The Grammar Book

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The Grammar Book

Understanding and teaching primary grammar

By Zoë and Timothy Paramour

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

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First published in Great Britain, 2020

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-4729-7229-3; ePDF: 978-1-4729-7228-6;
ePub: 978-1-4729-7230-9

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 (paperback)

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Group (UK) Ltd., Croydon CR0 4YY



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Introduction

Ms Armstrong doesn't look worried. She rarely does. She's several years into her second successful headship; she's battled budget cuts and political change, and her staff are rightly confident in her. And maybe she isn't worried exactly, but she's certainly feeling a little out of her depth. This afternoon she's attending a meeting with her school's senior and middle leaders, where the English coordinator will unveil the new grammar scheme of work. Having had a quick flick through its pages, Ms Armstrong is aware that she isn't familiar with many of the words and phrases in the document, especially those at the top end of Key Stage 2: *coordinating conjunction, subjunctive mood, past progressive tense.* Ms Armstrong didn't learn about any of this when she was younger. She went to school in the seventies and eighties and she mostly remembers her English teachers being brilliant, but they taught her to write by exposing her to examples of writing, and most of her understanding of grammar, which she rightly believes to be pretty good, was absorbed by osmosis. She *feels* where the commas should go in a sentence and she usually gets it right – but she can't necessarily explain how or why using technical linguistic terms. She's always been an avid reader and a very competent writer. All the grammar stuff on the primary curriculum now just seems so… unnecessary. She says nothing but silently curses Michael Gove.

In a classroom on the floor above, learning support assistant Mr Yildiz has just been handed next week's English planning by the Year 6 class teacher. On Wednesday, he has to take a group of children 'who are struggling to identify the subject and object in a sentence' out of class and help them. There's just one problem and you can probably guess what it is: Mr Yildiz has no idea how to identify the subject and object in a sentence. He went to school in the nineties and noughties, when the National Literacy Strategy reigned supreme. His English lessons were rather more prescriptive and content-driven than Ms Armstrong's had been 20 years before but the content still seemed to be different from what children are learning now. Mr Yildiz and his family moved to Britain from Turkey when he was four years old and he can see some logic in teaching grammar discretely. He often used to make mistakes with verb tenses that would never cause problems for native English speakers. His teachers would circle or underline them but they rarely explained *why* they were wrong. Even now, he can still make these mistakes if he's not careful and it's really embarrassing. Mr Yildiz wants to do his PGCE next year and become a teacher but he's worried that his colleagues will think he isn't clever enough.

Down the road, Mrs Patterson is helping her ten-year-old son with his English homework. A word in a sentence has been underlined and he has to state whether it's a determiner, a pronoun or a preposition. Mrs Patterson has been googling all three words for half an hour to try to come up with an answer and she thinks she might be getting somewhere. It's certainly not the most baffling task he's come home with this year; a fortnight ago he'd had this piece of work

to do about *main and subordinate clauses*, and before half-term there was that bewildering activity on *fronted adverbials*. Ironically, Mrs Patterson voted for this. The government said that they were going to bring 'rigour' back to the education system and it had sounded great. She thought she wanted her children to have a proper, traditional education, but this isn't quite what she was expecting.

Ms Armstrong, Mr Yildiz and Mrs Patterson, as you've probably guessed, are fictional characters, but that doesn't mean they aren't real. Or, at least, the grammar demons that haunt them are as real as can be and they are currently on the rampage in school communities across England. The frustration and irritation felt by Ms Armstrong, the fear and embarrassment felt by Mr Yildiz and the utter bewilderment felt by Mrs Patterson are all understandable and reasonable responses to a rapid and radical change of emphasis in the English curriculum over the course of the last decade. We've faced the grammar demons ourselves and, like most adults of working age in this country, we weren't taught grammar formally when we were at school. But we defeated our grammar demons and we wrote this book because we want to help you to defeat yours.

What's changed?

In the time we have been teaching, we have seen dramatic changes to the English curriculum. We both joined the profession in the shadow of the 'National Literacy Hour' – if you look carefully you may still find the ring binders at the back of a dusty cupboard in your school. This was an attempt to break down the English curriculum into teachable chunks. However, a lot of grammar was oversimplified to the point that teachers did not always fully understand what they were teaching. The term 'connectives' is a hangover from this era (see page 111 for the problems with connectives). It became clear that this was over-prescriptive and was often limiting more experienced teachers, and the 'National Literacy Hour' ended up being phased out in the late noughties.

With less prescription in the curriculum itself, schools and primary teachers entered a period where what they were expected to teach became synonymous with what was being assessed. 'Assessing Pupil Progress' (APP) grids were produced, outlining what 'good writing' (and sometimes, confusingly, bad writing) should look like for children working at the different levels of the old National Curriculum assessment system. This sometimes made it hard for schools to make effective judgements about what needed to be taught when in terms of grammar and punctuation. This was the background to the reforms that created the current system.

The National Curriculum changed radically in 2014 and statutory assessments changed more gradually in the years before and after the new curriculum was introduced. Both now reflect a greater emphasis on the discrete teaching of grammatical terms as a way to understand and talk about language. The way in which this has been done is far from perfect and, throughout this book, we will explore some of the issues that we still don't think the Department for Education has got quite right. However, it's where we are now, whether we like it or not, and we think that it's best to avoid the rose-tinted spectacles. We didn't live in a utopia as far as English teaching was concerned before the grammar, punctuation and spelling test was introduced and, with the

right approach, we don't have to resign ourselves to living in a dystopia now. We can do all the things we, as teachers, believe in; we can teach our children to write with flair and individuality and deliver the requirements of the curriculum. In fact, a genuinely good understanding of the foundations of grammar should actually help with all of this.

Who are we?

Other than self-confessed grammar geeks and demon defeaters, who are we and why are we writing this book?

Well, we are Zoë and Timothy Paramour. At present, we are both class teachers and English coordinators in our respective schools. We have almost 25 years' combined experience of teaching and leading in primary schools. We've both held a variety of roles, from NQT to SLT, and, between us, we have worked under 15 different headteachers, three Ofsted frameworks and several revisions of the National Curriculum – that's a lot of change!

Throughout our careers, we have been interested in educational research, developing our subject knowledge and pedagogy, and we both harboured not-so-secret dreams of being writers when we were growing up. Over the years, we gradually managed to merge our two passions and started writing about education. Timothy blogs about education at https://timparamour.com and has written a play about the British education system, *Finding Mr Paramour*. Zoë blogs at 'The Girl on the Piccadilly Line' (https://piclinegirl.com) and has also written another book for Bloomsbury Education about middle leadership in a primary school. (It's more entertaining than it sounds, we promise.)

As you have probably clocked from the surnames, we are married, or at least we are as we start the long process of writing this book. Who knows where we will be after 18 months of grappling with the intricacies of English grammar?

The grammar demons

The grammar demons are not creatures of flesh and blood; they exist in our minds. However, the beings who put them there are very real and unfortunately you'll find them in most schools. They are the grammar pedants – those people who think they know all the 'rules' and 'right answers' when it comes to grammar and who like nothing more than to correct others when they believe they are violating these 'rules'. They sound terribly clever and they can make all your irritation, fear and confusion about grammar immeasurably worse. They like to tell people when they should use *whom* as opposed to *who*. They like to tell people that you can't end a sentence with a preposition. And they really like to tell people that you can't begin a sentence with *and* or *but*. But the grammar pedants don't know what they're talking about. When a grammar pedant tells you that you *can't* do this or you *must* do that, you should always feel entitled to ask them why or why not. Their response will usually be somewhat circular. 'It's against the rules,' they might say. This is not a satisfactory response. The grammar pedant is a fraud. Ms Armstrong, Mr Yildiz and Mrs Patterson shouldn't fear him or her. To understand why, we need to talk about rules.

There are two types of rule. Firstly, there are universal rules that we observe in the world and that we are powerless to change, like the rules of mathematics or the laws of physics. Grammar certainly can't be governed by these sorts of rules – languages were invented by people and they change over the years. Secondly, there are man-made rules whereby someone in authority enforces regulations on those under their jurisdiction. National laws and school codes of conduct are examples of this type of rule. But who has authority over the English language? Who is in charge of it and who has the right to create rules about how it can be used? The answer surely is no one. So, if there are no natural, universal laws governing grammar and there is no one in charge of the English language making human rules, we are left with an inescapable but surprising conclusion: grammar doesn't have rules.

So, if grammar doesn't have rules, what does it have? If a child in your class uses *your* when most educated English speakers would use *you're*, what's your basis for correcting them? The answer is simple. To say that the spelling choice is 'wrong' is merely a shorthand for saying it's 'not what most people do'. Shared norms about how we communicate ensure that we make ourselves understood. English wasn't designed. It developed and evolved over millennia. It wasn't constructed according to any rules – it just happened. Grammar is the way that we analyse the big, chaotic, random thing we call the English language and try to explain how it works. It's sometimes clumsy and imperfect – and for almost any generalisation you can make about English grammar, there will be exceptions. Grammar is not a means for *regulating* how people *should* speak and write. It is a way of *describing* how people *do*, in fact, speak and write. For that reason, you will notice throughout this book that we avoid the word *rule* and we avoid prescriptive verbs such as *should, must* or *can't* when describing the conventions of grammar. Doctors prescribe medication to patients who need it and they need to be qualified to do so. Grammar pedants are the self-appointed doctors of the English language but they have no qualifications. Beware their snake oil prescriptions.

Conventions: acceptable and unacceptable grammar

The closest we will come to being prescriptive in this book is when we talk about acceptable and unacceptable constructions. Consider these two sentences:

I like football.
~~**Like I football.**~~

The first of these is grammatically acceptable and the second is not. Throughout the book, we will strike through all examples of unacceptable constructions to avoid confusion. What makes it unacceptable? We know by now that it isn't breaking a rule. So what's unacceptable about it? The issue is one of convention. When saying or writing this sort of sentence, English speakers tend to put the subject (I) before the verb (like). It's just what they do. The first one is the acceptable version simply because we all accept that it is. I know it and you know it – it's acceptable because we accept it! Almost anyone would think the second one looked odd and almost anyone would find it harder to understand. It's not violating any regulations and it's not

breaking the laws of physics but it simply doesn't conform to our agreed sense of how English works. It just *looks wrong*.

The example above is an obvious one but there are greyer areas. Consider these two examples:

Clive has fewer sweets than Alex.
~~**Clive has less sweets than Alex.**~~

Is it true that the second of these sentences *looks wrong* to all English speakers? No. However, it does *look wrong* to enough people that it's probably worth avoiding. If you're not sure about the distinction between *less* and *fewer*, you might want to read the section on countable and uncountable nouns in Chapter 2, page 26. Exactly where the line is between acceptable and unacceptable grammar is not always clear. In this book, for example, we take the view that using *less* in place of *fewer* is generally unacceptable but using *who* in place of *whom* is generally acceptable. Like so much in grammar, that's an opinion, not a fact. You will read other books by other authors who draw their lines between the acceptable and the unacceptable in different places. It's not an exact science.

Wherever we come across these grey areas, we will flag them up and give you the tools to make informed judgements in your own writing and your own teaching. What we hope we'll do in the process is reassure you that the grammar pedants are deceiving you – there aren't massive lists of rules out there about grammar that you don't know. There are just conventions and most of them are completely familiar to you. In many of the cases where you think you 'don't know the rules' (e.g. *when do I use single inverted commas and when do I use double inverted commas?*), it's because there are a whole range of acceptable options and it's entirely down to your own preference.

The grammar curriculum

Before we get too misty-eyed about the boundless freedom to be enjoyed by taking a descriptive approach to grammar, we need a reality check. We've talked a lot about irritating grammar pedants making up rules and then trying to enforce them on other people. The bad news is that, at the time of writing, quite a few of them still work at the Department for Education and they're still producing a national test that all children in maintained schools in England have to sit at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. These tests are all about using 'correct' grammar, which sits awkwardly with what we've already told you. This is nothing to worry about and, as we make our way through the chapters of this book, we'll make sure that you understand everything you need to teach your pupils to ensure that they're ready.

One of the many valid criticisms one hears levelled at the current approach to grammar in the primary curriculum is that it feels somewhat divorced from the business of actually learning to write. We've provided examples of teaching ideas and resources you can use in each of the chapters but we also hope to equip you with the knowledge and confidence you'll need to teach grammar within the rest of the English curriculum – not as a separate inconvenience.

On page 197, we've included an edited and abridged version of the glossary of grammar terms from the primary National Curriculum with page references to where they are discussed

in this book. If you need to find out about a particular topic, this will enable you to reach the information you need quickly and easily. We've also included a 'frequently asked questions' section on page 203. This will tell you where to find the solutions to some of the most common puzzles that primary school teachers find themselves wrestling with when trying to teach grammar.

We weren't taught much grammar at school in any formal sense and nor, in all likelihood, were you. This is one of the reasons why the grammar, punctuation and spelling aspect of the National Curriculum causes stress for teachers of primary English up and down the country. We have both been in the position of having to get our heads around grammatical concepts (subjunctive mood, anyone?) in order to teach them, and understand the anxiety that can cause. One aim of this book is to alleviate that anxiety. We wanted to write a book that would provide clear and simple explanations of the concepts and jargon you need to know, alongside practical ideas for teaching it to your pupils. In every chapter, you will find a simple, accessible breakdown of key ideas in English grammar, alongside a selection of activities and lesson ideas you can bring straight into your classroom to make grammar interesting and meaningful for young learners.

However, we want this book to do more than that. The truth is that, while there is so much about the current educational climate that concerns us, we do believe in teaching grammar and in giving it more attention than perhaps schools tended to in the past. If we ruled the world then one of the changes we would make (apart from making cheese a national dish) is that grammar teaching wouldn't be centred around a dull and somewhat arbitrary Year 6 test. It would involve looking creatively at the mechanics of how our language works, exploring patterns and giving children the linguistic tools to express themselves with flair and conviction. It's always easy to say of any educational experience that we never had ourselves, 'I never did that and it never did me any harm', which is pretty much where we started on this journey. Being honest with ourselves over the last few years, we've started to realise that this is a cop-out: an easy excuse to turn our backs on something that will require us to change our habits and challenge our own thinking. Instead, we have started to alter our habits and question our preconceptions about grammar.

Understanding how language is used and examining how we generate meaning when we speak and write is never a waste of time. It goes to the heart of human interaction and it tells the story of how our language and culture evolved. Learning about grammar is not a matter of memorising 'rules'. While there are of course certain conventions that we firmly encourage you to observe, our primary focus will be on describing how people use English grammar to convey meaning and influence their audience, be it a reader or a listener.

This book is for Ms Armstrong, Mr Yildiz, Mrs Patterson and everyone else who needs a bit of extra help with primary grammar. This is the book we wish we'd been given when we first had to teach the new grammar curriculum. We hope that it will take away your fear of grammar and give you the confidence to teach it well. We hope that it will be informative and give you the answers to all the specific questions you have. Perhaps most importantly, we hope that it will make you feel positive about grammar and see the value in teaching children about it.

How to use this book

This book is divided into 18 chapters arranged in three parts. We'd be delighted if you felt inclined to read the whole thing from cover to cover, but you're probably more likely to focus on particular topics that you're slightly confused about or struggling to teach. If you've opened up this book looking for the answer to a specific grammar question, we suggest you take a look at the 'frequently asked questions' on page 203. A lot of the grammar confusion that causes teachers unspoken embarrassment is more common than they think.

What will I find in each part?

Part One of the book is called **Making sense**. It introduces the basic building blocks of sentence construction and most of the word classes or parts of speech. It explores the ideas of subject and object and it tackles common misconceptions about apostrophes and plurals. There may be a temptation to skip or brush over the details in this section, especially if you are teaching older children. However, the contents of Part One are the fundamental building blocks of English grammar; without a secure understanding of all these concepts, children may struggle to grasp the more abstract ideas introduced later on.

Part Two is called **Extending sentences**. As you'd imagine from the title, it deals with the wide variety of ways in which children can move beyond simple and obvious sentence structures in their writing, employing a wider range of techniques to get their ideas across with precision. It explores the different types of clause and phrase, offering clarity on the differences between them, which is often lacking in online reference resources. It also addresses the questions you've always been too afraid to ask about commas and semi-colons, speech punctuation, quotation marks and parenthesis.

Part Three is called **Writing with flair** and this is really about moving from proficiency to mastery. It deals with the functions of sentences and the way in which subtle changes in word order can alter the effect on the reader. It explores the different grammatical 'moods' and the challenges of incorporating these into one's writing effectively. It concludes with Chapter 18: Breaking the 'rules'. Here we explore the ways in which one can defy the usual conventions of grammar to enhance the effect of one's writing. We will tackle puns, poetry, one-word sentences and much more.

At the end of the book, you will find seven **appendices** providing a bit of extra background to some of the conventions we have discussed. They are designed to help you, as teacher, to understand the grammar curriculum in greater depth. The content of these sections goes beyond what children need to understand by the end of Year 6, but you may find they will

provide you with an additional level of knowledge that enables you to answer some of those trickier questions that pupils have a habit of throwing at you in Years 5 and 6. While there is no statutory requirement to teach the content in the appendices, you may find it useful to do so in certain instances.

What will I find in each chapter?

Each chapter starts with **What you need to know**, which explains everything you need to understand in order to teach that particular topic confidently. The second half of each chapter offers a variety of **Teaching ideas** for delivering this content to your class. The best thing you can do for your class is to understand the concepts really thoroughly yourself, explain them clearly to your pupils and then give them plenty of opportunities to practise using and applying their knowledge of grammar. Nonetheless, you may find some of the teaching ideas in each chapter a useful accompaniment to this. Next to each teaching idea, you will see a logo that tells you whether it is suitable for:

KS1 Key Stage 1: Years 1 and 2.

LKS2 Lower Key Stage 2: Years 3 and 4.

UKS2 Upper Key Stage 2: Years 5 and 6.

When you see this logo , it means that accompanying resources are available to download from www.bloomsbury.com/the-grammar-book. These include modelled texts, worksheets, templates and much more.

In each chapter overview, we have highlighted the sections that are relevant to Key Stage 1 (KS1), lower Key Stage 2 (LKS2) and upper Key Stage 2 (UKS2). You'll find most of what you need to cover in Key Stage 1 in Part One (with a few exceptions such as commas). If you are a Key Stage 2 teacher, then everything you need to cover with your class is in Parts One to Three.

Most of the information you will find in this book is available elsewhere but, as teachers, we have always been frustrated with the way in which it tends to be presented and organised. We've thought carefully about the progression in this book and how and when you should introduce each concept. This is a book by teachers for teachers and we hope that it will give you the sort of clarity and honesty you need.

A final thought before you dive in

We want to equip you to discharge your statutory duties and teach your pupils what they need to know to excel in the grammar, punctuation and spelling tests in Years 2 and 6. Far more importantly, however, we want to equip you to explore the weird and wonderful grey areas of grammar – to celebrate the inconsistencies and debate the uncertainties. We want you to use an enhanced understanding of grammar to celebrate the English language with your pupils so that they can take it and make it sing.

What you need to cover

With all the changes that have happened over the last few years, it is unsurprising that the first question lots of teachers have is '*What* grammar do I need to teach my class?' Every school seems to have its own scheme of work and its own way of doing things. The content you are statutorily required to teach is outlined on the Department for Education website. However, for those who don't have the time to trawl through dozens of documents, here is the content you are required to cover in each year group, from Year 1 to Year 6. You can use the table to help you find the chapters in this book that are most relevant to your current year group. The Department for Education (2013a) is keen to stress that this table shows 'when concepts should be introduced, not necessarily when they should be completely understood'. These concepts should be revisited repeatedly to consolidate them.

Key Stage 1		
Year 1		**Chapter(s)**
Word	• Regular plural noun suffixes -s or -es (for example, *dog*, *dogs*; *wish*, *wishes*) and the effects of these suffixes on the meaning of the noun. • Suffixes that can be added to verbs where no change is needed in the spelling of root words (e.g. *helping*, *helped*, *helper*).	1 and 4
Sentence	• How words can combine to make sentences. • Joining words and clauses using *and*.	5 and 11
Text	• Sequencing sentences to form short narratives.	17
Punctuation	• Introduction to capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate sentences. • Capital letters for names and for the personal pronoun *I*.	8 and 2
Year 2		
Word	• Formation of nouns using suffixes such as -ness, -er and by compounding (for example, *whiteboard*, *superman*). • Formation of adjectives using suffixes such as -ful, -less. • Use of the suffixes -er, -est in adjectives and the use of -ly to turn adjectives into adverbs.	1 and 6

Sentence	• Subordinating conjunctions (*when*, *if*, *that*, *because*). • Coordinating conjunctions (*or*, *and*, *but*). • Expanded noun phrases for description and specification (for example, *the blue butterfly*, *plain flour*, *the man in the moon*). • Identifying the purpose of sentences as statements, questions, exclamations or commands.	11, 12 and 16
Text	• Correct choice and consistent use of present tense and past tense throughout writing. • Use of the progressive form of verbs in the present tense and past tense to mark actions in progress (for example, *she is drumming*, *he was shouting*).	4
Punctuation	• Use of capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate sentences. • Commas to separate items in a list. • Apostrophes to mark where letters are missing in spelling and to mark singular possession in nouns (for example, *the girl's name*).	8, 13 and 7

Key Stage 2		
Year 3		**Chapter(s)**
Word	• Formation of nouns using a range of prefixes (for example, *super-*, *anti-*, *auto-*). • Use of the forms *a* or *an* according to whether the next word begins with a consonant or a vowel (for example, *a rock*, *an open box*).	1 and 3
Sentence	• Expressing time, place and cause using conjunctions (for example, *when*, *before*, *after*, *while*, *so*, *because*), adverbs (for example, *then*, *next*, *soon*, *therefore*), or prepositions (for example, *before*, *after*, *during*, *in*, *because of*).	11 and 6
Text	• Introduction to paragraphs as a way to group related material. • Use of the present perfect form of verbs instead of the simple past (for example, *He has gone out to play* contrasted with *He went out to play*).	17 and 4
Punctuation	• Introduction to inverted commas to punctuate direct speech.	15
Year 4		
Word	• The grammatical difference between plural and possessive -s.	7
Sentence	• Noun phrases expanded by the addition of modifying adjectives, nouns and prepositional phrases (e.g. *the teacher* expanded to *the strict maths teacher with curly hair*). • Fronted adverbials (e.g. *later that day*, *we went to the cinema*).	12 and 6
Text	• Use of paragraphs to organise ideas around a theme. • Appropriate choice of pronoun or noun within and across sentences to aid cohesion and avoid repetition.	17

Punctuation	• Use of inverted commas and other punctuation to indicate direct speech (for example, a comma after the reporting clause; end punctuation within inverted commas: *The conductor shouted, 'Sit down!'*). • Apostrophes to mark plural possession (for example, *the girl's name*, *the girls' names*). • Use of commas after fronted adverbials (e.g. *after they had finished eating, they cleared the table*).	15, 7 and 13
Year 5		
Word	• Converting nouns or adjectives into verbs using suffixes (for example, -ate, -ise, -ify). • Verb prefixes (for example, dis-, de-, mis-, over- and re-).	18 and 1
Sentence	• Relative clauses beginning with *who*, *which*, *where*, *when*, *whose*, *that*, or an omitted relative pronoun. • Indicating degrees of possibility using adverbs (for example, *perhaps*, *surely*) or modal verbs (for example, *might*, *should*, *will*, *must*).	10, 6 and 4
Text	• Devices to build cohesion within a paragraph (for example, *then*, *after that*, *this*, *firstly*). • Linking ideas across paragraphs using adverbials of time (for example, *later*), place (for example, *nearby*) and number (for example, *secondly*) or tense choices (for example, *he had seen her before*).	17
Punctuation	• Brackets, dashes or commas to indicate parenthesis. • Use of commas to clarify meaning or avoid ambiguity.	14 and 13
Year 6		
Word	• The difference between vocabulary typical of informal speech and vocabulary appropriate for formal speech and writing (for example, *find out – discover*; *ask for – request*; *go in – enter*).	17
Sentence	• Use of the passive to affect the presentation of information in a sentence (for example, *Tom broke the window in the greenhouse* versus *The window in the greenhouse was broken by Tom)*. • The difference between structures typical of informal speech and structures appropriate for formal speech and writing (for example, the use of question tags: *He's your friend, isn't he?*). • The use of subjunctive forms such as *If I were* or *Were they to come* in some very formal writing and speech.	16 and 17
Text	• Linking ideas across paragraphs using a wider range of cohesive devices: repetition of a word or phrase, grammatical connections (for example, the use of adverbials such as *on the other hand*, *in contrast*, or *as a consequence*), and ellipsis. • Layout devices to structure a text (for example, headings, sub-headings and bullet points).	17

Punctuation	• Use of the semi-colon, colon and dash to mark the boundary between independent clauses (for example, *It's raining*; *I'm fed up*). • Use of the colon to introduce a list and use of semi-colons within lists. • Punctuation of bullet points to list information. • How hyphens can be used to avoid ambiguity (for example, *man eating shark* versus *man-eating shark*, or *recover* versus *re-cover*).	14, 17 and 1

Adapted from Department for Education (2013a).

Chapter 1
Writing words

Chapter overview

Let's start at the very beginning. In this chapter we will be looking at how we put sounds together to create meaning. Or, in technical terms:

• How phonemes, graphemes, digraphs and trigraphs are combined to make words.	KS1	Pages 16–17
• How compound words can be divided into their root words, prefixes and suffixes.	KS1 LKS2	Pages 17–18
• When and how to use hyphens.	LKS2 UKS2	Pages 18–19
• Ideas and resources to support teaching of these concepts.	KS1 LKS2 UKS2	Pages 19–22

Most of this book is about how whole words are arranged to create and modify meaning. However, before we dive into all that, it's worth taking some time to look at words themselves, specifically how they're made and how they can change in different circumstances. This is not primarily a book about spelling, but spelling and grammar cannot be disconnected entirely. So, let's start at the very beginning – with the very building blocks of our language.

What you need to know

Your relationship with grammar began before your earliest memories were formed. From the moment we discover that we can combine sounds to modify their effects on another person, we are dealing with grammar. There is probably something we could call grammar in a baby's

cries. English grammar begins when we first start to make sounds within the context of the English language. So, we need to start our journey at the same place that English teaching in primary schools often begins: with phonics. Some of the information in this section will be second nature to Early Years specialists but, if you've spent most of your career in Key Stage 2, it's important to make yourself aware of these basic ideas.

Letters and sounds: phonemes, graphemes, digraphs and trigraphs

As most children in Early Years can tell you, there are 26 letters in the English alphabet: five vowels and 21 consonants. The vowels (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o* and *u*) correspond roughly to the sounds, also known as phonemes, that we can make by allowing air to flow freely out of our throats and mouths. The consonant sounds made by all the other letters of the alphabet require us to use our teeth, tongue, lips or palate to alter the sound of air escaping from our throats and mouths. That said, the letter *y* corresponds to vowel sounds in some words, such as *tiny* or *rhythm*. While there are usually one or more specific sounds that we associate with each letter, we can also generate completely different phonemes using combinations of different letter sounds. The written representation of a phoneme, whether it's composed of one letter or a combination of letters, is known as a grapheme.

When these graphemes are formed of two letters, we call them digraphs, for example the grapheme made by the letters *ph* in *phone* or by the letters *ea* in *read*. Sometimes, a digraph is formed of two vowels split by a consonant. For example, by adding the letter *e* to the word *hat*, it becomes *hate*, changing the sound of the *a*. When we were at school, this was taught as 'magic e'. Partly to sound more intellectual, and partly to sound less like they've misspent their summers in the nightclubs of the Balearic Islands, teachers nowadays are encouraged to use the more technical name: a split digraph. Some graphemes are formed of three letters, such as the letters *tch* in *match* or the letters *igh* in *high*, and these are known as trigraphs.

The representation of specific sounds by specific letters or groups of letters is not consistent in English. In fact, the most common sound in the English spoken language is the unstressed vowel sound known as a schwa (which is quite fun to say – SCHWA!). A schwa can be found represented on the page by any of the five vowels:

Cell<u>a</u>r

Broth<u>e</u>r

Nast<u>i</u>ly

Lond<u>o</u>n

Sat<u>u</u>rday

When the words above are read aloud, each of the underlined vowels sounds exactly the same. This is one reason why learning to spell in English is so tricky and it also explains why our language contains so many homophones: words with two different spellings (and meanings) with exactly the same pronunciation, such as *lesson* and *lessen* or *stationary* and *stationery*.

Combining letters and sounds according to the capricious conventions of the English language gives us words. Words have differing numbers of syllables – units of speech usually centred around an individual vowel sound:

Dog	*Dog*	one syllable
Chaos	*Cha* | *os*	two syllables
Damaging	*Dam* | *ag* | *ing*	three syllables
Apostrophe	*Ap* | *os* | *tro* | *phe*	four syllables

Morphemes: root words, prefixes and suffixes, and compound words

So far, we've established how letters can be used to create sounds but we still haven't got to the point where these sounds start to have meaning. At what point does that change? Like the moment in our evolutionary history when amino acids formed into proteins and life was breathed into the first ever organisms, there is a magical point where graphemes and phonemes, and the words and syllables they generate, become more than mere squiggles and grunts. There is a point when they start to *mean* something – that is where the story of English grammar begins and that is where we start our own journey into the art of making sense.

The very smallest unit of meaning in our language is a morpheme, and no, sadly, this isn't a narcotic for calming the nerves of primary school teachers. Consider this word:

Cat

Those three squiggles refer to something else. When you see them, you cannot help but imagine a four-legged mammal with pointy ears and whiskers. That reference requires the presence of these three letters, nothing more and nothing less. This word, therefore, is a morpheme: a single unit of meaning with a single reference. Now consider this word:

Unhelpful

This word is rather more complicated and its meaning is formed from three parts, or morphemes: a prefix, a root word and a suffix:

Un | help | ful

Just as the roots of a tree form the basis for its trunk, the root of a word forms the basis for its meaning. A prefix is a separate morpheme that comes *before* the root word and a suffix is a separate morpheme that comes *after* the root word. In this case, the root word is *help-*, which refers to the concept of offering assistance to someone else. This is followed by the

suffix *-ful*, one of many suffixes in English that turn a noun into an adjective (more on this in Chapter 18: Breaking the 'rules', page 171), so that the word (*helpful*) now refers to the quality of being keen to offer assistance to someone else. The root word is also preceded by the prefix **un-**, one of several prefixes that *negates*, or reverses, the meaning of the word following it. Other prefixes that do this include *de-*, *non-*, *in-*, *im-*, *ex-*, *anti-*, *dis-*, *mis-* and *a-*. After the negating prefix has been added, the word now refers to the quality of being unwilling to offer assistance to someone else.

Prefixes and suffixes can have all sorts of meanings. As well as providing negations, for example, some prefixes indicate how many of something there are or how widespread it is (*mono-*, *multi-*, *tri-*, *uni-*, *pan-*), some indicate when or where something happens or takes place (*pre-*, *post-*, *inter-*, *extra-*, *out-*) and some deal with size or scale (*mini-*, *micro-*, *mega-*, *super-*, *hyper-*). As well as determining the word class of a root word (whether it is a noun, verb, adjective, etc. – see later chapters for more on all of these), suffixes can determine verb tense (*-en*, *-ed*, *-ing*) or indicate plurals (*-s*, *-es*, *-es*, *-ves*).

Sometimes, two root words can be combined to make a compound word. Compounding is a posh grammatical term for putting two things together – usually two things of equal importance. A compound word is a single word composed of two or more root words, for example:

Shopkeeper

Backdate

Butterfly

Makeover

Bittersweet

Hyphens

Sometimes, two words can be joined by a hyphen (-) so that they stand as a single word.

People get themselves worked up over hyphens, worrying about specific rules that don't exist. The vast majority of these rules are entirely optional and, interestingly, the use of hyphens is declining across the English-speaking world. Worrying about imaginary rules is a common theme of this book and, as we explore the conventions of grammar, you may find that there are several instances where you've been worrying needlessly. So let's look at some cases where you would usually use hyphens and some where it really doesn't matter.

One instance where hyphens really do make your meaning clearer are what we call compound modifiers: two words used to describe something, often adjectives or adverbs or the participle form of a verb. (The later chapters in this section explain more about these word classes.)

Is he a self-made man or is he from a long-established family?

Without the hyphen, this sentence would be a lot more confusing, so, in instances like this, we probably want the hyphen to stay. Often, the question you should ask yourself when making decisions about grammar is not 'Am I obeying the rules?' but 'Does this make sense?' In the

sentence above, for example, the hyphen between *long* and *established* makes it absolutely clear that the writer is enquiring as to whether *the family is long-established*, as opposed to whether the *established family is long*. 'Good grammar' is often that which eliminates confusion or ambiguity. This often applies to compound nouns too:

I bought a Jack-in-the-box for my three-year-old.

In the sentence above, two individual nouns have each been made out of several separate words. The hyphen makes it much easier to read, immediately signalling to the reader that, in each case, the three hyphenated words are intended to be understood as a single entity.

There are several other instances in which you might see hyphens being used. They are often used after prefixes that end with the same letter as the root word they precede, e.g. *co-ordinate* or *re-energise*, to avoid potential confusion at the sight of a double vowel. These hyphens are completely optional. They're also used when a prefix or suffix is being added to a root word to create a phrase that may be new or unfamiliar to the reader, e.g. *ex-army* or *post-9/11*. Hyphens can also separate two parts of a word when you run out of space at the end of a line. Some teachers discourage this, preferring that their pupils check that they have enough space for the word before they put pen to paper but, again, this is entirely up to you.

It's impossible to list all the stylistic uses of hyphens that you might come across. You'll often see them used in direct speech between every letter of a word to indicate that a character is spelling it out, or between the individual syllables of the word to indicate that the pronunciation is unfamiliar to the character. The long and the short of it is that hyphens are used to separate parts of a word and you use them when it will aid your reader to do so.

Hyphens are not to be confused with *en dashes* (see Chapter 14, page 138), even though they look almost identical. While a hyphen separates parts of a single word or compound word, dashes separate entire phrases or clauses within a sentence.

Teaching ideas

The following ideas are suitable for teaching root words, prefixes and suffixes, compound words and hyphens to Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils.

The suffixes -ful and -less

KS1

When introducing your pupils to suffixes, start by explaining what the suffix means, for example:

- ful means 'full of'
- less means 'without'.

Your pupils can practise adding these suffixes and using the new words in a sentence by completing the following table. There is a worksheet to support this activity online.



+ful	Root word	+less
Careful	Care	*Careless*
You have to be careful when crossing the road.		*He was careless and knocked over the vase.*
	Hope	
	Fear	
	Doubt	
	Help	
	Power	
	Joy	

KS1 LKS2 UKS2

Compound word match-up

Split these 15 compound words into the root words and write them onto 30 sticky labels. For example, 'breakfast' would be written on two labels: 'break' and 'fast'.

Breakfast

Goalkeeper

Paintbrush

Butterfly

Goldfish

Sandpaper

Lipstick

Sunflower

Cupcake

Caretaker

Bookshelf

Raincoat

Football

Moonlight

Fishmonger

Stick one label on each pupil in your class and challenge them to find their partner to make a compound word. Once all the pupils have found their partner, get them to swap labels and repeat the activity.

Root word challenge

LKS2 UKS2

This is an activity that you can introduce once your class have a secure understanding of what a root word is and can use a range of prefixes and suffixes accurately. To start with, give your pupils a root word, e.g.:

Act

Challenge your pupils to add prefixes and suffixes to create as many words as they can with the root word, e.g.:

Action

Acting

Actor

React

Acted

Activate

Active

Actively

Deactivate

Crazy compound words

LKS2 UKS2

This is a sequence of activities to consolidate children's understanding of compound words. The first task requires pupils to match pictures that create compound words, for example 'book' and 'shelf' make 'bookshelf'. The second task is about identifying compound words in a sentence and matching words together to create compound words. The resource is available at: http://resources.hwb.wales.gov.uk/VTC/crazy_comp_words/eng/Introduction/default.htm.

Hyphen hunt

UKS2

Pupils use the following list of words to generate compound adjectives and write them out with the hyphen. There are multiple solutions to this activity and a worksheet is provided in the online resources to help you facilitate it.



Fire	Lit	Minded	Liked	Breathing
Ill	Eyed	Deep	Pocketed	Open
Blooded	Baked	Disposed	Hearted	Willed
Fitting	Warm	Well	Cold	Half
Well	Strong	Kindly	Green	