

# Preparing for 2013 Grammar and Spelling SAT



Literacy and learning advisors for the Royal Borough of Kingston, Christine and Lindsay have a long-standing and proven track record of effectively supporting school improvement in numerous schools across different boroughs. Together, their expertise covers a full spectrum of learning needs, including those of the more able, children with EAL, reluctant learners and those with socio-economic disadvantages. They have also led on improving boys' literacy, the development of thinking skills and the successful implementation of shared and guided reading and writing.

By this time in the Spring Term, teachers of Year 6 children will very likely be turning their thoughts to the high stakes tests in May. And while it is the case that the best learning occurs when it is applied to a broad range of contexts and subjects, the reality is that Year 6 children need to be familiarized with test formats: working to strict time limits and responding to very specific, unfamiliar question-types. This is particularly true of this year's brand new grammar and punctuation test.

It should, however, go without saying that continuing to relish the power and beauty of language - even in the context of SATs preparation - is the best way to guarantee life-long learning.

Having examined the question-types from STA's sample material, we have identified several likely sticking points. Again, we must stress that assessment for learning remains the absolute priority: every teacher must regularly analyse what their pupils can do against nationally identified expectations.

## Reading Well

A key skill within the format of the new test is the ability to comprehend not only the questions but also the sentences that may need analysing or completing. A child who apparently has good comprehension of real texts will not necessarily automatically read and understand a decontextualized sentence like, "I am putting on my shoes and I will *have been* for a walk in the park right now," (where the task is to correct the *underlined* verb). When we read text, we frequently skip parts of sentences while still achieving the overall meaning, but for the purpose of this kind of question, children must become used to reading and understanding decontextualized sentences. This issue can be effectively addressed in regular starter activities, where the focus can be *any* grammar or punctuation skill, and in guided group work, in which very specific individual needs can be picked up. In either format, it makes sense to do this across the curriculum, so that the isolated sentences link to wider learning. The habit of reading sentences carefully and digesting the meaning should be developed at every opportunity, becoming faster and automatic.

## Standard English: tense

Thorough and consistent accuracy in use of verb tense is a key grammatical skill and those children who struggle with grammar are likely to struggle with tense.

Closely analyse children's writing, and indeed their speech, and aim to model the correct form immediately. If errors of tense occur frequently, then this must be a high priority target for which additional support ought to be provided. If necessary, incorporate the correct use of tense in all grammar and punctuation work. For example, when exploring speech punctuation, include an error of tense that has to be corrected; if working on the addition of a subordinate clause with a comma, include an error of tense....and so on. As often as possible, use examples where there is more than one verb involved in order that children practise tense-consistency.

## Standard English: subject-verb agreement

As with tense consistency, errors in subject-verb agreement (e.g. "We was..") must be corrected at the point of error. As with verb-tenses above, this aspect can be picked up when focusing on other grammar and punctuation. And of course, it should be addressed in all areas of the academic curriculum.

## Terminology

There are many children who can accurately apply a broad range of grammar and punctuation skills in their writing, but do not use the accurate terms for the devices used. In improving writing, knowing the terms is useful (e.g. "That sentence could have much more descriptive impact if you expanded the noun-phrase"); for the purpose of the new test, knowing the terms is vital. Teachers should study Section 4 of STA's *English, grammar, punctuation and spelling test framework* (download from [www.education.gov.uk/ks2](http://www.education.gov.uk/ks2)) where necessary terminology is listed, for example:

**Article:** A word class that is used accurately by many children, but seldom named in primary classrooms. 'The' is the only definite article in the English language; indefinite articles are 'a', 'an' and 'some'.

**Preposition:** A word placed before a noun, pronoun or noun phrase to make a prepositional phrase, for example: *with me, to the left, of wood, from Israel, during break, and for example!* Often, prepositions are taught in relation to position (under, over, beyond, etc), but the list is broader than this.

**Contraction:** Most key stage 2 children will have encountered apostrophes for contraction, but they may not know that the shortened word (e.g. we've, I'll) is called a contraction.

**Inverted commas:** Again, children recognize and use these, but they also need to be familiar with this synonym for speech marks. It is possible to imagine a child confusing the term inverted commas for the simple comma!

## Direct and indirect speech

Although these terms do not appear in the content domain section of the STA document, there is an expectation that children move from indirect to direct speech within the exemplar questions produced in June last year. Learning to move from one to the other is a useful writing skill beyond the tests: for example, the journalistic style is best achieved by reducing the amount of direct speech and replacing it with indirect. In fact, being able to say, “Please change some of your direct speech into indirect” to a child who overuses dialogue in narrative would very likely improve the quality of many of the stories we all read.

## Articulating Understanding

As with reading comprehension tests, understanding is not enough: children have to be able to *explain* their understanding, using the correct terminology! Many children use commas for lists, to add information and to distinguish clauses, but can they explain *why* they are using a comma in each case? An ideal way to practise this is during oral and written peer feedback, and indeed in teacher feedback. Similarly, the analysis and articulation of grammar techniques during text immersion will embed the language and skills required. Done poorly, this will kill any enjoyment of reading, but done well, as with all of the strategies above, it will enhance the enjoyment of the author’s craft.

## Looking for teacher support which makes grammar fun?

Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton have just created Grammar and Spelling Bug. Designed to give you all the tools you need to deliver the grammar, punctuation and spelling requirements of the new Primary English curriculum without reaching for a hefty academic tome. It includes comprehensive lesson plans and assessments available at the click of a button. What’s more, your pupils will love practicing their newly acquired skills over and over with exciting, time-travel themed games.

To play your free game visit: [www.pearsonprimary.co.uk/spag](http://www.pearsonprimary.co.uk/spag)