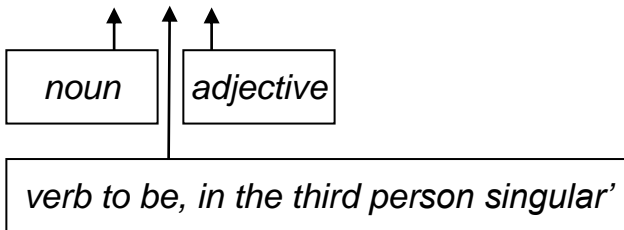
An adjective gives information about a [noun](#). It can be positioned immediately before the noun, or after some [verbs](#) such as *look, be, seem, get*.

For example:

A muddy football



The man is tall.



Explanation for children

An adjective is a word that tells you what someone or something is like. Words like *short, happy* and *dirty* are all adjectives.

Advice

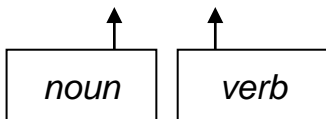
Some adjectives describe what something is like, e.g. *a blue pen*, others give an opinion about something, e.g. *a fantastic idea*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

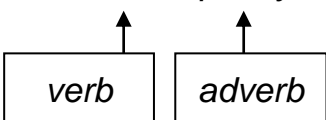
Adjectives are sometimes referred to as 'describing words', but this is misleading because some [verb](#) and [adverb](#) can also be said to be describing things.

For example:

The moon shone



She walked quickly



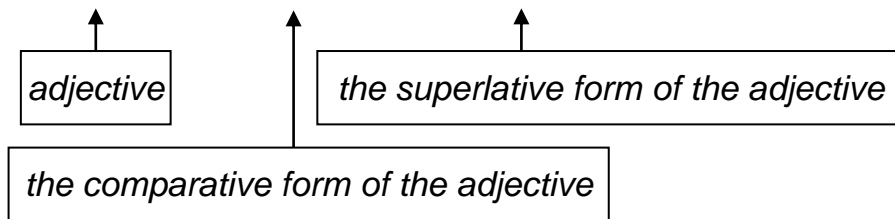


Comparative and superlative forms

When adjectives are used to compare and contrast, we can add [suffixes](#) to the root word. We add *-er* when comparing two things and *-est* when we are comparing more than two things.

For example:

I am quick. I am quicker. I am quickest.



Adverb

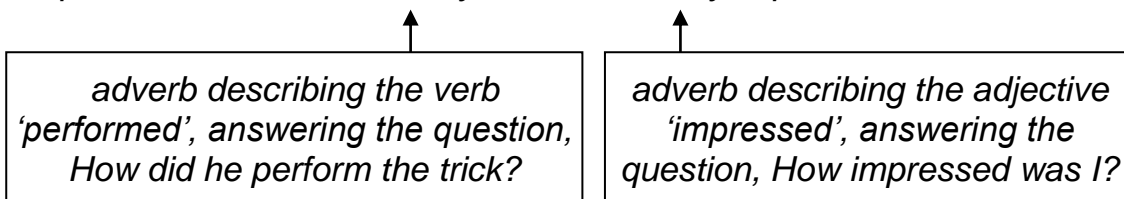
An adverb describes a [verb](#), an [adjective](#), or another adverb. (It never adds information to a noun.) Adverbs can answer questions such as *how*, *when*, *where*?

Adverbs are sometimes referred to as belonging to different categories such as:

- adverbs of manner (how)
- adverbs of time (when)
- adverbs of place (where).

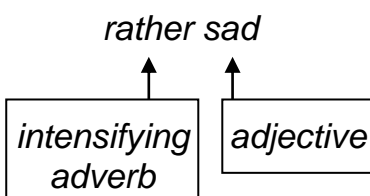
For example:

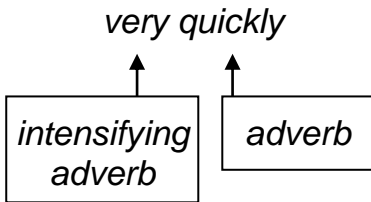
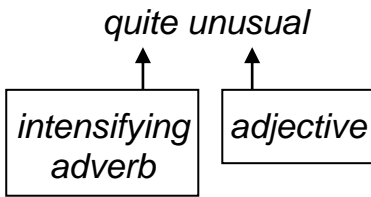
He performed the trick cleverly and I was really impressed.



Some adverbs are used for emphasis – they can **intensify** adjectives and other adverbs.

For example:



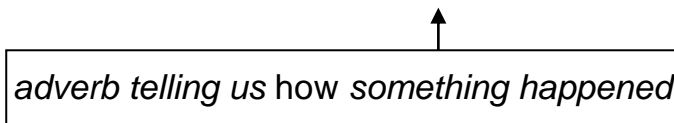


Explanation for children

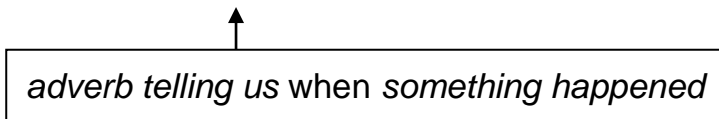
Adverbs are words that describe *how*, *when* or *where* something happens.

For example:

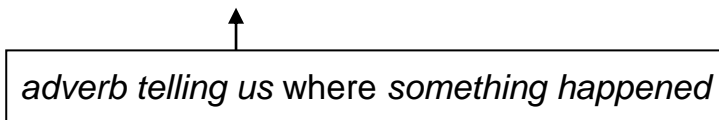
I unwrapped my present slowly.



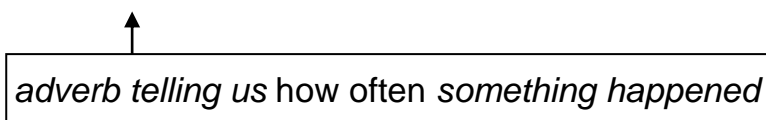
I saw him yesterday.



We played outside.



They often quarrel.



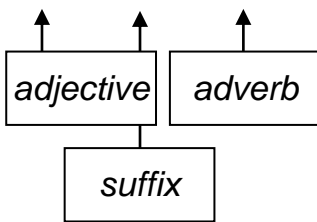
Advice

You can often form an adverb by adding the [suffix](#) *-ly* to the end of an adjective.

For example:



slow + -ly = slowly



Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Sometimes adverbs are overused. Make sure you don't use them when there is no need.

For example:

She screamed loudly.

This adverb is unnecessary, because you can't scream quietly!

He gripped his bat tightly.

This adverb is unnecessary, because you can't grip something loosely!

Adverbials

An adverbial is a word or a group of words that give more information about a [verb](#). Adverbials include adverbs, as well as some types of phrases and clauses.

For example:

We left the cinema at 2.30 p.m.

adverbial, giving more information about when 'we left'

She arrived on Wednesday.

adverbial, giving more information about when 'she arrived'



Advice

Most adverbials appear at the end of a sentence, but some appear at the beginning. These are called **fronted adverbials**.

For example:

At last, the cat came home.



adverbial, at the front of the sentence

During the holidays, we often went to the park.



adverbial, at the front of the sentence

Used correctly, fronted adverbials can really improve a child's writing.

Alliteration

(a literary device)

Alliteration is when the same sound or letter is repeated at the start of words that are close together, for special effect.

For example:

The wind whistled and wailed in the wilderness.

The sound of the alliteration sometimes echoes what is being described.

Ambiguity

An ambiguity is something that is open to more than one interpretation.

For example:

The main character in the film was wicked. The word 'wicked' could mean that the main character was evil, or if it is used in an informal way, it could mean that the main character was impressive or exciting.



Explanation for children

An ambiguity is something that is unclear because it has more than one possible meaning.

Advice

Try to avoid ambiguity in writing, as it can confuse the reader.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Sometimes the correct use of commas can help to avoid ambiguity. For example, the sign 'Slow police' is ambiguous. It could mean that the police are slow or that the police want traffic to slow down. However, the insertion of the comma in 'Slow, police' shows that 'slow' is a command that the police have issued.

Analogy

An analogy is a comparison between two things that is made in order to explain or clarify one of the things.

For example: *There is an analogy between an acorn growing into a tree and a baby growing into an adult.*

Explanation for children

An analogy is a comparison or similarity between two things that have something in common

Advice

Analogies are often used to help explain things, e.g. *The teacher drew an analogy between Velcro and prickly burrs that cling to fabric and fur.*

Antonyms and synonyms

An **antonym** is a word that means the opposite to another word.

For example:

Up is an antonym of *down*.

Happy is an antonym of *sad*.

A **synonym** is a word that means the same (or almost the same) as another word.



For example:

Big is a synonym of *large*.

Tired is a synonym of *exhausted*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

These two words are sometimes confused. Remember that *antonym* contains the [prefix ant-](#) which means ‘against’ or ‘opposite’ (as in *antagonism*, *Antarctic* and *antifreeze*).

The word *synonym* contains the prefix *syn-* which means ‘with’ or ‘together’ (as in *synchronize* and *synthesis*).

Apostrophe

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark used for two different purposes: possession and contraction (to show that letters are missing).

1. **Possession** – the apostrophe shows that something belongs to someone or something.

For example:

Kate's temper

A plant's leaves

The position of the apostrophe can show whether the thing or person is [singular](#) or [plural](#).

For example:

The girl's bad behaviour (refers to just one girl because the apostrophe comes after the singular noun)

The girls' bad behaviour (refers to more than one girl because the apostrophe comes after the plural noun)

Explanation for children

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark (') which can show that something belongs to someone or something.



Advice

If a singular word ends in ss, the possessive form still adds 's.

For example:

The witness's statement

The princess's horse

If a singular word ends in s, the possessive form usually still adds 's.

For example:

A bus's passengers

The planet Mars's gravity

James's book

If a plural word does not end in s, then the possessive form still adds 's.

For example:

The children's bags

The men's teeth

The women's sports

Some possessive forms of personal names sometimes omit the final s, particularly classical or longer names.

For example:

Venus' eyes

Nicholas' uniform

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Avoid the common error of using an apostrophe to make plurals (sometimes known as the greengrocer's apostrophe), e.g. *lettuce's* instead of *lettuces*.

To check whether you need an apostrophe, ask yourself if you need to show possession (it belongs to something or someone) or if you need to show omission (there are letters missing, e.g. *does not* contracts to *doesn't*). If you don't need to show either, you don't need an apostrophe.

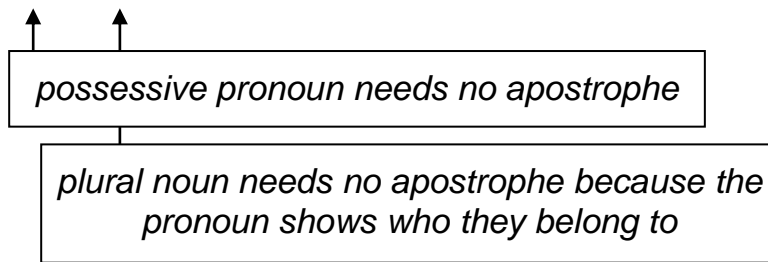


Possessive pronouns, e.g. *its, hers, yours, ours, theirs* are often mistakenly given apostrophes, but they are not necessary.

Another common error is to add apostrophes to plural nouns when used with possessive pronouns, but this is not necessary.

For example:

His clothes were torn.



2. **Contraction** – the apostrophe shows when two words have been compressed into one, and some of the letters are missing.

For example:

do + not = don't

does + not = doesn't

you are = you're

he is = he's

would have = would've

Explanation for children

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark (') which can show that there is at least one letter missing in a word, e.g. *he is* can be shortened to *he's*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Do not confuse with words that use similar letters.

For example:

you're (you are) is different from the possessive pronoun *your* (as in *That is not your coat, it's mine!*)



it's (it is or it has) is different from the possessive [pronoun](#) *its* (as in *Its wheels were punctured.*)

we're (we are) is different from the [verb](#) *were* (as in *They were going to the cinema.*)

could've (could have) is often mistakenly written 'could of', which is wrong. The same applies to *would've*, and *should've*.

If in doubt, say the contracted words in full to yourself, to see if they still make sense in the sentence.

Advice

Note that the apostrophe is placed where one or more letters have been missed out.

For example:

we've (we have)

shouldn't (should not)

Article

Articles are a type of [determiner](#), which go in front of [nouns](#) and [adjectives](#) to show who or what the sentence is about.

A, *an* and *the* are articles. *A* and *an* (used before a vowel sound) are known as indefinite articles; *the* is the definite article.

For example:

an apricot



indefinite article used before a word that starts with a vowel sound

a flag



indefinite article used before a word that starts with a consonant



the slime



definite article

Auxiliary and modal verbs

An auxiliary verb is the small verb put in front of a main [verb](#).

Primary auxiliary verbs refer to actual events in the past or present, and are forms of the verbs *to be*, *do* and *have*.

For example:

I have hidden the magic book.

We are going fishing.

They did enjoy the pizza.

Modal verbs help to show the future tense, and can also show possibility or desire or obligation.

The modal verbs are: *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *must*, *ought*

For example:

We ought to go home now.

I may be an astronaut.

You must take your brother with you.

She will join us later.

Explanation for children

An auxiliary verb is a 'helping verb', which goes in front of a main verb, e.g. *will*, *can*, *may*, *must*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

The terms 'auxiliary' and 'modal' verbs are sometimes confused. Auxiliary verb is a general term referring to all types of verbs that 'help' the main verb. A modal verb is a type of auxiliary verb, which is important for showing degrees of possibility or obligation. There are ten modal verbs.



Brackets

Brackets are punctuation marks () that are used to enclose words or figures and separate them from the surrounding context. Words inside the brackets are in [parenthesis](#). They usually add extra information to a sentence.

Explanation for children

Brackets are punctuation marks that you use in writing to separate words from what comes before (like this) and after.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Sometimes brackets are used wrongly. The sentence should not be dependent on them. If you take the brackets and the words within them away, the sentence should still make sense on its own.

Bullet points

Bullet points are large printed dots (bigger than full stops) that are used in texts to list things. They are often introduced by [colons](#), and the final bullet point usually ends with a full stop.

For example:

Please bring:

- *lunch*
- *a drink*
- *a waterproof.*

Capital letters

Capital letters are used at the beginning of all sentences and proper nouns, such as the individual names of people, places and titles, e.g. *Aneena, Scotland, London, The Lion King*. They are also used for days of the week and months of the year, e.g. *Wednesday, June*.

Explanation for children

Capital letters are the big letters you put at the beginning of names and sentences. A, B, C, D and so on are capital letters.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

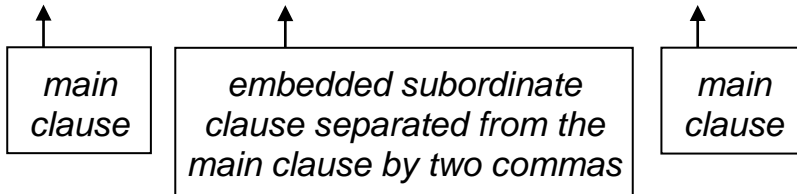
Capital letters are not needed at the beginning of seasons, e.g. *spring, winter*.



An **embedded clause** refers to a subordinate clause that is inside a main clause, but sandwiched between two commas.

For example:

Alfie, who was full of energy, ran up the escalator.



Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Avoid confusing phrases and clauses. Clauses always contain a verb.

For example:

A small cat is a phrase, it has no verb.

A small cat scratched me is a clause because it contains a verb, 'scratched'.

Cohesion

Cohesion means how something fits or links together to make a whole. In text, cohesion is achieved by using **cohesive devices**, such as:

- repetition
- [pronouns](#)
- [prepositions](#)
- [conjunctions](#)
- [determiners](#).

These devices link parts of the text together, by referring backwards and forwards, showing time and cause, and by repeating the same words and [phrases](#).

For example:

Josh and Ben packed their bags and started walking to¹ the campsite, although² they³ hadn't had time to check their equipment. By the time they arrived at the⁴ campsite⁵, it was already drizzling.

1 – preposition

2 – conjunction



3 – pronoun (referring to Josh and Ben)

4 – determiner

5 – repetition

Explanation for children

Cohesion means how things fit together. In writing, we group [sentences](#) together in [paragraphs](#), and use particular words and repetition to link them (like glue!)

We also link paragraphs together, by referring back to what's gone before, and to what's to come.

For example, we might start an instruction text with the words *First, get together...* and the second paragraph might begin, *When everything is ready, then you can ...* and the final paragraph might begin, *Finally, take the cakes...*

Advice

Always read through what you have written to make sure it makes sense and flows easily – or even better, ask someone else to read or listen to it. If it sounds confusing, you probably need to include more cohesive devices to link your ideas together.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Do not repeat too many words too often. Try to think of alternative words that mean something similar, to make your text interesting.

Some of the most over-used words and phrase are *and, lots of, suddenly, like, sort of, then.*

Colon

A colon is a punctuation mark (:) used to separate parts of a [sentence](#) when the second part explains, balances or completes the first clause. The second part can be a [phrase](#) or a [clause](#).

For example:

He was delighted to win the prize: a new car.

I have something to tell you: Aunty Jaz is coming tomorrow.

A colon is also used to introduce a list of items.



For example:

There are so many things I love about my room: the rainbow wallpaper, the big windows, the fluffy carpet and the bunk beds.

Explanation for children

A colon is a punctuation mark (:) often used to introduce lists, or to give more information about the first part of a sentence. You can think of a colon as a sort of 'gateway'.

For example:

You will need: butter, eggs, milk and flour.

They all wanted the present: a new bike.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Sometimes people put dashes after colons but this is unnecessary.

Colons are sometimes confused with [semicolons](#), but their uses are different:

- A colon is like a 'gateway' that introduces examples or more detail about what's gone before.
- A semicolon separates two main clauses that are of equal weight, but are still linked in some way. The two main clauses that a semi-colon divides could be separate sentences. (See the semicolons entry for more detail about other uses of a semicolon.)

Comma

A comma indicates a pause between parts of a [sentence](#) or separates items in a list.

Explanation for children

A comma is a punctuation mark (,). You can use a comma to separate different ideas within a sentence. When you are reading, a comma shows you where you should pause.

For example:

Football is my favourite sport, but I also like tennis.

Sometimes you use commas to separate a part of a sentence that adds information.

For example:



Lucy, who is my best friend, lives next door to me.

You also use commas in lists.

For example:

We've got two dogs, three cats, four goldfish and one parrot.

Advice

Commas are often used after introductory words or phrases that come before a main clause, e.g. *In 1066, the English lost...*

They can also be used to introduce direct speech, e.g. *The boy spoke up, "Why isn't there any food?"*

Generally, there is no comma before 'and' in a list of items. However it is sometimes used when a significant pause is required, perhaps at the end of a long, complicated list.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

If a sentence has too many clauses and commas it can be confusing. It is better to revise it, dividing it up into more sentences, so that it reads fluently and is easy to understand.

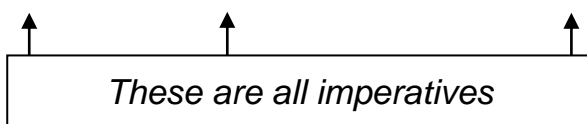
Command

A command is one of four [sentence](#) forms (the others are [questions](#), [exclamations](#) and [statements](#)).

A command is an instruction or order, and usually includes the **imperative** form of the [verb](#) at the beginning of the sentence.

For example:

Go outside. Look for the treasure. Bring it back to me.



Explanation for children

A command tells you to do something and sounds a bit bossy! It usually starts with a verb such as *go, put, don't, be, look, stop*.



Complex sentences

(see [types of sentences](#))

Compound sentences

(see [types of sentences](#))

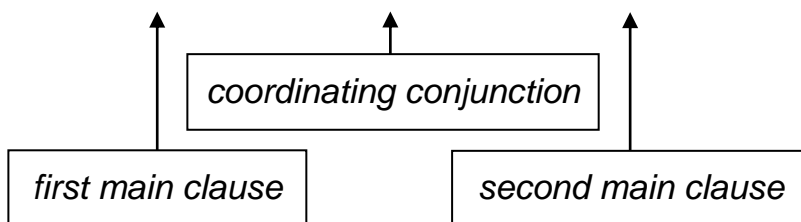
Conjunction

A conjunction links words or groups of words to another part of the same sentence. There are two types of conjunctions: coordinating and subordinating.

Coordinating conjunctions can link together two main [clauses](#) in a sentence, using words such as *and*, *or* and *but*.

For example:

I went to the supermarket *and* *I bought some apples.*

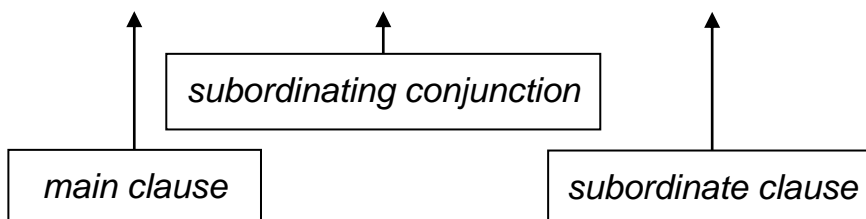


Coordinating conjunctions can also link together words or phrases of equal weight, e.g. *black and white* or *deep purple and bright pink*.

Subordinating conjunctions are words that link together a subordinating clause with a main clause.

For example:

I fell off my skateboard *because* *a squirrel jumped across the path.*





Explanation for children

A conjunction is a linking word in a sentence, e.g. *and*, *but*, *if* and *while*. It can link words or groups of words of equal importance, or clauses of different importance.

Advice

Some of the most common coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*.

Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions are *if*, *while*, *because*, *although*, *after*, *since*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Remember that the prefix *co-* means 'jointly', so a coordinating conjunction joins things of equal importance.

Remember that the prefix *sub-* means 'under', so a subordinating conjunction joins things that are of different importance (one is 'under' the other).

Connective

The term 'connective' is a general, informal term that is sometimes used to describe words that connect ideas expressed in different [clauses](#). However, the more specific grammatical terms are 'preposition', 'conjunction' and 'adverb'. N.B. The term 'connective' is not in the new National Curriculum and is listed here for reference only.

Consonants and consonant letters

A consonant is a speech sound made by someone interrupting the flow of air through their vocal tract using their lips, teeth or tongue.

Consonants letters are the letters of the alphabet that are used to make the consonant sound. They include all the letters of the alphabet, with the exception of the [vowels](#) *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*.

The letter *y* is commonly regarded as a consonant letter, although it can make a vowel sound too.

Contractions

See [apostrophes](#)



Dash

A dash is a punctuation mark (-) that can show a pause in a sentence, which is more dramatic than a [comma](#).

For example:

The waves were huge – I was terrified.

A pair of dashes can show [parenthesis](#).

For example:

She – poor girl – walked into the trap.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Some people use too many dashes, particularly in informal writing such as text messages and emails to friends. Try to use a variety of punctuation, including commas, [full stops](#), [colons](#) and [semicolons](#).

Determiner

A determiner is a word that goes in front of a [noun](#) and any of its [adjectives](#), and helps to give it some definition. Determiners can include numbers or [pronouns](#) such as *five, some, this, whose*.

Articles are a type of determiner. *A* and *an* (used before a vowel sound) are known as indefinite articles; *the* is the definite article.

For example:

Three foxes crept down the street.



this number is a determiner that tells us how many foxes there were

The children like sweets.



this is a determiner – known as a definite article – that shows it refers to certain children, not just any



Explanation for children

A determiner is a word in front of a noun and its adjectives and helps us to know or 'determine' how many there are and who or what the sentence is about.

Advice

Other common determiners are: *this, those, my, his, their, some, both, each, every, whose.*

Exclamation

An exclamation is one of the four sentence forms. (The others are [statements](#), [commands](#) and [questions](#).)

An exclamation always ends with an exclamation mark (!). This shows that the sentence is expressing strong feeling or drama, such as surprise, anger or pain.

For example:

Look out!

Please help me!

Hey, that hurt!

Wow, you got here quickly!

Explanation for children

An exclamation is like a shout. It shows surprise or urgency. It always has an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

An exclamation mark is always at the end of a sentence. No full stop is required after it.

Try not to use too many exclamation marks. They are most effective if used sparingly.

Fronted adverbials

(see [adverbials](#))



Full stop

A full stop (.) comes at the end of a sentence. It shows that the sentence is finished and complete.

Advice

A full stop is always followed by a capital letter at the start of the next sentence.

A full stop can also be used in an abbreviation, to show that some letters are missing at the end.

For example:

p.m. = post meridiem

etc. = et cetera

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Sometimes writers use too many commas and other punctuation marks within long sentences. Dividing some text into shorter sentences can add clarity and variety.

Hyphen

A hyphen (-) is used to join words or parts of words together. For example:

kick-off, mix-up, co-operate.

Hyphens can help to avoid confusion.

For example:

a man eating lion

This could mean a man is eating lion flesh.

a man-eating lion

The hyphen shows that it is the lion who eats people.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Check that hyphens are in the correct place to avoid confusion.

For example:

thirteen year-old boys



This means thirteen boys who are a year old.

thirteen-year-old boys

This means boys who are all aged thirteen.

Infinitive

The infinitive is the base word of a verb such as *run, play, sing, be, have*. The infinitive form of the verb is often used after the word 'to' and after [modal verbs](#). In a dictionary, verbs are usually listed in their infinitive form.

Children are not required to know this term, but teachers should be able to recognize the infinitive form.

Inverted commas (speech marks) and direct speech

Inverted commas (also known as speech marks) are used to show the actual words spoken in direct speech.

In indirect (reported) speech, inverted commas are unnecessary.

Explanation for children

We use inverted commas (speech marks) to show the words that were actually said by someone.

For example:

"We've got our school trip tomorrow," said Lucy.



inverted commas show the start and finish of the words that Lucy said

Advice

Inverted commas can be single or double. Whichever style is chosen, it should be consistent throughout the piece of writing.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Remember that if you open (start) inverted commas, you also need to close (finish) them. Always check through your writing that the inverted commas are in pairs, to show the beginning and end of speech.



Punctuation relating to what's said, should always go inside the inverted commas, including question marks, exclamation marks and ellipses.

If the direct speech is part of a sentence, add a comma before the final inverted commas and continue to explain who spoke, e.g. *said Lucy*. Note that the full stop comes after the name of the speaker, and *said* is all in lower case.

Metaphor

(a figure of speech)

A metaphor describes something as if it were something else.

For example:

The lion is the king of the beasts.

(The lion is not actually a king, but has similar qualities.)

Tim's room was a tip.

(Tim's room was not really a rubbish tip, but it had similar qualities, i.e. dirty and messy.)

(Compare [simile](#), which also uses comparison to describe something.)

Modal verbs

(See [auxiliary verbs](#))

Narrative viewpoint

There are two main narrative viewpoints: a first person narrative and a third person narrative.

1. **First person** narrative – the narrator/speaker retells his or her first-hand account of events, or the story, often using the [pronouns](#) *I* (first person singular), or *we* (first person plural).

For example:

I wandered back to the house alone.

We could hear the band from a distance.



The music came to us, slowly and quietly.

2. **Third person** narrative – the narrator/speaker stands outside the events or story and tends to be more objective and omniscient (all-seeing), often using the pronouns *he, she, it, they*.

For example:

The crowd surged forwards, unaware of the hazards.

She loitered near the pool.

They were quickly submerged.

Explanation for children

When you use the first person, you use the words *I* and *me* to write about yourself (or a character you are pretending to be) in a story.

When you use the third person, you use the words *he, she* or *it* to write about someone in a story.

Advice

If children query the naming of first and third person, you might want to introduce the table of pronouns, showing, first, second and third person, in both singular and plural forms.

Person	Singular	Plural
First	I	we
Second	you	you
Third	he/she/it	they

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Whether you are writing in the first person or the third person it is important to be consistent. Remind children to check that their 'narrative voice' does not change partway through their work.

Noun

A noun is a word that stands for a person, place or thing. It is the [subject](#) or [object](#) of a [verb](#). Nouns are sometimes described as 'naming words'.



A **proper noun** identifies a particular place, person or time. For example: *Jamie, India, Saturday, December*. A proper noun starts with a capital letter.

A **common noun** refers to people or things in general. For example: *bridge, hat, pitch, meal, book*.

A **collective noun** refers to groups of people or things. For example: *flock, team, crowd, choir, swarm*.

An **abstract noun** refers to ideas or qualities that cannot be seen or touched. For example: *help, fun, danger, friendship, happiness*.

Explanation for children

A noun names a person, place or thing.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Children do not always recognize collective or abstract nouns, as they usually find it easier to envisage nouns as physical objects. A useful test for a noun is to check that it makes sense when 'the' is put in front of it.

For example:

The fun lasted...

The danger passed...

The friendship endured...

Specific teaching of collective nouns can be helpful. Point out that these collective nouns are treated as singular, even though they refer to lots of people or animals.

For example:

The team of football players arrived at the airport.

A swarm of bees surrounded the hive.

The government ruled the country wisely.

Noun phrase

A noun phrase is two or more words that act as a [noun](#). The main noun is known as the 'headword' and there are often [adjectives](#) in the noun phrase.



For example:

The bright red bus stopped suddenly.



all these words are part of the noun phrase. 'bus' is the headword

A noun phrase does not have to be made up of just adjectives and nouns.

For example:

The man in the moon.



All these words are part of the noun phrase. 'man' is the headword

Explanation for children

A noun phrase is two or more words that act as a noun. They tell us more about the noun.

For example:

A big fluffy cat

Advice

You can identify a noun phrase by taking it out and replacing it with a pronoun. If the sentence still works, then you have identified the noun phrase.

For example:

(The bright red bus) stopped suddenly.

(It) stopped suddenly.

Onomatopoeia

(a literary device)

Onomatopoeia is using words that sound like the thing they describe, such as *bang*, *hiss*, *plop*, *gush*, *suck*.



Paragraph

A paragraph is a section of writing, made up of more than one sentence, but all the sentences are linked to the same idea. A new paragraph shows a new idea, or time, or place or speaker in a text.

A new paragraph is usually indented. Alternatively, paragraphs can be separated by line spaces.

Paragraphs help to group information or details together, to make it easier for the reader to understand the flow of the text.

Parenthesis

Parenthesis is something extra put inside a sentence, marked between [brackets](#), [dashes](#) or [commas](#). It is a word or group of words that gives extra information or an extra comment about something in the main sentence.

For example:

He really wanted the new bike – the shiny green one – before the race.

No one told the teacher (not even the other staff) that she was wearing odd shoes.

The opening of the play was delayed (luckily), so I had time to pin my costume together again.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

The sentence should never depend on the words in parenthesis. If you take out the words in parenthesis, the sentence should still make sense.

Participle

[Verbs](#) have two participles: the **present participle** and the **past participle**.

The present participle (which ends in *-ing*) describes a continuing action or condition.

For example:

We were going to the cinema.



I was feeling sad.

The past participle describes a completed action or past condition.

For example:

They have gone into town.

We were guided to our seats.

Note that the passive voice uses a verb participle, e.g. *The vase was smashed.*

Some participles can be used as adjectives, e.g. *a guiding light.*

Advice

Children do not need to learn these terms, which can be confusing, but teachers should be aware of them.

Personification

(a literary device)

Personification describes something as if it has human qualities (and is a 'person').

For example:

The breeze whispered among the leaves.



whispering is a human activity, but this description suggests that the sound of the breeze is similar

The jumper was slumped over the chair.



slumping is a human posture, but this description suggests that the jumper looked like a person

Phrase

A phrase is a group of words in which there is one word that all the other words help to modify.

A noun phrase is two or more words that act as a noun, e.g. *a huge monster.*



An **adjectival phrase** is a group of words that act as an [adjective](#), e.g. *brightly coloured*.

An **adverbial phrase** is a group of words that act as an [adverb](#), e.g. *thirty seconds later*.

A **prepositional phrase** is a group of words that start with a [preposition](#), e.g. *with curly hair* or *under the bridge*. (Note that prepositional phrases can be adjectival or adverbial in meaning.)

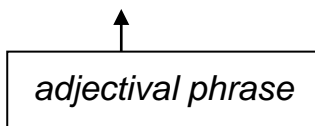
A **verb phrase** (or [clause](#)) always consists of one or more [verbs](#). If there is more than one verb in a verb phrase, one will be a main verb and the others will be [auxiliary verbs](#), e.g. *ought to go*.

Explanation for children

A phrase is a group of words that work together to give more information about one main word.

For example:

Its long tongue flicked toward the fly.



Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Phrases and clauses are often confused. However, if the main modified word is a verb, then it is a clause or sentence.

Plural and singular

The plural form of a [noun](#) means more than one person or item. It is usually formed by placing an s or es at the end of the singular form of the noun.

For example:

hat – hats

bus – buses

Some plurals do not simply add s or es:

If the noun ends in a consonant and y, change the y to *ie* and add s.



For example:

baby – babies

If the noun ends in *f* or *fe*, change the ending to *ves*.

For example:

life – lives

Note that there are some exceptions, for example the plural of *roof* is *roofs*.

Explanation for children

Plural is the form of a word meaning more than one person or thing, e.g. *cakes*, *children*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Not all plurals follow the rules for adding an *s* at the end of the singular form. There are some tricky nouns that do not change their form at all.

For example:

one fish – three fish

one pence – ten pence

one sheep – lots of sheep

one deer – hundreds of deer

Some words change their spelling completely to make the plural.

For example:

man – men

child – children

foot – feet

tooth – teeth

Prefix

A prefix is a word or syllable joined to the beginning of a [root word](#) to change or add to its meaning.



Different prefixes have different meanings.

For example:

auto- means *self*

super- means *above* or *over*

dis- means *not*

sub- means *below*

anti- means *against*

re- means *again*

mis- means *wrong*

de- means *undoing* or *taking away*

See [suffix](#) for words that have additional letters at the end of a root word.

Explanation for children

A prefix is a group of letters added to the front of a word to change its meaning, e.g. unhappy, disorder, overflow.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

There is no need for a hyphen between a root word and its prefix, unless it's necessary to distinguish two possible meanings.

For example:

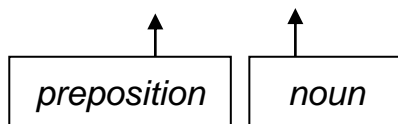
recount and *re-count*

Preposition

A preposition is a word that is placed before a [noun](#), [pronoun](#) or [noun phrase](#), to show a link to some other word in the [sentence](#).

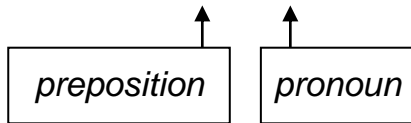
For example:

The monster hid under the bed.

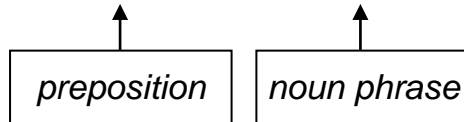




She walked towards us.



The dragon crouched inside the dark, dripping cave.



Some other common prepositions are:

above, behind, on, over, through, between, in

Explanation for children

A preposition is a word you put in front of a noun or pronoun to show how it links with another word. A preposition usually shows where something or someone is, or where they are 'positioned'.

For example:

under the table

beside Lucy

Advice

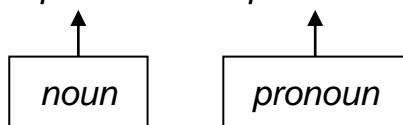
Note that unlike [conjunctions](#), prepositions can't link [clauses](#).

Pronoun

A pronoun is a word that can be used in place of a [noun](#). It avoids repeating the same noun.

For example:

The queen stood up. She looked furious.



Possessive pronouns tell us who or what owns a noun.

For example:



Josh grabbed his surfboard and ran into the sea.



pronoun shows that the surfboard belonged to Josh

Other possessive pronouns include *her, our, their, your, my, its*.

Relative pronouns introduce more information about the noun.

For example:

The actor who fell off the stage.



pronoun introduces more information about the actor

Other relative pronouns include *whose, which, that, whom*.

Explanation for children

A pronoun is a word used instead of a noun, for example, *he, her, it, they, those*. Using a pronoun avoids repeating the same noun.

Advice

Remember that the pronoun *I* is always a capital letter.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

There is often confusion about whether to use the pronoun *I* or *me*. *I* is the correct usage for the [subject](#) of a [sentence](#), even if there is more than one subject.

For example,

Ricky and I went to the stadium.

If in doubt, test whether the sentence still sounds correct if you remove the other subject (person). For example, *I went to the stadium* sounds correct, but *Me went to the stadium* sounds incorrect!

See [apostrophe](#) for advice on how to avoid confusion between *it's* (which shows the omission of a letter in *it is*) and the possessive pronoun *its*.



Punctuation

Punctuation is the set of symbols used to mark writing to help the readers understand it. The most commonly used punctuation marks are the [full stop](#), [comma](#), [apostrophe](#), [question](#) mark, [exclamation](#) mark, [inverted commas \(speech marks\)](#) and [direct speech](#), [dash](#), [hyphen](#), [semicolon](#) and [colon](#).

Question

A question is one of four [sentence](#) types (the others are [command](#), [exclamation](#) and [statement](#)).

A question is something that you ask, and often starts with words such as *why*, *when*, *how*, *where*, *who*. A question always ends with a punctuation mark called a question mark (?)

For example:

Who is that clown over there?

Where do you think you lost it?

Why are you grinning?

In speech, you tend to raise the pitch of your voice at the end, to show that the sentence is a question.

Relative clause

(see [clause](#))

Root word

A root word is a word which cannot be broken down into any smaller words, but which [suffixes](#) and [prefixes](#) can be added to in order to make new words.

For example:

train is the root word in *trainer*, *training*, *retrain*

marine is the root word in *submarine*, *mariner*, *maritime*



Semicolon

A semicolon is a [punctuation](#) mark that is used for two main purposes:

- to separate two main [clauses](#) in a sentence that are closely linked in meaning
- to separate items in a list, where the items are longer [phrases](#), rather than just single words.

Separating main clauses in a sentence

When two separate sentences are very closely linked in meaning, they can be joined together in one sentence, using a semicolon. This emphasizes the link between them.

For example:

Dad bought tickets to the pantomime. We're so excited.

These two sentences can be made into one sentence, using a semicolon, which emphasizes the link between the two clauses:

Dad bought tickets to the pantomime; we're so excited.

Explanation for children

A semicolon is a punctuation mark that shows a link between two main clauses in a sentence. It can be used to turn two separate sentences into one.

Advice

A semicolon is never followed by a word beginning with a [capital letter](#), unless it is a [proper noun](#) or the pronoun 'I'.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Semicolons are sometimes confused with [colons](#), but their uses are different:

- A colon is like a 'gateway' that introduces list, or examples or more detail about what's gone before.
- A semicolon separates two main clauses that are of equal weight, but are still linked in some way. The two main clauses that a semicolon divides could be separate sentences.

Separating items in a list

In most lists, [commas](#) separate items but if the items are long and complicated, and may even have commas within them, then semicolons can be used to separate each item from the others.



For example:

For the camping trip you will need: a warm sleeping bag; a pillow or cushion for your head; a torch with spare batteries; a waterproof coat, particularly if the weather is bad.

Sentence

A **sentence** is a group of words that make complete sense on their own. Most sentences:

- contain a main [verb](#)
- begin with a [capital letter](#)
- end with a [full stop](#), [question mark](#) or [exclamation mark](#).

Sentences can be [statements](#), [questions](#), [commands](#) or [exclamations](#).

Sentences can be made up of just one single main [clause](#), or two or more coordinating clauses, or a main clause and a subordinate clause.

For an explanation of simple, compound and complex sentences, see [types of sentence](#).

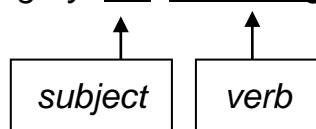
Explanation for children

A sentence is a group of words that mean something together. A sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.

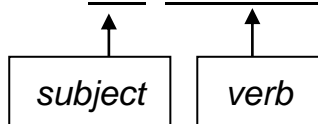
Sentences with a single main clause contain a [subject](#) and a verb.

For example:

The grey cat is chasing a baby mouse.



The bird is watching the drama.

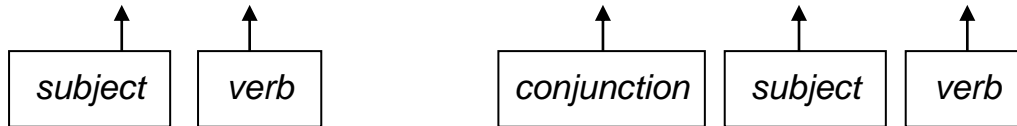


Sentences with coordinating clauses are made of two or more [main clauses](#) joined together using coordinating [conjunctions](#) such as *and*, *or* or *but*. These clauses are of equal importance and both could be two separate sentences.



For example:

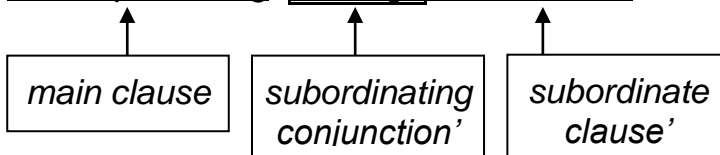
The grey cat is chasing a baby mouse and all the birds are watching.



Sentences with main and subordinating clauses that contain at least one main [clause](#) and at least one subordinate clause are linked by subordinating conjunctions, such as *until, although, after, before, since, because*.

For example:

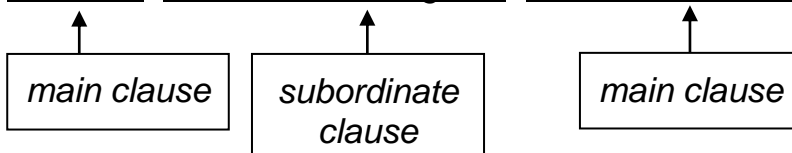
She kept running although her foot hurt.



The relative [pronouns](#) *who, which, or that* can also be used to add information as a subordinate clause.

For example:

The men who were chasing him had taken another path.



Advice

One way of identifying subordinate clauses is to ask yourself whether they make sense on their own. If they do, then they are main clauses rather than subordinate clauses.

For example:

You must stay in your seat is a main clause which makes sense on its own, but *until the bell rings* is a subordinate clause that does not make sense on its own.

Simile

(a figure of speech)



In a simile, one thing is compared to another using the linking words *like* or *as*.

For example:

The football smashed through the shed wall like a cannonball.

Her dress was as sparkly as a starry night.

The headteacher had a face like thunder.

Explanation for children

A simile is a way of describing something by comparing it with something else, using the words *like* or *as*.

For example:

He was as brave as a lion.

Her hands were as cold as ice.

The moon was like a smiling silver face.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

Beware confusion with [metaphors](#). A simile always compares things using the words *as* or *like*, whereas a metaphor describes something as if it is actually something else.

Simple sentence

(see [types of sentences](#))

Speech marks

(see [inverted commas](#))

Statement

A statement is one of four [sentence](#) types (the others are [command](#), [exclamation](#) and [question](#)).

A statement is a sentence that declares or states something, clearly and definitely.

For example.



I am hungry.

The boys are on their skateboards.

It is snowing.

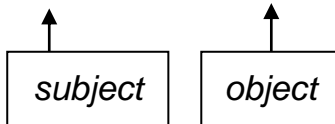
Subject and object

The **subject** is who or what does the action of the [verb](#).

The **object** is who or what is acted upon by a verb.

For example:

Millie invited Vineeta to the party.



The dog grabbed the bone.



Explanation for children

The subject of a [sentence](#) is the person or thing that does the action of the verb.

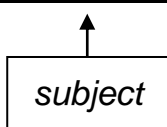
The object in a sentence is the [noun](#) that shows which person or thing receives the action of the verb.

Advice

There can be more than one person or thing as the subject of a sentence, as long as they are both doing the action of the verb.

For example:

Peter and I are going for a walk.



Common errors and strategies for avoiding them



When you are talking about yourself as the subject of a sentence, always use *I* not *me*.

For example:

My father and I love sailing is correct (*My father and me* is incorrect).

If in doubt, make the subject (person) singular to see if the sentence still makes sense with just *I*.

For example:

I love sailing is correct (*Me love sailing* doesn't make sense).

Subjunctive

The **subjunctive** form of a [verb](#) is used as a very formal expression of wishes or possibilities (something that hasn't happened yet).

The subjunctive is sometimes used in subordinate [clauses](#) that begin with the words *that* or *if*.

For example:

If I were you, I'd tell the teacher.



subjunctive form of verb (not 'was')

It is vital that she leave without delay.



subjunctive form of verb (not 'leaves')

The report recommends that he go to court.



subjunctive form of verb (not 'goes')

Explanation for children

The subjunctive is sometimes used when talking about what is imagined or wished or possible.



Advice

The subjunctive is rarely used now in English, except in very formal or traditional contexts.

Suffix

A suffix is a word or syllable joined to the end of a [root word](#) to change or add to its meaning. It can also change a word into a different [word class](#) or alter the tense of a [verb](#).

Common suffixes are:

-er meaning *more*

-est meaning *most*

-ness meaning *state or condition*

-hood meaning *state or condition*

-ible/-able meaning *able to be*

-s /-es meaning *more than one* (see [plurals](#))

-ed indicating the *past tense*

-ing indicating the *continuous tense*

-ful meaning *full of*

Suffixes for comparison

-er and *-est* can be added to [adjectives](#) to form comparisons.

For example: *grander, tallest, weaker*

Changing verbs into [nouns](#)

-er, -ment, -ation are some of the suffixes which can change verbs into nouns.

For example: *teacher, enjoyment, imagination*.

Changing nouns into verbs

-ate, -ise, -ify are some of the suffixes which can change nouns into verbs.



For example: *dominate*, *memorise*, *falsify*.

Changing nouns into [adjectives](#) and [adverbs](#)

-ly, *-ful*, *-less* are some of the suffixes which can change nouns into adjectives and adverbs.

For example: *slowly*, *playful*, *heartless*

Explanation for children

A suffix is a word or syllable joined to the end of a word to change or add to its meaning. For example: *hopeful*, *helping*, *bravest*.

Common errors and strategies for avoiding them

When adding the suffix *-ful* to a word, don't be tempted to add an extra *l*. For example:

help – helpful (NOT helpfull)

Syllable

A syllable is like a 'beat' in a word. Each vowel sound in a word counts as one syllable.

For example:

Peg has one syllable

Pizza has two syllables.

Umbrella has three syllables.

Synonyms

(see [antonyms and synonyms](#))

Types of sentence

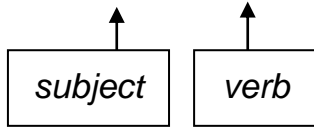
There are three types of sentence: simple, compound (co-ordinated), and complex.

Simple sentences contain a single [subject](#) and a single [verb](#).

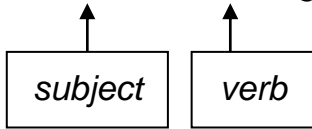
For example:



The grey cat is chasing a baby mouse.



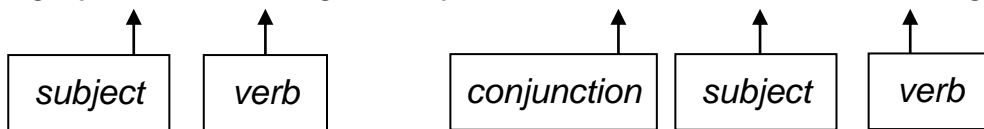
The bird is watching the drama.



Compound (or **co-ordinated**) **sentences** are made of two or more [simple sentences](#) joined together using [conjunctions](#) such as *and*, *or* or *but*. (Compound sentences have at least two subjects and two verbs.)

For example:

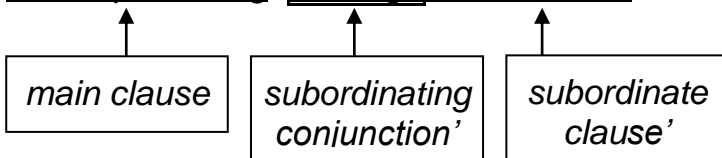
The grey cat is chasing a baby mouse and the bird is watching the drama.



Complex sentences contain at least one main [clause](#) and at least one subordinate clause and they are linked by subordinating conjunctions, such as *until*, *although*, *after*, *before*, *since*, *because*.

For example:

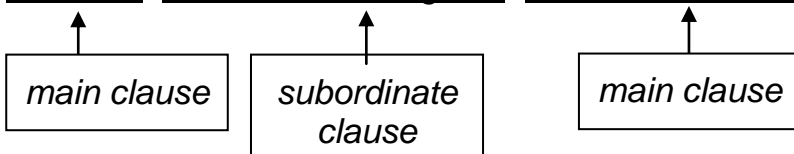
She kept running although her foot hurt.



The relative [pronouns](#) *who*, *which*, or *that* can also be used to add information as a separate clause, and create a complex sentence.

For example:

The men who were chasing him had taken another path.





Advice

One way of identifying subordinate clauses is to ask yourself whether they make sense on their own. They do not – although main clauses do.

For example:

You must stay in your seat is a main clause which makes sense on its own, but *until the bell rings* is a subordinate clause that does not make sense on its own.

Verbs and tenses

A verb shows an action, a happening, a process or a state. It is sometimes described as a 'doing' or 'being' word, but it is most accurately identified by its ability to have a tense, such as the past and present.

The **present tense** describes something that is happening now. It often (but not always) ends in -s.

For example:

Mum fixes the shelf.

Ben plays on his computer.

Poppy is team captain.

The **past tense** describes something that happened earlier. It often (but not always) ends in -ed.

For example:

The girls raced to the finish line.

The boys cheered their football team.

The teacher clapped and smiled.

Some verbs change completely in the past tense.

For example:

is (present) – *was* (past)

go (present) – *went* (past)

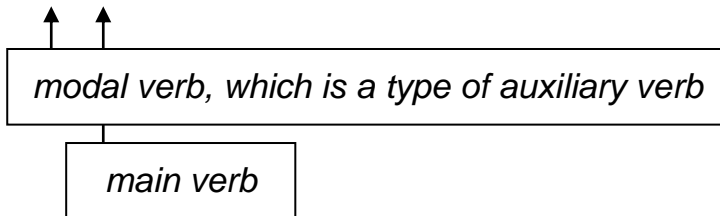
think (present) – *thought* (past)



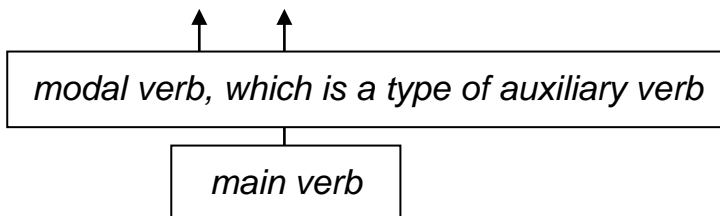
To show the **future tense**, we use two verbs, a main verb and an [auxiliary verb](#).

For example:

I will go to the fair tomorrow.



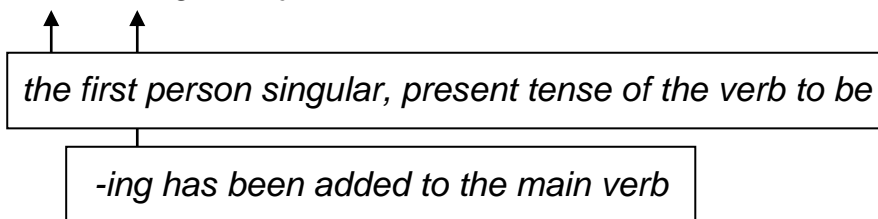
The train might leave in ten minutes.



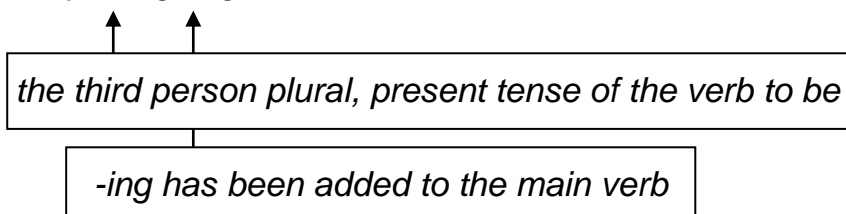
The **present continuous tense** describes an action in progress now. It uses the *-ing* form of the verb, plus the present tense of the verb *to be*.

For example:

I am waiting for my friend.



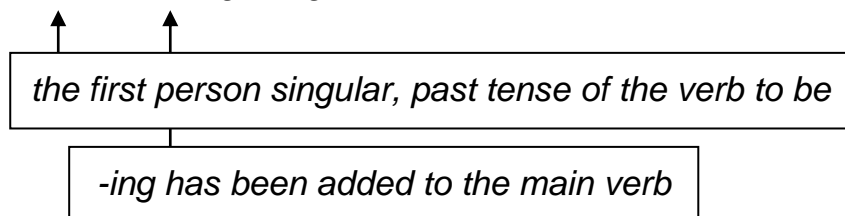
They are going to the circus.





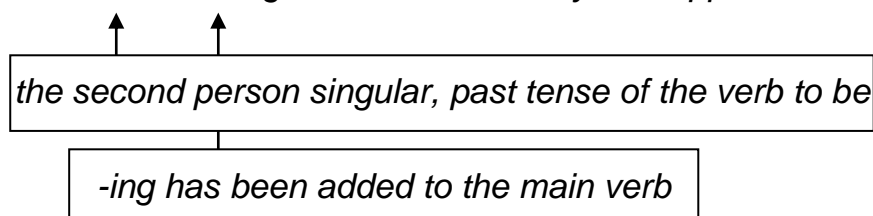
The **past continuous tense** describes an action that was ongoing in the past or was still happening when something else happened. It uses the *-ing* form of the verb, plus the past tense of the verb *to be*.

I was watching the game.



For example:

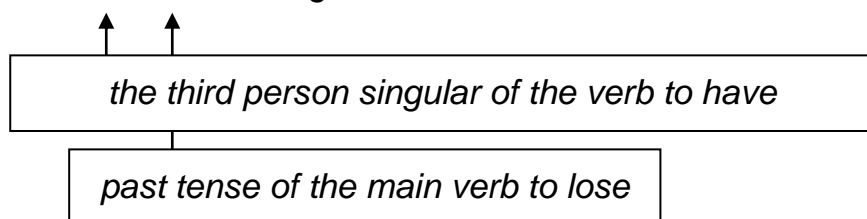
You were running towards me when you dropped the ball.



The **perfect tense** generally describes a completed action or event in the past, but it is still meaningful or relevant now. It uses the verb *to have* with the past tense of the main verb.

For example:

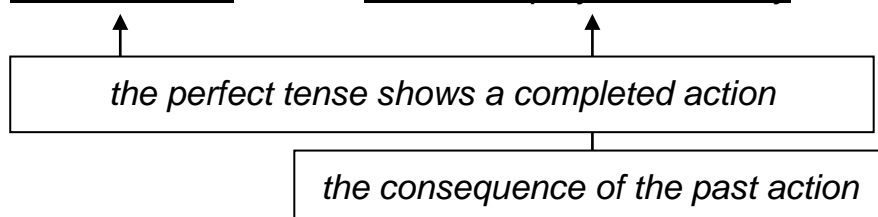
She has lost her dog.



The perfect tense is often used to show the link of time and cause.

For example:

I have washed the kit *so we can play on Saturday.*





Explanation for children

A verb is a word that shows what someone or something is doing, such as *sit, go, walk, swim, sing, take*. Every sentence must have a verb.

Advice

If you feel it is helpful, particularly for higher ability children, or those familiar with other languages, explain that verbs often have different forms, depending on who is the subject and whether they are singular or plural.

The table below shows the different forms for the present tense of the irregular verb *to be*.

	Singular	Plural
First person	I am	We are
Second person	You are	You are
Third person	He/she/it is	They are

The table below shows the different forms for the past tense of the irregular verb *to be*.

	Singular	Plural
First person	I was	We were
Second person	You were	You were
Third person	He/she/it was	They were

Vowels and vowel letters

A vowel is a speech sound that is made without closing the vocal tract.

Vowels are represented by the vowel letters: *a, e, i, o, u* and sometimes by the letter *y*.

Word class (also known as ‘parts of speech’)

Each of the groups into which words can be divided in grammar: noun, adjective, pronoun, adverb, preposition, determiner, conjunction, verb.



Advice

Note that some words can be in more than one word class, depending on how they are used.

For example:

play can be a noun or a verb (*I liked the play/Can we play now?*)

hard can be an adjective or an adverb (*the cement was hard/ I work hard*)

until can be a preposition or a conjunction (*until June/until the rain stops falling*)

Word family

Words that are related to each other, often sharing the same [root word](#).

For example:

magic, magical, magically, magician

playful, playtime, played, replay

teaching, teacher, teach, teachable