

Just checking...

Not sure whether to use a colon or a semi-colon? Not sure where the apostrophe should go? Not sure whether 'a lot' should be two words or one? Just checking?

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are increasingly important in assessments across the curriculum. Although some people find written work very easy, many of us need support to enable us to write effectively.

Whether you're a student or an adult supporting a student's learning, this guide should help to explain some of the trickier aspects of SPAG, as well as how to avoid some common errors.

It's a working document, so if there is anything else that anyone would like to see clarified, please let us know and we'll add it in.

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Apostrophes



Apostrophes have just **two** uses

1) **Possession:** to show that something belongs to another person or thing, we add an apostrophe plus an s, e.g. the helicopter belonging to Harry = Harry's helicopter.

If there is more than one owner, such as girls, boys, dogs, we don't add an extra s, but just an apostrophe, e.g. the coats belonging to the boys = the boys' coats; the experience of the students = the students' experience.

However, plurals that do not end in s, such as men or children, still need both apostrophe and s, e.g. the books belonging to the children = the children's books.

If in doubt, imagine the sentence in its long form (using of or belonging to) without the apostrophe. The apostrophe goes immediately after the owner, whether that's John, the girls, the dog or the men.

2) **Omission:** to replace a missing letter, e.g. do not = don't, does not = doesn't, you have = you've.

The apostrophe goes where the letter is missing, not where the two words have joined.

If there is no question of possession or omission, then there is **no need** for an apostrophe.

Common mistakes - not using them at all; using them every time a word ends in s.

Verbs that end in s (sits, stands) or straightforward plurals (flowers, chairs) do not need apostrophes.

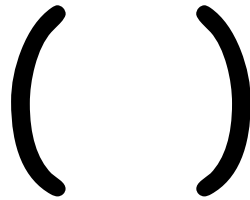
Decades (1990s, 1850s) and plurals of acronyms (PCs, MOTs) do not need apostrophes.

NB: It's or Its?

It's = it is eg: **It's** nearly three o'clock.

Its = belonging to it (just like hers or his, no apostrophe is needed), eg: The car needs **its** MOT.

Brackets (parenthesis)



Sometimes when you're writing you may want to include a piece of additional information that isn't essential to the sentence, or to add a comment as an aside or afterthought. For example:

1. I bought a lovely bunch of flowers (tulips, daffodils, lilies) at the local shop.
2. We gave Alice a lift home (it was our turn this week).
3. My new hat looks fantastic (at least, I think it does) and goes beautifully with my lime green shoes.
4. The meeting of the school council (Years 7 to 11) will take place at lunch-time.

The information in brackets could disappear without damaging the sense of the sentence.

Capital letters

Aa Bb Cc

Every letter has a large and a small version (upper and lower case). Sometimes they're very similar to each other; sometimes they're very different. If you're unsure of which is which, here's a guide:

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

You need to use a capital letter every time you begin a new sentence and also at the start of the name of a person, place or company. You also need a capital letter for I, when you're talking about yourself.

Commas 1



Commas are used to separate items in a list. You do not need a comma between the final items if a connecting word, such as 'and', is used, eg:

a) Your tasks for today include: mopping, sweeping, scrubbing, washing and polishing.

b) I need to pack my hiking shoes, woolly socks, walking poles and purple pyjamas.

However you CAN use a comma (an Oxford comma) before an 'and' if it helps clarify the sentence, eg:

I love my parents, Adele and Tom Cruise.

Or

I love my parents, Adele, and Tom Cruise.

Without the Oxford comma, it would appear that Adele and Tom Cruise ARE your parents; with the comma it becomes a list of people you love.

Commas 2



Commas are also used to separate clauses in a complex sentence, or to separate off phrases offering additional information.

For example, if we take the simple sentence 'The cat sat on the mat', we could extend it using commas.

The cat, **who was fat and fluffy**, sat on the mat.
(additional clause)

The cat sat on the mat, **plotting against the neighbour's dog**. (adverbial phrase)

The cat, **Felix Whiskerington**, sat on the mat. (noun phrase)

The cat sat on the mat, **which was surprising as he normally preferred to sit on the bed**. (additional clause)

Colons

:

Colons are used before a list.

For example:

For this recipe you will need: eggs, butter, flour and sugar.

They are also used before an explanation, functioning much like the word 'because'. For example:

I was cold: the temperature was well below zero.

Dashes



Dashes can be used to separate off an aside or afterthought at the end of a sentence.

- I spilled my food all over the carpet - don't think they'll be inviting me back in a hurry.

Or it can be used to show hesitation.

- "I - I don't know," she stammered.

Or they can be used in pairs, like brackets or commas.

- My dog - a black Labrador - loves to chase rabbits.

Full stops, question marks and exclamation marks

. ? !

All sentences need punctuation. Statements end with full stops; questions end with question marks; exclamations end with exclamation marks.

Statement: I like that book.

Question: Is that my book?

Exclamation: You've taken my book!

Paragraphs

When writing, you need to change paragraph to guide your reader through your ideas.

You should start a new paragraph when you change time, place or topic, plus every time a new person speaks if you are writing dialogue.

If in doubt, check in a published novel to see how speech and narration are punctuated.

The first line of a paragraph in handwriting should be indented about 2cm from the margin, to signal clearly to the reader that a new paragraph is beginning.

An alternative to indenting the first line, most often seen in computerised texts, is leaving a line blank in between paragraphs.

Semi-colons

•
;

Semi-colons have two main uses:

- 1) To separate statements which could stand on their own as complete sentences, but are so closely linked that a full stop seems like too much of a break. For example:

It was colder outside now; the snow was sure to start falling soon.

- 2) To separate items in a list, when they are longer than a single word or idea.

They were finally ready to leave as they'd fed the fish; locked the back door; put the burglar alarm on and given the dog a farewell biscuit.

Speech marks

“ ”

Speech marks, quotation marks, or 'inverted commas' are used to go around the words that a person or character speaks, to show the words belong to them.

- Each new piece of speech begins with a **capital letter**, even if it is not the beginning of a sentence, eg:

“Hello,” the boy said.

The boy said, “Hello.”

- You must always punctuate speech **before** closing speech marks, but if a 'he said' or 'she said' follows afterwards it does NOT need a capital letter, even if the speech ends with a question or exclamation marks.

“Who are you?” asked the girl.

“I’m the new teacher,” replied the old man.

“Gosh!” she exclaimed in surprise.

- You **must change paragraph** every time you change speaker.

If in doubt, check in a published novel or newspaper article to see how it’s done.

Tenses



When you write a piece, it's important to choose the right tense. If something has already happened, it's in the past. If it is happening at the moment, it's in the present. If it will happen, it's in the future. If you mix your tenses up, you will confuse your reader, so you need to choose carefully.

Basic parts of speech and sentence construction

Noun - thing, object or idea (chair, dog = **concrete** nouns; war, love, glory = **abstract** nouns; Fred, George, Hermione = **proper** nouns)

Verb - doing word (to run, to jump, to skip = **dynamic** verbs; to love, to hate, to fear = **stative** verbs)

Adjective - describes a noun (fat, slimy, happy, good) **comparative adjective** (fatter, slimier, happier, better) and **superlative adjective** (fattest, slimiest, happiest, best)

Adverb - describes how a verb is performed (quickly, gracefully, miserably, joyfully) **or when** (yesterday, next, tomorrow, finally, never, always).

Pronoun - replaces a noun, eg he, she, it, we

First person = I or we (plural - sometimes used to include the audience or to suggest a larger team/authority);

Second person = you;

Third person = he/she/it or they (plural)

Possessive pronoun - eg his, her, its, ours, mine

Intensifier - used to intensify an adjective to increase its effect, eg so, really, such, incredibly

Sentence level

Phrase - collection of words conveying meaning, eg the big red bus (noun phrase), or travelled incredibly quickly (verb phrase), or with a cry of relief (adverbial phrase)

Clause - unit of meaning containing an active verb, eg The bus **was** late (main clause) because it **had** a flat tyre (subordinate clause)

Simple sentence - The cat sat on the mat.

Compound sentence (uses **FANBOYS** connective - ie either **For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So**) - The cat sat on the mat **and** it went to sleep.

Complex sentence (with **subordinate clause**) - The cat, **who was called Marmaduke**, sat on the mat.

Exclamative - a phrase or sentence that is an exclamation! Eg **Help!**

Declarative - a statement. Eg **The cake is delicious.**

Imperative - a command. These sometimes, but not always, use an exclamation mark too. Eg **Give me some cake.**

Interrogative - a question. Eg **Who made the cake?**

Common spelling queries

Verb or noun?

Verb

advise (advising)

practise (practising)

license (licensing)

affect (affecting)

Noun

the advice

the practice

the licence

the effect

One word or two?

One word

Indeed

Nonetheless

Nevertheless

Anyway

Sometimes

Whereby

However

Whatever

Whoever

Whomever

Someone

Anyone

Anyhow

Somehow

Two words

Thank you

In fact

As well

A lot

A bit

No one

There, their or they're?

Their = belongs to them (their coats)

There = place (it's over there)

They're = they are (they're smiling)

Your or you're?

Your = belongs to you (that's your lunch)

You're = you are (you're beautiful)

Its or it's?

Its = belongs to it (have you seen its new front door?)

It's = it is (it's gorgeous)

ible or able?

There isn't a simple hard and fast rule, but in MOST cases, you can take away the 'able' to leave a whole word (eg understandable - understand, acceptable - accept) in a way that you can't with 'ible' words (eg terrible, edible).

terrible	reasonable
horrible	suitable
flexible	available
sensible	understandable
responsible	laughable
incredible	bearable
accessible	predictable
possible	comfortable

Useful spellings

accidentally
accommodation
achieve
actually
although
audience
beginning
believe
brilliance
buried
business
column
committee
community
conclusion
conscientious
conscious
consequence
continuous
creation
daughter
definite
definitely
developed
development
disappear
disappoint
does
doesn't
embarrass
environment
evidence
explanation

extremely
fierce
fiery
friend
fulfil
fulfilled
fulfilment
genuinely
government
guard
happened
health
height
imaginary
independent
independence
interesting
interrupt
jealous
knowledge
listening
lonely
lovely
marriage
minute
necessary
necessity
people
permanent
possession
process
receive
receipt
remember
remembrance

separate
sincerely
skilful
stomach
straight
strength
subtle
success
surprise
technique
tomorrow
tried
unfortunately
unnecessary
usually
vulnerable
Wednesday
weird
woman
women