

Collins

Grammar for GCSE English



Series editors: Mike Gould and Paul Higgins

Authors: Mike Gould, Beth Kemp

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A large, stylized green number '1' is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a library with wooden shelves filled with books of various colors.

Chapter 1

The basics

What's it all about?

In order to analyse and use language creatively in your GCSE work, it is important to understand the basics of word classes and punctuation, as well as the fundamentals of sentence structure such as phrases and clauses.

This chapter will show you how to

- understand vocabulary
- understand clauses and phrases
- understand sentence structures
- use punctuation accurately
- use paragraphs effectively.

- use a range of grammatical terms for word classes.

Understand vocabulary

It will help your GCSE reading and writing to understand the fundamental building blocks of language: word classes.

Getting you thinking

Read this line from the nonsense poem 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll.

'Twas **brillig**, and the **slithy toves** did **gyre** and **gimble** in the **wabe**.

- 1 For each highlighted word, find three real words that could go in that slot.

Exploring the skills

There are eight word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and determiners. Each class performs different jobs in a sentence.

In the line above, each of the nonsense words clearly belongs to a certain word class (noun, verb or adjective). You can only replace them with words of the same class.

Nouns

There are two types of noun: common and proper.

	Common nouns	Proper nouns
Physical objects or 'things'	table, car, computer, bread	Mercedes, Apple Macintosh
Abstract concepts, emotions, ideas or ideals	peace, religion, anger	Judaism
Living creatures	cat, postman, doctor	Sooty, John, Dr Jones
Places	beach, town	England, Munich

- 2 Look at the right-hand column in the table. How can you tell if something is a proper noun?
- 3 Which nonsense words in the line of poetry can you replace with nouns?



- Some nouns have a plural form, ending in 's': *tables, cats, beaches*.
- Nouns can be replaced by a *pronoun*.

John was in the middle of explaining
when he suddenly raced out of the room.

proper noun

pronoun

Verbs

There are three different types of verb.

- *Main verbs* express an action, process or state: I **think**, we are **going**, they would have **loved** it.
- *Auxiliary verbs* help create the tense: we **are** leaving, they **have** eaten it all.
- *Modal verbs* (a type of auxiliary verb) tell us how definite, likely or possible something is: I **must** do that now, we **could** say that.

Verbs are **conjugated** to make them agree with a *subject* (the noun or pronoun that is 'doing' the verb):

first person ————— third person
I **walk**, he **walks**

first person ————— third person plural
I **am**, she **is**, they **are**
————— third person

Verbs are also conjugated to make different *tenses*:

I **walk**, I **walked** ————— present tense

I **am**, I **was** ————— past tense
————— present tense
————— past tense

The table below shows how the main tenses in English are formed for **regular verbs**, such as 'to walk' and 'to jump'.

Tense	Example	Explanation
Simple present	I jump, he jumps	The ending of the main verb changes according to the tense and subject.
Simple past	I jumped, she jumped	
Present progressive	I am jumping, he is jumping	These tenses are created with an auxiliary verb and a <i>present participle</i> of the main verb (ending in '-ing').
Past progressive	I was jumping, she was jumping	
Present perfect	I have jumped, he has jumped	These tenses are created with an auxiliary verb and a <i>past participle</i> of the main verb (ending in '-ed').
Past perfect	I had jumped, she had jumped	

Top tip

Main verbs are essential – every full sentence must have at least one.

Auxiliary verbs, including modals, are used with a main verb.

Glossary

conjugated: when verbs change form, usually taking on a different ending

regular verb: a verb that follows predictable patterns in forming tenses and agreeing with subjects



6

Chapter 6

Writing to narrate and describe

What's it all about?

Writing to narrate and describe means engaging your reader through vivid settings, distinctive characters and compelling storylines. To write successfully, you will need a wide vocabulary and the ability to adapt and vary sentence and paragraph structures to keep your reader 'hooked'.

This chapter will show you how to

- improve and build vocabulary to create characters and settings
- use tenses to sequence events and create drama
- use a range of sentence structures for different effects
- use dialogue to advance plot and improve characterisation
- use commas and semicolons to add descriptive detail
- use paragraph structures to position the reader
- structure stories creatively to interest the reader
- structure description creatively.

You will write

- a monologue on the theme of imprisonment
- a first-person narrative about being lost in a hostile environment
- the opening to a story that deals with the 'madness' of the main character
- the opening to a story that involves an encounter at a train station
- a personal description of someone you know well who is a good listener
- a short story on the theme of natural disasters
- the first draft of a story based on the theme of revenge
- a descriptive account called 'City Streets' or 'Early Morning Market'.

Improve and build vocabulary to create characters and settings

You will learn how to

- distinguish between concrete and abstract nouns and ideas and use these effectively
- use nouns, noun phrases and adjectival phrases to create vivid characters and settings.

Storytelling and description both require you to create memorable settings and characters with distinctive traits. To do this, you need to be able to appeal to the reader's senses through well-chosen vocabulary.

Getting you thinking

Read this description.

The situation was hopeless; I felt fear, loneliness and isolation. There seemed to be no prospect of escape.

- 1 Can you picture this speaker? What has happened to her? What do you see?

Take two or three minutes to think, and then write a description of this person and her story. Simply put down what you imagine.

Now read an alternative version of the same story.

The rough, steel door in the depths of the heaving ship slammed shut behind me, and the harsh voices of my captors receded into the distance. By now my skin should have been tanned, but as I stared at my reflection in the broken and dusty mirror hanging from the wall, under my eyes I noted the grey bags and the streaks left by my tears. It seemed a long, long time since, as newlyweds, Steve and I had set out on our beautiful, shining yacht to sail around the world.



- 2 Write brief answers to these questions.
- What do you think has happened to the narrator?
 - How do you know? Are you told directly, or is it implied?
 - What background information is revealed about the narrator and her life?

- 3 Compare the two openings of this story.
- What are the main differences between them (apart from their length)?
 - How easy would it be to draw an image or make a film of the second? Explain your answer.

Glossary

implied: suggested indirectly. For example, writing 'Having no one to talk to as a child was both a blessing and a curse' might imply the narrator was an only child. 'I was an only child' says it directly.

Exploring the skills

Concrete nouns are words for things that can be touched or seen. For example, 'mirror' is a concrete noun. *Abstract nouns* tend to be emotions – qualities such as 'fear'.

- 4 Which of these nouns are concrete and which are abstract?

despair lake dagger attitude necklace
pride power fingernail ladder

Concrete qualities – such as sound, touch, texture, colour, smell and taste – are key to good description. Abstract references – for example, nouns such as 'fear' – have their place, but on their own they are not enough to paint a picture or show what is happening.

- 5 Sort these concrete nouns, adjectives and verbs into their qualities (some might suggest more than one sense).

acid splintered rusty pungent smoky
rattle amber dull creaking shrill
echoing fresh dented iron frothy
salty bloody wrinkled shredded misty
groan windswept

Sound	Sight/ colour	Touch/ texture	Smell	Taste



Developing the skills

One key way to create vivid pictures in the reader's mind is to create *noun phrases* by building detail around a basic noun.

The rough, steel door in the depths of the heaving ship...

determiner
pre-modifier (adjectives)
central noun or head
post-modifier

6 List at least two other noun phrases from the second text that have been constructed in this way. Then write them out and divide them up as shown in the example above.

7 Now have a go at developing noun phrases yourself. Imagine the narrator was able to stare out of a porthole at the sea all around her. Copy and complete this sentence:

I watched the _____ / _____ / sea / _____.

Top tip

Do not *over-modify* nouns, or they will seem exaggerated. For example, 'the rough, steel, worn, shabby and hard door in the dingy, dark depths of the heaving, swaying and rocking old ship' is overkill!

It is equally important to pay attention to the *verbs* you select. The more specific the better. In the text the writer says, 'the door *slammed*'. She could have said 'closed' or simply 'shut', but 'slammed' describes the sound that is made – and also suggests aggression.

8 Copy and complete this later section from the same story, either replacing the highlighted verbs with more specific ones or adding verbs in the spaces.

Seeing a chance for freedom, I _____ over the side of the ship, onto the ladder, but slipped and **fell** into the icy waters below. I **moved around** in the water for several minutes and then finally, I **got hold of** the side of the dinghy and _____ into it. I was safe, at least for a moment. 'Start rowing!' I **said** and Steve did so.

Adjectival phrases are another way of building vivid detail about a character. For example:

The man was **very heavily** tattooed.

adverbs modify 'tattooed'
adjective



Alternatively, you could turn this into a noun phrase as part of a longer sentence:

A **very heavily tattooed man** came through the door.

noun phrase



Applying the skills

- 9 Write a monologue based on the theme of 'imprisonment' from the point of view of the prisoner.

Top tip

Words that have the ability to suggest several qualities can be very evocative: for example, 'smoky' might evoke taste, touch, sight and smell. To be really original, you could even use it to evoke a sound.

Checklist for success

- ✓ Show, don't tell: you can tell the reader how the character feels using abstract ideas ('fear', 'hope'), but it is far better to show their actions, describe their surroundings and evoke or imply their fear through concrete vocabulary choices and images.
- ✓ Consider how references to the senses can help create a vivid setting or character.
- ✓ Build detail by expanding noun and verb phrases, by adding pre- and post-modifiers. Try to do this subtly, making the writing flow.

Check your progress:

Sound progress >>>

I can use concrete nouns and noun phrases in my monologue.

Excellent progress >>>>

I can use concrete nouns and noun phrases, and use a wide vocabulary related to the senses to create an atmospheric monologue.

Use tenses to sequence events and create drama

You will learn how to

- use the past simple, present perfect and past perfect tenses to reveal information
- explore the effect of the present tense on voice and tone.

Using verb tenses creatively to reveal a character's past or present situation can make your short-story narratives both convincing and engaging.

Getting you thinking

Read these three possible opening lines to a story about someone stranded in an isolated environment.

I look at the sheets of ice for miles around and wonder how I will ever get out of this place.

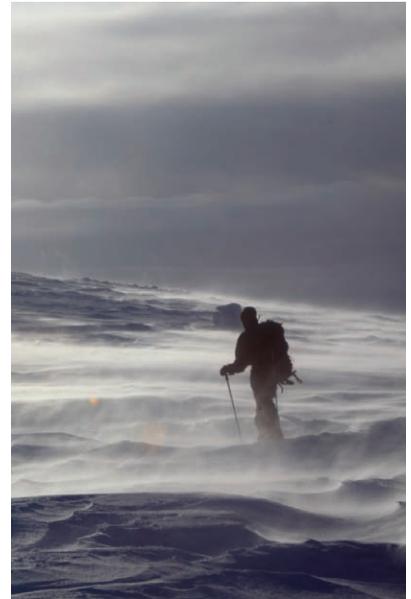
I looked at the sheets of ice for miles around and wondered how I would ever get out of this place.

I had looked at the sheets of ice for miles around and had wondered how I would ever get out of that place.

There are three main tenses here:

- the present simple: 'I look'
- the past simple: 'I looked'
- the past perfect: 'I had looked'.

- 1 Think about the effect and meaning of each tense.
 - a) Which one suggests the writer has escaped and is looking back on events?
 - b) Which one seems to be happening as you read?
 - c) Which one is written in a tense commonly used to tell stories in a straightforward sequence?



Exploring the skills

Tenses allow you to describe *when* things happen(ed) and the *status* of events (whether actions or states of being are still going on or whether they have been completed).

Read the following extract from a diary entry written in the persona of a character from the film *Into the Wild*.

I look out of this old camper van at the spring sky, my breath coming in shorter and shorter bursts. I remember how I crossed the river in winter, while it was frozen, telling myself to return before the thaw. But last month, when I prepared to return to civilisation, I could not; the thaw had come early and I almost drowned when I attempted my transit. Now, I am trapped. I have always trusted myself to deal with life, with fate but...not now. It will not be long before...I cannot bear to write it...

- 2 Find examples of the present simple or progressive, past simple and past perfect tenses and put them in a table like the one below. Can you also find the present perfect ('I have looked') and future ('I will/am going to look')?

Tense	Example
Present simple or progressive	'I look out of this old camper van'

Developing the skills

How you use tenses can clarify time order and add to the drama.

I **had been lying** in the cave for many hours, perhaps even days, when I **saw** a chink of light.

past perfect progressive

sudden single event

- 3 Complete this paragraph adding the past perfect or past simple tenses as necessary.

Val and I _____ in the underground chamber for several weeks, when finally we heard the ice above start to crack. We had just stumbled to our feet when a voice _____. Finally, the search team _____ us, and lowered ropes down.



Applying the skills

- 4 Write a first-person narrative or monologue in which someone is trapped or lost in an isolated environment.

Checklist for success

- ✓ Use tenses to provide background information about the character and make the sequence of events clear.
- ✓ Think about how your choice of tense can create drama or immediacy, and explain past events.

Check your progress:

Sound progress >>>

I can use tenses accurately to establish character and describe their thoughts.

Excellent progress >>>>

I can vary the tenses in my monologue to make clear the sequence of events and create drama.

Use a range of sentence structures for different effects

You will learn how to

- use sentences of different lengths and types for different effects
- vary your use of the first and third person, and introduce ellipses to engage the reader's response.

Selecting appropriate types of sentences – and knowing where to position them – can help to speed up a narrative, introduce something surprising or develop an idea.

Getting you thinking

Read these two very similar extracts from a story.

I didn't see them at first in the darkness, which was descending as I set off at a brisk pace from the station towards the lights of the city. Then I noticed that they were following me so I began to increase my pace almost without thinking. Behind me I could hear their steps speed up too, so I increased mine again, beginning to panic, and then began to be aware of something else – that I had been wrong about the road, too, as it led nowhere, and there was just a dead end with no escape.

I didn't see them at first. The darkness was descending as I set off at a brisk pace from the station towards the lights of the city. Then I noticed that they were following me. I began to increase my pace, almost without thinking. Behind me, I could hear their steps speed up, too, so I increased mine, beginning to panic, and then began to be aware of something else. I had been wrong about the road as it led nowhere. There was just a dead end. No escape.

1 What differences are there in the use of sentence types and structure?

2 Which has more tension and drama?

Exploring the skills

In stories and description, short or **minor sentences** can

- state a simple fact or event clearly – perhaps to surprise or to clarify what is happening
- indicate a sudden pause in proceedings or a change of direction (literally or emotionally)
- sum up or add a punchline – either serious or comical.



Glossary

minor sentences: sentences that do not contain a subject and/or a verb, but that still make sense (for example, 'No escape.')

Longer sentences can

- explore reasons or consequences
- provide descriptive or factual detail to fill in what is happening
- create momentum with a series of linked events or actions building up towards a moment of drama or release of emotion.

3 Rewrite this next paragraph from the same story. Create a mix of longer and shorter/minor sentences for dramatic effect. You will need to remove some words, and perhaps add one or two.

I was trapped and turned around to see them circling me as their hoods cast shadows across their faces in the cold winter light. One of them stepped forward and I instinctively took a pace backwards until my back was pressed against the wall. To my right I saw that the door of a nearby house was slightly ajar so I ran towards it. As I reached it, it slammed shut in my face so I had no option but to face my pursuers again.

You could start: 'I was trapped. I turned around to...'



Developing the skills

The grammatical structure of your sentences is as important as the length in terms of adding information and creating atmosphere. **Non-finite clauses** are a good way of economically adding detail to sentences. For example, you could write:

I turned round to face them. I realised I was trapped.

But if you wanted to avoid the repetitious use of the subject 'I', you could write:

Turning round to face them, I realised I was trapped.

non-finite clause that has no subject

comma separates non-finite clause from main clause

main clause containing subject 'I' and verb 'was trapped'

Glossary

non-finite clause:

a subordinate clause that does not contain a finite verb (a verb in the present or past tense), but one in its non-finite form, such as an infinitive ('to go') or a participle ('going'); in non-finite clauses, there is no subject, or else the subject is implied