

2017 & 2018 KS2 Grammar, punctuation and spelling test - implications

If you are a teacher, I would recommend completing the last three GPS test papers (probably in the comfort and safety of your own home). If you find yourself pausing over particular questions, or find you have incorrectly answered questions, don't panic. This diagnostic information will help you identify areas of grammar that you need to strengthen. With limited time available for professional development, it is worth honing in on specific aspects rather than trying to work on all elements of grammar, e.g. If you find you have incorrectly answered question 37 in the 2017 paper, then you know it is relative pronouns you need to develop your understanding of, if it's question 48 in the 2017 paper then you know it's present progressive tenses you need to focus on. All teachers should invest in books that can support them in developing their own knowledge and understanding. I would recommend the following:

- Usborne Junior Illustrated Grammar and Punctuation, Jane Bingham, 2016.
- Teaching Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in Primary Schools, David Waugh, Claire Warner and Rosemary Waugh, 2nd Ed 2016.
- Essential primary grammar, Debra Mayhill, Susan Jones, Annabel Watson and Helen Lines, 2016.
- Grammar Survival, for Primary Teachers, Jo Shackleton, 2017.
- A series of teacher books which are very reasonably priced and written for specific year groups that are written by Carol Matchett, 2017. *Whilst I would not advocate a plethora of stand alone grammar activities, the blurb in the teachers' book is quite useful.*

Once you have completed the examination paper, it is worth getting together with colleagues to consider the **implications for teaching that can be gleaned from each question**. What do pupils need to know and understand in order to confidently answer the test questions (and similar ones). How did pupils perform in the test? Drill down to question level analysis (available on ASP) to consider which questions nationally pupils had difficulty with, and which ones your pupils performed significantly above or below the national. This will help you adapt teaching for the coming year.

General points:

There is quite a lot in the SPAG test which is linked to reading. If pupils read often and widely they are more likely to be able to spot errors and deduce the answers to some of the GPS questions. Pupils can usually read and understand far more punctuation and grammar than they can actually use and apply independently in their own writing. (Avid readers are also more likely to achieve the 'greater depth' standard in writing.) This places fiction and non-fiction books centre stage: as part of whole class reading, for guided reading, for topic work and reading beyond the school day. Every school should look carefully at how the curriculum is underpinned with high quality texts. Since disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be read to by an adult at home and are less likely to engage in out of school reading, they are a key group to target. If your whole class reading does not include class copies, make sure that certain segments are photocopied to enable pupils to look at the sentence structures. It is not enough to simply hear the text read aloud, they must engage with it. When using a whole class text, teachers are advised to use visualisers to draw pupils' attention to how an author has used grammar.

Children who learn grammar through stand-alone exercises will be at a disadvantage. Research shows that teaching grammar in context (i.e. linked to the context of the writing they are about to produce, the topic or the novel currently being studied) has more impact than exercises with random contexts. When pupils complete a lot of exercises that are not directly linked to the work they are about to produce, they struggle to transfer the new grammar into independent writing - this is particularly so for middle and lower attaining pupils. If pupils can apply techniques to their independent writing, they should find it easier to answer the full range of GPS test questions. (Separate exercises do have their place, e.g. they are useful for consolidation, revisiting aspects and to address common problems such as was/were, for revision and examination preparation, for extra practise).

Don't forget to teach grammar before and after pupils have produced a piece of writing. Which pieces of work will link to a particular aspect of grammar? Which sentence structures will be beneficial to the genre of writing? For example, when might it be appropriate to teach active and passive voice, levels of formality and tenses?

When marking pupils' writing, look out for opportunities to select a 'fix it' sentence from their texts that can then be displayed and used as a whole class activity. When pupils produce writing, it shows where there are gaps in their knowledge and understanding, thus providing some great teaching opportunities.

'Understanding' and 'secure learning' are the bedrock features of the National Curriculum. Through this approach, pupils should produce accurate writing and have the ability of pupils to use techniques discerningly. You can see that questions setters have selected questions that test out how secure understanding is. If pupils have not looked at the **WHY** as well as the **how** of the rules, they will struggle with a significant number of the questions. This means that teachers need to have a deep, rather than surface level, understanding of grammar - so they can tease out tricky aspects and unpick pupil's attempts at independent application of grammar in their own writing. As with a mastery approach in Mathematics - the advice is don't rush on until understanding is secure. Select questions with care, choosing ones that offer plenty of opportunities to address common misconceptions to test out understanding before moving on to new learning. Across all the KS2 test papers, and the assessment criteria for writing, the emphasis is on high quality teaching which takes pupils on a journey from guided practice to independent application of skills and knowledge.

Examples of questions that particularly 'test the edges of understanding' are:

In the 2017 paper Q37 on relative pronouns, Q25 on apostrophes, Q32 which has two main clauses, Q33 conjunctions, Q34 on prepositions, Q35 in relation to the subject of a sentence, Q34 on prepositions, Q42 on possessive pronouns, Q45 on the definition of noun, Q50 where the adverb is at the end of a sentence and tests pupils' understanding that not all adverbs end 'ly'.

In the 2018 paper Q27 on identifying the subject of a sentence (as it is more than one word – tightrope walker), Q31 on how word class changes depending on its use in a sentence, Q32 is tricky as it is which is most formal, Q38 on simple past tense as you have to see past the sentence itself, Q40 as they always seem to throw in a trickier example the questions about active and passive voice, Q42 on possessive pronouns, Q44 underline the adverbial in the sentence 'On Wednesday, Felix has a dental appointment.', Q46 suffixes, Q48 which requires pupils to identify 'were' as a verb, Q50 underline the subordinate clause 'Hassan and I are

going to our dance class; we are going to be late as we missed the bus.’ – would be an easy mistake to make to underline everything after the colon rather than ‘as we missed the bus’.

As you might expect, the questions get more challenging as the paper progresses and in some of the latter questions, the pupils have to write their own answer (rather than fill in the blank or pick from a selection). There are also questions which require pupils to explain a point, e.g. Explain how the position of the apostrophe changes the meaning of the second sentence. ‘1. What are your brother’s favourite toys. 2. What are your brothers’ favourite toys?’ There are also questions where there may be one box but the answer is two words, e.g. Rewrite the underlined verb in the sentence so it is in the present progressive. ‘I taught my sister to skateboard.’ (am teaching). Therefore, as with mathematics, the advice would be to ensure pupils are exposed to plenty of different question types when covering grammar topics.

On a more obvious point, if pupils are not confident with **grammar terms** they will not be able to understand the questions. Pupils need to know the term **'word class'** and be able to identify if words are **conjunctions, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, determiners, etc.**. There are additional reasons (beyond passing the test) why this terminology is important. For example, it enables pupils and teachers to converse more effectively and precisely during lessons, supports teachers and pupils in making the most of written and verbal feedback, and supports teachers in delivering lessons that aid pupils in expanding their use of different sentence structures.

A significant percentage of questions focused on differences, e.g. differences between nouns and pro-nouns, the difference between adjectives and verbs. They also tested pupils' understanding of ‘am, are, is, have been, was, were, seem’ as verbs. E.g. *Circle the four verbs in the passage below : ‘There were hundreds of gulls circling in the sky. They gathered near the dock, searching for scraps.’* Pupils had to spot when the word was acting as a noun and when it was acting as a verb. Pupils had to spot when a word was acting as an adjective and an adverb depending on how it was being used in a sentence. E.g. *What is the word class of each underlined word? Josef has beautiful writing. Josef writes beautifully.* (The first being an adjective and the second being an adverb.)

Examples from the 2018 paper

6 Tick the **adverb** in the sentence below.

Tick **one**.

The lively crowd cheered loudly when the rally car race began.

18

Which sentence uses the underlined word as a **noun**?

Tick one.

Dancers must be very fit and athletic.

Can I help you with that jigsaw?

We heard thunder, but we did not see any lightning.

The ocean is grey and angry-looking today.

21

Which **word class** is the underlined word in the sentence below?

My brother thinks that football is an amazing game.

Tick one.

adverb

adjective

determiner

conjunction

44

Underline the **adverbial** in the sentence below.

On Wednesday, Felix has a dental appointment.

In addition, teachers might find it useful to set exercises for pupils such as:

- Match the definition to the word class.
- Be given cards and asked to put them into the right category (particularly useful to stretch more able pupils as words might fit into more than one category depending on how they are used in a sentence).
- Quiz, quiz, trade (if you have not heard of this activity - try a Google search).
- Look at a sentence from the whole class text and pick out the word class elements.
- Look through a piece of text pupils have created and pick out the elements.
- Look at a sentence and replace the...(adverb, conjunction...)

Which sentence uses the word round as an adjective?

Tick one.

The dog ran round in circles.

There was a round of applause.

The castle had a round tower.

The team has already made the final round.

For higher ability pupils, some of the questions also test out their understanding of how a word may belong to a different word class depending on its position and use in a sentence, and that the same word can have many meanings, e.g. a round of golf, the final round, a round hole. You cannot legislate for the word that might be selected in the test paper (which points again to the need for pupils to read widely and have a well-developed vocabulary). Vocabulary covers depth (different word meanings) and well as breadth (the number of words known and understood). An example of this can be seen in question 13 (above).

As with other examinations, pupils need to be taught examination technique and be exposed to a variety of question types in the weeks before the test.

Pupils need to take care with spelling and correct formation of punctuation marks. For example, in Q22 (2018) pupils were asked to insert a subordinating conjunction to show that they ate lunch and listened to music at the same time. 'We listened to the music _____ we ate our lunch.' Possible answers included 'as, while, whilst, when' but were only credited if spelt correctly. In Q41 pupils were asked to rewrite the sentence as direct speech.

41

Rewrite the sentence below as **direct speech**.
Remember to punctuate your sentence correctly.

I asked her if she needed any help.

I asked, _____

The answer : I asked, "Do you need any help?" – some pupils possibly forgot the capital letter at the start of the speech.

Reading the question carefully is essential.

Let's consider the test paper in more detail:

Tick the sentence that must end with a **question mark**.

Tick one.

Why he went there was a mystery	<input type="checkbox"/>
What he thinks about the problem is anyone's guess	<input type="checkbox"/>
When are your cousins expected to arrive	<input type="checkbox"/>
How they would get to the match was unclear	<input type="checkbox"/>

Pupils need to know that not all sentences that start with 'why, what, when, where and how' are actually questions and some may be statements that would not end with a question mark. This reflects the emphasis of the National Curriculum on pupils having 'understanding' rather than blindly following a set of 'rules'. (Question 1, 2017 and tested in Q2 2018 and Q16 2018)

Pupils need to know the term semi-colon and the associated punctuation mark ';'. Even if pupils are not using semi-colons in their independent writing, they can be exposed to semi-colons in reading materials. To prepare for the examination it is useful for pupils to complete exercises where they need to fill in the missing punctuation mark. (Questions 2 and 10, 2017)

Which sentence uses **capital letters** correctly?

Tick one.

We went to manchester for Kajal and Jamal's party.	<input type="checkbox"/>
we went to Manchester for Kajal and Jamal's party.	<input type="checkbox"/>
We went to Manchester for Kajal and Jamal's party.	<input type="checkbox"/>
We went to Manchester for Kajal and Jamal's Party.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Capital letters - Question 3 (2017) is a good example of how useful it is to provide pupils with three or four similar sentences and ask not only 'which one is correct', but **why are the other three incorrect!**

It also tests the full range of capital letter application.

The examination targets many **common errors and misconceptions**. This is in keeping with a mastery approach to English. The more understanding a teacher has about common misconceptions, the more these can be targeted through teaching and feedback. Some common problems are due to local dialects and some are more national issues. As a school it is useful to create a list of the common pitfalls and misconceptions your pupils have, so they

can be regularly addressed. In the examination paper, questions targeting common errors can be seen in questions 5 (2017), which deals with verb tenses 'is/has/was' and 'ing / ed' verb endings. Question 5 is quite tricky for lower ability pupils and requires pupils to know the difference between verb and verb form, understand tense and have a sense of 'timeline' in the action taking place in a sentence as well as holding quite a lot in working memory. Question 6 (2017) targets a firm favourite 'was/were'. We would all be rich if we had a £1 for every time we identified a 'was/were' error in independent writing! The word 'accuracy' is mentioned 22 times in the National Curriculum and should be a key feature of English lessons.

Which **verb form** completes the sentence?

After Disha _____ her medal, she gave a television interview.

Tick one.

is collecting

had collected

has collected

was collecting

Circle the correct **verb form** in each underlined pair to complete the sentences below.

The last place I saw Jack and Gwen was / were in the playground.

At the museum, there was / were many interesting exhibits.

The bikes was / were lined up for the start of the race.

Some pupils' understanding of commas is limited to answers such as 'they are used for a pause or where to take a breath'. They often find it hard to explain how they are used to separate clauses, indicate the end of a fronted adverbial phrase at the start of a sentence, or how they are used to separate items in a list. Teachers are advised not to ignore the comma! Throughout school the use of commas should be a key priority. It starts in Year 2 with commas in a list and should be a central feature of every year group. Year 6 teachers have reported that knowledge, skill and understanding of commas, particularly their role in clause structure, limits pupils' ability to achieve the expected standard in independent writing at the end of Key Stage 2. So again, this is not just about the GPS test!

As a mastery approach tests out the 'edges of understanding' the questions are therefore set to test the wider knowledge base of the pupils. The questions in the test paper focus on commas to show multiple events in a sentence, e.g. Joe went upstairs, turned on his computer, took out his homework and started. *If pupils could put this technique into their 'writers toolbox' it would serve them well in all aspects of writing as well as in completing the test papers successfully.* The same applies to commas being used after prepositional phrases, e.g. 'In 1988, snowboarding became an official Olympic sport at the Winter Olympics in Japan'. It is also useful for pupils to consider that sometimes a comma is used before the final 'and' in a sentence for clarity. (Questions 7 & 8 – 2017 -are tricky examples of testing out this knowledge.)

1

Insert a **comma** in the correct place in the sentence below.

Although he was the youngest Tom was one of the tallest.

5

Add two **commas** to the sentence below to make it clear that Ana has four favourite things.

Ana's favourite things are camping holidays cycling and swimming.

7

Insert a **pair of commas** in the correct place in the sentence below.

My father who works at the museum gave my class a guided tour.

19

Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

Tick one.

Lately, the days have been growing noticeably longer and, warmer.

Lately the days, have been growing noticeably longer and warmer.

Lately the days, have been growing noticeably longer, and warmer.

Lately, the days have been growing noticeably longer and warmer.

The 'dash' - this is another example of where avid readers are more likely to spot the correct answer. In practice situations, pupils should be advised to read the sentence aloud, pausing slightly for the dash, and consider which sounds correct and makes more sense. It is useful for pupils to consider the purpose of the dash, e.g. it is often used as an interruption or an abrupt change of thought, to add extra detail, or to make an aside to the reader. Frequent encounters in reading, even if pupils are not using them in their own writing, will help.

Which sentence is punctuated correctly?

Tick one.

The man grabbed his coat – it looked cold and windy outside.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The man grabbed his coat it looked cold – and windy outside.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The man grabbed his coat it looked cold and windy – outside.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The man grabbed his coat it looked – cold and windy outside.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Brackets. Pupils need to know how to use brackets, including if the full stop needs to be inside or outside the bracket. (If it is a full sentence, the full stop is placed inside the bracket.)

Conjunctions. Pupils need to know the difference between co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions and be able to provide some when prompted, e.g. question 16. There is a lot of research that shows the more pupils understand conjunctions the easier reading comprehension is. This is particularly the case for EAL pupils.

Complete the sentence with an appropriate **subordinating conjunction**.

Tracey decided to walk _____ it was a lovely day.

For example, consider how the change in conjunction alters the meaning of the text.

- Dan was late. He got the bus.
- Dan was late because he got the bus.
- Dan was late even though he got the bus.
- Dan was late so he got the bus.

In addition, there are lots of examples of where pupils struggle to convey complex ideas in their independent writing because of a limited knowledge of conjunctions.

Pupils also need to know that conjunctions can come at the start or middle of a sentence, such as in question 33.

Circle the **conjunction** in each sentence.

We like to eat popcorn when we go to the cinema.

Although my sister likes salted popcorn, I prefer sweet popcorn.

My brother doesn't like popcorn at all, so he buys sweets instead.

Pronouns - Questions 20 and 37 (2017). Pronouns are an interesting aspect because they are one of the issues that holds back struggling readers with their ability to comprehend text. Pupils can find it difficult to track the person when sentences change between proper noun (e.g. Bob) and pronouns (e.g. he). It is well worth focusing on this aspect in reading sessions. Better use of pronouns will a) improve levels of comprehension, b) help with the SPAG test and c) improve flow and variety in children's independent writing. Look at the pronoun changes in the reading papers – particularly the non-fiction text.

Replace the underlined word or words in the sentence below with the correct **pronouns**.

For his ninth birthday, James visited his grandparents
and his grandparents took James to the cinema.

Circle the **relative pronoun** in the sentence below.

The mountain, which could be seen in the distance, had snow on top of it.

45

Circle the **relative pronoun** in the sentence below.

The boy who knocked on our door was at the wrong house.

42

Circle the **possessive pronoun** in the sentence below.

When Mum saw that I was wearing Oliver's gloves, she wanted to know where mine were.

It is easy for pupils to plumb for 'Oliver's gloves' in the above example (Oliver is a proper noun rather than a pronoun replacing the noun!) when actually the correct answer is 'mine'.

The most common **relative pronouns** are: who, whom, which, whoever, whomever, whichever, and that.

Punctuation of speech. Really, this just needs practice through 'spot the error' exercises, direct teaching to illustrate how to construct speech and feedback via marking pupil's writing. Improving dialogue is a separate matter. Remember that the test is likely to test the trickier elements of punctuating speech.

Contractions. Pupils might be thrown by question 25 (2017) as they might immediately think of contractions as didn't / couldn't etc., rather than the missing word 'is'. It really does challenge their knowledge of possession and their ability to read questions carefully.

Tick one box in each row to show whether the apostrophe is used for a **contracted form** or **possession**.

Sentence	Apostrophe for a contracted form	Apostrophe for possession
Where is Karen's pen?		
Joshua's hungry.		
Please get the dog's dinner.		
The cat's outside.		

Prepositions. Comes up a couple of times. Probably best taught through reading and writing as they are often a way of adding more detail to writing. The questions in both papers were not too tricky – as long as they had a basic understanding of the term!

Levels of formality. A central element of KS2 writing 'train the moderator' training in 2017 focused on assessing levels of formality, particularly pertaining to the greater depth criteria. Levels of formality are particularly difficult for those with speech and language difficulties, those who don't read widely and children with local dialect issues. When you look at some of the KS2 writing for children who did not meet the expected standard, levels

of formality are one of the hurdles they did not clear. Question 22 (2017) in the GPS test picks up on this issue.

Which sentence is the most formal?

Tick one.

Your presence is requested at the wedding of our daughter.

You would like to come to our daughter's wedding, wouldn't you?

We'd love you to join us for our daughter's wedding.

Our daughter's getting married – please come!

The 2018 paper had several questions about levels of formality and standard English. Plenty of practice is advised.

13 **Which sentence is written in Standard English?**

Tick one.

Two sports teams come to our school yesterday.

My friend was tidying the classroom.

Today the children done their school play.

The teachers was going to send a letter next week.

25 **Which sentence is the most formal?**

Tick one.

Watching too much television should be avoided.

You shouldn't watch too much TV.

Watching lots of TV isn't a good idea.

You really should try not to watch loads of telly.

There is, as you might expect, quite a lot of emphasis on clauses and tenses. To challenge greater depth pupils, there are questions on present progressive tense as well as more simple past tense.

38 Rewrite the underlined verbs in the **simple past** tense.

During the winter months, the sun does not appear high in
↓
[]
the sky and the days are much shorter than the nights.
↓
[]

12 Which option completes the sentence in the **past perfect**?

Soon after a Frenchman _____ the first land speed record, it was broken.

Tick one.

has set

had set

set

was setting

Prefixes and suffixes : The questions in the test are about showing understanding, e.g. Q3 (2018) The prefix re- can be added to the root word play to make the word replay. Tick the meaning of the word replay (from 'to play together' ; 'to play later'; 'to play again'; 'to play badly'. You can't predict which ones will be examined, but if these have been part of your vocabulary building, then pupils should cope ok with questions on this topic.

There are one or two questions which are tricky and hard to plan for. They should probably just be part of your revision strategy, such as Q8 in the 2018 paper which requires pupils to know that 'In three weeks' time, I will be on holiday.' is grammatically correct.