

Section 8

Language Awareness

First Things First

With the first step in our study of comprehension and composition, it is important to stress some of the key points of grammar, punctuation and sentence structure that are essential to accurate writing. A significant percentage of marks are awarded in the Leaving Certificate English Examination for accuracy and efficiency in the use of language, so it is important to be attentive to the rules of grammar and punctuation. In addition, understanding these elements of writing helps you to more easily appreciate how writers use them to make their work more effective.

It is also worth remembering that grammar and punctuation do not exist in a vacuum. They are not topics you can study for a week or two and then ignore. On the contrary, they are part of every sentence you will read and write in your senior school years and in your examination. Without any doubt, grammar and punctuation fulfil a vital role in allowing you to communicate your ideas to a reader more clearly and to better effect.

The 'Nuts and Bolts' of Language – Grammar at Work



Read the following description by the writer Charles Dickens, and then discuss how effectively you think the writer has used nouns and verbs in the extract.

Extract: *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens

My father's name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Phillip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry was Pip.

'Hold your noise!' cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. 'Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!'

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

'O! Don't cut my throat, sir,' I pleaded in terror. 'Pray don't do it, sir.'

'Tell us your name!' said the man. 'Quick!'

'Pip, sir.'

'Once more,' said the man, staring at me. 'Give it mouth!'

'Pip. Pip, sir.'

'Show us where you live,' said the man. 'Point out the place!'

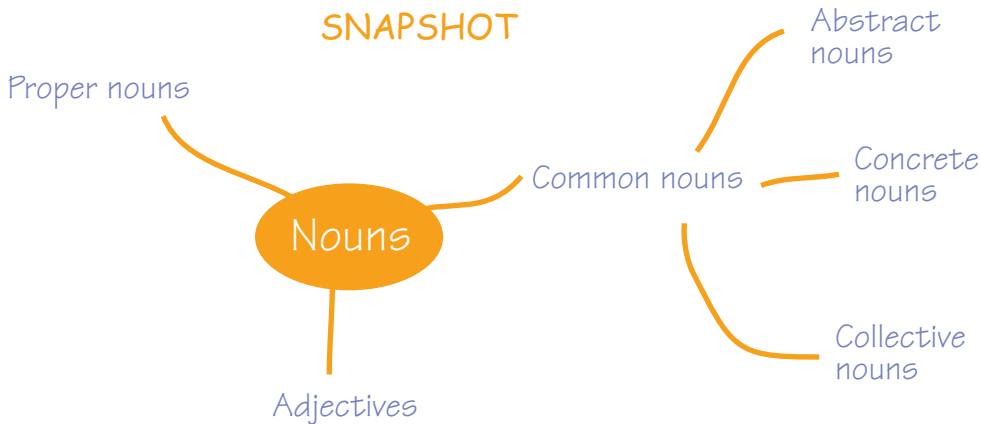
I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

[From *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens]

Over to You!

Do you think the writer makes effective use of nouns and verbs in the above extract? Give three reasons for your answer.

All about Nouns



A noun is the name of a person, place or thing. The names of your favourite song, your favourite band, your favourite website, are all nouns. Your favourite colour, your favourite soccer team, your favourite pet, your best friend – once again, all of these names are nouns. Nouns, therefore, are naming words, and together they make up the largest family of words in the English language.

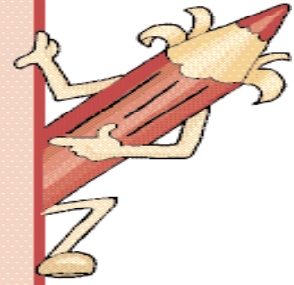
The nouns that you encounter in the English language are either proper nouns or common nouns. Common nouns can be abstract nouns, concrete nouns or collective nouns.

Proper Noun

A proper noun denotes a specific person, place, or organisation. Proper nouns begin with a capital letter: *Geraldine*, *Athlone*, *Aer Arann* are all proper nouns.

Top Tip!**Proper Nouns**

In your writing, remember to begin each proper noun with a capital letter. Also, remember that proper nouns can be very helpful in creating characters and a setting that is more believable. Giving your characters specific names and titles adds realism to your description.

**Common Noun**

A common noun names or denotes a person, animal, place or thing that is not specific. For example, *city* is a common noun (it does not denote or name a specific place). Similarly, words such as *village*, *country*, *woman*, *child* are common nouns.

Abstract Noun

An abstract noun denotes something (a quality or idea or feeling) that cannot be touched because it is not physical. Examples include *happiness*, *love*, *anger*.

Concrete Noun

A concrete noun, however, can be touched and seen because it is something physical. *Car*, *grass*, *pencil*, *jacket*, *tree* are concrete nouns.

Over to You!

Nouns don't only make an appearance in written texts. In visual texts such as photographs and cartoons an artist is very aware of the type of nouns being included in the composition.



Look at this image of the quays alongside O'Connell Bridge in Dublin. Make a list of as many proper and common nouns as you can observe in the picture.

Does the inclusion of a large number of proper nouns in the piece affect your reading of this visual text?

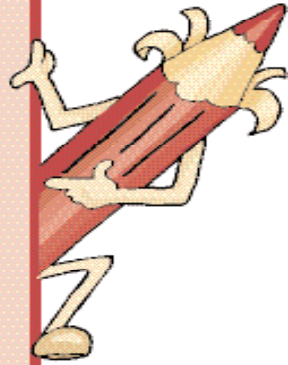
Collective Noun

A collective noun denotes a group of people, animals or objects. Examples include *staff* (a group of teachers), *team* (a group of players), *pride* (a group of lions), *litter* (a group of pups), *library* (a collection of books).

Top Tip!

Use of Nouns

When you write your own sentences and paragraphs you should try to be as specific as possible in your choice of noun. Nouns help your reader to imagine a person or place you may be describing. For example, Dickens refers to several nouns in the extract above to create a precise picture of the 'marsh country'; nouns such as *nettles*, *churchyard*, *dykes*, *mounds*, *gates*, *cattle*, *river* all help to build a vivid image in our minds.



Nouns and Adjectives

Adjectives also have a major role to play in your writing. If nouns give a one-dimensional picture of things, adjectives add a second dimension. They are used to modify a noun and frequently they indicate some quality of that noun. Look at the following examples:

- The *steep* hill
- The *broken* window
- The *old* man
- The *spectacular* fireworks

Remember, adjectives can also appear after the noun:

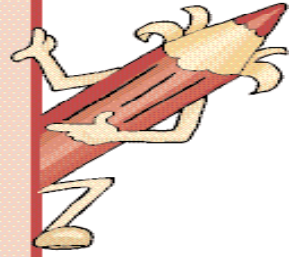
- The hill is *steep*.
- The window is *broken*.

Other examples include the following:

- The singer's voice is *beautiful* (The singer has a beautiful voice).
- That bottle is *disposable* (That disposable bottle).
- The students are *successful* (The successful students).

Top Tip!**Adjectives**

To add variety to your sentences, vary the position of your adjectives. Don't always place your adjectives before the noun. Varying the word order of your sentences (syntax) can make your writing more interesting to read!



In his autobiography, Christy Brown makes effective use of adjectives to paint a vivid picture of his brother, Tony.

Extract: *My Left Foot*, by Christy Brown

Tony was a wild kid. He was always getting into trouble at home and outside. He was a bit of a Romeo. He had all the girls in the neighbourhood running after him, though he didn't care a rap for any of them, not even for Nancy, who was considered the belle of the place. He was the handsomest of us all, a tall, sallow-faced young fellow, very strong, very quick tempered, with curly black hair, big hands and white teeth that flashed when he smiled or laughed. Everyone at home was a little in awe of him, and I made him my first hero.

[From *My Left Foot*, by Christy Brown]

Over to You!

Would you agree that adjectives create a more vivid image in your mind of Tony? Explain your view, briefly.

..... **You Try!**

- 1 Here are two lists of 20 nouns. Categorise them into common nouns (either abstract, concrete, or collective), and proper nouns.

List A

Cologne
nurse
bouquet
anxiety
train
library
success
grief
stadium
crowd
endeavour
spire
paper
The Irish Independent
mountain
Ballymore
advice
café
bliss
seaside

List B

happiness
chair
Belfast
freedom
zoo
desert
coffee
family
Arsenal
team
Sahara
envy
kindness
James
pride
love
mushroom
European Union
democracy
tickets

- 2 In the extract from *Great Expectations*, Dickens makes use of carefully selected common nouns to give us a clear picture of the setting in the opening chapter of his novel.
- (a) Write out five examples of common nouns in the extract that are modified by adjectives.
- (b) Can you suggest, at this point, why writers might decide to modify some nouns in their writing?



..... You Try!

- 3 Write an 80-word description entitled *The Concert*. Use each of the following nouns, in any order, to build your description of the setting. Do not use any adjectives in this exercise.

stage, performers, Naas, euphoria, applause, excitement, The Red Hot Chilli Peppers, amplifiers, sound-check, band, attendance, Oxegen

- 4 Now rewrite the paragraph you wrote for Q3, but this time add at least five adjectives to your description. Do the adjectives change the picture somewhat?
- 5 Sometimes it is useful to know the specific term that describes a group of things. For example, instead of writing 'I was chased by a lot/a group of wolves,' it is more accurate to write 'I was chased by a pack of wolves.'

Here is a list of group terms. Can you match them correctly?

- | | | |
|----------|--------------|--|
| A team | of stars |  |
| A board | of fish | |
| A troupe | of horses | |
| A host | of cars | |
| A pack | of swallows | |
| A shoal | of directors | |
| A fleet | of angels | |
| A bundle | of foxes | |
| A galaxy | of dancers | |
| A flight | of wolves | |
| A skulk | of rags |  |

..... **You Try!**

6 A synonym is a word or phrase which has a similar meaning to another word or phrase in the same language. For example, synonyms for the noun *sky* include *the heavens* and *the firmament*. Synonyms for the word *small* include *tiny* and *minuscule*. A thesaurus can assist you in building up a store of synonyms.

Read the following lists of nouns and synonyms. Can you match the noun on the left column with an appropriate synonym from the centre column and from the right column? The first one is completed for you.

Noun	Synonym	Synonym
1. brook	A. yardstick	Q. misconception
2. fallacy	B. prophet	R. pamphlet
3. charlatan	C. deliberation	S. apprentice
4. nightfall	D. rivulet	T. letter
5. brochure	E. dusk	U. criterion
6. oracle	F. delusion	V. cheat
7. trainee	G. pretender	W. hearing
8. missive	H. dispatch	X. stream
9. touchstone	I. circular	Y. clairvoyant
10. consultation	J. novice	Z. twilight

Example:

1. Brook	D. rivulet	X. stream
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7 Write a 100-word description of each of the following settings and characters. Keep the focus on selecting appropriate and specific nouns that will create a clear picture of your setting and characters. Insert some adjectives to add clarity to your word pictures.



..... You Try!

- 8 Comment on the language usage in the following advertisement for a child's bicycle.

BMW Kidsbike 2006.

Sheer Riding Pleasure. From the very beginning.

The new BMW Kidsbike 2006 enables children to enjoy a bicycle without stabilisers.

With the multiple award-winning BMW Kidsbike 2006, children experience from the very beginning what it feels like to discover the world on two wheels – and entirely without stabilisers. The key here is that the bike grows with the child! For the little ones from age two, it is a walking bike. Later the child can use pedals: simply mounting the supplied pedal unit turns the BMW Kidsbike 2006 into a full-fledged children's bicycle, allowing 6-year-olds to experience sheer riding pleasure too.

Using the walking bike, the little ones can naturally train their sense of balance and gain some initial experience of setting off, steering and braking. As soon as a child feels safe enough, the BMW Kidsbike 2006 enables a seamless and child-oriented transition to real cycling on the same bike: the adjustable saddle is simply raised, and the pedals and chain unit are mounted in a few simple steps.

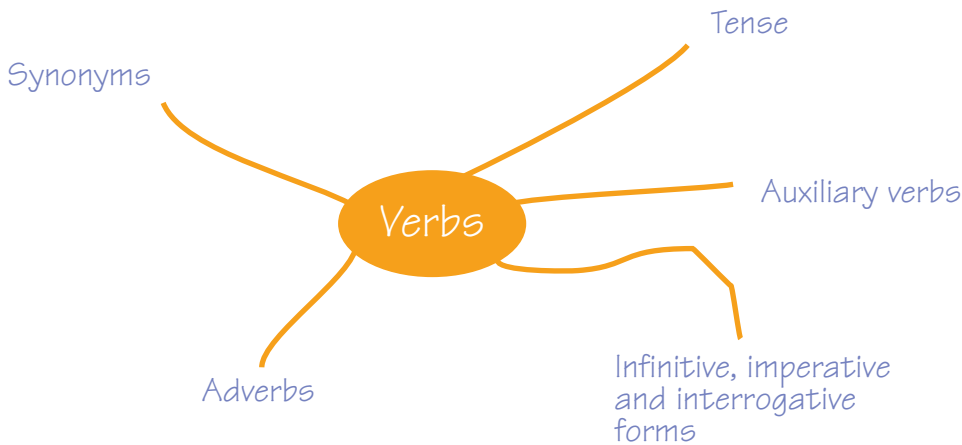
The dynamic proportions of the new Kidsbike demonstrate that you are never too young for a real BMW, with convex and concave surfaces in the characteristic BMW design. 'Form follows function' is the child-based principle here, resulting in an impressive

saddle design with improved ergonomics. The innovative frame in highly rigid aluminium consists of a single countersunk and curved multichamber extrusion profile which has a number of surprisingly practical functions such as an integrated bag. Specially designed components such as the functional impact protection complete the distinctive appearance of the new BMW Kidsbike 2006.

If things do get a bit rough now and again from sheer riding pleasure, the BMW Kidsbike 2006 provides optimum safety. The adjustable cantilever front wheel brake is particularly easy to operate. The mounted pedals also have a back pedal brake which ensures a short braking distance. An important point at dusk: the integrated synthetic pedals are fitted with reflectors, and reflective strips on the 20cm tyres provide an enhanced signalling effect at night. A bell and the passive lighting are part of the standard equipment as well as the children's bike helmet with TÜV/GS and EF 1071 certification. Further safety features of the BMW Kidsbike include a child-oriented handlebar design, a fully encapsulated chain, a limited steering stop limit and a protective pad on the handlebars (with additional storage compartment) and an upper tube.

[From *BMW website*, www.bmw.ie]

The power of verbs and adverbs



In writing, verbs give word pictures a type of three-dimensional effect. With verbs, things come alive. Characters move and interact; relationships develop; change occurs. When we think of verbs, therefore, we often think of words that indicate what someone is ‘doing’:

- The mountaineer *reached* the summit.
- The child *cycled* home from play-school.
- At dawn, the soldier *packed* his kit and *trekked* into the forest.

While numerous verbs are indeed ‘action’ or ‘doing’ words, many other verbs indicate a state of mind:

- Marianne *adores* her new baby.
- Mr Burke *regrets* not going to college.
- The opposing teams’ supporters *despise* each other.

Verbs may also work with adjectives to suggest what people ‘think’ and ‘feel’. Such verbs tell us about the state or condition of nouns:

- The man *was* devastated.
- The captain of the team *was* proud of the victory.
- The community leaders *were* delighted with their success in the Tidy Towns competition.
- The island *was* abandoned.

Infinitive, Imperative and Interrogative forms

The Infinitive

The basic form of a verb is called the infinitive. *To dance, to dream, to believe* are verbs in their infinitive form. Writers and speakers may use this form when they wish to indicate their goals or their aspirations for a community or society.

Extract:

'Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.'

[From '*I Have a Dream Speech*' by Martin Luther King]

The Imperative

Verbs can also give commands. In any one day we use several verbs in their imperative form: *Get away! Stay quiet! Pass the ball! Close the door! Show me your homework!*

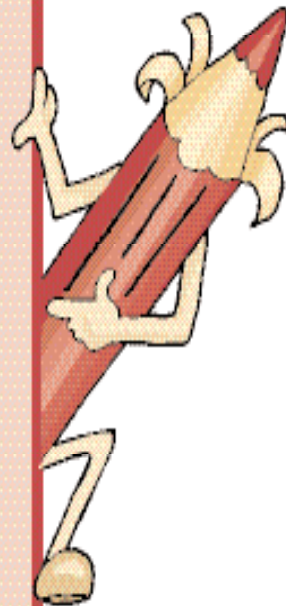
Top Tip!

Verbs in the Imperative

Journalists add power to their articles by using the imperative form. It is a way of indicating what should be done or what needs to be done in a particular situation. It therefore features regularly in subjective writing where opinions are being expressed. In advice columns about relationships, health, DIY, finance, studying for the Leaving Certificate, and so on, the imperative form is very useful! Watch out for it in Editorials too.

When you write articles or debates you can add conviction to your arguments by including some verbs in the imperative form. In report writing, imperatives can be used where you make a series of recommendations at the end of the report.

When writing a series of instructions, you will find the imperative form invaluable.



Over to You!

Identify the use of the imperative form of verbs in this short extract. Can you suggest why the writer uses the imperative in this piece?

Extract: *Coping with Exam Stress*

- Be positive – get rid of every negative thought immediately; reverse it into a positive one.
- Be early and have all the materials like pens, pencils, calculators, eraser, rulers.
- Expect the best – exams are payday; today you get paid (in marks) for the work you have done in this subject over the last two years. Everybody is happy on payday.
- Remember your time management for the exam – do not deviate from this.
- Remember the special answering technique skills for this exam.
- Concentrate – ignore everything except the answer you are working on; give each question maximum effort.

[From 'Final Countdown', Irish Independent Exam Brief, 3 May 2006]

In fiction, characters who use imperatives often do so in moments of tension when they are stressed or angry or threatened. Other characters use it to assert their authority or power over others:

Extract:

She looked around at me with disbelief.

'Don't. You never could sing anyway.'

Her fingers crumbled the brown bread angrily, and she held it out ... She threw the last pieces into the water and the birds splashed in after them ...

'What is his name?

'Jeremiah.'

She laughed.

'M ... mostly he's called Jerry.'

'Well, no more Jerry. No Jeremiah. End to that. Yes.'

... The rest of our walk was in silence ... At the bottom of the steps she turned to me, the bread plate outstretched.

'Take it to the pantry, there's a good boy.'

[From *How many Miles to Babylon*, by Jennifer Johnston]

The Interrogative

Another way to use verbs is in their interrogative form. In our daily lives, we constantly ask questions:

- What time is it?
- Who are you?
- Is that your lunch?
- Were you at the concert?
- Are they mad?

Similarly, in fiction and drama, characters often use the interrogative form.

Extract:

Kate	Gar ...
Public	What's troubling you? <i>[He tries to kiss her again and she avoids him.]</i>
Kate	Please. This is serious.
Private	'Please. This is serious.'
Public	<i>[irritably]</i> What is it?
Kate	You'll have to see about getting more money.
Public	Of course I'll see about getting more money!
Kate	But will he --_____?
Public	I'll get it; don't you worry; I'll get it. Besides: <i>[with dignity]</i> I have a-a-a source of income that he knows nothing about – that nobody knows nothing about – knows anything about.
Kate	<i>[with joy]</i> Investments? Like Daddy?

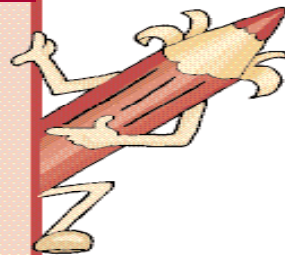
[From Philadelphia, Here I Come!, by Brian Friel]

The interrogative form is very important in fiction and drama because it often asks questions that we, the reader/audience would like to see answered. The answers to some questions may increase our understanding of characters and situations in the text.

But remember also that the type of questions characters ask of others can be very revealing.

Top Tip!

In your own writing, you can of course include questions that might seem trivial, e.g. 'Is it raining outside?'. However, using more serious or probing questions can help to build tension and suspense in your story while the answers to such questions can be very telling and even profound.



Tense

Most sentences contain one or more verbs and each verb has a number of distinctive properties:

- (a) A verb has a particular tense: I eat my lunch. I ate my lunch.
- (b) A main verb may be preceded by an *auxiliary*, or helping verb: I *am* eating. I *have* missed the bus. I *was* tired. I *do* love you.

Using auxiliaries is a technique often deployed by writers to add emphasis to particular sentences.

- ‘Excuse me, but I *was* sitting there.’
- He *was* annoying me.
- I *do* love my summer holidays.
- ‘I *did* complete my homework, Miss.’
- ‘I *am* watching this programme.’
- ‘She *is* walking home.’

When you use the present tense in your writing, it makes your point, or description, more immediate. Writers may decide to use the present tense to give the reader a sense that an activity is happening here and now. It draws a reader into events because you can picture those events occurring as you read.

Extract: *Real Life*

Garda Ryan here. Ex-Garda Ryan now. My last day on the job was five months ago. Got a call about a woman who had collapsed in Grafton Street. I found her under a bundle of clothes. African. She was having a baby. I recall it clearly still.

I arrive, survey the situation, pretending to be calm. It is unreal – my last day on the job and I get *this*. The deepest part of me wants to turn tail. I feel my stomach churn. I amn’t trained for this.

I loosen her clothes. I can’t believe I’m doing this. They are so tight that no baby, no matter how pushy, could get out into this world. People just walk on. The African woman contracts, breathes, her face contorts and, totally silent up to now, she suddenly lets out an ear-splitting scream. ... That gets attention. That stops people up.

‘How can we help?’ mute eyes seem to say. They look as if they can hardly help themselves. They can’t help staring anyway. It’s better than any soap. Better than reality TV. This is reality.

A baby arrives to a large, ashamed audience. A soggy little thing, sliding out on a river of blood and waters. Life renewing itself.

[From *A page in the life, true life stories*, from RTE’s *The Marian Finucane Show*]

Over to You!

- 1 What is the effect of the present tense in the extract 'Real Life'?
- 2 Would the narrative have been as effective if written in the past tense? Rewrite the passage in the past tense before answering.
- 3 The past tense of some verbs can be quite irregular! Give the past tense of each of these verbs:

Present Tense

arise	see
bite	sing
burst	slay
choose	spin
do	stride
drink	strike
drive	teach
go	think
mistake	tread
saw	wring

Voice

Active Voice

Example: 'The full forward scored the winning goal in the dying seconds of the match.'

The verb *scored* is active because the sentence underlines the subject of the verb (the full forward).

Passive Voice

Example: 'In the dying seconds of the match a goal was scored by the full-forward.'

In this example, the verb *was scored* is passive and the emphasis moves away from the full-forward to the 'dying seconds of the match'.

Other examples:

- A monkey bit a tourist. (Active voice)
- The tourist was bitten by a monkey. (Passive voice)

- The child ate the toast. (Active voice; note the emphasis is on *child*)
- The toast was eaten by the child. (Passive voice; note the emphasis is on *toast*)

It is also possible, in using the passive voice, to omit any reference to who performed the action. Look at these examples:

- The car was crashed.
- The match was called-off.
- The lotto was won yesterday evening.

Sometimes, the passive voice is useful when you are unsure as to who performed the action. For example: 'The park was destroyed with litter.'

Political speak?

Politicians are often very careful in their use of language, especially in prepared speeches. If a speech announces good news, they tend to use verbs in their active voice. If, however, the news is not so good, the passive voice is often used as it can distance the subject from the action.

Examples

- 'I am delighted to announce that my Department is committing a further €10 million in direct funding to help disadvantaged areas this year.'
- 'It is regrettable that the hospital wards were closed, but our Department is determined to provide a top-class health service to the public ...'

Over to You!

The following extract is taken from a speech made by Mr Dermot Ahern TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

Comment on the Minister's use of language in the speech. At this point in our study, you may keep your main focus on the Minister's use of verbs.

Extract:

Killarney, 24 April 2006

Joint Chairs, Fellow Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you in the scenic surroundings of Killarney, Co. Kerry. I have very fond memories of my time as a member of the Body and as co-chair of this unique and valuable inter-parliamentary forum. ...

We are determined to get maximum benefit from the massive 100bn euros spend on infrastructure development planned on the island over the next 10 years.

We have initiated a comprehensive study on the development of an all-island economy. It will examine opportunities for further co-operation in areas such as innovation, R&D, trade and investment promotion.

We are identifying ways to work together for the economic development of the North West.

In telecoms, energy, education, health we are developing co-operation which will deliver for ordinary people.

We cannot afford to miss these opportunities. The economic well-being of all our people depends on it.

We want to see the North-South Ministerial Council meeting again and doing its work for the benefit of all communities on the island. This is absolutely our preferred option ...

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have made huge strides forward since this time last year. We have consistently argued the case for devolved Government and for the full implementation of the Agreement.

[source: http://foreignaffairs.gov.ie/Press_Releases/20060424/2032.htm]

Verbs and Nouns

When verbs end in 'ing' you can use them as nouns:

- Swimming is a popular sport in the Community Games.
- Soccer training is on every Tuesday night.
- There are several different forms of dancing activity.
- Reading is easier when there is silence.

Watch it!

Sometimes it can be a little more difficult to distinguish the verb from the noun. Confused? Read the following sentences, then identify the noun and the verb in each one:

- I wound a white bandage around my bleeding wound.
- The groom stood up to present a present to his new bride.
- The ticket inspector told the invalid that her ticket was invalid.
- It is not easy to produce quality farm produce.
- I couldn't pass through security until I had shown my pass.

Verbs and Adverbs

Frequently, writers decide to give more information about an action. To do this, they use adverbs. An adverb modifies or tells us more about a verb. It is usually easy to recognise adverbs because many of them end in *-ly*.

- The thief ran *quickly* through the streets.

Other adverbs include *happily, sadly, reluctantly, gingerly, proudly, seriously, suddenly*.

Sometimes, an adverb can tell us more about another adverb:

- He walked *very slowly*.
- She spoke *extremely quietly*.

Watch it!

Be careful not to confuse the comparative and superlative forms of adverbs with those of adjectives.

Read sentences A and B. One of them is grammatically correct, one incorrect. Can you say which sentence is correct and explain your choice?

- A. He completed the task easier than everyone else.
- B. The easier exam was in the morning.

The following table might help.

Adverb: <i>easily</i> (to describe the verb 'completed')		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
easily	more easily	most easily

Adjective: <i>easy</i> (to describe the noun 'exam')		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
easy	easier	easiest

Sentence B is correct.

The correct version of Sentence A would be:

- He completed the task more easily than everyone less.

Now read sentences C and D. One of them is grammatically correct, one incorrect. Can you say which is which and explain your choice?

C. The plain house was built in the area.

D. The house was built plainer than the others in the area.

The following table might help.

Adjective: <i>plain</i> (to describe the noun 'house')		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
plain	plainer	plainest

Adverb: <i>plainly</i> (to describe the verb 'built')		
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
plainly	more plainly	most plainly

Sentence C is correct.

The correct version of Sentence D would be:

- The house was built more plainly than the others in the area.

..... **You Try!**

Complete the blank spaces in the table of adjectives and adverbs.

Adjectives

<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
white	whiter	_____
smart	_____	smartest
long	longer	longest
_____	clearer	clearest
loud	_____	loudest
quick	quicker	_____

Adverbs

<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
clearly	more clearly	_____
successfully	_____	most successfully
_____	more loudly	most loudly
quickly	_____	most quickly

Watch it!

Some forms are irregular:

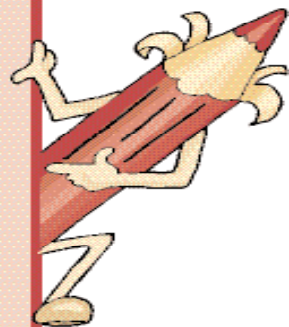
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
badly	more badly	most badly
badly	worse	worst

- He played *badly* today but he played worse yesterday.

Top Tip!

Positive, Comparative and Superlative forms

Advertising and articles with a persuasive purpose tend to use several adjectives and/or adverbs in the positive, comparative and superlative forms. These forms tend to convince many readers that a particular product or argument is superior to another.



Don't Overdo It!

Writers should be careful not to use too many adverbs. Sentences can become very predictable, repetitious and tedious if they read like this:

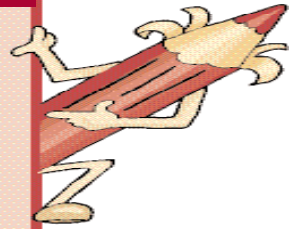
The thief ran *quickly* through the streets. The policeman shouted *loudly* at him. Pedestrians looked *incredulously* at the scene before them. Some people shouted *jubilantly* when the thief was apprehended.

The paragraph would read just as well, if not better, with the following:

The thief raced through the streets. The policeman yelled at him. People looked *incredulously* at the scene before them. Some people cheered when the thief was apprehended.

Top Tip!**Verbs and Adverbs**

Finding a precise verb can often do the job of a more general verb and adverb together.

**Verbs and Synonyms**

There are many synonyms for most verbs. For example, you could write: *I walked through the countryside* in the following ways:

- I rambled through the countryside.
- I roamed through the countryside.
- I sauntered through the countryside.
- I marched through the countryside.

Note that sometimes a synonym can be more specific. For example, if you write *I 'walked' through the countryside* the verb 'walk' does not tell us much about your journey. If, on the other hand, you wrote *I 'trudged' through the countryside* it suggests a difficult walk, whereas *I 'sauntered' through the countryside* suggests a leisurely walk.

You Try!

A. In the following sentences, replace the verb and adverb with just one, more precise, verb.

- 1 The horse ran quickly through the field.
- 2 The demolished building fell loudly to the ground.
- 3 The residents argued strongly against the new motorway.
- 4 The drink-driver walked awkwardly along the straight line.
- 5 The researcher studied carefully each piece of evidence.
- 6 Bricks and stones were thrown violently at the police.
- 7 The new mum gently touched her new-born child.
- 8 The winner spoke vainly about his success.
- 9 The lotto winner spent much of her money foolishly.
- 10 The investigators looked closely at the scene.

B. Look up a thesaurus. Rewrite each of the following sentences and replace each verb in bold with a synonym:

- 1 Mr Jones **fixed** his roof rack to his car with small bolt.
- 2 The bulldozer **flattened** the old buildings.
- 3 The butterfly **flapped** its wings into the breeze.
- 4 A reflection of sunlight **flashed** across the lake.

Punctuation

Punctuation is essential to good writing. The proper use of punctuation marks such as capital letters, full stops, commas, and inverted commas helps us to quickly grasp the meaning of a sentence or paragraph. Punctuation may also suggest the tone of a passage, through the use of question marks and exclamation marks. Inaccurate punctuation, by contrast, will distract the reader who may lose the train of your argument or the plot of the story.

Rewrite the following extracts and insert punctuation including capital letters, full stops, commas, and inverted commas where appropriate. The first extract includes some help tabs which show what punctuation is required in each paragraph.

Extract 1: *My Left Foot*, by Christy Brown

Help!

capital letters X 7
full stops X 4
abbreviation point X 1
commas X 2

it was january 1949 the start of the new year when I made the flight to london with mother to see mrs collis for her verdict we stayed just one day that was all yet even in the space of a few hours my entire life was changed

capital letter X 1
full stops X 1
commas X 2

we all expected mother to be excited and indeed a little nervous for this was to be her first air trip

capital letters X 4
full stops X 2
abbreviation point X 1
commas X 1
inverted commas X 4/2
apostrophe X 1

you'd better bring your prayer book along with you i jibed st. peter is bound to let you in then

capital letters X 2
full stops X 2

but we didn't know her half enough at all she took the prospect of flying quite calmly

capital letters X 2
full stops X 2
abbreviation point X 1
comma X 1
inverted commas X 2

might as well die in the air as on the ground she summed it up next day she went out and bought a new hat

capital letters X 5
full stops X 2
commas X 2
inverted commas X 4
question mark X 1

this is for london she announced trying it on before the mirror got it in cleary's do you like it

capital letters X 1
full stop X 1
commas X 5

father looked at it from right angles, left angles and a host of other angles paused looked very critical paused again scratched his head and spoke
[From *My Left Foot*, by Christy Brown]

Extract 2: This Frog's not crazy, by John Collins

its always wise to be a bit wary of anything that's offered free online bitter experience has taught most net users that just as in the real world theres no such thing as a free lunch if it comes with no up-front costs you can be sure you are paying for it come other way and online that can often mean viruses trojans or other malicious software that can infect and damage your computer

so this week's announcement of a new service called SpiralFrog (www.spiralfrog.com) offering free music downloads in exchange for viewing advertisements seemed too good to be true for many observers

based in new york SpiralFrog has teamed up with universal music the world's largest record company to offer free downloads of its artists such as u2 eminem and elton john

[From *The Irish Times*]

See if you can spot the errors in this newspaper article on punctuation.

Extract 3: Hope your well – and you're family too ... by Pat Stacey

An editor with this newspaper rang me the other day. 'Oi, Stacey,' he said, 'you're not doing nuffink at the moment, are ya?'

Hes from London by the way.

'No, sir.'

'Awight, ere swot I want you to do: I want you to write me a piece on apostrophe's, yeah? There the little squiggly fings wots supposed to be in words like cant, don't, wont and didn't.

Point is, mate, it aint working. Nobody knows how to use the bleeding fings any more. Punctuation? It's a dying art, innit. The hole bleeding worlds becoming ... whassisname ... illirritable ...'

'Illiterate?'

'Alliterate, that's the one. Ive got to ave it by free oclock tomorrow, so no twatting about.'

The newspaper article goes on to give some ideas on the conversation.

You probably noticed that the above paragraphs are overflowing with glaring errors. Then again, maybe you didn't notice anything amiss. Maybe you're homophone-phobic and didn't realise that the 'there' up there in the fourth paragraph should be a 'they're' or that the 'hole' in paragraph five should instead be filled by a 'whole'. Perhaps the absence of apostrophes – or their presence in all the wrong places, which is just as irritating – slipped beneath your linguistic radar.

If so, consider yourself in good company. Far too many people these days cannot tell the difference between an apostrophe and a catastrophe. Apostrophes are disappearing off the face of the planet faster than Siberian white tigers, Amstard computers and Lada cars.

Now, punctuate the remainder of the article!

the english language has evolved down the years if it hadnt wed all be walking around talking like the characters in the pickwick papers

at the moment though were stuck in a linguistic limbo and you can lay blame for this on the vile virus of text messaging (r txt msgn if u want) which has taken the english language stripped it of its beauty and boiled it down to meaningless retarded electronic drivel thats creeping into classrooms into exam papers and across advertising hoardings.

teenagers may be able to text one another at a rate of knots but show them an apostrophe or a comma and theyd probably think theyd squashed a fly between the pages of their schoolbook

the future belongs to the 'cu l8r' generation the way things are going its going to be a punctuation-free zone peopled by functional illiterates who don't know what theyre doing wrong, because no one has ever shown them how to do it right, and probably couldnt care less anyway.

[From *The Irish Independent*, 2 September 2006]

Over to You!

After punctuating the passage, 'Hope your well...' write your personal response to the piece in about 150 words. Remember to punctuate your work!

More Punctuation marks

Ellipsis dots ...

Ellipsis dots, sometimes known as points of ellipsis, may be used to show that (a) a sentence is incomplete, or that (b) part of the original is missing from a quotation. You may find yourself using ellipsis when answering questions on drama, poetry, or the novel.

Example from Drama

Ellipsis dots may indicate that a sentence is incomplete:

Johnny: Holy Mary, Mother o' God, I ...

Boyle: He's goin' away – he must ha' got tired knockin'. (*Seán O'Casey*)

Example from Drama

Original quotation from Shakespeare:

Lady Macbeth: O, never

Shall sun that morrow see!

Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men

May read strange matters. To beguile the time,

Look like the time; bear welcome in your eyes,

Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,

But be the serpent under't.

[Act 1, Scene 5, *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare]

Ellipsis dots indicate that part of the original is missing from the quotation:

In scene five, Lady Macbeth advises her husband, 'To beguile the time ... look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under't.'

Example from Poetry

Original quotation:

I thought you blew a kiss before you died,

But the bony fingers that waved to and fro

Were asking for a Woodbine, the last request

Of many soldiers in your company. (From *Last Requests*, by Michael Longley)

Ellipsis dots indicate that part of the original is missing from the quotation:

In the second stanza, Longley describes how he thought his father 'blew a kiss ... but the bony fingers ... Were asking for a woodbine.'

Example from Fiction

When writers include conversation in a novel, they frequently use ellipsis dots to suggest that a speaker is hesitant or emotional:

Extract:

And father was silent for a really long time.

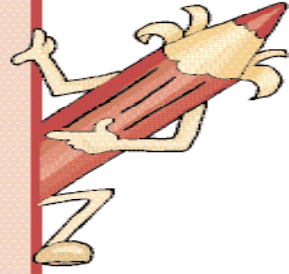
Then he said, 'Look, maybe I shouldn't say this, but ... I want you to know that you can trust me. And ... OK, maybe I don't tell the truth all the time. God knows, I try, Christopher, God knows I do, but ... Life is difficult, you know. It's bloody hard telling the truth all the time. Sometimes it's impossible. And I want you to know that I'm trying, I really am. And perhaps this is not a very good time to say this, and I know you're not going to like it, but ... You have to know that I am going to tell you the truth from now on. About everything. Because ... if you don't tell the truth now, then later on ... later on it hurts even more. So ...'

Father rubbed his face with his hands and pulled his chin down with his fingers and stared at the wall.

[From *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, by Mark Haddon]

Top Tip!**Ellipsis dots**

When writing conversations in your own compositions, include ellipsis dots occasionally to show that a character is being emotional, or hesitant or stressed. However, don't overdo it! Readers can quickly tire of the technique if it is used too often.

**Over to You!**

Look at the photographs of two characters in conversation. Based on one of the photographs, write out, in dramatic form, the conversation between the two characters (aim to write about 200 words). You should use ellipsis dots on a few occasions in the drama.



Parentheses ()

Parentheses, or round brackets, are used by some writers as an alternative to a comma. You may use parentheses to include a brief explanation, insert an afterthought, or make a brief personal comment. For example, if you include a quotation in a composition, and you highlight some words in the quotation to make a particular point, you should insert a comment such as (my emphasis).

Example: In the poem *Valediction*, Seamus Heaney employs more crafted images in his attempt to express the depth of his loneliness since his friend's departure. Several images of the sea are used. We can see this when Heaney exclaims: 'Need breaks on my *strand*' and in the dramatic irony of the line, 'You've gone, I am at *sea*' (my emphasis).

In this example, the writer informs us that the words 'strand' and 'sea' were not italicised in the original poem, but have been italicised in this answer to add emphasis to the point being made about imagery.

Another example:

Extract:

Ordinary sun screens protect against medium-wavelength ultraviolet light (ultraviolet B), which causes sunburn. They do not protect against longer-wavelength ultraviolet light (ultraviolet A) which, while not causing sunburn, does cause long-term skin ageing and cancer.

[From *The Hamlyn Encyclopedia of Family Health*, Dr Michael Apple]

Dash –

A single dash at the end of a sentence or statement can be used to show a comment, or an afterthought.

Example: I was amazed when she ate the last piece of cake! – although I did offer it to her.

Example: His (Boxer's) answer to every problem, every setback, was 'I will work harder!' – which he had adopted as his personal motto.

[from *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, Penguin, London, 1989, p.18]

Use dashes very sparingly in your writing.

Hyphen -

Hyphens show the parts of a compound word:

- The blue-eyed boy lives in the yellow-brick house at the end of the cul-de-sac.
- All types of chewing-gum are banned in the school.

Hyphens may also be used after a prefix to make compound words easier to read:

- Prewar: pre-war
- Preexistence: pre-existence
- Minimarathon: mini-marathon
- Antiglobalisation: anti-globalisation

Over to You!

- 1 Use each of the compound words in a sentence of its own: weather-beaten, middle-aged, forty-five, great-grandmother, long-term, fact-finding, near-escape, open-air
- 2 Each of the following sentences has been taken from an article on food safety. Read each sentence and then comment on the writer's use of brackets and dashes in the piece.
 - (a) Most food now comes with storage information, giving the temperature at which to keep it, the length of time it can be kept (the shelf life or 'best before' date) and what to do once the packaging has been opened.
 - (b) Consider, too, that meat heated on barbeques may not be thoroughly cooked — something especially important to remember with meat burgers and poultry.
 - (c) Treatment rarely requires anything more than fluids (avoid milk), sugar and salt solutions available from pharmacists and bland food like rice or pasta.
 - (d) The main risk is from eating raw egg (for example in mayonnaise and meringues) and poultry.

[from *The Hamlyn Encyclopedia of Family Health*, Dr Michael Apple, Octopus, London, 1999, pp 174, 175]

Sentence Structure

Types of Sentences

Sentences can have many different functions. They can make statements (declarative sentences) or exclamations (exclamatory sentences), ask questions (interrogative sentences), and give commands (imperative sentences).

In **statements**, the *subject* usually appears before the verb:

- *I* walked home.

- *Seán* scored a goal.

[Note also, that the subject controls the verb: e.g.

- *He* walks home from school everyday.

- *They* walk home from school everyday.]

However, in **questions**, the *subject* may appear after the verb:

- Were *you* injured?

- Am *I* late?

Sentences that give **commands** or instructions, or offer advice, usually begin with a verb. Often the subject is omitted:

- Walk away from here.

- Listen to the music.

- Study that chapter carefully.

Active and Passive Voice

Sentences can be written in the active or passive voice:

- The forester cut down the tree. (active voice)

- The tree was cut down by the forester. (passive voice)

The passive voice is not as common as the active voice. In speech, it is rarely heard. In writing, it may be used in informative writing, which is factual rather than personal in nature. In fiction, the passive voice may be used to emphasize the *action* rather than the *subject* in a sentence.

Simple, Compound and Complex

Sentences may also be simple, compound or complex.

A clause is a unit of grammar that contains a subject and a predicate. It contains at least a subject and a verb:

■ I run.

This is a clause. It is also a **simple** sentence. A simple sentence consists of a single main clause.

In a **compound** sentence, however, two or more main clauses are joined together by the conjunctions *and*, *or*, *yet*, *so*, or *but*:

■ I run *but* I prefer to cycle.

The conjunction *but* joins two clauses, each of which could stand alone as a simple sentence. In other words, each clause makes sense on its own.

In a **complex** sentence, clauses are joined by conjunctions such as *because*, *when*, *since*, *although*, *as*, and *except*:

■ I run *because* it is good for my health.

Note that the second clause (the subordinate clause) cannot stand as a sentence on its own. In other words, ‘because it is good for my health’ needs the first clause to make sense. Subordinate clauses are clauses of lesser importance.

Sentences, Syntax and Paragraphs

Each sentence is composed of words that are arranged in a particular order. This sentence structure is called the syntax. In the English language, the subject often comes before the verb, which in turn is followed by the object.

For example, *Michelle prepared the meal*. *Michelle* is the subject, *prepared* is the verb and *the meal* is the object. Much of your writing will observe this basic syntax. However, you can depart from this order occasionally. It will result in more variety in your writing, which in turn can make a passage more interesting to read.

Over to You!

- 1 John McGahern varies his syntax in the opening pages of his novel *That They May Face the Rising Sun*. Write a personal response to McGahern's language usage in the extract below. Refer to the writer's use of nouns and adjectives, verbs and adverbs, punctuation marks, syntax and sentence structure.

Extract:

'The morning was clear. There was no wind on the lake. There was also a great stillness. When the bells rang out for Mass, the strokes trembling on the water, they had the entire world to themselves.' ...

'In his dark Sunday suit, white shirt, red tie, polished black shoes, the fine silver hair brushed back from the high forehead and sharp clean features, he was shining and handsome.' ...

The gun dogs were beautiful. They were as much part of Johnny as the double barrel, and they adored him. The evening before he left he took them down to the bog with the gun. They were yelping and jumping around and following trails.

[From *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, by John McGahern]

Over to You!

- 2 The following extract is from another novel, *How Many Miles to Babylon* by Jennifer Johnston. Compare and contrast Johnston's use of language with that of McGahern's.

Extract:

By now the attack must be on. A hundred yards of mournful earth, a hill topped with a circle of trees, that at home would have belonged exclusively to the fairies, a farm, some roofless cottages, quiet unimportant places, now the centre of the world for tens of thousands of men. The end of the world for many, the heroes and the cowards, the masters and the slaves. It will no doubt be raining on them, a thick and evil February rain.

[From *How Many Miles to Babylon*, by Jennifer Johnston]