

Teaching  
grammar  
effectively  
in primary schools

David Reedy  
and Eve Bearne

UKLA

The United Kingdom Literacy Association

## ***Acknowledgements***

*We are very grateful to the following for their contributions to this book:*

*Jim Crinson, Seren Freestone, Donna Hughes, Chloe Martin, Kerry Marcuccilli, Ben Reave, Tammy Round, and other teachers who have shared their work with us.*

*Particular thanks to Rebecca Kennedy.*

Design by [mark@cm1design.com](mailto:mark@cm1design.com)

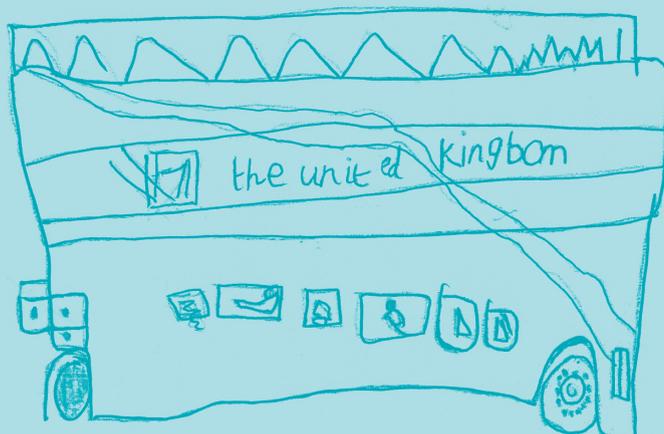
ISBN 978 1 897638 73 6

ISBN EPUB 978 1 909315 96 9

ISBN AER 978 1 909315 97 6

ISBN ONL 978 1 909315 98 3

ISSN 2042 2229



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
<i>Why teach grammar?</i>	4
<i>What do we mean by grammar?</i>	5
<i>Implicit knowledge about language</i>	5
<i>Current context</i>	5
<i>Research on grammar</i>	5
<i>Talking about grammar</i>	6
<i>Testing children's knowledge of grammar</i>	6
<i>The structure of these materials</i>	7
<b>Section One Words</b>	9
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Structural words and lexical words</i>	9
<b>Case study year 1</b> <i>Prepositions</i>	10
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Prepositions</i>	11
<b>Case study year 2</b> <i>Adjectives</i>	11
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Verbs</i>	15
Quick and Easy <i>Action verbs</i> (whole class)	15
<i>Vignette year 2</i> <i>Past and present verbs</i>	16
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Adverbs</i>	18
Quick and Easy <i>Verbs and adverbs</i> (whole class)	18
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Modal verbs</i>	19
Quick and Easy <i>Modal verbs</i> (whole class/guided group work)	19
Quick and Easy <i>Stative verbs</i> (whole class/guided group, independent work)	19
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Subject and object</i>	20
Quick and Easy <i>Personal pronouns</i> (whole class/guided group work)	20
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Pronouns</i>	21
Quick and Easy <i>Possessive pronouns</i> (guided group work)	22
Quick and Easy <i>Reflexive pronouns</i> (independent work)	22
<b>Section Two Words into sentences</b>	23
<i>Vignette year 2</i> <i>The expanded noun phrase</i>	23
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Nouns and noun phrases</i>	24
<b>Case study year 3</b> <i>Determiners</i>	24
Quick and Easy <i>Commands, questions, statements and exclamations</i> (whole class)	26
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Clauses and simple sentences</i>	28
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Different kinds of sentence</i>	28
<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Conjunctions</i>	29
<b>Case study year 3</b> <i>Compound sentences using conjunctions</i>	29
Quick and Easy <i>Verbs and verb phrases</i> (guided group work)	31

# Contents

2	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Adverbials and verb phrases</i>	32
	Quick and Easy <i>Adverbials: when, how, where, why</i> (guided group work)	32
	<b>Case study year 3</b> <i>Subordination</i>	33
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Subordination</i>	36
	<b>Vignette year 6</b> <i>Subordinating conjunctions</i>	36
	Quick and Easy <i>The relative clause</i> (whole class/ guided group work)	38
	Quick and Easy <i>Revisiting adverbs and adverbials</i> (whole class/ guided group work)	39
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Active and passive</i>	39
	<b>Vignette years 5/6</b> <i>Telling stories: active and passive</i>	40
	Quick and Easy <i>Matters of style: ambiguity and double negatives</i> (guided group/independent work)	42
	<b>Section Three Punctuation</b>	44
	<b>Case study year 1</b> <i>Punctuation pests</i>	44
	Quick and Easy <i>Commas in lists</i> (whole class)	47
	Quick and Easy <i>Choosing the right punctuation</i> (whole class/guided group work)	47
	Quick and Easy <i>Apostrophes of omission</i> (whole class)	48
	Quick and Easy <i>Apostrophes of possession</i> (whole class/guided group work)	49
	Quick and Easy <i>Direct speech</i> (whole class/ guided group work)	51
	<b>Vignette year 5</b> <i>Revisiting direct speech, improving expression</i>	52
	<b>Case study year 6</b> <i>Ellipsis</i>	53
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Parenthesis</i>	54
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Semicolons, colons and bullet points</i>	55
	<b>Section Four Beyond the sentence</b>	56
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Paragraphs</i>	56
	<b>Vignette year 3</b> <i>Paragraphs</i>	56
	<b>Terminology check</b> <i>Cohesion including connectives</i>	57
	<b>Case study year 5</b> <i>Cohesion: linking paragraphs in non-narrative</i>	58
	<b>Section Five Year six - preparing for the test</b>	61
	Children's books	62
	References	62
	<b>Section Six Photocopiable resources</b>	63
	Index	72

**List of Figures**

*Figure 1 Michael's story map with prepositions*

*Figure 2 Zone of relevance*

*Figure 3 Description of the main character*

*Figure 4 My favourite moment in Naughty Bus*

*Figure 5 Determiners*

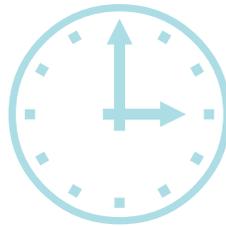
*Figure 6 Ellipsis indicating hesitation*

*Figure 7 Ellipsis emphasising tension*

*Figure 8 Ellipsis for dramatic effect*

*Figure 9 Extract from Joe's report based on information about Newcastle*

*Figure 10 Extract from Joe's comparison on Dagenham and Newcastle*



# UKLA

# Teaching grammar effectively in primary schools

4

*Grammar is the business of taking language to pieces, to see how it works.*

David Crystal (*Rediscover Grammar*, 2000)

## Introduction

### Why teach grammar?

This might be re-worded as ‘why teach about the use of language?’ If any reader or writer is to have a reflective and properly critical view of texts, then knowledge of language and how it is organised to make meaning is essential. This book is about language and how it works. It is also about meaning. Each case study or vignette begins with reading - even if it is just a fragment or a piece of film - to help see how language in different forms is used to express ideas. There are then examples showing how a particular grammatical element can be taught in context with suggestions for improving writing through exploration of that aspect of language. Most importantly, the examples aren’t about adding lots of adjectives, verbs or adverbs to writing. They are about achieving the effect that the writer wants. For example, in Tennyson’s poignant and moving poem ‘The Lady of Shalott’ when the poet wants to paint a picture of Lancelot, a dashing young knight, he uses ornate language:

*The gemmy bridle glitter’d free,  
Like to some branch of stars we see  
Hung in the golden Galaxy.  
The bridle bells rang merrily  
As he rode down to Camelot:  
And from his blazon’d baldrick slung  
A mighty silver bugle hung,  
And as he rode his armour rung,  
Beside remote Shalott.*

Teaching  
grammar  
effectively  
in primary schools

The cumulative effect of: *glitter’d, stars, golden, blazon’d, silver* gives a glorious image of Lancelot as seen by the Lady, even if only in the mirror. To create this effect, Tennyson deploys adjectives, adverbs and highly active verbs to evoke a particular image of splendour. However, when the Lady decides she must see Lancelot in the flesh, and takes the consequences, Tennyson strips his language bare, using mostly single syllable words:

*She left the web, she left the loom  
She made three paces thro’ the room,  
She saw the water-lily bloom.  
She saw the helmet and the plume,  
She looked down to Camelot.*

For the stark seriousness of this act, Tennyson uses simple language. The Lady sees just ‘the helmet and the plume’ - no adjectives. She ‘made three paces’ - no highly active verbs and no adverbs. He is also not afraid to use repetition; sometimes repetition is necessary to create the effect the writer wants. Tennyson, like all good writers, chooses language to evoke a particular mood or paint a precise picture in words. This is what all young writers should be encouraged to do, not pepper their work with unnecessarily decorative vocabulary or be taught ‘rules’ about ‘good writing’. Good writing is what works to do the job the writer wants. And studying how language works - grammar - should help young writers to say what they want to say as effectively as they can.

## What do we mean by grammar?

Grammar is the study of how we make sense in speaking or writing so that we can understand people who speak the same language as we do. It's no more mysterious than that. The trouble is that often grammar is taught by naming parts of speech: *noun*, *verb* etc which can in itself be misleading since the same word can be called either depending on how it's used. Take the word 'cheat' for example; in this sentence: *The ref called the footballer a cheat for diving* 'cheat' is a noun. But in this sentence: *I often cheat at cards* 'cheat' is a verb. So understanding grammar is more than a matter of learning just to name parts of speech; it's a matter of understanding how language works so that we can say (or write) exactly what we want to say as effectively as possible.

Before starting to teach grammar it's worth reflecting on how you were taught grammar, how successful it was and how confident you feel when you see lists of grammatical terms. If you feel confident, then it suggests that you were taught that knowing how language works, and the grammatical terms that describe that, will help you to make sense of language and shape language to make meaning. If you feel a tingle of fear when you hear particular terminology, then it suggests that you were only taught the names of grammatical parts, rather than how they work to create meaning.

## Implicit knowledge about language

It's often best to start with what you know implicitly about language. Try filling in the gaps here (there are no correct answers):

I walked to the \_\_\_\_\_ and picked up a \_\_\_\_\_. It was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
Unfortunately, I \_\_\_\_\_ it. What could I \_\_\_\_\_ now?

In the first sentence, you might have chosen words like 'table' and 'book' or 'cupboard' and 'plate'. These are nouns. No other kind of word would fit. It just wouldn't sound right if you put 'lovely' and 'jumped' in either of those gaps. In the second sentence you may have put the adjectives: old/blue/china, and tatty/leather/fragile. It wouldn't have made sense if you had put 'tree' or 'car' there (try it). In the third sentence, you wouldn't have put the adjective 'yellow'. 'Unfortunately, I yellow it' just doesn't make sense but adding a verb such as 'dropped' or 'hated' would. And similarly, in the final sentence you wouldn't put a noun or an adjective but another verb like 'do' or 'say'. That shows your implicit knowledge of language and it's worth remembering that children will have implicit knowledge too. Knowledge about language, or grammar, means bringing what is under the surface - implicit - out into the open and making it explicit. And having a language to talk about grammar helps in this process. When it comes to teaching, it's easier to help children be more reflective readers and writers if teachers and pupils have a shared language to talk about language - a metalanguage.

## Current context

So how is this different from what teachers have always done? It isn't really, except that now children at school in England will be tested on their knowledge of grammatical terminology and responsible professionals will want to make sure that they succeed. It's how it's done that will make the difference between children genuinely being able to use grammatical knowledge to enhance their understanding of language in use and being at the mercy of 'the naming of parts'. Seeing examples, working on texts, and hearing the terminology used in context, leads to more successful learning rather than simply rehearsing definitions.

## Research on grammar

What is research telling us about teaching English grammar? Repeated studies show no evidence that formal teaching of grammar out of context has any beneficial effect on either reading or writing. Two significant large-scale studies (Hillocks, 1986; Andrews *et al.*, 2006) found no evidence of a relationship. However, more recent projects have involved teaching grammar to support pupils' writing. Working with children aged 6 to 10 in Scotland, Hunt (2001) has shown that introducing key terms such as 'synonym' 'verb', 'noun',

'sentence' and 'noun phrase' in the context of shared writing can clarify the options and so help children consider alternative wordings and make appropriate choices. In England, a large-scale study by Myhill *et al.* (2012) in secondary schools found significant positive effects for teaching grammar in the context of teaching about writing. The key teaching principles in the Myhill *et al.* study are that grammatical metalanguage is best explained through real examples in texts; language features are discussed in the context of how their use can enhance writing; discussion is essential to encourage critical conversations about language and its effects; 'creative imitation' offers model patterns for pupils to play with and then use in their own writing and playing with language and taking risks are actively encouraged to support pupils in making choices about their own writing.

## Talking about grammar

Being able to use grammatical metalanguage allows for more succinct talk about grammar and discussion of function and effects. For example, in key stage 1, a focus on verbs might start with a picturebook about a child walking down the road. In role play children might be asked to think about different ways the child might be going down the road: *running, sprinting, trudging, gliding, scooting, skipping, dawdling...* Children enact these different verbs and discuss how they change the movement as well as suggesting the mood of the character. These insights can then be used to build vocabulary and offer choices for them to use in their own writing whilst developing their grammatical understanding of the function of verbs - that they are more than simply 'doing words'. Once children have got to grips with verbs they can think about how adverbials modify verbs - that is, add information about how, when or where the verb is carried out. For example, the child might trudge *slowly, unwillingly, yesterday, or along the pavement*. They may not immediately remember the grammatical terms, but they are likely to remember the way the language changes to suggest different effects.

## Testing children's knowledge of grammar

Eleven year olds in England from 2013 will be tested on their knowledge about grammar, punctuation and spelling. The tests are structured so that they can be easily marked online so the questions require simply identifying particular grammatical features. For example:

### 1 Which pair of pronouns is best to complete the sentences below?

The teacher split \_\_\_\_\_ into teams. \_\_\_\_\_ were batting; the other team were fielding.

Tick one

they      Them

us        We

her      She

them     I

### 2 Circle all the adverbs in the sentence below.

Excitedly, Dan opened a heavy lid. He paused briefly and looked at the treasure.<sup>1</sup>

In order to perform well in the test, children need to be familiar with the terminology and able to apply their understanding of grammatical terms in an unfamiliar and artificial context. But even if they are successful at this, it tells us nothing about their writing ability nor their ability to reflect on how authors make grammatical choices for effects. Although this book is not designed to help children practise for these kinds of test, it does set out to support children's developing knowledge and understanding of grammar in context and enhance their ability to tackle tests like these successfully.

## The structure of these materials

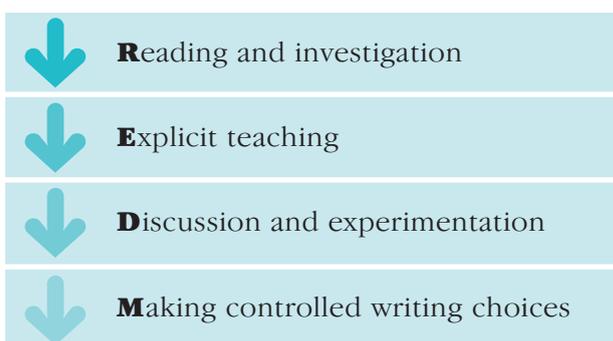
These materials cover the grammatical and punctuation features listed in the National Curriculum as sentence structure, text structure and punctuation. The materials do not cover the word structure section as we feel this is already being covered well in existing good practice about teaching spelling. The terminology related to spelling, for example, *singular/plural*, *suffix* etc are not dealt with in this book, for two reasons: i) there is already a mass of good guidance about spelling and ii) to cover all the spelling appendix in the curriculum would take another whole book!

The chart below shows the terminology the children should be introduced to in each year, according to the national curriculum for English.

Year	Terminology
1	word, sentence, letter, capital letter, full stop, punctuation, singular, plural, question mark, exclamation mark
2	verb, tense (past/present), adjective, noun, suffix, command, question, statement, exclamation, apostrophe (of omission)
3	preposition, direct speech, inverted commas, speech marks, prefix, consonant, vowel, clause, subordinate clause
4	pronoun, possessive pronoun, adverbial
5	relative clause, modal verb, relative pronoun, parenthesis, bracket, dash, determiner, cohesion, ambiguity, ellipsis, double negative
6	active and passive voice, reflexive pronoun, subject and object, hyphen, synonym/autonym, colon, semicolon, bullet points

As learning about language is a cumulative process, although case study examples and vignettes based on practice are attached to specific year groups, the rest of the material can be used with any year as appropriate. Certain aspects, for example, adverbials, will need to be revisited as children grow more experienced with texts, become more analytical about what they read and as they learn to refine the way they write. For this reason, the material does not strictly follow the sequence in the chart above.

However, there is a common process about all of the material and drawing on the work of Hillocks (1986) and Myhill (2012) we have based the material in the book on an underlying view of the importance of explicit teaching of grammar in context and of children being actively involved in investigating language in use. All the case studies, vignettes and 'Quick and Easy' examples begin with reading and investigation supported by explicit teaching of the specific language feature under consideration, then move through discussion about how this piece of language works, experimenting with it in use, and end in practising its use by making informed and controlled choices in writing. We summarise this as the **REDM** sequence - the process of teaching grammar in context:



- 8 Throughout the material there are also handy terminology checks and there is a special section about tackling the year 6 test. The final section contains photocopiable resources.

### Notes

These are taken from the sample paper English tests for Grammar punctuation and spelling Paper 1: short answer questions. Available on:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/g/sample%20ks2%2013-5%20english%20gps%20short%20answer%20booklet.pdf>

Accessed 18th February, 2013.

UKLA Teaching  
grammar  
effectively  
in primary schools