**SPELLING**

Is the spelling correct?: Some words are particularly easy to mis-spell (e.g.

accommodate, committee, correspondence, embarrass, gauge, manoeuvre, receive

recommendation, subtlety, unnecessary, wholly, yield). Spell-checks on a

word processor may help, but these should never be used to replace words

automatically, because they tend to turn some proper nouns into meaningless

alternatives. If you think that your spelling is a weak point, make it a priority to get your

written work checked. Try some self-improvement by noting down and learning each

mis-spelt word. Remember the warning of a certain Leeds nightclub bouncer: ‘I turn

away people with moustaches, or with facial tattoos that are spelt wrongly.’

**PUNCTUATION**

Traditionally, the rules of punctuation were taught in the early years of

schooling. Today, due to changes in teaching practice and less book-based study, there are

many people around the world with little formal training in their native language. Some

argue that there is no longer any need to learn or to follow what they see as ‘out-dated’ and

‘irrelevant’ rules. In fact, despite today’s increased reliance upon visual media, the need for

correctly-structured language has never been greater. If you remain unconvinced, consider

some common problems associated with poor grammar and punctuation:

• Receivers misinterpret the message, leading to incorrect responses and actions.

• Receivers waste time trying to check the intended meaning.

• Errors give a negative impression of the sender, who appears poorly educated, careless

and un-professional.

On a more positive note, there are benefits to be gained from learning more about grammar,

punctuation and the use of words:

• With a better understanding of its underlying laws, communicators can employ

language in more focused, flexible and creative ways. In a world that is increasingly filled with bland and sloppy messages, this is bound to result in more effective

Communication.

• Fluency in language is also associated with clear thinking, which benefits individuals,

Organizations and the wider public.

Punctuation is concerned with the ‘points’ or marks that are added to

the text. Some people seem to distribute punctuation marks randomly, whilst others manage

to avoid punctuation altogether. The aim of punctuation is to guide the reader, highlighting

pauses and identifying the ending of one idea and the beginning of another. This is

illustrated by the poem, reproduced above, where commas, semi colons and colons are used

to structure the way it is to be read. Punctuation marks are also used to provide the reader

with other useful information, such as identifying spoken words (i.e. quotations), showing

‘belonging’, emphasising particular statements and indicating that the writer is asking a

question.

The essential punctuation guide

**. Full stop**

A full stop indicates the end of a sentence. If your sentences are over-long, break them up

by replacing a conjunction with a full stop and a capital letter. Full stops are sometimes

used to indicate an abbreviation (e.g. B.B.C. Television, U.S.A., Dr. Jeckll and Mr. Hyde).

However, as noted in Chapter 8, ‘open punctuation’ is now widely accepted. Full stops are

omitted from abbreviations (as in BBC Television) but not from the ends of sentences.

**: Colon**

A colon is sometimes used, as an alternative to a comma, to open a quotation (As

Groucho Marx once said: ‘ I wouldn’t want to join a club that would have me as a

member.’). More commonly, it marks the beginning of a list. It is not good practice to follow

a colon with a dash, a colon on its own will suffice.

**; Semi-colon**

A semi-colon indicates a pause that falls somewhere between a comma and a full stop. It

is most commonly used to split two clauses in a complex sentence in place of a

conjunction (e.g. Our new product range has been a great success; it has out-sold all of

our main competitors). Note how this pause acts to balance the sentence, adding

emphasis to the words that follow it. In the above example, the obvious alternative would

be to replace the semi-colon and the word ‘it’ with the conjunction ‘which’.

**, Comma**

A comma signifies a short pause. It is used to separate items in a list and to mark out a

subordinate clause or additional detail that breaks the flow of a sentence (e.g. The year-end figures, released last Friday afternoon, revealed a dramatic improvement in retail

margins... The President’s five year old daschund, Algernon, ate all the sandwiches ...).

**‘...’ Single quotation marks / inverted commas**

“...” Double quotation marks / inverted commas

Inverted commas are used to enclose spoken words and the titles of books, films and

other publications. The following examples show how other punctuation marks are used

within a quotation. Double inverted commas are only used where one quotation contains

another item which also requires inverted commas. Here are some examples:

Asked what he thought of Western Civilisation, Mahatma Ghandi replied, ‘I think it would be

a good idea.’

During their visit, they went to see ‘A Doll’s House’, the classic play by Henrik Ibsen.

The sales director commented, ‘I thought we could base the new advertising campaign on

that “Four Weddings and a Funeral” theme tune. What do you think?’

**! Exclamation mark**

**? Question mark**

These marks are used at the end of sentences, replacing full stops. They are sometimes

over-used in advertising copy and other text, limiting their impact.

**– Hyphen**

**– Dash**

A hyphen is used to link two commonly associated words, especially where the adjacent

letters of each word cannot easily be joined (e.g. co-operative, pre-election, self-employed,

X-ray). However, once the combinations become widely used, the words are often merged

together (e.g. multimedia, antisocial, cellphone). Dashes are sometimes used in place of

brackets or commas. They do have a distinctive role, however, to mark a break or change

of direction in a statement (e.g. ‘Emily said, I know a really great pub we could visit – but

perhaps you have other plans?’). Technically, a dash should be longer than a hyphen.

However, most keyboards only allocate one key for both marks, which are therefore

becoming interchangeable.

**( ... ) Round brackets / parentheses**

**[ ... ] Square brackets / parentheses**

Brackets separate additional information or ideas from the main flow of the sentence,

including incidental details and references to other publications. Square brackets have a

special function, enclosing words that have been inserted by someone other than the

original writer in order to make a short extract of text comprehensible (e.g. As a leading

conservationist suggested, ‘The [Scottish Highlands] region is surely one of the most

beautiful in Europe (Gordon, 2005a) ...’)

**...’ Apostrophe**

The apostrophe indicates possession (e.g. John’s motorbike). When the ‘owner’ is plural,

the apostrophe normally moves to the end of the word. Hence, an individual athlete’s

performance is distinguished from the team of athletes’ collective performance. One word

that seems to cause particular problems in the business world is ‘company’. The full range

of alternatives comprises:

**Singular: Company**

Singular possessive: This company’s managing director ...

**Plural: Companies**

Plural possessive: The top five companies’ financial results ...

Apostrophes are also used to show the kind of abbreviations that are common in spoken

English (e.g. we’re, that’s, it’s, isn’t, don’t, won’t, wouldn’t are shortened versions of: we

are, that is, it is, it is not, do not, will not, would not). These abbreviations are not normally

used in written English, except when quoting a speaker or when making rough notes.

**... Omission marks / ellipsis**

Three dots are used to signify that words have been omitted from a piece of text that you

are quoting (e.g. ‘The great masses of the people ... will more easily fall victim to a great

lie than to a small one.’). Without these omission marks, a quotation might be open to mis-interpretation. For example, the shortened version might have missed out an important

subsidiary clause, that modifies the statement. To take an extreme example, if the

statement, ‘I agree that you should go ahead with the house purchase, subject to a

satisfactory survey, and wish you all the best.’, was shortened without omission marks, it

would read: ‘I agree that you should go ahead with the house purchase and wish you all

the best.’ In this case, the marks would not help a great deal, but they should alert the

reader to the fact that something has been left out of the quotation.

**PARAGRAPH**

Before you start writing a paragraph, you need to decide two things. What are you writing about? What do you want to say? The purpose of any paragraph is to express an idea. Most paragraphs consist of a few related sentences.

You can write a successful paragraph by starting off with a plan. The key to doing a successful paragraph is to break down the writing into short, simple steps.

* **Subject of your paragraph**  
  Write down the subject of your paragraph. To express your subject, write only a word or phrase. Who or what are you writing about?
* **Pre-writing for your paragraph**  
  Begin by brainstorming. Brainstorming doesn't involve writing complete sentences or paragraphs. Brainstorming involves coming up with ideas using words or short phrases.
* One popular way to to create pre-writing ideas is to ask yourself questions about your subject.

Here are some questions you might ask yourself:  
What do I know about this subject? How does this subject relate to me? What do I like or dislike about this subject? What words best describe it?

**Building the body of your paragraph**

Reread all your words and phrases. Now, organize your thoughts. Decide if your brainstorming ideas are related. Do you want to add a new word or phrase or take something out? Next, decide if you like the order of your brainstorming ideas, or want to change the order.

**Writing a paragraph draft**

A lot of people get nervous when it's time to write. Don't worry. This is going to be your first draft. The important thing is to take your brainstorming ideas, add to them, and turn them into sentences.

* **Topic sentence**  
  Reread the word or phrase about the subject of your paragraph. You are going to expand this into the first sentence of your paragraph.

This first sentence, which comes at the beginning of a paragraph, is called the topic sentence. Remember that its job is to introduce your paragraph.

* **Paragraph body**  
  Reread your brainstorming words or phrases for the body of your paragraph. Expand each brainstorming word or phrase into a complete sentence. These sentences explain your topic sentence by offering facts, details, or examples.

Remember that the job of your paragraph body is to share an idea with your reader.

* **Concluding sentence**  
  Reread your paragraph and then add another sentence that sums up the paragraph. This sentence ends your paragraph.

## Reviewing and revising

Good job! You've almost completed a paragraph. But you're not done yet. Every paragraph can be improved. The way to complete a successful paragraph is by looking over your work.

Try reading your paragraph draft aloud. Ask yourself questions. Do you like the order of the sentences in your paragraph? Do you need to add words so your sentences make better sense? Are there words you could put in to improve the connection between your sentences?

Do you like your introductory sentence? Your paragraph body? Your concluding sentence?

Make at least two changes that could improve your paragraph. Remember that even professional writers make lots of changes!

## Proofreading

It's time to check your work. Read your improved paragraph aloud slowly. Look at details of punctuation and grammar in your writing. Are your sentences complete? Do your verbs go with your nouns? Do you need to add any missing punctuation? Have you used capital letters for names and addresses? How's your spelling?

Remember that the job of proofreading is improves the way you express your ideas. Try catching and changing at least five mistakes.

## Publishing

Congratulations on completing your paragraph! Finish by saving it on your computer, and by printing it. Share your essay with a family member, friend, classmate or teacher.

Remember, you can always write a paragraph by first brainstorming, then breaking the writing process down into short steps.