

ANDREW JENNINGS

SENTENCE NINJA





BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain, 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This edition published in Great Britain, 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Andrew Jennings, 2025

Andrew Jennings has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes

All rights reserved. This book may be photocopied, for use in the educational establishment for which it was purchased, but may not be reproduced in any other form or by any other means – graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage or retrieval systems – without prior permission in writing of the publishers

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

ISBN: PB: 978-1-8019-9566-5; ePDF: 978-1-8019-9567-2

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

Text design by Marcus Duck

Printed and bound in India by Manipal Technologies Limited.



To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters



This book is dedicated to all the fabulous pupils I have taught throughout my career. Thank you for always inspiring me to think more deeply about how best to help you become confident and skilled writers.

OTHER NINJA RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS



COMPREHENSION NINJA NON-FICTION

A set of six books for ages 5–11 that provide carefully curated resources to teach the key reading comprehension skills. With strong links to the National Curriculum, each book presents 24 high-quality non-fiction texts and photocopiable activities that help embed reading skills and improve comprehension, using strategies and question types such as true or false, labelling, matching, highlighting, filling in the gap, sequencing and multiple choice.



COMPREHENSION NINJA FICTION AND POETRY

Each book in this six-book set contains 24 immersive fiction extracts and poetry texts by acclaimed writers including Roald Dahl, Michael Morpurgo, Patrice Lawrence, Katherine Rundell, David Almond, Zanib Mian, Joseph Coelho and Polly Ho-Yen. Every text is accompanied by photocopiable comprehension activities to boost reading retrieval skills in Key Stages 1 and 2.

NINJA MATHS RESOURCES



TIMES TABLES NINJA

SARAH FARRELL WITH ANDREW JENNINGS

The activities in these photocopiable books give Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils all the tools they need to gain fluency in multiplication and division. The KS1 book focuses on the 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10 times tables, while the KS2 book covers the 2 to 12 times tables in detail, ready for the Year 4 multiplication tables check.



ARITHMETIC NINJA

ANDREW JENNINGS WITH SARAH FARRELL AND PAUL TUCKER

The Arithmetic Ninja series is the perfect resource for any primary classroom. Ideal for daily maths practice and quick lesson starters, each photocopiable book includes 10 questions per day and 39 bonus weekly ninja challenges – 702 question cards in total.

FOR CHILDREN AT HOME AND IN THE CLASSROOM



WRITE LIKE A NINJA

A pocket-sized book packed full of all the grammar, vocabulary and sentence structures that children need in order to improve and develop their writing skills. Fully aligned to the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum, this book is designed to be used independently by pupils.



SPELL LIKE A NINJA

This book provides essential tips, lists and advice to support the teaching and learning of spelling in the classroom or at home. Including every statutory spelling pattern in the National Curriculum, this all-in-one quick reference tool enables pupils to learn at their own pace.

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND CHILDREN ONLINE

Head to www.vocabularyninja.co.uk and follow @VocabularyNinja on X (formerly Twitter) for more teaching and learning resources to support the teaching of vocabulary, reading, writing and the wider primary curriculum.

CONTENTS

PART 1 – THE WAY OF THE SENTENCE NINJA

Introduction 9
Sentence-level progression 14
Understanding the Sentence Ninja progression 21

PART 2 – GRAND MASTER SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Essential subject knowledge 26
Photocopiable activities – subject and verb 28

PART 3 – SENTENCE NINJA TOOLKIT: SENTENCE SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Essential subject knowledge 36
Compound sentences 38
Coordinating conjunctions – meanings and function 40
Complex sentences 45
Subordinating conjunctions – meanings and function 48
Relative clauses 55

PART 4 – ESSENTIAL SENTENCE NINJA TOOLKIT: PRACTICE

Simple sentences (subject + verb) 60
Compound sentences (coordinating conjunction) 64
Complex sentences (subordinating conjunction) 76
Relative clauses (relative pronoun) 88
Relative embedded clauses 97
PACE milestones 106
Create and connect 126
Make the reader feel 129
Build and vary 131
Answers 138





PART 1

THE WAY OF THE SENTENCE NINJA

Sentence Ninja © Andrew Jennings, 2025

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

Hello and welcome to *Sentence Ninja*! It's fabulous to have you with us on this journey of sentence-level awakening and enlightenment. *Sentence Ninja* is your complete toolkit to improving pupils' ability to create well-structured sentences independently. Simple! Yup, and that's what this book aims to do … keep it simple, cut through the policies and progressions and provide clarity on how to improve sentences in your classrooms and schools.

Sentence Ninja aims to provide a clear guide to sentence-level improvement across the whole school. This includes subject knowledge, sentence progressions, teachable sentence toolkits and outstanding photocopiable resources to enable regular practice in school.

School Focus: Start to implement a consistent and universally agreed progression of sentence types across the school.

Teacher Focus: Equip teachers with the subject knowledge and resources to prepare, teach, track and assess sentence-level competence of their pupils.

Pupil Focus: Build sentence-level confidence as well as a secure toolkit of sentence types that pupils can apply easily within their any writing.

Well you're here, so I'm guessing there's a problem. So let's talk about sentences and teaching. But first, let's get REAL! Real about everything that surrounds the teaching of any aspect of the curriculum well. We need to deal in the realities and realisms of the situation. It helps that I'm speaking from over a decade of my own experience as a teacher and leader in many different KS1, KS2 and even KS3 settings, trying to combat what feels like a plague of sentence-level insecurity. But how can it be that pupils arriving in KS3 aged 11 and 12, having been in hour-long literacy lessons on pretty much a daily basis for the past six or seven years, can't write a few correctly structured sentences? Now, don't get me wrong, this isn't all pupils, absolutely not! But, despite the best efforts of so many hard-working and dedicated teachers, huge numbers of pupils still can't develop basic sentence- level structures independently.

Sentences are arguably one of the single most important 'things' our children will be taught in school, but sentences are quite often a subject of great misunderstanding and genuine lack of confidence for so many of our pupils.

I dare you to ask the next pupil you encounter in school, 'What is a sentence?'. For most pupils, and potentially many teachers (myself once included here), they might just be wishing for the ground to open and swallow them whole. OK, that's all a little dramatic, but I'd pretty much guarantee that you would get answers that were incredibly unsure or that were wildly inconsistent.

Either way, the phrases 'incredibly unsure' and 'wildly inconsistent' are not really what we want to be associating with high-quality teaching and learning. We would really like to see the opposite of those two phrases to be true. Every child and adult in our schools should easily and confidently be able to respond to this question, and we'll uncover how simple the answer is soon enough.

So, why are sentences so misunderstood? There are potentially many factors that contribute to the downfall of sentences in our schools.

Training: Teacher training, from memory, is an intense process that has to cover so much ground in what is such a short space of time. This can mean that, even though subject knowledge is included in the training, it can often take a back seat.

Time: We need time to teach sentences, time to practise, time to dig a little deeper and understand sentences more. Although time in teaching is so often against us, hopefully this book will provide solutions to this problem.

CPD/whole-school vision: If sentences really are to be taught well, they need to be prioritised from the top down, where the curriculum allows for sentence-level teaching and practice within an English or literacy lesson.

Assumption: Is it the assumption that sentence-level teaching is prioritised or taught well, when this isn't necessarily the case? Ultimately, we may have pupils higher up the school who aren't capable of confidently constructing varied sentences.

Lack of dedicated discrete teaching: The demands of the curriculum, or to generate writing outcomes, can often be at the detriment of focusing on what really matters … the sentence.

Practice: Practice is often misinterpreted as copying and as a result is not encouraged. We need to look at how practice is perceived and, more importantly, valued if we are to see the positive changes we desire.

Now this isn't all about painting a negative picture about sentences and teaching. There's a huge amount of outstanding teaching of sentences and writing to be seen. But there are also many teachers who find themselves, due to the reasons above, in a position where sentence-level standards in their classrooms, year on year, just aren't improving – despite everyone's effort.

First we need a reality check! We need to look at the reality of writing in our school and understand what is *going to* make a real difference versus what we *think will* make a difference.

REALITY CHECK

This is a great point to take a reality check and ask some questions about writing in your classroom or school. You may be a class teacher, subject leader, member of the SLT, or even have responsibility for all of these roles. So it's important to consider your role and the impact you can have. Try not to kid yourself too; be honest.

- Would everyone in your school (pupils and staff) be able to consistently explain what a sentence is?
- Do you and/or your staff regularly and explicitly teach different types of sentences?
- Do you and/or your staff dedicate time to practising how to write specific sentence types?
- Do you and/or your staff have a strong grammatical understanding of different sentences?
- Does your school have a consistent approach and terminology for teaching sentences?

If the answers to these questions are tending to edge towards 'no', then we need to start to understand and visualise the reality of the problem and how we can go about solving it.

ARE OUR PUPILS 'MATCH READY'?

Here's an analogy to help us visualise where we need to be with sentences, both in terms of our approach and the outcomes we want to achieve. There are so many real-life examples of how practice is the key ingredient to success in nearly every aspect of learning and life, and yet in education this often goes out of the window.

Let's use football as a common ground. Even at a grassroots level of any sport, a coach will emphasise to children the importance of practising regularly. Yes, playing matches is important, but during a match you might only touch the ball seven or eight times, so we are unlikely to improve technically by playing a match (the outcome), or just by doing more matches (writing outcomes). The only way to really improve technically is to practise, under the instruction of a coach (the teacher who has experience) when needed for specific instruction, and then solo practise over and over again until we develop an independent level of competence or skill. Then we can apply it in the match (or writing outcome). Makes sense, doesn't it? And yet, in so many settings, I've seen just more and more matches being played.

Even the most famous and successful sports people – for example, Cristiano Ronaldo, Kobe Bryant or Dame Kelly Holmes – cite their dedication to practice as being key to their success, despite being naturally gifted at their chosen sport. Practice and training are the things that make them great. And let's remember, not all of our pupils are naturally gifted at writing, so practice for them is even more crucial. Imagine asking a child who has never really kicked a football before to go and play for the school team in a competitive game. It wouldn't be a nice experience for the child. If we then ask that child to play more matches, they will become acclimatised to the traumatic environment we keep putting them in, but they won't be successful and they won't improve technically. We have to realise the reality of asking children to just keep writing more often.

If practice is the key ingredient to success in the development of nearly every skill, why do we not ask children to practise how to write sentences? And why don't we encourage them to practise writing sentences to a point where they are awesome at crafting a wide range of different sentences? Well fortunately, that's what this book is all about. *Sentence Ninja* is going to keep it super simple and take you from the basics of what a sentence is, to providing an effective teachable toolkit that can be applied across your whole school.

ARE OUR WRITERS EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS? DO WE HAVE A STRATEGY?

Essentially, a writing outcome is a problem to be solved; a challenge, an opportunity to express ourself as a person. We need to come up with a solution.

In maths, we teach a range of strategies to equip pupils to be able to successfully answer a given problem. Adding fractions, long division or calculating area all require an element of subject knowledge that is then applied via a strategy or a skill, which has been practised regularly to build confidence. However,

Sentence Ninja © Andrew Jennings, 2025

testing pupils more frequently doesn't make them any more successful at tests. Linking back to writing, this continues to ring true as the writing outcome is essentially a test of our ability to write.

The reality of writing, once again, is overcomplicated. After children leave school, 99.9 per cent of them will never need to write fairy tales, recounts of trips, newspaper reports or diary entries. More importantly, our primary pupils need to be able to articulate their thoughts and ideas clearly and with variation, ready for GCSE and life beyond school. We can build those foundations right now. We need to simplify our vision of what is valuable: the ability to create grammatically sound sentences independently, with some level of variation.

When pupils are equipped with multiple strategies and knowledge, they can apply these skills and strategies independently and problem-solve, ultimately becoming more successful with the test environment. As teachers, we must actively think about what this 'sentence-level toolkit' looks like for writing and how it is going to equip all our pupils inclusively and effectively for the challenges of writing in our settings.

Being able to write clear, varied, and well-structured sentences is an essential skill that all children need to be able to do, and actually it's not that difficult. We just need to understand and prioritise the basics, have a clear progression and practise regularly, and be supported by explicit instruction.

PRACTICE – OUR HIDDEN SECRET WEAPON

As teachers, it's inbuilt in us to naturally assess and look for solutions to improve and develop our pupils, moving them on in their educational journey. So, it's especially infuriating when, despite our best efforts and all the high-quality teaching that our pupils receive, the basic skill of creating coherent sentences just seems to stagnate.

Well, here's the solution. **We need to learn to love the basics**. **To live and breathe them**. It can't always be about the superlatives, forced semicolon use and pathetic fallacy, which I have seen creep into so many lessons over the years. And yes, some children who are secure are possibly ready for this, but so many more aren't – not because they won't understand it or won't be able to do it, but because they can't do the basics. **We have to ensure that – wait, it's much more than that; it's our moral responsibility and pledge – our pupils have mastered the basics**. And let's spell it out: we have to ensure that they can write simple, compound and complex sentences without really having to think too much about it, because it's embedded. It's simple, and as teachers we need to take responsibility for this as a school, with everyone prioritising sentence-level teaching together – day after day, year after year!

Let's be honest, expected standard writing is basically just writing with sentences that are well structured and varied. If pupils can do that, then they are pretty much there. Yes, there are a few other grammatical features that need to be thrown in, but none of those are particularly tricky to teach or include. A good piece of expected standard writing at the end of KS2 will be made up of four to six paragraphs, most likely made up of five or six sentences each. So really, we need to train our pupils in the skill of creating those sentences, which create those paragraphs. A word of warning: we're not telling pupils that a paragraph is five to six sentences long or creating some type of archaic formula – we are instead creating a simple reality of what we need to equip and teach children to do.

WE NEED TO 'KEEP IT UP!' THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF PRACTICE

Here's a non-teaching real-life example that exemplifies the **principles of practice**!

My son (a football-mad nine-year-old in Year 5) attends Cubs. It's fab – if you have children, I'd highly recommend it. Recently, Akela (the pack leader) set the task of completing two personal challenges. My son loves football, so inevitably he decided that one of the challenges would be to do 40 keepy-uppies. If you don't know what a keepy-uppie is, it is basically kicking or 'keeping' the ball in the air without it hitting the floor, mostly with your feet. My son's challenge was to keep the ball up 40 times – his best at that time was about 10.

Let's unpick the whole situation from a teaching and learning perspective.

Outcome: Child to complete 40 consecutive keepy-uppies.

Teacher (me): Highly skilled and experienced in the skill itself. Has shown the child many times how to perform the skill.

Assessment: Child is currently capable of 10 keepy-uppies, maximum. He doesn't practise in a regular or focused fashion. He wants to be able to do it, but isn't really improving, despite playing football competitively for five years, including various regular training sessions.

Expectation: **My expectation** is that my son **should** be able to perform this skill to a fairly high level already, but he can't.

In writing this, it hit me! It's really scary how similar this situation mimics how I felt about many pupils' writing abilities over the years, and **my expectations** of what they **should** have been able to do. Despite my skill level and my son's/my pupils' regular exposure, the outcome task (keepy-uppies/a piece of writing) and his/their skill level wasn't improving. It's interesting, isn't it?

This situation is extremely common, whereby a high-quality teacher/mentor with high personal knowledge and experience, teaches and models the skill to the pupil. So what's missing? The answer is **PRACTICE**! Regular, dedicated practice of the skill, with ongoing teaching throughout the journey.

When I trained to be a teacher, my wife and I bought a black Labrador puppy, Max. Sadly, he passed away recently. As a family, we made the decision to get a new yellow Labrador puppy, Merlin. In getting Merlin, I made a very conscious decision to commit to training him properly, by using expert advice (experienced teacher) and learning from past mistakes made with Max. So, as you do, I bought a book called *Easy Peasy Puppy Squeazy* by an expert dog trainer called Steve Mann. After trying to familiarise myself with the first few recommended basic and foundational skills of 'sit', 'down' and 'heel', the book moved on to discuss the importance of practice and 'taking skills on the road', which just means to practise the skills in different environments. Steve used this phrase: 'Don't trust the pup that has done a thousand exercises, trust the pup that has done one exercise a thousand times.' (Mann, 2019, p. 95)

What Steve is saying here is that within the plethora of skills and tricks I could teach Merlin – glossing over each one for a few days at a time and never really mastering any – the few that I will come to rely on are 'sit', 'down' and 'heel'. These are not only the absolute basics, but the basics that will be the foundations of keeping Merlin safe, making walks more enjoyable and making him an extremely reliable dog under any circumstance or environment. The same must be held true for our pupils' ability to construct sentences. To finish my puppy analogy, the mindset we need to adopt when it comes to teaching a puppy is exactly the mindset we need to adopt when teaching anything. Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent.

As educators and leaders, we need to shift our mindsets and behold the serious value of dedicating time to practising.

CREATIVITY STEMS FROM CONFIDENCE IN SOLID FOUNDATIONS

As pupils move through school and continue to write, 'flair' and 'creativity' are the buzz words that ring loudly in teachers' ears, while often staring into writing books where pupils have produced half a page of writing without a full stop or a single conjunction. This is a sure-fire warning signal that the writing curriculum in a school is moving on far too quickly for pupils and that the basics of sentence structure are not embedded within the school. It isn't that the child hasn't understood what they have been taught; we just haven't equipped them with what they need, or given them the time to practise effectively to make these skills permanent.

For children to be able to demonstrate flair and creativity, we must first create young writers who have confidence in how to structure sentences one after another. Once they start to have this emerging confidence, children can show the flair that we really want to see, which is only enhanced further as it sits within well-structured and varied sentences.

SERIOUS ABOUT SENTENCES, PASSIONATE ABOUT PRACTICE

If a writing curriculum that is focused on writing outcomes just continues to move on, then there is no real way for pupils to genuinely catch up when it comes to their sentence-level ability. We provide checklists and opportunities to edit, but if the child doesn't independently know how to create different sentence structures at a grammatical level, then these sticky-plaster scaffolds won't help or make any real difference.

Despite the sentence-level writing doomsday rant, all is not lost. And, in actual fact, the solution itself is really simple, and this book is here to set you on the path to getting serious about sentences in your school and passionate about practice in your classrooms.

PROBLEMS, POLICIES AND PROGRESSIONS (AND DON'T FORGET PRACTICE)

Why do most writing policies and progressions all look pretty much the same?

A quick internet search for a 'primary writing policy' or a 'primary writing progression' will yield pretty much the same content, mapped out in a fairly similar fashion by schools across the country. Why is this? Well, everyone teaches from the same curriculum, so you'd expect the writing progressions to be very similar.

Sentence Ninja © Andrew Jennings, 2025

However, the other reason is, because schools are so busy, when a writing policy or progression is required, looking for examples where it's been done already, well, sort of makes sense. So we end up in a situation where lots of schools have progressions and policies that are replicated versions of another school's policy. The reason this is a problem is linked to the following question: why do most writing policies hardly mention sentences in any real detail?

If we can assume that all of the policies and progressions are derived from the primary National Curriculum, then this is the first problem that we encounter. We all know that the National Curriculum can be quite vague and, to a certain extent, requires quite a lot of the detail to be filled in by teachers and schools. With regards to the English part of the National Curriculum, Writing is broken down into 'transcription' and 'composition'. In KS1, sentences are covered with the phrases 'compose individual sentences' and 'combine to make sentences'. The whole of KS2 is covered with broad statements such as, 'use an increasing range of sentence structures'. That's it for composition on sentences. Following on from this, we are directed to the English Appendix 2 for Vocabulary, Grammar and Punctuation, where we get a little more detail on sentences.

If we look at the sentence row in each year group, we could argue that the bulk of the sentences we want our pupils to master – simple sentences (compound sentences using coordinating conjunctions) and complex sentences (using subordinating conjunctions) – are covered by the end of Year 2! And yet, lots of pupils in Year 5 and 6 still struggle to create these sentence structures.

In the National Curriculum, Year 3 focuses on developing phrases/clauses of time and place, Year 4 focuses mostly on the development of fronted adverbials, Year 5 looks at relative clauses, and Year 6 places emphasis on passive sentences. You could argue that all of these areas are relatively easy to teach and are actually more like grammatical tweaks and variations of a sentence.

I would argue that the sentence-level content is more critical in the success of writing for our pupils, and is the content we really need to 'make permanent'. According to the National Curriculum, this should have been mastered by the end of Year 2. I would personally suggest that, for many schools and teachers, this just isn't the writing reality within which we teach.

EVERY SENTENCE PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY!

So many children find writing a challenge, and that's because they find it hard to construct sentences and they don't have the opportunity to practise. Sentence construction can be challenging, in the same way that long division is super-challenging without a strategy that has been practised many times, over and over again. We dedicate the time to this type of practice in maths, but not in writing. Well that's about to change!

So let's get started. But before we do, I want you to take the following simple idea with you throughout the rest of the book and hopefully into your teaching of writing in the classroom: **Every sentence provides an opportunity!** We want pupils to see every sentence they write as an opportunity to express their skills, abilities and craft in sentence-writing. For pupils to get to this point, we need to embed simple systems to teach, analyse, track and assess, so that all of our pupils can craft a range of core sentences, discuss their grammatical structures and create them independently.

Just like the old saying, 'Look after the pennies, and the pounds will take care of themselves', as teachers we need to, 'Look after the sentences, and the paragraphs will write themselves'.

SOMEBODY PLEASE THINK OF THE ADJECTIVES!

Well it's not quite that dramatic, but it's a fair question. What about the adjectives? It's really simple why they haven't been referenced. This book is all about not being distracted and being able to solely focus on what sentences are and mastering how they are structured. The beauty of the adjective is that it can very easily be added into a sentence to describe without any great difficulty, and is used by most children with ease. Whereas sentence structure is much more complex and needs a dedicated approach and focus, especially for our lower- and middle-ability pupils.

In fact, how often have you, as a teacher, seen poorly structured writing that is full of wonderful adjectives and verbs? We need to switch the narrative and master the sentence first. **Then we can think of the adjectives!**

SENTENCE-LEVEL PROGRESSION

THE PRIMARY NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Let's first take a look at what we are currently working with to guide a sentence-level progression for primary-age pupils – specifically focusing on the content that is genuinely sentence structure or sentence type. We are going to take punctuation and grammar for granted. Inherently, punctuation and grammar make up a huge part of how we structure sentences, but we want to focus specifically on how the curriculum outlines – in a statutory or non-statutory way – how sentences should or might progress throughout our primary National Curriculum.

In the table opposite we have teased out the content that relates directly to sentence structure, which can help us start to map out how sentences might progress across our curriculum. To do this, we have unpicked the 'Composition' and 'Vocabulary, grammar and punctuation' aspects of the Writing Curriculum, and the 'Vocabulary, punctuation and grammar' aspects of the English Appendix 2, focusing on 'Sentence', 'Punctuation' and 'Terminology for pupils', in order to try to piece together the puzzle and highlight what schools are working with when it comes to our precious sentences.

So, this is really as close as the primary National Curriculum gets to referencing and prioritising sentences for our pupils, teachers and schools. The content in Years 1 and 2 briefly mentions sentences. In essence, however, very little instruction is provided in Year 1, apart from in the grammar appendix where the discussion of punctuation alludes to a simple sentence by referencing capital letters and full stops. Year 2 then very quickly moves onto compound and complex sentence structures, including referencing subordination and coordination, but this isn't really mentioned anywhere else.

Once we leave Year 2, the guidance and useful information becomes less and less, the higher up we move through the year groups. As we get to Years 5 and 6, the composition arm of the writing curriculum doesn't have any guidance at all, leaving it to the punctuation and grammar aspect (including Appendix 2) to introduce some more grammatical concepts, such as relative clauses and passive sentence types.

From the information we have, based on our primary National Curriculum, by the end of Year 2, pupils should have really mastered a huge proportion of the sentence structures we want them to be skilled with, ready to apply them in Year 3 and beyond.

From my own personal experience as a teacher and senior leader, this often just isn't the case – for many different reasons. The National Curriculum doesn't really offer much guidance (as outlined) and quite quickly, at a very young age, children (according to the National Curriculum) are expected to have mastered concepts and skills that will, in the real world, need considerable **practice** for them to be made **permanent**. The other worry is that if the curriculum does move on at this pace, and schools have writing policies and progressions mapped against it, then pupils will never be able to catch up.

What we need is a clear, logical and simplified vision for sentences for our pupils and our schools. Let's have a look at what this might look like.



Sentence Ninja © Andrew Jennings, 2025

WHAT THE PRIMARY NATIONAL CURRICULUM SAYS ABOUT SENTENCES

Year 1 programme of study
Writing – composition (statutory requirements) Pupils should be taught to: • write sentences by: – composing a sentence orally before writing it – sequencing sentences to form short narratives
Writing – vocabulary, grammar and punctuation (statutory requirements) Pupils should be taught to: • develop their understanding of the concepts set out in English Appendix 2 by: – joining words and joining clauses using *and* – beginning to punctuate sentences using a capital letter and a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark
English Appendix 2: Vocabulary grammar and punctuation **Year 1: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)** **Sentence** • How **words** can combine to make **sentences** • Joining **words** and joining **clauses** using *and* **Punctuation** • Introduction to capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate **sentences** **Terminology for pupils** • capital letter • sentence • punctuation, full stop, question mark, exclamation mark
Year 2 programme of study
Writing – composition (statutory requirements) Pupils should be taught to: • Consider what they are going to write before beginning by: – encapsulating what they want to say, sentence by sentence
Writing – vocabulary, grammar and punctuation (statutory requirements) Pupils should be taught to: • learn how to use: – sentences with different forms: statement, question, exclamation, command – expanded noun phrases to describe and specify [for example, *the blue butterfly*] – subordination (using *when*, *if*, *that*, or *because*) and coordination (using *or*, *and*, or *but*)
English Appendix 2: Vocabulary grammar and punctuation **Year 2: Detail of content to be introduced (statutory requirement)** **Sentence** • **Subordination** (using *when, if, that, because*) and **coordination** (using *or, and, but*) **Punctuation** • Use of capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks to demarcate **sentences**. **Terminology for pupils** • compound