



A Guide to English in Year Four



Spelling, punctuation, and grammar – often called SPaG in schools – are crucial building blocks for children learning to speak, write, and listen. Having a good knowledge of grammar allows your child to communicate their ideas and feelings and helps them choose the right language for any situation.

Grammar & punctuation in Year 4 (age 8-9)

In Year 4, your child will use many key features of grammar and punctuation in their writing, as well as being able to use all the grammar and punctuation they learnt earlier in school.

What your child will learn:

Knowing the plural and possessive -s

An -s is commonly added to the end of a root word for two reasons:

1. to show that there is more than one of the thing (plural), or
2. to show who or what something belongs to (possession).

When an -s is added to show a plural (for example, 'one motorbike; two motorbikes' or 'a cow; a herd of cows'), there is no apostrophe added. When an -s is added to show possession (for example, 'Tom's motorbike' or 'the farmer's cow'), then an apostrophe is added.

Your child will learn how to recognise this difference and avoid using 'the greengrocer's apostrophe' in their writing. No more potatoe's!

Using apostrophes for plural possession

Apostrophes are sometimes used to show possession (who or what something belongs to). These are different depending on whether one person or thing (singular) or more than one (plural) is the owner.

When showing singular possession, an apostrophe and an -s is often added (for example, 'Paul's bike' or 'the girl's voice'). Where an -s is already at the end of a word to show a plural, the apostrophe is added after the -s (for example, 'the girls' voices').

So, singular possession would be: 'the horse's field' (one horse). Plural possession would be 'the horses' field' (more than one horse).

When a word ends in an -s, but isn't a plural (for example, 'Chris' or 'diplodocus'), the apostrophe can be added with or without the -s ('the diplodocus' swamp' or 'the diplodocus's swamp').

Some plural words do not end in an -s (for example, 'children' or 'team'). Here, an -s is added with an apostrophe after the final letter ('the children's toys' or 'the team's boots').

opportunity to see how the punctuation and grammar are used to share meaning.

When you read, occasionally look at the punctuation and talk about what it is telling the reader to do. For example, you could show your child how a question mark tells you to raise your voice at the end of the sentence to indicate a question being asked.

Explore how you can show the 'feeling' behind an exclamation mark. Are the characters shouting? Has something unexpected happened? Has something gone wrong?

3. Give your child opportunities to write

Writing at home can be a great way of practising writing, including using grammar and punctuation to create particular effects. Here are some ideas to encourage regular writing:

- Create a story about a space adventurer with strange planetary systems to explore. Every week or month, your child could write about a new chapter about a different planet. Before long, the chapters will have built into a book they can be really proud of.
- Write an A-to-Z. It could be based on anything your child is interested in – animals, space, dinosaurs, fairies, even their favourite TV programme. A page for each letter of the alphabet gives you 26 short pieces of writing spread over the year that build into one big project.
- Produce a version of a book for a younger child. For example, they could write *The Rhino Who Came to Tea* or *The Very Hungry Angler Fish*. Books with a distinctive format such as *The Day the Crayons Quit* or *The Last Polar Bears* are perfect for this.

4. Help your child learn key grammatical ideas

Activity books and games can help your child get to grips with particular points of grammar and punctuation in an enjoyable way.

<https://www.topmarks.co.uk/english-games/7-11-years/spelling-and-grammar>

<https://www.topmarks.co.uk/english-games/7-11-years/punctuation>

Adding preposition phrases to a noun phrase can help to add further detail. A preposition is a word such as 'after', 'in', 'to', 'on', and 'with'. They are used to describe the position of something (for example, 'The car was *in* the garage'), the time something happened (for example, 'The garage opens *at* 8.15am'), and how something happened (for example, 'They travelled *by* car'). Prepositions can be used to expand a noun phrase for each of these purposes, each time giving additional detail or information: for example, 'the frog *on* the lily pad' (position) or 'the train *after* this one' (time).

Using fronted adverbials

An adverbial is a word or phrase that is used, like an adverb, to describe or add more information to a verb or clause.

Adverbs are often used as adverbials, (for example, 'he moved *slowly*') but many other types of words and phrases can be used this way, including preposition phrases (for example, 'the day *after* tomorrow') and subordinate clauses (for example, 'when we've finished'). 'Fronted' just means that the adverbial (the word or phrase doing the describing) is moved to the front of the sentence, followed by a comma:

'Suddenly, the door opened.' instead of 'The door suddenly opened.'

'Before we set off, fasten your seatbelt.' instead of 'Fasten your seatbelt before we set off.'

Using paragraphs to organise ideas

Paragraphs are collections of sentences that are grouped together because they deal with a common idea or topic. There is no set length to a paragraph.

Your child will be organise paragraphs around a specific theme to make their writing easier to read.

Choosing appropriate nouns and pronouns

Pronouns are used in place of a noun that has already been mentioned in a text to avoid repeating the noun. For example:

'Liz was hungry so she made a sandwich.'

'We went back to the shop.'

'That is a terrible idea.'

Your child will use different nouns and pronouns to avoid repetition in their writing. So, instead of writing:

'Slowly, the detective edged into the room. The detective had the detective's gun drawn and ready. The detective listened carefully for any sound. The detective heard a creak, so the detective turned to look at the door. The loud creak was just the detective's partner.'

A child might write:

'Slowly, *Captain Jones* edged into the room. The *detective* had *her* gun drawn and ready. *She* listened carefully for any sound. *She* heard a creak, so *she* turned to look at the door. It was just *Jones*' partner.'

Using inverted commas to punctuate speech

Your child will learn to use inverted commas (often called speech marks) and other punctuation to indicate direct speech in stories or other writing.

The actual words that are spoken are enclosed in inverted commas:

'It's pizza for dinner,' said Dad.

At the end of a piece of speech there should be a comma, full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark. This is placed inside the closing inverted comma or commas:

'I think we will win,' said Bill.

'What time is it now?' asked the man.

'How strange!' cried Alice.

'This path leads to the sea.'

A comma comes before the first inverted comma if the speech is after information about who is speaking:

Tom replied, 'Of course it is.'

If the direct speech is broken up by information about who is speaking, a comma (or a question mark or exclamation mark) is used to end the first piece of speech, and a full stop or comma is used before the second piece of speech:

'No,' he said. 'It's my birthday.'

‘And with that,’ she said, ‘they were gone.’

‘Stop!’ he cried. ‘You haven’t closed the door properly!’

How to help at home

There are lots of ways you can help your Year 4 child with grammar and punctuation:

1. Read to your child

Although your child will probably be able to read independently now, reading aloud to your child is still very important for their education, especially with books they can’t yet read on their own.

Listening to a story develops reading skills, builds vocabulary and broadens general knowledge. It also helps to support your child’s writing skills and understanding of grammar and punctuation. While children will learn about how language works from speaking and listening, the type of language we use in writing is often different from that in speech, so listening to text can model different patterns of language.

When you are reading together, look at how authors use different sentence types for effect:

- Simple sentences containing one clause (for example, ‘Sam picked up the spoon.’).
- Short commands (for example, ‘Give me the spoon, Sam!’).
- Compound sentences (for example, ‘Sam picked up the spoon and she ran away excitedly.’).
- Sentences with a subordinate clause (for example, ‘With great excitement, Sam picked up the spoon.’).

Talk about different types of punctuation as well, such as question marks, exclamation marks, commas, and so on. Can your child identify ellipses? See how these are used to ramp up tension or to get the reader thinking.

2. Encourage reading

Making time to hear your child read, even when they can read independently, can be really valuable. By frequently seeing words in print, they will have the

Using Standard English verb inflections

The National Curriculum says that Standard English is:

the variety of English which is used, with only minor variation, as a major world language... [recognised] by the use of a very small range of forms such as ‘those books’, ‘I did it’, and ‘I wasn’t doing anything’ (rather than their non-standard equivalents). For example:

Standard English variety	Non-Standard equivalents
‘those books’	‘them books’
‘I did it’	‘I done it’
‘I wasn’t doing anything’	‘I weren’t doing anything’

Your child will explore different structures of English, identifying features of Standard English, including verbs, to support their writing.

Writing noun phrases with modifying adjectives, nouns, and prepositional phrases

Nouns are often referred to as ‘naming words’. At their simplest level, nouns are the words that are used to name people, places and things. For example, ‘cat’, ‘Scotland’, and ‘hope’ are all nouns.

Sometimes more than one word does the job of a noun – this is called a noun phrase. The simplest example of a noun phrase is where a word (a determiner) tells us which noun we are referring to or how many or much there is: for example, ‘*that* parcel’, ‘*three* cows’, or ‘*some* porridge’.

Your child will be taught to expand noun phrases by modifying adjectives, nouns, and preposition phrases. While this sounds like it might be complicated, thankfully the grammar knowledge required isn’t too tricky, and many children will do this automatically when they write. The main difficulty as a parent lies in knowing what the different terms mean.

A noun phrase might be created by adding an adjective to give more information or detail about noun: ‘cat’ might change to ‘*grey* cat’ or ‘*ravenous* cat’.