



**Hampshire**  
County Council

Improvement and  
Advisory Service

**HIAS MOODLE OPEN RESOURCE**

# **Building strong sentences**

## **A whole-school approach to teaching sentence structure**

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# Overview

## **This document contains...**

Guidance on approaches to developing sentence structure over time, maintaining consistency across the school.

## **Points to consider when using this resource**

When using any of the strategies in this guidance, ensure that they are used consistently across each year group so that pupils are supported by using familiar scaffolds as they move through the school.

# Building Strong Sentences: A Whole-School Approach to Teaching Sentence Structure

Across our work with schools, a consistent message is emerging: when pupils are taught to understand and control sentence structure, the quality, accuracy and confidence of their writing improves significantly. As a team, we are supporting schools to develop a **whole-school approach to teaching sentences** across the primary phase, ensuring progression, consistency and clarity from Reception to Year 6.

## A common approach

A shared approach to sentence teaching ensures that teachers across year groups use common language, models and expectations, allowing pupils to secure fundamental structures before moving on to more complex ones.

At the heart of this approach is a focus on **accuracy first**. Pupils are explicitly taught the structure of sentences before being asked to add detail or stylistic features. This prevents cognitive overload and helps pupils gain confidence in writing that is both grammatically correct and purposeful.

## The concept of the base sentence

From the earliest stages, pupils are introduced to the idea of a **base sentence**. A base sentence is stripped back to its essential structure so that pupils can focus on:

- Having a complete sentence
- Clear subject and verb agreement
- Accurate punctuation

For example, pupils learn that **all sentences need a subject and a verb** before adding anything else. In KS1, this may be as simple as “*Max sailed.*” Once pupils are secure in constructing accurate base sentences, they are taught how to **extend** them with additional detail such as adjectives, adverbs, expanded noun phrases or adverbial phrases.

Crucially, teachers are encouraged to **check the accuracy of the base sentence** every time new learning is introduced. If the core structure is not secure, additional detail will not improve the sentence.

## Introducing sentence types: simple, compound and complex

Sentence progression is carefully mapped across the primary phase.

- **Simple sentences** are introduced first, focusing on subject + verb, and later subject + verb + object. Pupils then extend these with adjectives and expanded noun phrases once the structure is secure.

**Simple Sentences**

- These sentences contain a main clause.
- Main clauses include a subject and verb.

^ \_\_\_\_\_ .

| Capital letter                              | Main Clause                               | Punctuation   |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Every sentence starts with a capital letter | Makes sense on its own<br>Contains a verb | .<br>...<br>! |

**Using and to join words**



**Simple Sentences**

- These sentences contain a main clause.
- Main clauses include a subject and verb.

| Subject        | Verb | Object                      | Punctuation |
|----------------|------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| The Wild Thing | has  | orange eyes and sharp teeth | .           |
| The Wild Thing | has  | and                         | .           |
| The Wild Thing |      | and                         | .           |
|                |      |                             | .           |

- **Compound sentences** are introduced next, showing how two main clauses can be joined using co-ordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but* and *or*. Pupils are taught to recognise that each clause must make sense on its own.

**Compound Sentences**

- These sentences contain two main clauses separated by a co-ordinating conjunction.

^ \_\_\_\_\_ ● \_\_\_\_\_ .

| Capital letter | Main clause            | Co-ordinating conjunction       | Main Clause            | Punctuation |
|----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
|                | Makes sense on its own | Links two main clauses together | Makes sense on its own |             |

**Using *and* to join clauses**

Compound Sentences  
\* These sentences contain two main clauses separated by a co-ordinating conjunction.

| Capital letter | Main clause                      | Co-ordinating conjunction | Main clause        | Punctuation |
|----------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
|                | The Wild Things have sharp claws | and                       | they look fearsome | .           |
|                | The Wild Things                  | and                       | they               | .           |
|                |                                  | and                       |                    | .           |

- **Complex sentences** build on this understanding, introducing subordinate clauses using subordinating conjunctions such as *because*, *when*, *if*, and *although*. Pupils learn how punctuation changes depending on the position of the subordinate clause.

| Capital letter | Main clause            | Subordinate Clause (starts with a subordinating conjunction) | Punctuation |
|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
|                | Makes sense on its own | Doesn't make sense on its own                                |             |

^ \_\_\_\_\_ ▲ \_\_\_\_\_ .

^ ▲ \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ .

| Capital letter | Subordinate Clause (starts with a subordinating conjunction) | Comma | Main clause            | Punctuation |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------------|
|                | Doesn't make sense on its own                                | ,     | Makes sense on its own |             |

After Max had blown the trumpet , the Wild Things stood quietly .

Throughout, teachers model sentences explicitly, often orally first, and use visual scaffolds and images to support understanding.

## Progression from KS1 into KS2

As pupils move into Key Stage 2, the same principles remain in place: base sentence first, accuracy checked, then extension.

In **Lower Key Stage 2**, pupils are introduced to:

- adverbial phrases that express time, place and cause
- **fronted adverbials**, initially within simple sentences

Models demonstrate how a fronted adverbial is added to an already secure main clause, rather than constructed simultaneously. Pupils learn that:

- the main clause must still make sense on its own
- a comma is required after the fronted adverbial
- sentence meaning and clarity remain the priority

As confidence grows, fronted adverbials are applied to compound and complex sentences, always building on secure sentence structures rather than replacing them.

**Fronted adverbial  
(compound sentence)**

With a sudden splash, the whale burst through the water and the crew stepped back in amazement.

With a sudden splash , the whale burst through the water

and the crew stepped back in amazement .

**Fronted adverbial  
(complex sentence)**

With a sudden splash, the whale burst through the water as the children looked on.

With a sudden splash , the whale burst through the water

as the children looked on .

## Upper Key Stage 2: refining and shaping meaning

In **Upper Key Stage 2**, pupils are supported to manipulate sentences more deliberately for effect, while still grounding their writing in accurate structures.

The models introduce:

- **relative clauses** to add extra information, with clear teaching around punctuation and the idea that the main clause is interrupted but still complete
- the use of **semi-colons** to link closely related main clauses, reinforcing pupils' understanding of compound sentence structures
- **colons** to mark clause boundaries where the second clause explains or expands on the first

Rather than being taught as isolated punctuation skills, these features are framed as tools to shape meaning and cohesion, built on pupils' understanding of clauses developed earlier in the school.

## Supporting teachers and schools

Our models outline clear progression from KS1 through to UKS2, providing concrete examples, sentence models and images that can be used directly in the classroom. As a team, we support schools to:

- develop shared language around sentence structure
- align planning and modelling across year groups
- identify gaps in pupils' understanding of sentences, not just vocabulary
- build staff confidence in explicitly teaching grammar within writing

By embedding a consistent approach to sentence teaching, schools are enabling pupils to write with greater independence, clarity and control. Accuracy is not treated as a barrier to creativity, but as the foundation that allows creativity to flourish.

# HIAS English team

The HIAS English team offer a wide range of high-quality services to support schools in improving outcomes for learners, including courses, bespoke consultancy and in-house training.

For further details referring to English, please contact:

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