





























Writing is different, particularly at work.

We write to share **factual** information **quickly**, **clearly** and **accurately** – often with people we don't know and may never meet, e.g. social workers, GPs, inspectors, even solicitors.

To do this we use English that is **formal**, **precise** about details and **impersonal** (no opinions).

### Learning question

What problems might arise at work if we wrote the way we speak?

### Did you know?

Speaking comes naturally to us, but writing had to be invented. This first happened about 5,000 years ago. Early writing was used in law, accounting, magic rituals and astronomy. Writing only became part of everyone's daily life recently.

## 5. How writing works

Have you ever put a kit together?

You check the instructions, lay out the parts then assemble them according to the instructions.

In written English, **words** and **punctuation** are the parts. The rules of **grammar** are the instructions.

When we talk face-to-face, we use tone of voice and facial expressions to get our meaning across. We check the other person understands. We can't do any of this when we write.

Instead, we choose exactly the right **words**. We use **punctuation** (e.g. commas, full stops etc) to show how our words relate to each other. We use **grammar** to create sentences that make sense to other people.

**Writing tip** Knowing a little about **grammar**, **punctuation** and **words** makes it much easier to improve your writing skills.

## What is grammar?

Compare these two sentences:

*She was in bed when I arrived.*

*She I arrived bed in was when.*

Both sentences use the same words, but only one of them makes sense.

The one that makes sense follows the rules of English. We call those rules **grammar**.

When something doesn't make sense, we say it is **ungrammatical**.

## How to check your grammar

Read what you have written. If it makes sense, your grammar's basically OK.

If you're still not sure, ask someone else if it makes sense to them.

## What's the difference between **good grammar** and **bad grammar**?

Good grammar is clear and easy to follow. Bad grammar is confusing.



## 6. Standard English

There are many types of English:

- British, Indian, African, Australian
- Technical (e.g. medical English)
- Slang, texting

In fact, the list could go on and on.

They are all as good as each other, but they are different – different words, different grammar.

At work, we write to **share information**.

To avoid confusion, it's very important we all use the same sort of English.

For this reason, when we write at work we use what is called **standard English**.

Standard English is the language of education, business and public life.

It is the most widely understood form of English.

This booklet is written in standard English.

Here are some questions to help you think more about the way we use language.

### **Learning questions**

What sort of English do you, your colleagues and the people you care for speak?

What differences do you notice?

What do you and your colleagues do to make sure you understand each other?

What differences do you notice between spoken English and written English at work?

Why do you think these differences occur?

### **Did you know?**

Other languages work differently to English. Their grammar rules are different. They use words and punctuation differently.

### **Learn more**

Ask a colleague who speaks another language about writing in their language.

# 7. Sentences (1)

Most writing is based on the **sentence**, so it's helpful to understand what a sentence is.

## What is a sentence?

A sentence expresses a complete thought.

In other words, a **sentence** makes **sense**.

It doesn't have to tell us everything, but it must express at least one **complete thought**.

*Add salt.* is a short sentence.

*Although our body needs a certain amount of salt to function properly, too much salt is bad for us.* is a longer sentence.

*Although our body needs a* is **not** complete. It is **not** a sentence.

## Sentence punctuation

All sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop (.), a question mark (?) or an exclamation mark (!).

## Learning question

Here is a report with all the punctuation taken out:

*Mrs George is a very independent person she gets herself washed and dressed she needs lots of prompting to change clothes she says that her partner does the shopping and house-work this is not true she can get angry if you do something she does not want you to do she worries about paying her bills reassure her that they are paid by direct debit*

How many sentences can you find?

Clue: make each complete thought into a separate sentence.

(The answer is at the end of the booklet.)

### Top writing tip

Separate ideas into sentences with full stops.  
~~Don't string them together with commas.~~

## 8. Sentences (2)

A sentence that **tells** us something is a **statement**, e.g. *Mrs Peters ate lunch.*

A sentence that **asks** us something is a **question**, e.g. *When did Mrs Peters eat lunch?*  
Always end questions with a question mark (?).

### Statement or question?

*Chris asked Mrs Peters if she wanted lunch.*

This is a statement. It **tells** us that Chris asked Mrs Peters about lunch.  
It does not ask us anything.

### Sentences about what people say

We can **quote** the exact words a person used or **summarise** what they said.

**Quote:** *Mrs Peters said, 'I am starving.'*

This is called **direct speech**.

**Summary:** *Mrs Peters said that she was hungry.*

This is called **reported speech**.

**Tip** Quote when a person's **exact words matter**.  
Otherwise, summarise them.

## Sentences about the same topic

We group sentences about the same **topic** into **paragraphs**. Here's an example:

*As we age, our sense of taste fades. We may be tempted to add extra salt to flavour our food. We should, however, be careful. It is not a good idea to eat more than 6g of salt a day. Instead, try herbs, spices, lemon juice or mustard.*

**Paragraphs** show the reader how sentences relate to each other. Paragraphs make longer pieces of writing **easier to read**.

Not sure if sentences belong together in a paragraph? Ask yourself if they all relate to the same topic. If so, put them in a paragraph.

**Tip** Stick to one topic per paragraph. It's clearer.

### Learning question

How do paragraphs make writing easier to read?

## 9. Some *dos* and *don'ts*

Would it be correct to write:

*She were in bed when I arrived ?*

Your answer may depend on what sort of English you yourself speak.

Many of us do say *she were*, but it is not **standard English**.

Here is the sentence in standard English:

*She was in bed when I arrived.*

When you write at work, use standard English.

### **Do write**

*You were on time*

*He was asleep*

*We were on duty*

*They were late*

*It doesn't matter*

*She did it yesterday*

*Himself*

### **Don't write**

~~*You was on time*~~

~~*He were asleep*~~

~~*We was on duty*~~

~~*They was late*~~

~~*It don't matter*~~

~~*She done it yesterday*~~

~~*Hisself*~~

## One negative is all you need

Many of us use double negatives when we talk:  
*He ~~didn't~~ do ~~nothing~~.*

Both **didn't** and **nothing** are negatives.  
Used together, they become a **double negative**.  
Logically, someone who **didn't** do **nothing**  
must have done **something**.

We do **not** use double negatives (two negatives together) in writing.

**Do** write *I ~~didn't~~ hear anything* or *I heard nothing*.

**Don't** write *I ~~didn't~~ hear ~~nothing~~*

**Do** write *She ~~didn't~~ say anything to him* or *She said nothing to him*.

**Don't** write *She ~~didn't~~ say ~~nothing~~ to him*

## Learning question

If you are ever unsure about what to write, who is the best person to ask at work? Why?



# 10. Punctuation marks (1)

Punctuation marks make writing easier to follow. Here are some useful marks of punctuation.

**A Capital letters** mark the beginning of a sentence and the beginning of a name. The word 'I' (myself) is **always** spelled with a capital.

**. Full stops** mark the end of a sentence. They can also be used after initials and abbreviations, as in *Mr. D.F. Jones*.

**, Commas** link things. Here are some examples. *You can have tea, coffee, chocolate or water.* | *Mrs Jones likes peas, but not beans.* | *He said, 'Yes.'* | *When Jill comes, please tell Pat.*

**? Question marks** are used at the end of direct questions, as in *Did the post come?* | *What did she say?* | *How many aprons did you order?*

A., ? ! ( ) - - " / : '

**!** **Exclamation marks** are used to indicate something attention-catching, such as *Danger!* or *Sam shouted, 'Go away!' when I came in.*

**()** **Brackets** are used to include extra information (a bit like commas). Here is another example: *Mrs Hassan said that Monica (her daughter) is away for two weeks.*

**-** **Dashes** are used – a little like brackets – to add extra information. They are often used towards the end of a sentence – like this.

**-** **Hyphens** (say it: **hi**-fen) are used to show words go together, as in *brother-in-law* or *three-quarters*.

### Did you know?

Both the question mark and the exclamation mark ( ? ! ) already have a full stop (at the bottom) so we don't add another after them.

# 11. Punctuation marks (2)

**' ' or " "** **Speech marks** are used to quote the exact words someone said, as in *Mrs Lake said, 'I don't want to go out today.'* Use **either** single (') or double speech marks (").

**/** **Slash** means *or*, as in *Mr / Mrs* (Mr or Mrs)

**:** **Colon** shows that information follows, e.g. *What you will need: gloves, apron*

**'** **Apostrophes** (say it: uh-pos-trof-ee) are used in two main ways.

1. To show letters have been left out, e.g.

*I'm* (I am) | *you'll* (you will) | *she's* (she is) | *don't* (do not) | *can't* (cannot)

2. With the letter **s** to show that something belongs to someone, e.g. *Mrs Smith's glasses* | *the man's coat* | *Billy's mobile*

**What's the difference between *it's* and *its*?**

- *It's* = it is (e.g. *It's hot*) or it has (e.g. *It's been a beautiful day*)
- *Its* = belonging to it *My car passed its MOT.*

## Learn more: How to practise punctuation

Get a friend to read **aloud** some text (but not the punctuation) from a book or magazine.

Write it down, putting in your own punctuation.

Then check **your** punctuation with the punctuation in the original text.

Here is some text for you to practise with.

### **Mrs Smith's glasses**

*When I came into her room at 09.15, Mrs Smith said to me, 'I don't know where my glasses are, dear. Can you help me find them?'*

*She looked and sounded upset.*

*I said, 'Don't worry, Mrs Smith. I'll help you find them now. You sit down while I look.'*

*Mrs Smith sat down.*

*I found her glasses a moment later under the bedside table. Mrs Smith seemed very relieved.*

*She said, 'It's a good job you're here. Heavens! What would I do without you?'*

*I made her a cup of tea and she told me about her family while I tidied her room.*

## 12. Words are things too

The reports we write describe real events.  
The words we use refer to real things.

### What happened



### Report

*Mrs Peters had  
a cup of tea  
and a biscuit.*

When we use a word, normally we think only about what the word refers to. For example, when we write *biscuit* we think of a biscuit.

Often, the only time we think about the **word itself** is when we can't spell it.

*How do you spell 'biscuit'?* is a question about the **word** *biscuit*, not the thing it refers to.

To study writing we must think about words as **words**, not just as the things they refer to.

### **Different types of word**

English has different types of word.  
Each type has its own name.

The most important types of word are:

- Nouns
- Verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Pronouns

Learn more on the next three pages.

### **Learning riddle**

When is *tea* not a drink? When it's a word!

# 13. Nouns, verbs

At work we write to share **information** about what has **happened**.

That means writing about **people** and **things** and about what has been **said** and **done**.

To do this, we use **nouns** and **verbs**, e.g.

*Mrs Peters* (noun) *ate* (verb) *toast* (noun).

## Nouns

The word *noun* comes from *nomen*, Latin for name. Nouns are our 'names' for people and things, e.g. grilled bread = *toast*.

**Common** nouns identify a class (or group) of things, e.g. *women*, *cities*, *shops*.

**Proper** nouns identify individuals, e.g.

*Mrs Peters*, *Oxford*, *the Co-op*.

## Learning question

Which type of noun **always** starts with a capital letter?

## Verbs are words for doing, being, saying

Here are a few examples.

*Eat, sleep, walk, feel, talk, look after, hold, arrive.*

## Two ways of using verbs

*Mrs Peters ate the toast.*

*The toast was eaten by Mrs Peters.*

We call this **active** and **passive**.

**Active** verbs spotlight the person 'doing' the verb, e.g. *Mrs Peters ate the toast.*

**Passive** verbs spotlight what was done, e.g. *The toast was eaten by Mrs Peters.*

**Writing tip** It's best to use **active** verbs that spotlight the person, e.g. *Mrs Peters ate the toast.* It's clearer, more direct and friendlier, e.g. *Please wear your ID badge at all times.*

~~*not ID badges must be worn at all times.*~~

Only use the passive when what has been done is all that matters (not who did it), e.g.

*The photocopier has been repaired.*



# 14. Adjectives, adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are describing words.

**Adjectives** say what **people** or **things** are like.

*Cool, sharp* and *green* are all adjectives.

Adjectives go with nouns, e.g. *green apple*.

**Adverbs** say **how** something happened.

*Well, accidentally, softly* and *carefully* are all adverbs. Many adverbs end in *-ly*.

Adverbs go with verbs, e.g. *speak softly*.

Here is a sentence with adjectives and adverbs:

*Mrs Peters ate the **dry** toast **slowly**.*

*Dry* is an adjective. It describes the toast.

*Slowly* is an adverb. It tells how Mrs Peters ate.

The adjective and adverb in this sentence give us **extra information** about **what happened**.

Used in this way, adjectives and adverbs help us give more **exact** information in our reports.

Now look at this use of **adjectives** and **adverbs**:

*Mrs Smith was **difficult** (adjective) and behaved **aggressively** (adverb).*

The adjective and adverb in this sentence give us **no** extra information about **what happened** or about Mrs Smith herself.

They tell us only how whoever wrote the sentence **feels** about Mrs Smith – their personal **opinion** of Mrs Smith.

As care workers, we keep personal opinions to ourselves. We use reports for **real information** about things that we **actually saw happen**.

### **Writing at work tip**

Whenever you want to include an **adjective** or an **adverb** in a report, ask yourself if you are adding **real information** about what actually happened (**OK**), or just **your opinion** (**not OK**).

# 15. Pronouns

*She* and *her* are **pronouns**. So are *I*, *me*, *you*, *he*, *him*, *we*, *us*, *they* and *them*.

We use pronouns to avoid continually repeating the name of a person or thing.

Consider this report:

*Mrs Peters was in bed when I arrived. I helped her to get up. She told me that she was hungry so I made her two pieces of buttered toast for breakfast. She ate both of them.*

## Learning question

It is clear that *them* in the report refers to the toast - but how can we be sure?

Talking face to face or on the phone, we can explain who we mean if there is confusion. In writing, we have to be more careful.

**Tip** When you use a pronoun in writing, always check that it is obvious who or what the pronoun refers to. It makes what you write much clearer.

Now consider this report:

1. *Mrs Peters' daughter was with her today. She asked me to reheat some food she had cooked yesterday.*

*I explained to her that I could not do this on account of Food Safety rules, but she could.*

*I told her I could cook her scrambled eggs or she could reheat it. She asked her to reheat it.*

It is impossible to know for sure who *she* and *her* refer to. To find out, read this version:

2. *Mrs Peters' daughter was with her today. Mrs Peters asked me to reheat some food her daughter had cooked yesterday.*

*I explained to Mrs Peters that I could not do this on account of Food Safety rules, but that her daughter could.*

*I told Mrs Peters I could cook her scrambled eggs or her daughter could reheat the food. Mrs Peters asked her daughter to reheat the food.*

# 16. Handwriting

Despite computer technology, a lot of care writing is handwritten. So long as that is the case, **good handwriting matters**.

## What is good handwriting?

Handwriting is good when

1. Other people can read it quickly and easily
2. You can write it quickly and easily
3. It fits neatly into the space allowed for it

Number 1 is by far the most important.

Things that make handwriting **hard** to read:

- Small writing
- Messy writing
- Poor spelling

## How legible is your writing?

Show a few people a piece of your handwriting. Ask if they find any bits **difficult** to read.

If they do, what would make your handwriting easier to read?

## How to improve your handwriting

Handwriting is a **physical** skill.

**Practice** will improve it.

First **identify** the letters you wish to change.

**Decide** how you want to write them (see next page for a model).

**Practise** writing them the new way, first on their own then in real words.

Soon you will be writing in a new way!

**Tip** Use a pen that helps you to write well.

## Poor handwriting: a true story

A man went into a care home for two days' respite care. A care worker listed the items he brought with him.

Later his relatives came to collect him. Another care worker went to check that he had all his belongings. The list was impossible to read.

Frustrated and embarrassed, the second care worker had to ask the man's relatives if anything was missing. **Very** unprofessional!

## 17. Easy-to-read writing

Here is an example of easy-to-read writing.

### Small letters

a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
n o p q r s t u v w x y z

### Capital letters

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Notice how each letter is formed and how it relates to other letters (i.e. if it is taller or shorter, if it rises above or falls below).

### Learning question

How does this compare with **your** handwriting?  
Which is easier for **other people** to read?

## Capital letters and small letters together

A a      B b      C c      D d  
E e      F f      G g      H h  
I i      J j      K k      L l  
M m      N n      O o      P p  
Q q      R r      S s      T t  
U u      V v      W w      X x  
Y y      Z z

### Learning more

Do you know the alphabet off by heart?  
It's really useful for things like filing and  
dictionaries.



# 18. Spelling

*'Beware of heard, a dreadful word  
That looks like beard and sounds like bird...'*

English spelling is definitely tricky.

**All of us** make mistakes, often.

This raises an interesting question.

If we all make spelling mistakes all the time, how important is it to spell correctly?

## **It's all about sharing information**

**1.** Spelling mistakes are **not** the end of the world. *Mrs Peters has run out of her medersin.* Medicine is misspelled, but the **meaning is clear.**

**2.** Write what you mean, even if you aren't 100% sure how to spell the words.

**It's better to misspell the right word** than use a wrong word just because it is easier to spell.

If Mrs Peters says she is feeling depressed and you aren't sure how to spell *depressed*, do **not** write ~~*Mrs Peters said she was poorly.*~~ *Poorly* does not mean *depressed*. Better to write *depressed* even if you misspell it.

3. If you really cannot spell the word you want, ask yourself what it **means**. Then write that, e.g. *Mrs Peters said she was feeling sad and low.*

4. Spelling **does** matter, but only because it makes writing – particularly handwriting – much easier to understand.

**Always** try to spell correctly.

### Did you know?

There are about half a million words in English. If you are now thinking, *How on earth am I going to remember that many spellings?* – don't panic!

We **write** only a very limited number of words. At work we write the **same words again and again**. Those are the only spellings you need.

### Why not?

Keep a list of tricky spellings on you. Whenever you come across a difficult new word, jot it down. Later, check the spelling and add it to your list.

# 19. Improve your spelling (1)

To improve your spelling, start by looking at how spelling actually works.

## Letters spell sounds

We make words out of **sounds**.

The word *so* has two sounds (s-o). *Pan* has three (p-a-n). *Plan* has four (p-l-a-n).

English makes all its words from 46 different sounds, used alone or in combination.

When we write, we use letters to **spell the sounds** in a word.

We use 26 letters to spell the 46 sounds in English.

Now, this is where it gets tricky...

The **same letter** can spell **different** sounds:  
*plan*, *want*, *any*.

**Different letters** can spell the **same sound**:  
*see*, *heat*, *relief*.

## Learning question

Look at these words: *feet* *ship* *lack*  
Each one is made up of **three** different sounds.  
How is each sound spelt?  
Here's a clue: **f-ee-t** **sh-i-p** **l-a-ck**

## How to learn to spell a word

1. Break the word down into its sounds. Notice how each sound is spelt: **d i a b e t i c**.
2. Practise **writing** the word by hand. This will give you a **feel** for it. Write it out a few times Say each sound while you write the spelling. This will help fix it in your mind.
3. Later, **test yourself**: write the word again. Does it **look** correct? Does your spelling match the **separate sounds** in the word? Check it. Write it again.

In short:

- **Notice**: break the word down
- **Practise**: write it down a lot
- **Review**: test yourself

## 20. Improve your spelling (2)

Some people say there is no pattern to English spelling. In fact, there are **many** patterns. Some of them are to do with where a word comes from.

### Did you know?

English words come mostly from German, French, Latin and ancient Greek.

Look at the sound **g** spells in *gift*, *girl*, *get* – words from German. Compare it to these words from French: *gentle*, *germ*, *giant*.

You don't need to know about word origins, but it is helpful to **notice** common **spelling patterns**.

### Learning question

What patterns can you see:

*Mat – mate – matter*    *late – later*    *pat – patter*

*cat – cater*    *hat – hate*    *bat – batter*    *fate – fatter?*

**Clue** What sound does **a** spell in each word?  
Which words end in **e**? Which have two **ts**?

## Useful spelling patterns

Spelling patterns are about:

- **Vowels** = **a e i o u** (and sometimes **y**) and
- **Consonants** = all the other letters

Here are three common patterns.

1. **i** before **e**, except after **c**

*grief, piece, receive, receipt*

Exceptions: *leisure, their*

2. If a word ends in **e**, drop it when you add **ing**.

*change → changing, manage → managing*

*save → saving*

Exception: *age → ageing*

3. When adding *lee* to a word, spell it **ly** not *ley*.

*careful → carefully, proper → properly, quick →*

*quickly, safe → safely* No exceptions

### Learn more

Get a good teach-yourself-spelling book.

See the spelling pages in *Writing for care work*.

## 21. Quiz

1. What are writing skills?
2. Does criticism help us learn?
3. Why are words more important when we write than when we talk?
4. Written English is chatty, vague and full of opinions – true or false?
5. Why is it useful to learn about grammar?
6. What sort of English do we write at work?
7. Is either of these a sentence? (a) *Be careful!*  
(b) *Whenever you do that.*
8. When should we use direct speech?
9. Should we write *they were* or *they was*?
10. What does every sentence start with?
11. What is the difference between *its* and *it's*?
12. When is *lunch* not a meal?

13. Identify the nouns and verbs here:  
*Mrs Peters enjoys eating a pear with cheese.*
14. Identify the adjectives and adverbs here:  
*Walk carefully when the floor is wet.*
15. How might pronouns (e.g. *he, she, them*) cause confusion in a report?
16. How does good handwriting support care?
17. What is good handwriting actually like?
18. What should you do if you can't spell the word you want to write?
19. What does it mean to *break a word down*?
20. Which letters are vowels?

The information you need to answer these and many more questions is in this booklet.

For answer 1, see page 1. See page 2 for answer 2 and so on.



# What next?

If you want to develop your writing skills, you may find another booklet in this series useful.

It is called ***Reporting and other care work writing*** and it covers all the essentials:

- Writing factually
- Care plan notes, messages, accident reports, emails, letters etc
- Useful spellings... and more

For more on developing your **care work** knowledge and skills, including qualifications:

- Visit the **Skills for Care website** at
- [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)
- Go to the *Developing skills* section

## Learning through Work series

- > Reporting and other care work writing
- > Writing skills for care workers
- > Talking about bodily functions and feelings
- > Physical health
- > Using numbers in care work
- > Number skills for care workers
- > Talking about how much, how often

Answer to p 7 Learning question:

There are eight sentences:

*Mrs George is a very independent person.*

*She gets herself washed and dressed.*

*She needs lots of prompting to change clothes.*

*She says that her partner does the shopping and housework.*

*This is not true.*

*She can get angry if you do something she does not want you to do.*

*She worries about paying her bills.*

*Reassure her that they are paid by direct debit.*

SAMPLE

SAMPLE