

A Parent's Guide to the Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Test

Your child's Year 6 SAT tests are an important milestone in their education. Naturally, you want them to do as well as they can and you want to offer them as much support and guidance as possible. This brief guide helps you to understand the new Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Test, so that you can fully support your child through this test.

Why has the test changed, and what was being done before?

Since their introduction, SATs have included a writing test which was broken into 3 tasks: a long writing task, a short writing task and a spelling task. The long and short tasks asked children to do some creative writing (a persuasive letter or a newspaper article for example) which was marked by an examiner. These marks were added to the score from a spelling task to give an overall score. The score was translated into a level (3, 4 or 5 for most children) used to indicate how good a child was at writing at the end of KS2.

What has changed?

Many educational professionals argued that getting children to do creative writing in a test situation never reflected the best that the child could do. Now teachers collect a portfolio of evidence of each child's writing, which is submitted for moderation. This selection of writing is used to judge a child's level for their writing at the end of KS2.

What is the new test testing?

There is still a writing test which is now focused on testing three elements of writing: grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling.

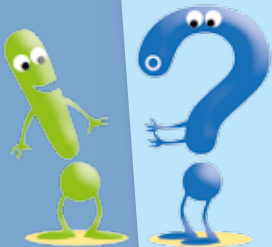
Grammar: The structure of sentences; whether they make sense or not; understanding of tenses and verbs.

Vocabulary: The understanding of words; how words are linked together.

Punctuation: What the different punctuation marks are called; what they are used for.

Spelling: How to use spelling rules; spelling of common words.

These are the only elements that the level 3 – 5 test (which most children take) is testing. There is no creative writing element.





How does the test work?

Children are given two test papers:

Paper 1 consists of between 40 and 50 questions assessing grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. Each question is worth one or two marks with a total for the paper of 50 marks. The questions are 'selected response items' (such as multiple choice questions) or 'short, open response items', in which children may have to write a word, a few words or a sentence.

Paper 2, the spelling task, consists of 20 sentences, which are read aloud by the test administrator. Each sentence has a word missing which the child must complete. The task is worth a total of 20 marks.

Here are some sample questions from the 2013 test:

Circle the most suitable connective to complete the sentence below.

Amir went to the doctor _____ he was feeling ill.

however because despite yet

Tick one word to complete the sentence below so that it is grammatically correct.

The window was _____ by a ball.

Tick one.

broked broke broken breaked

Which pair of pronouns is best to complete the sentence below?

The teacher split _____ into teams. _____ were batting; the other team was fielding.

Tick one.

they Them
 us We
 her She
 them I

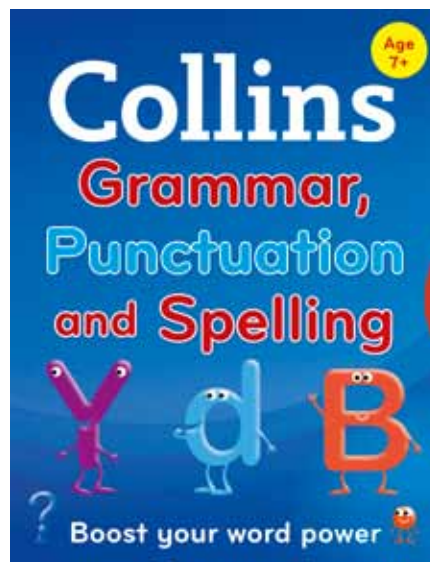


What can I do to help my child prepare for the test?

As you can see from the questions above, the children need to have a good understanding of the technical vocabulary of writing. Phrases such as 'connectives,' 'pronouns' and 'verbs' for example, alongside a good understanding of spelling rules and the different types of punctuation and what they are used for. All of these will have been covered by the children in KS2. Many schools will try to bring this knowledge together during Year 6, especially in the lead up to SATs.

Familiarising yourself with the technical language of writing would be a good place to start. If you can hold a conversation with your child that supports their understanding, this reinforces their learning. It also helps the child to see that you are specifically interested in the technical side of their writing development and take any revision that is going on within their school more seriously.

Collins Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling, is a great place to start helping your child prepare for the KS2 test.



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