

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Improving written accuracy for units 1 and 3

Ways in which this booklet will be used:

- Your teacher might set some of the exercises as SPAG homework
- You can use your initiative, print it off and work your way through it. Hand in completed exercises to your teacher for marking

Name:

Teacher:



INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains information and exercises on a number of areas of potential difficulty in written English language. It is intended to be a resource for you in the preparation of your assignments and for classroom activities throughout the year, as well as forming a VITAL part of your GCSE exam preparation. The examples and tests will aid you in controlling the quality of your written work. We have tried, as much as possible, to use no unfamiliar grammatical terms. If you find some of the terms confusing, you should consult your teacher, research them in dictionaries or find explanations on the Internet.

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FREQUENTLY CONFUSED WORDS

Why do we confuse some words? There are various reasons. Though the meaning of these confusable words will differ, their sound and spelling may not differ much, or even at all. These words can be a problem, particularly as a computer spell-check will not pick them up if they are correctly spelt, but wrongly used.

SAME SOUND BUT DIFFERENT SPELLING

Words that sound alike but which have different spelling and meanings are called *homophones*, meaning 'same sound'.

Examples:

alter and altar;

knew and new;

two, too and to

Normally, we know which ones we mean when speaking, because we understand the context in which they are used and do not have to spell them. We may not be so confident when we have to write them down, however.

There are many words of this kind that can cause such trouble. Here are more examples. Fill in the blank boxes on the next page with examples of your own.

<i>aid and aide</i>	<i>weather and whether</i>
<i>bow and bough</i>	<i>Their, there& they're</i>
<i>draft and draught</i>	<i>where and wear</i>
<i>piece and peace</i>	<i>site and sight</i>
<i>break and brake</i>	<i>through and threw</i>
<i>canvas and canvass</i>	<i>caught and court</i>
<i>here and hear</i>	<i>allowed and aloud</i>

SAME SPELLING BUT DIFFERENT SOUND

Some words with the same spelling have different origins and meanings. These are called *homographs*, meaning 'same writing'.

Examples:

<i>bow</i> – to bend at the waist	a pretty tie on a dress
<i>object</i> – a thing	to protest against something
<i>intimate</i> – familiar or loving	to confide or express a point of view
<i>present</i> – a gift	to deliver or give something

We sometimes deal with these words more readily because of pronunciation differences; we can hear the different sound associated with the different meaning. For example, we give a present but we present a speech; the former word has the emphasis on the first syllable; the latter has the emphasis on the second syllable.

SIMILAR SPELLING BUT DIFFERENT SOUND

Yet more words have similar spelling but do not sound exactly alike. We confuse them simply because we don't realise the difference in their meanings. If we read misused words rather than hear them, we don't detect the different pronunciation, and therefore we may pick up the wrong habit. Use a dictionary to be certain of the correct word.

There are many words of this kind that can cause such trouble. Here are more examples. Fill in the blank boxes with examples of your own

<i>Access and excess</i>	
<i>Aural and oral</i>	

<i>Allude and elude</i>	
<i>Desert and dessert</i>	
<i>Moral and morale</i>	
<i>Personal and personnel</i>	
<i>Affect and effect</i>	

TEXTESE – SMS LANGUAGE

Over the past few years, there has been a growing trend in the English language where people replace correctly spelt Standard English words with their SMS text equivalent. If you do this in your GCSE exams or controlled assessments / coursework, you will be penalised. It is a form of slang which has no place in written work. Whilst it is now considered to be an appropriate form of communication, it must only be used in the texting realm.

Examples:

GR8 = Great

2mro = tomorrow

thr4 = therefore

There are many words of this kind that can cause such trouble. Here are more examples. Fill in the blank boxes with the correct Standard English word.

<i>thru</i>		<i>txt</i>	
<i>sk8</i>		<i>kybrd</i>	
<i>gr8</i>		<i>thnxs</i>	
<i>8</i>		<i>pls</i>	
<i>in2</i>		<i>Omg</i>	
<i>y</i>		<i>lol</i>	
<i>dctnry</i>		<i>gtg</i>	

OTHER CONFUSABLE WORDS

Lastly, while the evolution of language relies on the emergence of new words (neologisms) or the gradual change in meaning of existing ones, there are some words which are simply regarded as being misspelt or misused. For instance, there is a growing use of '*alot*', which is just a combination of two words, *a* and *lot*, meaning *many*. You wouldn't write '*asausage*' or '*abook*', so DON'T write '*alot*'!

Do you know the differences between these words?	
<i>Anticipate</i> and <i>expect</i>	
<i>Formerly</i> and <i>formally</i>	
<i>Awhile</i> and <i>a while</i>	

EXERCISES

In the following exercises, you should complete each sentence by choosing the words which best suit the apparent meaning. A good start is always to pronounce the words carefully, in case there is a subtle difference that will help you to decide upon the correct one. Words in italics have the same spelling, so you should identify the appropriate meaning of the word.

1. I had to (*break* / *brake*) to avoid hitting the cat on the (*rode* / *road*).
2. We wondered (*whether* / *weather*) to take his (*advise* / *advice*).
3. They (*aught* / *ought*) to object to the (*current* / *currant*) system.

4. The (principle / principal) of the school was (formerly / formally) known as the headmaster.
5. During the holiday (brake / break) she sacked half of her (personal / personnel).
6. The (effect / affect) of the layoffs was a drop in (morale / moral).
7. The (weather / whether) here reminds me of a (dessert / desert).
8. His (principal / principle) aim was to maintain society's (moral / morale) health.
9. A (piece / peace) of the ship's *bow* (past / passed) by.
10. (Their / they're / there) is little hope for (their / they're / there) application, because (their / they're / there) well known vandals.
11. I didn't want it to (effect / affect) his (personnel / personal) life.

THE RUN-ON SENTENCE OR THE COMMA SPLICE

A very common error in sentence structure is for writers to run two sentences together with no punctuation or merely a comma between them. This seems to happen when writers get so tied up in what they are saying that they forget they have to put out signposts for their readers to show the relationships between the different sections of their writing.

Examples:

The book was interesting, it showed me how to cook.

I read a lot, my friend doesn't read at all.

The book was very interesting, therefore I had to finish it.

Each of the examples above has two separate units of meaning, and so must be divided in a way which makes the separation clear. Run-on sentences can be corrected in three different ways.

TURN THE TWO SEPARATE STATEMENTS INTO TWO SEPARATE SENTENCES

Examples:

The book was interesting. It showed me how to cook.

I read a lot. My friend doesn't read at all.

The book was very interesting. Therefore, I had to finish it.

JOIN THE TWO STATEMENTS WITH A JOINING WORD (CONJUNCTION) WHICH SHOWS HOW THEY ARE

CONNECTED

Examples:

The book was interesting because it showed me how to cook.

I read a lot but my friend doesn't read at all.

The book was very interesting and, therefore, I had to finish it.

SEPARATE THE TWO STATEMENTS WITH A SEMICOLON

Examples:

The book was interesting; it showed me how to cook.

I read a lot; my friend doesn't read at all.

The book was very interesting; therefore, I had to finish it.

Use the semicolon to connect the two sentences only if they are closely related in meaning and if you feel confident that you know how to use semicolons. The first two methods of punctuation are easier and safer, **but you need to become confident with the use of the semi-colon to be sure of a higher grade in both English/Language Creative Controlled Assessments as well as in the GCSE exam.**

EXERCISES

Rewrite these comma-splice sentences in full, with corrections.

1. The cat sat on the mat, he slept for many hours.
2. The library is full, it is exam time all the students are busy.
3. I have no money for food, I'll be fine.
4. The car is missing, I think it's been stolen.
5. Hollywood movies are terrible they always have sappy endings they are boring.
6. My dog is extremely smart, he can count to three.
7. I walked over (there / their / they're), I knocked on the door no one was home.
8. My friends have all left, now I'm alone.
9. He said no he was in a bad mood, he always is.
10. Get me a drink these pretzels are making me thirsty.

SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

A sentence consists of, at the very least, a subject and a finite verb. A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence; that is, a group of words erroneously followed by a full stop, which either lacks a subject or a finite verb, or which is a subordinate clause. For example:

Sitting on the mat. (No subject or finite verb.)

The cat on the mat. (Subject, but no verb.)

The cat sitting on the mat. (Subject but no finite verb.)

All of these are sentence fragments which do not make sense on their own. Each needs some additional part(s) of speech to make it into a complete sentence. ***Many of you write in sentence fragments and they are a major cause of lost SPAG marks!***

EXERCISES

Build complete sentences (either compound or complex) from these fragments. You may need to add quite a lot of information, or rephrase the sentence.

1. Running after the train and jumping between parked cars as he tried to keep his

appointment. _____

2. I had to take my friend back to civilisation. For a decent Christian burial. _____

3. The magistrate showing complete lack of sympathy for the victim of the crime. _____

4. His wealthy father had given him a large sum of money. To buy a farm so that he could live a happy and prosperous life. Of the English aristocracy in a far-off land.

5. The dog eating everything in sight. Nothing left. _____

6. The pain in my arm. Was like lightning. And it made me pass out. _____

7. Although the book was easy to read. _____

8. If you don't listen. _____

9. It was a miserable night. Seeming to last an eternity. At last looking eastward I noticed a faint rose glow on the horizon. And I knew that day was about to dawn. _____

10. Because we all understand what he means. _____

USING APOSTROPHES CORRECTLY

The apostrophe causes more misunderstanding than any other punctuation mark. The rules for its use, however, are simple, but recognising those rules in practice is very difficult for many people.

There are two main uses for the apostrophe: to show possession or ownership and to indicate that letters have been left out of a word.

USING THE POSSESSIVE APOSTROPHE

Remember that the whole point of using an apostrophe to show possession is to distinguish the possessive form of the noun from the simple plural. You **never** use an apostrophe to indicate a plural!

<u>Write:</u>	<u>Do NOT write:</u>
I bought a pound of tomatoes	I bought a pound of tomato's
The animals slept outside	The animal's slept outside
The shoes were a good fit	The bottle's were made of glass
There are many books in the library	The 1990's produced some great music

In the preceding examples, the nouns *tomatoes*, *animals* and 1990s are plurals. None of them owns anything in these sentences. ***None of them needs an apostrophe, therefore.***

The simple rules for the possessive apostrophe are: 1) write the name of the possessor, and; 2) add an 's' if you think you need one.

SINGULAR NOUNS

An apostrophe plus 's' at the end of the final letter of a singular noun indicates ownership of the word immediately following. For example:

The student's experiments were finished. (The experiments of the student were finished.)

The committee's decisions were final. (The decisions of the committee were final.)

The animal's teeth are huge! (The teeth of the animal are huge.)

Singular proper nouns (i.e. names of people and places) ending in 's' can be followed by an apostrophe or by an apostrophe plus 's'.

Charles Dickens' novels are entertaining. **OR** Charles Dickens's novels are entertaining.

James' father is very strict. **OR** James's father is very strict.

PLURAL NOUNS

If a noun is plural and already ends with an 's', then, to show possession, you must add an apostrophe after the final 's'.

The students' experiments were finished. (The experiments of the students were finished.)

The committees' decisions were final. (The decisions of the committees were final.)

The animals' teeth are huge! (The teeth of the animals are huge.)

Some plural nouns do not end in 's'; for example, 'women', 'men', 'children' and 'sheep'. You should treat these nouns in the same way as the singular forms, and add an apostrophe plus 's' to indicate if they are possessive. For example:

The children's toys were all broken. (The toys of the children were all broken.)

Women's working conditions were awful. (The working conditions of the women were awful.)

The men's work was awful. (The work of the men was awful.)

Possessive apostrophes are used only with nouns. The pronouns *his*, *hers*, *your*, *my*, *our*, *their* and *its* are already possessive, so no apostrophe is needed. There is often a lot of confusion about *its* and *it's*: the apostrophe shows that *it's* is short for *it is*. Without an apostrophe, *its* becomes a possessive pronoun, meaning, 'belonging to it'.

USING THE APOSTROPHE TO SHOW CONTRACTIONS

When two words are contracted to form one word, an apostrophe is used in place of the missing letters. For example:

cannot	becomes	can't
you will	becomes	you'll
do not	becomes	don't
it is	becomes	it's
were not	becomes	weren't
was not	becomes	wasn't

This use of the apostrophe to show contractions is extremely straightforward and usually does not cause writers the same problems as the possessive apostrophe.

EXERCISES

1. When should you use an apostrophe to show a plural? _____

2. What does an apostrophe replace when it is used to show contractions? _____

3. What are the two simple rules for using a possessive apostrophe?

a. _____

b. _____

Rewrite the complete sentences, and put apostrophes where they should be, while removing them from where they do not belong.

4. The dog buried it's bones all over James backyard.

5. You can't do that to John's book!

6. Mum, when will the family's dinners be ready?

7. The latest X-Box game isn't selling very well.

8. The computers weren't working so the students' essays weren't completed on time.

They're all getting extensions.

9. The government's attitude didn't reflect the people's opinion's.

10. The animal's aren't happy because they're maltreated.

USING ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VERBS

Verbs express actions of some kind, and they always have a subject! When a verb is in the active voice, the subject of the verb is clearly identified as the one who performs the action.

For example:

Scientists (subject) perform (active verb) many experiments.

Most patients (subject) feel (active verb) anxious before surgery.

Books (subject) provide (active verb) a lot of information.

When a verb is in the passive voice, however, the subject of the verb is acted upon, rather than acting. This is why this kind of construction is called passive. For example, the sentences above, written with the verbs in the passive voice, would look like this:

Many experiments (subject) are performed (passive verb) by scientists.

Anxiety (subject) is felt (passive verb) by most patients before surgery.

A lot of information (subject) is provided (passive verb) by books.

While both sets of examples say the same thing, you can see that the examples using the passive voice use more words, are less direct, sound a lot more impersonal and can seem

overly wordy and rather pompous. They are also weaker in their impact on the reader than the examples using the active construction. The reader has to think longer to work out the meaning of the passive phrases.

The effect is more noticeable in a more complex sentence that uses the passive assembly:

The work in this area is being assessed and a decision will be reached next week about whether the early exams will be sat by the students as part of their GCSE career. (32 words)

The same sentence using active voice would read:

We are assessing the work in this area and will decide next week about whether students will sit early exams as part of their GCSE career. (26 words)

Always use active voice unless you have a particular reason for choosing a passive construction (especially in creative writing).

There are situations where passives are preferable. For example, you may deliberately want to emphasise information other than the 'doer' of an action because what is done is more important. For example:

The information has been collected and will be collated as soon as possible.
Smoking will be prohibited.

In sentences like those above, the reader's interest may lie with the information, rather than with who has done the collecting or collating and with whether or not he or she can smoke, rather than knowing who has done the prohibiting.

The passive voice is also very useful when you **do not know the 'doer'** of an action:

The books were taken from the library.

The cd's were ruined because they were left out in the sun.

Every ticket to the concert has been sold.

Passive voice is frequently used by institutions to conceal who did what, and by stuck-up writers in the mistaken belief that by avoiding first person pronouns, they can make their opinions more authoritative. You **should not use the passive to avoid responsibility for your actions or opinions**. For example:

The data was examined and it was concluded that the students should be entered early for their exams.

Your draft has not been accepted and it will be returned to you for further correction.

Both of these sentences would be much better in the active voice:

I examined the data and concluded that the students should be entered early for their exams.

I have not accepted your draft and will return it to you for further correction.

In general, use active voice in all of your sentences unless you have a very specific reason for using the passive, and you are sure that it is a **very good one!**

EXERCISES

Rewrite the following sentences by replacing the passive verbs with active verbs.

1. The speech was given by the Prime Minister.

2. The city was bombed by the occupying forces.

3. The binoculars were used by James, to spy on the girls who were swimming.

4. When the book was read, the characters were felt by me to be unsympathetic.

5. The war was started by the government in the 1950s.

6. Runs are scored by batsmen when a weakness is seen by them in the bowlers.

7. The murder was committed by John when Jane's infidelity was discovered by him.

8. Contrary to their expectations, the exam was passed by most students.

9. The result will be sent to you when our decision has been made.

10. The event was poorly planned by the manager.

USING COMMAS, CAPITAL LETTERS AND NUMBERS

USING COMMAS

Commas have specific functions in structuring clear sentences. You do not put a comma into a sentence to imitate the way you would break up a sentence if you were speaking. Written expression is different from spoken expression, and by inserting commas as you would in speech, you break up the rhythm of the sentence and quite often confuse the reader!

Many people scatter commas throughout their sentences in a hope that these 'magic marks' will somehow make everything clear. Too often, they have the opposite effect. As with capital letters, you should use only the commas which are needed, but you must use them in places where they indicate the correct meaning of your sentence.

To some extent, you have to use your own judgement about when to use commas, since the rules governing their use are not set hard and fast. Set out below are *guidelines* which outline the seven most common uses for commas.

1. Use a comma before *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *yet*, *so*, when they join two independent clauses. For example:

The disease spread very rapidly, yet the authorities were able to finally contain it.
Lady Chatterly's Lover is a great novel, but *Pride and Prejudice* is more popular with young readers.

2. Use a comma after an introductory expression, to divide it from the main part of the sentence. For example:

If you are having trouble with your writing, you should practice by keeping a diary.
If the books are not kept in amazing condition, it will be hard to write in them.

3. Use commas around information which is not essential to the sentence's meaning, to divide it from the rest of the sentence in the same way you would use brackets. For example:

The documents, which appeared to have been forged, were leaked on Wikileaks.com.
Good diet and regular exercise, although not very popular with most people, are the keys to good health.
The Prime Minister, David Cameron, will issue a press release on Human Rights today.

4. Use commas between the items in a series if those items could be separated by 'and'. For

example:

Vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation and paragraph structure are all important aspects of writing.

Mining involves geologists, surveyors, engineers, mechanics and workers in many other areas.

Increasingly in the United Kingdom, writers are placing a comma before the 'and' in the final pair of a series. This is a relatively new usage, and is not universally accepted, but one which avoids ambiguity.

On the other hand, most people no longer put commas between the items in a short series of adjectives. For example:

The green fragrant foliage is characteristic of these trees.

They took the old dusty fishing line from its hiding place.

5. Use commas around the name of a person you are addressing. For example:

Your support, Ms Croft, has been essential to the success of the program.

Can you, Ms Long, continue to be supportive of your staff?

Ms Kennedy, your school has a calm environment.

6. Use commas around a word that interrupts the sentence, for example, 'however', 'moreover', 'therefore'. That is to say, connectives.

The causes, however, are more interesting than they appear at first.

Moreover, the students have worked hard to achieve their grades.

The results, therefore, should be interesting.

7. Use a comma to introduce a short quotation. For example:

The writer said, 'I always think about commas in bed'.

John Donne wrote, 'No man is an island'.

USING CAPITAL LETTERS

Use capital letters in the following positions:

- for the first word in a sentence:

The end is nigh.

Every so often I forget to do something important.

We all know how to use capital letters.

- for the proper names of specific individuals, institutions, official positions, languages, races, countries, and nationalities:

This is where Uncle Fred lives (but not: *This is where my uncle lives.*).

The Prime Minister (but not: *She is a government minister.*).

Crown Woods College (But not *They go to school.*).

French, English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Nigerian, Jamaican.

- For the days of the week, months, and special days / holidays:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, January, February, March, Christmas Day, Easter Sunday.

But not for the seasons – summer, winter, autumn or spring.

- For the title of a relationship if it is taking the place of a specific person's name:

I know that Mother will do it. (But not in: *I will ask my mother to do it.*)

Did you know that Aunt Jean has gone home? (But not in: *Did you know that my aunt, called Jean, has gone home?*)

- For the first word in quoting direct speech:

He said, 'Once more should do it'.

Hamlet is renowned for saying, 'To be, or not to be'.

- For the first, last, and every important word in the title of a book, journal, article, painting, musical or dance composition, video, musical compilation, or film:

The Principles of Semantics

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

The Creature from the Black Lagoon

The New World Symphony

Pride and Prejudice

A Grand Don't Come for Free

The Mona Lisa

A Day at the Races

Capital letters are seldom used in modern writing. Some people use capitals to begin any word which is important to them. **You should resist this temptation.** The importance of one word or name over another is a matter of personal opinion, and your ideas may be very different to those

of your readers. Some people, for example, give capitals to titles such as Manager or Doctor. A manager or a doctor is really no different to a teacher, a nurse or a fire fighter, and none of these occupational titles need capitalisation.

USING NUMBERS

Numbers can be written in figures or in words. Whether you use figures or words depends on the context in which you are writing and the position and function of the numbers in your sentences.

- In most formal writing, use words rather than figures for numbers less than 10. Single digit numbers are easier to understand when they appear in written form.
- In narrative or descriptive writing, express numbers of less than 100 in words, since figures interrupt the flow of the writing and look inappropriate in a text which uses words exclusively.
- In scientific, technical, mathematical or statistical writing, use figures rather than words, because figures and symbols are used often in this context and precise values are an important requirement of the text.
- Do not use commas to separate groups of three figures in numbers greater than 999, but do use spaces instead. For example: *9 000* or *30 248 678*

- Do not use figures at the beginning of a sentence in any kind of writing. A sentence must always begin with a word. If you wish to use figures only in your text, you must structure your sentence so that the first word is not a number.
- Always use figures to express numbers which are accompanied by units of measurement or symbols. For example:

The recommended single dose for a child is 35 mg.

The new glasses will cost £35.00 each.

In the four classes, 30% of students were unable to spell their own name.

The diameter of the pipe is 9mm

EXERCISES

USING COMMAS

Rewrite the following sentences using commas appropriately:

1. I do like Austen but Lawrence is the master.

2. Your support Mrs. Smith is essential for our program which is already underway.

3. If you watch very closely you will see a small black insect emerge from the hole which is under the bright green leaf.

4. In this topic we study Shakespeare Orwell Steinbeck Duffy Armitage and many others.

5. We have decided that you Ms. Renson are the winner.

6. The situation therefore was quite out of control.

7. I turned around and said 'Go away'.

8. However he had decided that despite her strongly stated objections he would buy coffee
tea milk and sugar.

9. His bike which is useless broken and old is in the shed.

10. Meanwhile the cat who was fat ran away from the dog which caused damage noise and
anger because the owners who were rather elderly were not at home.

USING CAPITAL LETTERS

Rewrite the following sentences using correct capitalisation:

1. i do like austen, but dickens is the master.

2. your support, mrs. smith, is essential for our Program, which is already underway.

3. The prime minister said england would go to War.

4. In this subjectwe study shakespeare, orwell, steinbeck, duffy, armitage, and many others.

5. His name is uncle Fred, because he married my Aunt.

6. The minister for transport should catch the Bus.

7. After finishing *much ado about nothing*, shakespeare said, 'let's go for a milkshake.

8. Having christmas during Winter is crazy.

9. The Teacher said i had a detention because i was lazy in class. I should be called crazy

matt!

10. The bureau of meteorology forecast Thunder.

USING NUMBERS

Rewrite the following sentences using numbers correctly.

1. In poker you deal out 5 cards.

2. 100 years later it happened again: a flu epidemic swept across Europe.

3. The precise quantity of ammonium sulphide must be one point four six two milligrams.

4. The mean result from the program was thirty.

5. Over the hill came twenty-five battle hardened soldiers.

6. He failed twenty percent of the exam.

7. The book is four hundred and twenty five years old.

8. That car is worth £2,500,000.
