

# TEACHING GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION AND SPELLING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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# TEACHING GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION AND SPELLING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

3RD EDITION

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# Introduction

This book explores the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling in primary schools, at a time when the National Curriculum places an increasing emphasis on these important aspects of literacy. Indeed, since 2013, Year 6 children have taken a grammar test (see Chapter 1 and Appendix 3) and teachers are under increasing pressure to prepare children well so that they are successful in the test.

A quick search on the internet reveals a great preoccupation with what are often considered to be the more formal elements of literacy. In 2013, for example, the *Telegraph's* website included an article entitled 'It's cruel not to teach children grammar' in which the author concludes:

*At its worst, educational theory that rejects grammar does so because of a mad idea that children are noble savages better left to authenticity and the composition of rap lyrics. That way lies the scrapheap and jail.*

*Grammar sets them free. No one would think it a kindness to give a teenager a car without teaching her to drive, and that includes the rules of the road.*

Wordsworth (2012)

However, there is considerable debate about the most effective way to teach grammar. For some, the words 'grammar' and 'syntax' conjure up images of exercises and formal teaching; but there are alternatives. Myhill *et al.* maintain:

*The argument underpinning these approaches is that teaching grammar as a discrete, separate topic, where the grammar is the focus of study, is not likely to help writing development because it does not make connections between grammar and writing, or between grammar and meaning ...*

*... a writing curriculum which draws attention to the grammar of writing in an embedded and purposeful way at relevant points in the learning is a more positive way forward. In this way, young writers are introduced to what we have called 'a repertoire of infinite possibilities', explicitly showing them how different ways of shaping sentences or texts, and how different choices of words can generate different possibilities for meaning-making.*

(2011, p. 3)

In this book, we stress the importance of contextualised grammar teaching. The examples provided in the chapters, most notably in the case studies, illustrate how children can develop

a good knowledge and understanding about language when it is taught through meaningful activities rather than through exercises. Consider two approaches to learning the function of adjectives.

1. Children are shown some examples of adjectives in sentences on the board. They are then given a series of sentences with spaces where they should insert adjectives.
2. Children go outside on a warm spring day and are asked, when they return to the classroom, to discuss and note, in pairs, what it felt like to be outside: what did they see, hear, feel, smell? They then share these descriptions with the class and the teacher writes short noun phrases on the board, such as *warm sunshine*, *light breeze*, *damp grass* and *fresh, green buds*. She then creates a short poem comprised only of adjectives and nouns, using the children's ideas. As she does so, she asks the children to suggest a variety of words that describe nouns, telling them that such words are called *adjectives*. The children then return to their tables to write their own adjective–noun poems.

Perhaps you remember the kind of exercises described in the first example. It was easy to fill in the gaps in the sentences because only certain types of words would fit. Try putting words into the gaps in the sentences below.

Jan wore a \_\_\_\_\_ blouse and a \_\_\_\_\_ skirt.

Simon drove a \_\_\_\_\_ car and lived in a \_\_\_\_\_ house.

It isn't difficult to find words to fit into the spaces, is it? You could happily (or perhaps tediously) complete 20 such sentences, but how much help would this be in understanding and remembering the function of adjectives?

Now look at the sentences below and place *pobdrobs* in the spaces.

Dave ran \_\_\_\_\_ towards the goal.

Craig laughed \_\_\_\_\_ when he heard the joke.

If you completed the sentences, you almost certainly inserted words like *quickly* in the first sentence and *heartily* or *loudly* in the second. You probably wondered what a *pobdrob* was, but this is a book about grammar and you probably expect to find some unfamiliar terms, so you simply completed the sentences anyway. But would you remember what a *pobdrob* is next week? There is actually no such thing as a *pobdrob*, and the missing words were in fact adverbs, but the point we want to make is that a knowledge of terms is meaningless without understanding, and understanding comes through using and discussing language. In the second example, the children learned the term and became familiar with the function of adjectives through discussion and writing; and we would argue that they are more likely to use and be

able to name adjectives than those who filled in missing words in sentences. Try completing the following sentence:

The \_\_\_\_\_ rattled through the \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ speed.

Easy? Yes, but could you name the parts of speech or word classes of the words you inserted? And why would you want to know them anyway? Apart from the obvious reason that you will have to teach them one day, another strong justification is that you will be able to develop a shared language for discussing language with your pupils. In mathematics, we stress the importance of correct and accurate nomenclature – for example, when differentiating between isosceles, scalene and equilateral triangles. Other subjects also teach the use of specialised vocabulary. For some reason, in the past many teachers avoided doing the same for English, using terms such as ‘naming words’, ‘describing words’ and ‘doing words’ rather than nouns, adjectives and verbs. If you want your class to show in a poem just how they felt when walking outside on a warm spring day, it is much easier to use the term *adjective* once they are familiar with it, rather than repeatedly talking about *describing words* or *words which describe things*.

A description of different approaches to Year 3 learning about adverbs suggests that there are advantages to taking a more creative approach to developing children’s knowledge about language. Danielle, a PGCE student, worked with groups of Year 3 children as part of her research for an assignment. She describes, below, two different approaches and their outcomes.

### Case study: Year 3 learning about adverbs

The basic premise of the task was to determine if *creative* or *traditional* teaching would affect grammatical retention/understanding. Eight Year 3 children were chosen and were divided into two equal groups by their class teacher, based on gender and academic ability, to test their knowledge of adverbs. The children were all taught on the same day (but at different times) and tested the following day. The teaching session for the traditional group involved recapping what verbs and adverbs are (some of the children already knew this). The children then had to identify adverbs (and verbs if they wanted to) in a selection of sentences such as ‘The dog ran quickly’, and write these on their whiteboards. The sentences were initially read out and written for the children to see, but as the lesson progressed they just heard the sentences.

For the creative group, the same teaching process was followed, but when children had to identify adverbs, they used a mixture of drama, music and art to show the adverbs. Both groups were asked to recognise the pattern of the adverbs – i.e., they ended in ‘ly’ (in the examples provided) and what an adverb was. Overall, both groups generally understood what an adverb was.



The groups were tested the next day using a basic reading test where they independently had to identify the adverbs in a list of ten sentences and then define an adverb. Overall, there was no great difference between the scores of the two groups; although the creative group seemed to be more able when defining an adverb and they did comment that they thought the creative aspects helped them to learn during the lesson, and to remember later what they had learnt.

Danielle's small-scale study seems to indicate that there are some benefits to adopting a more creative approach to teaching about language. It certainly suggests that it is worth considering ways of making your lessons interactive and multisensory in order to help children to retain knowledge and understanding.

## What do children need to know?

The National Curriculum is quite specific about what children should know about grammar and the terminology and states that *they should learn to recognise and use the terminology through discussion and practice* (DfE, 2013, p. 74). The Glossary of terms (Appendix 1) provides definitions of this terminology and other terms that you will often encounter, and includes brief suggestions for ways of teaching about the terms, as well as an indication of the chapters where you can find out more. For many trainee and qualified teachers, the terminology may seem quite daunting and probably includes some terms that you have never previously met.

In Year 1 this includes: letter, capital letter word, singular, plural, sentence, punctuation, full stop, question mark, exclamation mark.

In Year 2 this includes: noun, noun phrase, statement, question, exclamation, command, compound, adjective, verb, suffix adverb, tense (past, present) apostrophe, comma.

It is worth pausing for a moment, before looking at Key Stage 2, to consider how familiar you are with such terms and how confident you would feel about discussing and exemplifying them. It may also be worthwhile looking in the glossary to clarify the meaning of terms that you are unsure about.

The Key Stage 2 terminology will probably have most readers turning to the Glossary for some terms.

In Year 3, children are expected to know: adverb, preposition, conjunction, word family, prefix, clause, subordinate clause, direct speech, consonant, consonant letter, vowel, vowel letter, inverted commas (or 'speech marks').

In Year 4: determiner, pronoun, possessive pronoun, adverbial.

In Year 5: relative clause, modal verb, relative pronoun, parenthesis, bracket, dash, determiner, cohesion, ambiguity.

And in Year 6: active and passive voice, subject and object, hyphen, synonym, antonym, colon, semi-colon, bullet points and ellipsis.

If you already feel confident that you know and understand all of the terms, we hope that our book will help you to find ways of teaching them. If some of the terms are unfamiliar, you will find explanations and examples, as well as activities and self-assessments, which should enable you to develop confidence in your ability to teach them. The self-assessments sometimes include the kind of exercises we have already criticised in this Introduction, but we hope you will see these as quick checks that you have understood what are intended as more creative examples and explanations. You will find the answers to these self-assessments in Appendix 2.

By reading this book and exploring more creative approaches to knowledge about language, you will not only become more familiar with relevant terminology, but also more confident about teaching it effectively. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to grammar and a rationale for how you might teach it.

We also explore spelling and vocabulary development, emphasising the importance of *teaching* spelling and not simply *testing* it. Perhaps you remember being given ten words to learn on Mondays and being tested on them on Fridays. You may also remember your teacher's frustration that people continued to misspell words that they had only recently been tested upon. In Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 you will find guidance on, and examples of, ways of teaching vocabulary and spelling so that children not only remember spellings, but also are able to apply their knowledge of spelling patterns when faced with unfamiliar words.

In Chapter 6 you will find ideas for teaching and learning punctuation, as well as explanations of different punctuation marks. Chapter 7 focuses on one particular punctuation mark: the apostrophe, which seems to cause more problems for writers than all the rest put together.

Chapter 8 looks at the grammar and syntax of sentences, providing examples of ways to teach and learn about phrases and clauses. Chapter 9 draws everything together, examining how we can make our texts cohesive as well as accurate. The requirements for the grammar, spelling and punctuation (GP&S) tests in England are examined in Appendix 3.

We hope that by reading this book, you will find that acquiring the knowledge and understanding you need to teach children about language in a meaningful and stimulating way need not be too difficult. Indeed, we hope that your curiosity will be aroused, and that you will want to take your knowledge and understanding and that of the children you teach further.

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# 1 Teaching grammar

## Learning outcomes

By reading this chapter you will develop:

- an overview of grammar in the National Curriculum for England;
- an understanding of how grammar can help children to become better writers.

## Teachers' Standards

This chapter will help you with the following Teachers' Standards.

- 3 Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge:
  - have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings;
  - demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship;
  - demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of Standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject.

## Introduction

In the book's Introduction we considered what grammar is and why it is important. This chapter will look at the grammar you are required to teach, and explore ways of teaching it that are meaningful and effective.

Our starting point is the National Curriculum for English (DfE, 2013) and the knowledge children will be required to have by the end of Key Stage 2. We will consider how we can draw on and extend aspects of children's implicit knowledge about grammar, and help you to develop an understanding of the important concepts that underpin teaching in the classroom. We will draw on recent research that identifies how to teach grammar so that it impacts positively on children's understanding of language.

As you read, you will need to keep in mind the key purposes of teaching grammar. It is not simply for you to be confident about correcting mistakes in children's work, nor is it to pass on tricks and techniques to be replicated in a mechanistic way. This does not make children writers or lead to good writing. Teaching grammar effectively is about making visible what experienced language producers know and do, enabling children to control grammar to express increasingly complex ideas. As they learn how to do this, the range of choices open to them as speakers

and writers will be extended. Importantly, this does not need to be dull. Effective grammar teaching takes place in meaningful contexts, both in literacy lessons and across the curriculum (see Chapter 10). It can also be fascinating. Playing with words, investigation, puns, jokes and rhymes can all enrich and inform grammatical knowledge and understanding, and develop a genuine interest in how language works.

### Activity

What do you think you know about teaching grammar? You may think you have never seen any explicit grammar teaching, but what is it that you think you know? Try writing it down.

Underline anything that you are not sure about, and turn those uncertainties into questions. By the time you have read this chapter, some of your questions will have been answered and you will also realise that you know a little more than you thought.

## Grammar in the National Curriculum for English

The National Curriculum for English highlights the importance of children acquiring a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language (2013). It makes clear that children need to know, understand and be able to use a wide range of grammatical terms and features; by the end of Key Stage 2, they should be able to reflect their understanding of the audience for and purpose of their writing by selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammar (DfE, 2013, p. 41). To do this they will need to be aware of the variety and complexity of grammatical choices that are available to them and manipulate language appropriately.

The National Curriculum sets out in great detail the key knowledge that must be taught in primary schools from Year 1 to Year 6. There are three strands: *word structure*, *sentence structure* and *text structure*, and at the end of this chapter (pp. 23–26), you will find an overview to show what this looks like in each year group. Children are tested on their knowledge of grammar at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. You will find further information in Appendix 3.

## How to teach grammar

It is important to realise that the teaching of grammar goes far beyond the ability to succeed in end of Key Stage tests. It is about being able to choose and use language well for a wide range of purposes and audiences, and being able to harness the power that writing offers. Meek (1991) writes about the importance of *confident knowing* (p. 23). She describes the *powerful literates* as those who know they will be able to cope with written language, however unfamiliar, *by discovering how it works*. Myhill (2012) stresses how important it is for children



to discover how meanings are subtly shaped by lexical and syntactical choices; that language changes in different contexts; that there are differences between spoken and written English, and between standard and non-standard varieties of language. These discoveries are too important to be left to chance. They need to be planned for.

By this point, you may well have become concerned about your own subject knowledge. However, the good news is that, as an experienced language user, you are already using language flexibly all the time. You will choose your words much more carefully during a job interview than when you are sitting with friends over a drink at the weekend. Similarly, the way that you write your letter of application will be quite different from the note you leave that says 'Dinner in dog – gone out'. The vocabulary you use, the way you construct your sentences, the precision with which you communicate your thinking and the tone you convey change to suit the purpose and audience. What you may not yet have is an explicit knowledge of the grammar that informs the choices you make.

## Implicit and explicit knowledge of grammar

Most children come to school knowing many of the rules of spoken language. This knowledge is implicit – they understand and apply these rules in an unconscious and intuitive way in the classroom to communicate with their teachers and their peers. The rules of oral language will have been learnt from listening to adults talking in a range of contexts, by imitating and innovating. We can see this when young children make generalisations that are inaccurate, such as 'I rided my bike' or 'I goed to the park', which are actually very logical. Many children also cope well with the increasingly complex language in the texts that are read to them and that they later read for themselves. Our task is to build on the patterns they already know implicitly by making them visible and letting children into the secret of the decision-making process – that is, what goes on in our minds – so that we enable them to become more sophisticated language producers themselves.

### Activity

Look at the sentences below. None of the sentences is correct. But can you explain the grammatical knowledge you are applying to make your judgements?

*I didn't do nothing.*

*Me and my dad went to the park.*

*She was stood at the end of the road.*

*A box of tools are useful.*

*I can't hardly believe it.*

*The childrens' house.*

It is quite likely that you found it hard to explain why the grammar in each of the sentences above was incorrect (see our explanations below). This is likely to be because you have implicit rather than explicit grammatical knowledge. Although you will be able to correct the errors in children's writing, having explicit knowledge will allow you to go beyond this to appreciate what they can do and what they need to learn next. It will also allow you to teach and discuss how language works, which is the first step to enabling children to understand, internalise and extend the range of language that they use.

- *I didn't do nothing.* This is a double negative. If you didn't do nothing, then you did do something.
- *Me and my dad went to the park.* 'I and my dad' – you wouldn't say 'me went', because when 'I' is the subject of the verb we use 'I' rather than 'me'. It is also usually considered polite usage to put the other person first, so 'My dad and I'.
- *She was stood at the end of the road.* 'She was standing' – the imperfect tense, used here for describing a situation, uses the present participle (the -ing form) rather than the past participle 'stood'.
- *A box of tools are useful.* 'A box of tools' is singular (there is one box, even though it contains several tools) and so the part of the verb to be 'are' needs to be 'is' in order for the subject and verb to agree.
- *I can't hardly believe it.* 'Hardly' means 'with difficulty'. If you have difficulty believing something, then you **can** hardly believe it.
- *The childrens' house.* Apostrophes for possession are placed after the item/person etc. who owns something. Children is the plural of child, so the apostrophe should be placed after n but before s.

## Developing a meta-language

It makes sense that it is easier to talk about grammar with children if there is a shared common language. We call this a meta-language. A shared meta-language allows teachers and children to talk together using terms that everyone understands.

Before some less well-known events at the London Olympics, the spectators were told the main rules of the game and some of the tactics that they should look out for. Those watching the diving learnt about *pikes*, *reverse three-and-a-half somersaults with tuck*, *rip entries* and *flat hand grabs*, as well as the complexities of the scoring system. This basic knowledge made it possible for everyone to understand what was happening and added to their engagement in the drama of the competition. Teachers and children who have a meta-language in common are able to talk together in an inclusive way. There is no need to shy away from using the correct terms consistently and accurately. Indeed, given the demands of the curriculum, it will be unhelpful if we avoid them.

## The impact of teaching grammar

Although we have stressed the importance of knowing about grammar and having a shared meta-language, we know that the teaching of grammatical knowledge, while interesting in its own right, often has very little impact on the quality of children's talk, reading or writing. Studies such as those carried out by Andrews *et al.* (2006) suggest that there is little point teaching formal grammar as there is little evidence to indicate its effectiveness. Barrs and Cork (2001) argue that the direct teaching of written language features is no substitute for extensive experience of written language, and demonstrate that the influence of children's reading of literature on their writing at Key Stage 2, when mediated effectively, is significant. Moreover, Bearne (2007) writes about the danger of seeing learning to write as putting together different 'skills' and of reducing writing to a series of formulaic 'this is how to do it' exercises. Research has shown that this is likely to result in disaffection and a lack of engagement (Packwood and Messenheimer, 2003).

You may have experienced this. You may have noticed children who produce the correct forms on exercises and tests and do not use them accurately or appropriately in the context of their own writing. Using a highlighter to underline all the adverbs in a series of unrelated sentences does not have any intrinsic value beyond knowing what an adverb is. Decontextualised worksheets and exercises do not sit comfortably with the purposes of teaching grammar outlined at the start of the chapter. Grammar teaching is most effective when it is taught in the context of reading and writing, either in the context of the linguistic demands of a particular genre, or the writing needs of a particular child (Myhill, 2012). In the next section we shall look at pedagogy and highlight some of the principles that underpin successful grammar teaching in the classroom.

### Research focus: pedagogical approaches to teaching grammar

A recent study by Myhill *et al.* (2011) has focused on pedagogical approaches to teaching grammar that make a difference to children's writing. The researchers found that teaching grammar as a discrete, separate topic, where the grammar is the focus of study, was not likely to help writing development because it did not make connections between grammar and writing, or between grammar and meaning. However, they found that actively engaging children with the use of grammar could be a powerful and effective tool for improving their written work. They identified a number of approaches that led to significant improvements in children's writing, including:

- experimentation and playful engagement with language;
- explicit teaching and application using the texts children were already using as part of a unit of work;



- explicitly teaching the meta-language, but also the reasons for using it;
- deconstructing how grammar was used in different texts and encouraging children to use this knowledge in their own writing.

The research also showed that:

- teaching grammar out of context as a discrete lesson can teach meta-language successfully, but does not help children to see the use and purpose of the grammar;
- grammar needs to be seen as something to be experimented with and played with rather than labelled and corrected;
- children need to build a repertoire of grammatical skills to experiment with – this does not happen by chance;
- teachers' subject knowledge is an important factor.

## Teaching grammar effectively

One of our aims as primary teachers is to open up to children what Myhill called *a repertoire of infinite possibilities*. Knowing the frames and shapes that language uses is part of developing the linguistic competence that children need, and allows them to participate in text production, both spoken and written.

The grammatical characteristics of spoken language are quite different from those used in writing. If you listen carefully to a conversation, you will immediately notice how fragmented it is, and how gesture, context and shared understandings influence the nature of the language used. Very few of us talk in sentences all the time. It would be even stranger to hear the language of most written texts spoken aloud in conversation, unless we are giving a presentation or speaking at a more formal occasion. In these circumstances, we may well craft our words very carefully, and *read a written to be spoken text* (Carter, 2003). If talk is to be an effective bridge between thought and writing, we need to turn this round and look at how we can help children to produce *spoken to be written* texts.

## A wardrobe of voices

Recently, a group of children from an inner-city school visited another class in a more 'leafy' part of the city as part of a project that they were involved in. When they were reflecting on their day and the teacher asked what they had learned, one child astutely commented, 'Those children speak like you want me to write, Miss.'

The child who made this observation was commenting on the use of Standard English. Her perceptive remark highlights that children whose dialect is nearest to Standard English may be at an advantage when they write. Mercer and Littleton (2007) have commented that there is no

research evidence to show that all children will naturally encounter all the language genres that they might need for taking responsible control over their own lives. However anxious you may feel about expecting all children to add Standard English to their spoken repertoire, particularly when this may be very different from the home language they bring to school, we cannot ignore its importance.

Lockwood (2005) used the metaphor of a *wardrobe of voices* to explore the concept of language variety and to investigate how Standard English could hang in that wardrobe as one set of linguistic clothing to be worn at certain times. Just as children put on different clothes for different occasions – the clothes they choose when they ride their bikes in the park will be quite different from those they wear to go to a wedding, and would probably not be the same as the clothes they wear for the school disco – so they need to be able to select the right voice from the ‘wardrobe’. To do this they need, of course, to have a range of voices available to them, and to know the purpose and the audience for their talk. For example, do they want to explain, entertain or persuade, or to get their audience to come to a consensus? Who is it for and where is it going? When they know this, they can begin to make choices about the language they need to select.

## Opportunities to use Standard English

Lockwood’s analogy is valuable and highlights the importance of providing ample opportunities for children to use more formal language from the beginning. This might include a themed home corner such as a vets’ practice or travel agency. Listen to children using such an area next time you are in school, and you will hear them questioning, diagnosing, advising and prescribing. Older children can be given opportunities to take part in debates in role, perhaps as a town councillor when discussing a controversial proposed development; as a newsreader reporting on a historical event; or by presenting findings in assemblies. These provide authentic contexts for the kind of formal talk that tends to be more polished and closer to written English.

Speaking frames to support individual, paired and group talk can also be useful. These are often used to support children learning English as an additional language, but they can be beneficial for all children, particularly when you explicitly discuss the differences between formal and informal talk. It is, of course, essential to do this with care and to avoid using value or judgemental terms which may make children feel that their ‘home’ language is being criticised or seen as inferior. Language and identity are closely intertwined. Our approach needs to be firmly based on how language changes in different contexts.

In the case study below, you will meet Kate who is working with a Year 1 class and is keen to extend the children’s language. She makes sure that she always models Standard English in the classroom. When one of the children enthusiastically showed her a photograph and said, ‘We was at the seaside’, she responded by modelling Standard English, saying, ‘You were at the seaside’.

yesterday? How fantastic!' Kate is keen to use every opportunity to help children to move beyond their home language and use Standard English in meaningful contexts. When you are reading the case study, think about how you might be able to use high-quality texts and drama in a similar way with your own class.

### Case study: modelling Standard English

The children had been reading *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* (Armitage, 2007). As part of the unit of work, they made freeze frames of events from the story, and Kate used *thought tracking* to interview Mr and Mrs Grinling to extend the children's talk. As they did this, she commented on how well they had taken on particular roles, and encouraged them to imitate and innovate on the rich but formal language of the text. Kate set up the role-play area with a seaside theme to provide opportunities for the children to retell the story using props, and others acted as reporters, finding out what had happened using 'magic microphones' and notepads, and reporting back to the newsroom.

The children wrote their own versions of the story, and Kate was pleased to see that they had started to use the rich language of the text and new vocabulary, such as 'wretched birds' to describe the seagulls. She realised that storytelling was a powerful tool for helping children build a bank of narrative patterns they would be able to use when creating their own stories, and she continued to provide opportunities for children to internalise oral stories and structure their sentences orally. This impacted significantly on the grammatical structures they used in their writing.

### Curriculum links

A key aim of the National Curriculum for English (DfE, 2013) is to reflect the importance of spoken language in children's development across the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically. It states that *The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are vital for developing their vocabulary and grammar and their understanding for reading and writing* (p. 13).

The programme of study for spoken language is for all year groups and includes the need for children to be taught to:

- listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers;
- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge;
- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary;
- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions;

- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings;
- maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments;
- use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas;
- speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English;
- participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates;
- gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s);
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others;
- select and use appropriate registers for effective communication.

In this lesson, Kate's objectives related to becoming very familiar with key stories, fairy stories and traditional tales; retelling them and considering their particular characteristics (Year 1, reading comprehension, p. 21); and sequencing sentences to form short narratives (Year 1, writing composition, p. 24).

### Activity

We all have an accent and we all speak with a dialect. Think about your own language history. Do you speak differently now from the way you spoke as a child? Perhaps you have changed the way you speak on occasions. Can you work out why you think this is?

Think about the children in your most recent school experience. Do you think that some children's dialect – their everyday speech – was closer to a writing style than others? Were they at an advantage? If they were, what strategies were being put in place to make sure that all children could choose from a fuller wardrobe of voices?

## Reading aloud and reading as a writer

The links between reading and writing are well known (Barrs and Cork, 2001). If you look at the good writers in the classes you work in you will find that they are almost always good readers. Britton (1982) suggested that the store of language that children internalise comes from their reading and being read to. Barrs and Cork explain that what children write reflects

the nature and quality of their reading and that it is reading that allows them to *take on the whole feeling and rhythm of a text* (2001, p. 116).

A rich experience of reading is important for all children and a planned read-aloud programme needs to be an integral part of the literacy curriculum. However, being a reader and hearing texts read aloud does not lead to an automatic understanding of what the author has done. If children are going to understand and internalise the more complex grammatical structures of writing, you need to draw their attention to these during shared and guided reading, and create opportunities to discuss them explicitly. As we explore children's responses to texts, we can also investigate how writers use language to create particular effects and, as we will see later, use these written texts as models for writing.

## Talk for writing

We know how important it is for children to spend time exploring ideas so that they know their material well and can plan effectively. However effectively we do this, it will not automatically lead to good writing. A teacher using the *Talk for Writing* materials (DCFS, 2009) reflected on why, after providing lots of opportunities for speaking and listening, writing outcomes did not reflect the varied and interesting vocabulary used in their talk. She posed the question, 'Can children modify their writing more effectively if they hear it and keep making changes until the talk for writing becomes the writing?' Bridging the gap between high-quality talk, high-quality texts and high-quality writing is not something that you can leave to chance. You need to support the oral rehearsal of the kind of language, vocabulary and sentence structures that can then become the written form.

## Shared and modelled writing

We should not be surprised if children find it difficult to write if they have not been immersed in the kind of text and sentence structures they are being asked to produce. An important way of making the writing process explicit is to model writing to the class. Modelled writing is a powerful pedagogy that involves externalising what you do when you write, and is effective whether your focus is on text structure, sentence types, sentence complexity or word structure. As an experienced writer, this will often come to you automatically. You will need to learn to talk aloud to yourself as you write, so that the children can see the decisions you are making. If you are focusing on the use of adverbial phrases to add interest and richness to the text, you may say: 'I think I'll put the phrase there, or perhaps it would make more sense to leave it here. Yes, I'll leave it where it is because then the readers will be wondering what is going to happen next and I'm trying to keep them guessing.' You will need to prepare this beforehand, so that you can do it confidently. It is not easy to do in front of a class, but it is well worth the effort. As Myhill (2012, p. 22) points out, *A writing curriculum that draws attention to the*



*grammar of writing in an embedded and purposeful way at relevant points in the learning is a ... positive way forward.*

Modelled writing plays an important part in ensuring that children have a toolkit of organisational and linguistic structures. Children will, of course, need to try out the techniques for themselves and apply these in their own writing. It may seem obvious, but if children are to do this, you need to make sure that the context for the writing lends itself to the task. There is no point asking children to practise their use of complex sentences when you are writing haiku.

## Language and word investigations

As you have already seen, grammar teaching will be most effective when it arises from the talk, reading and writing that you are already doing in the classroom. However, discrete teaching, when it involves finding patterns and rules through investigations and playing with words, can enrich and inform grammatical knowledge and understanding. What matters is that this is then applied in meaningful contexts. In later chapters, you will discover how to use tongue-twisters and puns, jokes and rhymes, and collections of words to transform texts from non-Standard to Standard English, construct rules and explanations, and simply enjoy language.

## A model for teaching grammar in context

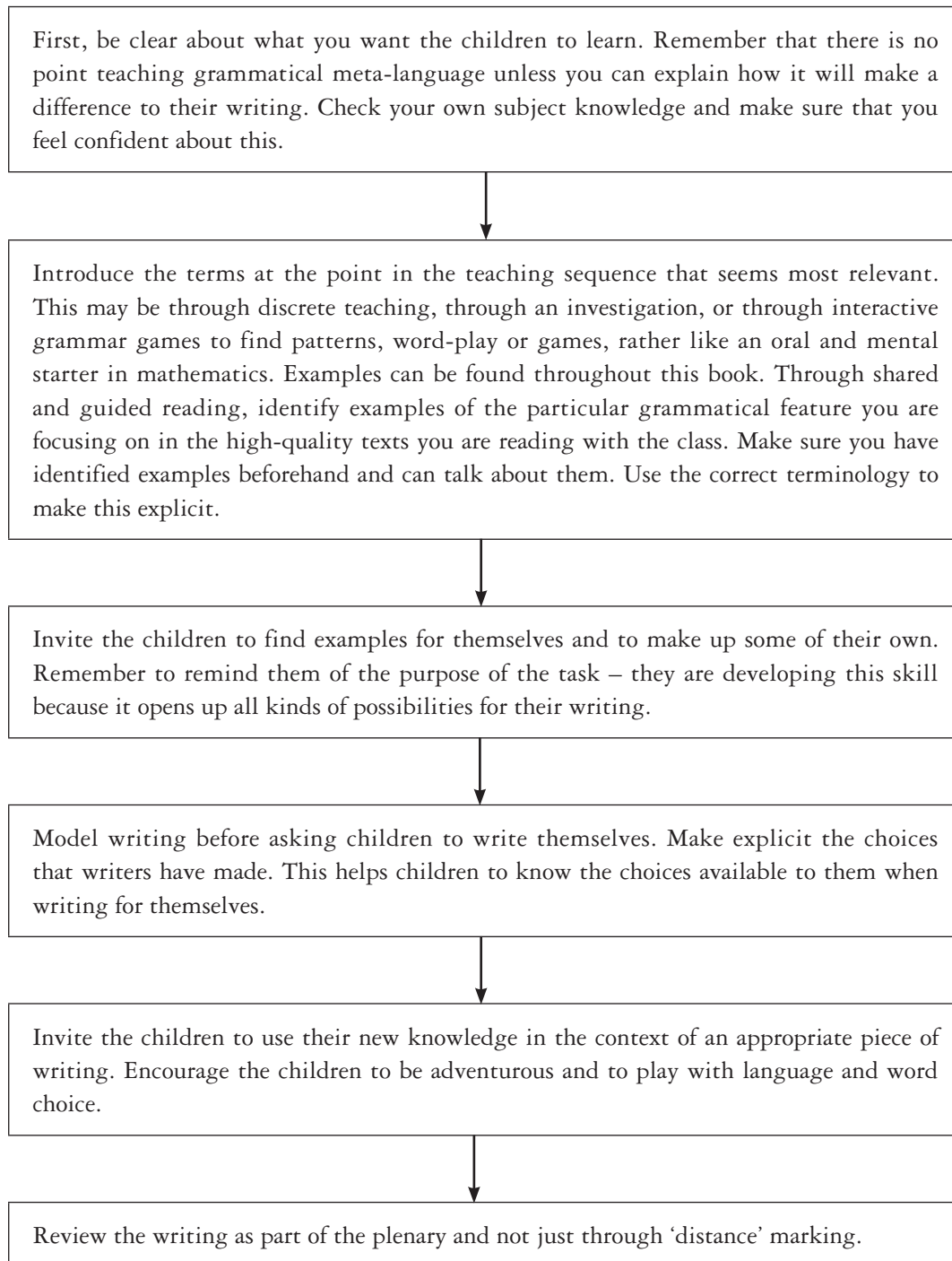
The teaching sequence below draws together the key principles discussed above and provides one model for teaching grammar effectively (see model on p. 18).

### Key principles for teaching grammar

Knowledge about grammar can make a significant difference to children's literacy development, but it is important to bear in mind seven key principles.

1. **Build up your own subject knowledge.** To teach grammar you need explicit as well as implicit knowledge, so that you are confident about using the correct terms and explaining these. Don't just learn the next term you are teaching. It is important to be able to relate new learning to other features and the text as a whole.
2. **Give talk a high priority in your classroom.** Children need to be able to select from a wardrobe of voices that includes Standard English.
3. **Remember the purpose of teaching grammar.** Grammar is not simply the naming of parts of speech or for teaching the rules of English. It needs to be strongly embedded in classroom talk, reading and writing.

## A model for teaching grammar effectively



4. **Teach grammar in context.** By introducing children to grammatical features and language in context, you will be helping them to internalise these principles. Try not to go for the ready-made solution by using a worksheet from a book. It will make very little difference to children's use of language and will be meaningless for those learners who are not yet able to think in abstract ways.
5. **Read aloud and discuss how authors use grammar.** Children who read extensively and are read to will have a 'toolbox' of structures, patterns and rhythms to draw on.
6. **Be systematic.** Make sure you know what the class you are working with have already learned and what they need to learn now. Link new learning with their prior knowledge.
7. **Make learning grammar fun.** Teaching grammar can involve investigation, problem-solving and language play as part of developing children's awareness of and interest in how language works.

In the case study below, you will meet Chris, who is in his second year of a three-year degree and is working with a Year 4 class. He had been asked to focus on the children's use of paragraphs so that they can organise ideas around a theme. His first task was to check that he could make his implicit knowledge about paragraphs explicit, so that his discussion with the children would be clear and unambiguous. As you read the case study, think about how Chris helps the children to organise content in a simple but effective way that can support them in their use of paragraphs in other curriculum areas.

### Case study: using paragraphs in Year 4

The children had been reading *The Lion and the Unicorn* by Shirley Hughes, a powerful picture book set in the Second World War. The outcome of the unit of work was for the children to write their own version of the story in role as Lenny, an evacuee and the main character in the story.

Chris modelled how to summarise the key points of a story. He took as an example, Humpty Dumpty, and segmented it into three boxes representing the main stages of the narrative:

*Humpty sits on a wall.*

*Humpty falls off a wall.*

*Soldiers can't repair Humpty.*

He demonstrated how this can be written and organised on the principle of one paragraph per box. As he did this he talked aloud so that the children could see and hear the decisions that he made. The children had already done a lot of work around *The Lion and the Unicorn*



and knew it well. This included using a range of drama techniques, visualisation and retelling, as well as more specific work focusing on the language of the text. The children worked in small groups to 'box up' the story. This involved summarising the bare bones of the story in six points. Each group had six strips of paper on which to record the 'key points' they chose. Chris worked intensively with a guided group and his TA supported the rest of the class. The children compared their versions and discussed the reasons for the decisions they made.

The next step was for Chris to model the writing of a paragraph before the children did this for themselves, all the time remembering what he wanted the children to be learning.

Chris was surprised that the children found it quite challenging to see the underlying pattern of the story, but his approach was successful and provided a framework that the children later used as a basis for writing their own versions. He was able to use the same approach successfully in other areas of the curriculum, from history and geography to science, and it became a basic planning framework for children when writing non-fiction.

### Curriculum links

Effective composition involves articulating and communicating ideas, and then organising them coherently for a reader. This requires clarity, awareness of the audience, purpose and context, and an increasingly wide knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Chris's lesson enabled children to discuss a text similar to the one they were planning to write, in order to understand and learn from their structure, grammar and vocabulary (Year 3–4, composition, p. 39) and focused on the use of paragraphs to organise ideas around a theme (Year 3–4, writing composition, p. 39).

## And finally – a word of caution

In a discussion about the place of grammar in the curriculum, Myhill (2012, p. 22) writes:

*Learning to label and dissect language into its component parts and learning to underline grammatical errors in artificially generated sentences will not equip young learners to become confident and mature language users. But using grammar to help young writers to see through language, to see how language constructs socially-shaped meanings, to see how great language users break rules – this is where grammar realises its potential as a dynamic and vibrant element of English.*

All children need to know that reading, writing, speaking and listening are powerful. This goes beyond writing accurately and pleasing their teacher. They need to experience the pleasure that

having a voice brings and the opportunities that it offers. Writing can never be taught simply by teaching techniques, and learning about grammar can never be a genuine purpose for writing. Meaning has to be at the heart of all teaching of literacy.

### Learning outcomes review

This chapter has highlighted the rewards of teaching grammar. You will be aware of the importance placed on grammar in the new curriculum and the need to have an explicit knowledge of grammar so that you are confident in your subject knowledge. You will know how to teach grammar effectively, understand the importance of oral language, reading and modelled writing, and explicit discussions about how language works.

### Self-assessment questions

1. How can you ensure that all children have a *wardrobe of voices* that includes Standard English?
2. What do you see as the key features of an effective pedagogy for teaching grammar? How can you avoid this becoming a grammar-spotting exercise?
3. Have you observed children having fun and playing with language? Start collecting together word-play activities that you will be able to use in the future.

### Further reading

Lockwood, M. (2005) Opening the Wardrobe of Voices: Standard English and Language Variation at KS2, in Goodwin, P. (ed.) *The Literate Classroom* (2nd edition). London: David Fulton, pp. 189–99.

This chapter considers how explicit discussion about dialect, register and Standard English can develop children's knowledge about language. It provides helpful suggestions for strengthening the use of Standard English in the classroom.

Waugh, D., Allott, K., Waugh, R., English, E. and Bulmer, E. (2014) *The Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar App*. Morecambe: Children Count (available through the App Store).

This app provides guidance and activities on all aspects of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

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*Progression in vocabulary, grammar and punctuation – Years 1 to 6 in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013)*

Year 1: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	Regular <b>plural noun suffixes</b> -s or -es (e.g. <i>dog, dogs; wish, wishes</i> ), including the effects of these suffixes on the meaning of the noun.  <b>Suffixes</b> that can be added to <b>verbs</b> where no change is needed in the spelling of root words (e.g. <i>helping, helped, helper</i> ).  How the <b>prefix un-</b> changes the meaning of <b>verbs</b> and <b>adjectives</b> (negation, for example, <i>unkind</i> ; or <i>undoing: untie the boat</i> ).
<b>Sentence</b>	How <b>words</b> can combine to make <b>sentences</b> . Joining <b>words</b> and joining <b>clauses</b> using <i>and</i> .
<b>Text</b>	Sequencing <b>sentences</b> to form short narratives.
<b>Punctuation</b>	Separation of <b>words</b> with spaces. Introduction to capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate <b>sentences</b> . Capital letters for names and for the personal <b>pronoun I</b> .
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	Letter, capital letter Word, singular, plural Sentence Punctuation, full stop, question mark, exclamation mark
Year 2: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	Formation of <b>nouns</b> using <b>suffixes</b> such as <i>-ness, -er</i> and by compounding (e.g. <i>whiteboard, superman</i> ).  Formation of <b>adjectives</b> using <b>suffixes</b> such as <i>-ful, -less</i> .  (A fuller list of <b>suffixes</b> can be found on page 46 in the year 2 spelling section in English Appendix 1.)  Use of the <b>suffixes -er, -est</b> in <b>adjectives</b> and the use of <i>-ly</i> in Standard English to turn adjectives into <b>adverbs</b> .
<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Subordination</b> (using <i>when, if, that, because</i> ) and <b>coordination</b> (using <i>or, and, but</i> ).  Expanded <b>noun phrases</b> for description and specification (for example, <i>the blue butterfly, plain flour, the man in the moon</i> ).  How the grammatical patterns in a sentence indicate its function as a <b>statement, question, exclamation</b> or <b>command</b> .
<b>Text</b>	Correct choice and consistent use of <b>present tense</b> and <b>past tense</b> throughout writing.  Use of the <b>progressive</b> form of <b>verbs</b> in the <b>present</b> and <b>past tense</b> to mark actions in progress (e.g. <i>she is drumming, he was shouting</i> ).

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Year 2: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Punctuation</b>	Use of capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate <b>sentences</b> . Commas to separate items in a list. <b>Apostrophes</b> to mark where letters are missing in spelling and to mark singular possession in nouns (e.g. <i>the girl's name</i> ).
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	Noun, noun phrase Statement, question, exclamation, command, compound, adjective, verb, suffix adverb Tense (past, present) Apostrophe, comma

Year 3: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	Formation of <b>nouns</b> using a range of <b>prefixes</b> (e.g. <i>super-, anti-, auto-</i> ). Use of the <b>forms a or an</b> according to whether the next <b>word</b> begins with a <b>consonant</b> or a <b>vowel</b> (e.g. <i>a rock, an open box</i> ). <b>Word families</b> based on common <b>words</b> , showing how words are related in form and meaning (e.g. <i>solve, solution, solver, dissolve, insoluble</i> ).
<b>Sentence</b>	Expressing time, place and cause using <b>conjunctions</b> (e.g. <i>when, before, after, while, so, because</i> ), <b>adverbs</b> (e.g. <i>then, next, soon, therefore</i> ), or <b>prepositions</b> (e.g. <i>before, after, during, in, because of</i> ).
<b>Text</b>	Introduction to paragraphs as a way to group related material. Headings and subheadings to aid presentation. Use of the <b>present perfect</b> form of <b>verbs</b> instead of the simple past (e.g. <i>He has gone out to play</i> contrasted with <i>He went out to play</i> ).
<b>Punctuation</b>	Introduction to inverted commas to <b>punctuate</b> direct speech.
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	Adverb, preposition, conjunction Word family, prefix Clause, subordinate clause Direct speech Consonant, consonant letter vowel, vowel letter Inverted commas (or 'speech marks')

Year 4: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	The grammatical difference between <b>plural</b> and <b>possessive -s</b> . Standard English forms for <b>verb inflections</b> instead of local spoken forms (e.g. <i>we were</i> instead of <i>we was</i> , or <i>I did</i> instead of <i>I done</i> ).



Year 4: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Sentence</b>	Noun phrases expanded by the addition of modifying adjectives, nouns and preposition phrases (e.g. <i>the teacher</i> expanded to <i>the strict maths teacher with curly hair</i> ). <b>Fronted adverbials</b> (e.g. <i>Later that day, I heard the bad news</i> ).
<b>Text</b>	Use of paragraphs to organise ideas around a theme. Appropriate choice of <b>pronoun</b> or <b>noun</b> within and across <b>sentences</b> to aid cohesion and avoid repetition.
<b>Punctuation</b>	Use of inverted commas and other <b>punctuation</b> to indicate direct speech (e.g. a comma after the reporting clause; end punctuation within inverted commas: <i>The conductor shouted, 'Sit down!'</i> ). <b>Apostrophes</b> to mark <b>plural</b> possession (e.g. <i>the girl's name, the girls' names</i> ). Use of commas after <b>fronted adverbials</b> .
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	Determiner Pronoun, possessive pronoun Adverbial

Year 5: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	Converting <b>nouns</b> or <b>adjectives</b> into <b>verbs</b> using <b>suffixes</b> (e.g. <i>-ate, -ise, -ify</i> ). <b>Verb prefixes</b> (e.g. <i>dis-, de-, mis-, over- and re-</i> ).
<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Relative clauses</b> beginning with <i>who, which, where, when, whose, that</i> , or an omitted relative pronoun. Indicating degrees of possibility using <b>adverbs</b> (e.g. <i>perhaps, surely</i> ) or <b>modal verbs</b> (e.g. <i>might, should, will, must</i> ).
<b>Text</b>	Devices to build <b>cohesion</b> within a paragraph (e.g. <i>then, after that, this, firstly</i> ). Linking ideas across paragraphs using <b>adverbials</b> of time (e.g. <i>later</i> ), place (e.g. <i>nearby</i> ) and number (e.g. <i>secondly</i> ) or tense choices (e.g. <i>he had seen her before</i> ).
<b>Punctuation</b>	Brackets, dashes or commas to indicate parenthesis. Use of commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity.
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	Modal verb, relative pronoun Relative clause Parenthesis, bracket, dash Cohesion, ambiguity

Year 6: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Word</b>	The difference between vocabulary typical of informal speech and vocabulary appropriate for formal speech and writing (e.g. <i>find out - discover; ask for - request; go in - enter</i> ). How words are related by meaning as synonyms and antonyms (e.g. <i>big, large, little</i> ).

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Year 6: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)	
<b>Sentence</b>	<p>Use of the <b>passive</b> to affect the presentation of information in a <b>sentence</b> (e.g. <i>I broke the window in the greenhouse</i> versus <i>The window in the greenhouse was broken (by me)</i>).</p> <p>The difference between structures typical of informal speech and structures appropriate for formal speech and writing (e.g. the use of question tags: <i>He's your friend, isn't he?</i> or the use of <b>subjunctive</b> forms, such as <i>If I were</i> or <i>Were they to come</i> in some very formal writing and speech).</p>
<b>Text</b>	<p>Linking ideas across paragraphs using a wider range of <b>cohesive devices</b>: repetition of a <b>word</b> or phrase, grammatical connections (e.g. the use of <b>adverbials</b> such as <i>on the other hand</i>, <i>in contrast</i>, or <i>as a consequence</i>) and <b>ellipsis</b>.</p> <p>Layout devices (e.g. headings, subheadings, columns, bullets, or tables, to structure text).</p>
<b>Punctuation</b>	<p>Use of the semi-colon, colon and dash to mark the boundary between independent <b>clauses</b> (e.g. <i>It's raining; I'm fed up</i>).</p> <p>Use of the colon to introduce a list and use of semi-colons within lists.</p> <p><b>Punctuation</b> of bullet points to list information.</p> <p>How hyphens can be used to avoid ambiguity (e.g. <i>man eating shark</i> versus <i>man-eating shark</i>, or <i>recover</i> versus <i>re-cover</i>).</p>
<b>Terminology for pupils</b>	<p>Subject, object</p> <p>Active, passive</p> <p>Synonym, antonym</p> <p>Ellipsis, hyphen, colon, semi-colon, bullet points</p>