

Glossary of terms used in English teaching in Primary Schools

Please note: A glossary of terms found in the teaching of Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar can be found in the [Primary SPaG Glossary](#).

Alliteration	A poetic device which uses the same letter sound at the start of adjacent or closely connected words in a sentence. For example, 'The bird sang sweetly.'
Analogy	A comparison between one thing and another, usually to explain or clarify. Similes and metaphors are used to draw analogies.
Argument text	A text where the writer is either 'for' or 'against' an issue or subject, or presents the case for both sides. Common areas for primary school children to write about include the use of zoos and whether children should wear school uniform.
Ascender	'The part of a letter that extends above the level of the top of an x (as in b and h).'
Atmosphere	Atmosphere (or mood) refers to the feeling the reader gets about the story based on the details the author uses. Atmosphere is created by the description of backgrounds and settings, characters and events.
Autobiography	An account of a person's life written by that person.
Biography	An account of a person's life written by another person.
Blending	Reading the individual sounds in a word and then putting those sounds together to read the whole word. One of the first ways that children learn to decode words.
Book report	A child's written description of what a book is about, which may help others decide whether to read the book. See also book review .
Book review	A child's written description of a book that also contains a critique of the book and recommendations as to who else may want to read it.
Bullet points	An organisational device that uses small dots or symbols to indicate separate items in a list or separate sentences or paragraphs.
Character	A person in a story. In many stories this may not be a human, but a fantasy character, mythical character or animal.
Clause	Clauses are the building blocks of a sentence . They are groups of words that contain a subject and a verb . A clause can usually make sense as a sentence on its own.
Common exception word	A word which does not follow the common phonetic spelling rules of the language, or where the usual rules act in an unusual way. Children have a list of these words which they are expected to learn to read and spell by the end of each year in primary school.
Composition	The act of creating a piece of work – in this case, writing. See also transcription .
Comprehension (reading)	The understanding of what has been read. Just as important as decoding . Some children are excellent decoders, but struggle to understand what they have read. The teaching of reading in schools has an increasing focus on comprehension. 'Comprehension' is also sometimes used to describe a set of questions which children may be asked to answer related to a text they have read.
Creative writing	Also known as narrative writing . Writing a story with a structure , using knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar to set it out correctly.
Cursive handwriting	'Handwriting in which most letters are joined.'

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CVC/CCVC/CVCC words	C – consonant, V – vowel. So a CVC word is consonant-vowel-consonant e.g. 'cat'. An example CCVC word would be 'stop', CVCC would be ' mask '. Some of the earliest words children learn to read and write as they use the basic letter sounds learnt first in phonics teaching.
Decoding	Reading words in a text using phonic knowledge and knowledge of sight words . The ability to decode needs to be accompanied by the ability to understand what is being read (comprehension).
Descender	'The part of a letter that extends below the level of the base of a letter such as x (as in y and p).'
Dialogue	A conversation or speech that is written down as part of a piece of narrative text. May be presented as reported speech, direct speech (using speech marks) or as a play script .
DUMTUMS	An acronym to help children remember how to neatly set out the beginning part of a piece of written work. Stands for ' Date – Underline – Miss a line – Title – Underline – Miss a line – Start '.
Effect	The impact of a piece of writing or a literary device (e.g. alliteration) on the reader. How the writing makes the reader feel, think or react.
Encoding	The process of hearing a sound and being able to write a letter or letters to represent it. See also segmenting .
Explanation text	A piece of non-fiction writing which describes a process, such as how something works. Usually written in the present tense, and may have bullet points , numbers and/or pictures or diagrams.
Extended writing	Also known as independent writing . An opportunity for children to write independently for a longer period of time, usually at the end of a unit of teaching, to enable them to show new skills and consolidate existing ones.
Fable	A piece of fiction which features animals, plants or other natural elements and gives them human characteristics in order to deliver a 'moral' or cautionary message.
Fact	A statement that is true (e.g. ' Some people hunt whales ') as opposed to an opinion , which is an individual's personal view (e.g. ' Hunting whales should be banned ').
Fiction	A piece of writing which describes imaginary people and/or events.
Figurative language	Uses words and images to suggest meaning rather than directly giving meaning. Examples include simile , metaphor and personification . See also literal language .
Finger spaces	The amount of space that needs to be left between words so that they can be read as individual units of meaning. Young children learning to write are first taught to put their finger on the page to create the necessary spacing.
Fluency	The ability to read or write at a comfortable pace without undue hesitation which could impact on meaning or understanding.
Free verse	Poetry that does not rhyme or have a regular rhythm.
GPC	Grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Relates to the individual letters or letters strings which represent individual sounds in the language.
Grapheme	A written symbol (or group of letters) that represents a sound (phoneme), for example, a, f, ch, ow . There are 26 letters in the English language and 44 phonemes.

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Guided reading	A method of teaching reading where children share and discuss the reading of a text under guidance from a teacher. Guided reading sessions are usually timetabled regularly. See also reciprocal reading .
Haiku	A type of short poem originating in Japan. Haikus have only three lines (but can have any number of words). It must be in the syllable-form, 5-7-5 : the first line having five syllables, the second line seven and the third five.
Heading	The title of a piece of writing, usually used for non-fiction , which may then be broken down further using sub-headings .
High-frequency words	Words which appear most often in the language. Many of these are also common exception words , for example, 'I', 'the', ' you '. Children are taught to learn these words by sight in order to increase the fluency of their reading.
Hyperbole	A highly exaggerated phrase or statement intended to create effect . For example, ' I'm so hungry I could eat a horse. '
Imagery	Words used in writing which create a strong effect in the reader's mind by appealing to one or more of the five senses.
Independent writing	See extended writing .
Inference	Reaching a conclusion based on evidence. Children are taught inference as part of their reading comprehension as it requires an ability to look beyond the text on the page, and to collect evidence on a character's thoughts, feelings and motivations. For example, ' I think Goldilocks is naughty because she goes into the Three Bears' house and eats their porridge when they are not there. '
Information text	A non-fiction text which gives information on a particular subject. Sometimes called a non-chronological report as it gives information without referring to the order in which things happen.
Instruction text	A non-fiction text which gives instructions on how to complete a task. May have organisational features such as bullet points or numbers, diagrams or pictures.
Intonation	Varying the tone of voice when reading a text aloud in order to make the text interesting for the listener. A good sign that a child is becoming a fluent reader.
Journalistic writing	A type of non-fiction writing where children create newspaper or magazine articles and report on real or imagined events.
Kenning	Using a two-word phrase instead of a one word noun in a piece of poetry, for example ' sky water ' for rain, ' sleep story ' for dream.
Literal language	Language which gives information directly rather than leaving it open to interpretation. See also figurative language .
Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check	A way of learning spellings, where children study each word, say it aloud, cover it up, write it out then check their version against the original.
Metaphor	A comparison which is not actually true. Gives an idea of what something is like by comparing it to something else that has similar features e.g. ' Your room is a pigsty. ' See also simile .

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Modelled writing	When a teacher writes a passage of writing in front of the whole class. Differs from shared writing because the teacher does not ask for the input of the class. The intention of modelled writing is to show directly how to use a text, punctuation, spelling or grammar feature correctly.
Mystery text	A story which features an unexplained event (sometimes a crime) and then gives information as to how the event took place.
Myths and legends	Traditional, ancient fictional stories, often from ancient cultures such as the Vikings, Ancient Greeks or Native Americans. Myths were often written to try and explain natural phenomena such as the weather, and quite often involve gods and fantasy creatures. Legends are stories from human history, which may have had an element of truth but have evolved and changed over time.
Narrative	A spoken or written account of events, real or fictional .
Narrative writing	Writing a story or an account of events.
Non-chronological report	See information text .
Non-fiction	Writing that gives information or facts.
Non-narrative	Writing that does not give an account of events – for example a set of facts about a subject.
Onomatopoeia	Words which describe a sound, but also sound like the sound they describe – for example ‘ buzz ’, ‘ woof ’, ‘ boom ’.
Opinion	An individual’s personal view. See fact .
Oral composition	A process by which children are taught to say out loud what they want to write before writing it down. This process enables them to check for fluency and sense, and to make improvements, before committing words to paper. The process can be done individually or as part of a larger group.
Organisational devices	Methods used when writing a piece of text which make it clearer for the reader. Examples include using bullet points in a list, numbers in a set of instructions, or organising ideas into paragraphs in a story or piece of non-fiction writing.
Paragraph	A section of writing which consists of one or more sentences grouped together which deal with one subject or element of the writing as a whole.
Peer assessment	A method of assessing children’s work where pupils look at a partner’s work and assess it, usually against a given set of success criteria .
Personification	A type of figurative language which gives an animal, plant or object human characteristics e.g. ‘ The sun smiled down at us. ’
Persuasive text	A type of non-fiction writing which gives arguments in favour of a subject in order to persuade the reader to do something or accept a point of view. Adverts and travel brochures are examples.
Phoneme	A unit of sound within a word. For example, the word ‘ dog ’ consists of three phonemes, d – o – g ; the word ‘ charm ’ also consists of three phonemes, ch – ar – m . There are 44 phonemes in the English language compared with 26 letters.

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Phonetically plausible	A word is phonetically plausible if it can be read for what it is, even though it is not spelled correctly. Young children learning to write will create phonetically plausible versions of words, as they only have a limited range of GPCs at their disposal. For example, a young child may write ' beecos ' instead of ' because ', since this is a phonetically plausible version of the word. As pupils' phonic and spelling knowledge increases, they will use fewer and fewer 'phonetically plausible' spellings, and instead use correct versions.
Phonics	Teaching pupils to read and write by directly linking phonemes (the sounds in words) and graphemes (the symbol used to represent them).
Phrase	A phrase is a group of words that form part of a sentence, e.g. ' along the quiet country lane '. Can add further information to nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs, e.g. ' my car ', ' on the table '. A phrase does not make sense as a sentence on its own. See clause .
Play script	A piece of writing intended to be performed on the stage. Will contain such features as a list of characters, stage directions and dialogue. May also be divided into scenes and acts.
Précis	A summary of the content of a piece of writing. Older pupils are taught to find the key facts and events in a text and write them in a shortened form in order to increase their comprehension .
Prediction	Using evidence from a text to say what may happen next, what events may unfold or how a character may behave. A key part of a pupils' comprehension of their reading.
Presentational devices	Ways of presenting a piece of writing in order to create effect, for example underlining headings and sub-headings , using different or larger fonts or presenting facts in boxes.
Proof reading	Checking a piece of writing to make improvements and correct errors.
Reading comprehension	See comprehension .
Reciprocal reading	A structured method of guided reading where children are gradually taught to take on group roles to explore and find meaning in texts. Emphasises teamwork and supports independent comprehension skills.
Recount	A piece of writing which retells events that have previously occurred. Examples include diaries, newspapers reports and letters.
Rhyme	The repetition of similar sounds in words, usually at the end of the word. Most often seen in poems and songs.
Scaffolding learning	Providing support for children to practise and consolidate a particular skill, perhaps by providing a writing frame , word bank or structured task sheet.
Segmenting	Breaking a word into its constituent sounds for the purpose of writing those sounds down to spell the word.
Self-assessment	A method of encouraging children to assess their own work, usually by providing a set of success criteria and asking children to mark their own work against these criteria.
Shared writing	A process used to teach children how to produce a particular style of writing. The teacher creates a piece of writing on the board with input from the children.

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Sight words	Words that children need to learn to recognise by 'sight', usually because they cannot be decoded phonetically . See also common exception words .
Simile	A comparison phrase which finds similarities between two objects or ideas and compares the, always using the words 'like' or 'as', e.g. ' as old as the hills ', ' he ran like a streak of lightning .' See also metaphor .
Simple, compound and complex sentences	Simple sentences contain one clause or idea. Compound sentences contain two or more clauses that can stand alone, linked by a connective word such as ' and ' or ' but '. Complex sentences contain two or more clauses where one clause is the main idea and the other clause is a dependent clause as it does not stand alone without the main clause.
Spider diagram	A way of planning writing where a central idea has several offshoot ideas (the legs of the spider) where information and thoughts can be organised.
Story map/story mountain	A way of planning the structure of a story by following the path of the main character up one side of a mountain to the climax of the story at the peak, then down the other side with the resolution. A story map plots out the story along a pathway, such as 'Introduction - Build Up - Problem - Resolution - Conclusion'. Pupils may also use a story mountain or story map to analyse the plot of an existing story.
Story setting	The location where a story takes place.
Structure	The basic events of a story and how its plot unfolds. See story map/story mountain .
Style	The way an author writes to suit a specific context, purpose or audience. For example the style needed to write a formal letter of complaint is very different to the style needed to write a children's story.
Sub-heading	A heading given to a subsection or paragraph within a main piece of writing. Most often seen in non-fiction writing such as instructions or information texts.
Success criteria	A set of features that a teacher wants to see in children's work during the course of a lesson. Will usually be shared with pupils, or created by them, and referred to regularly, before being used to self-assess or peer assess the work.
Summarising	See précis .
Synonym	A word with the same or similar meaning to another word.
Talk partner	Pairs of children who discuss topics within lessons and share ideas and thinking.
Text	A piece of writing.
Text-marking	Highlighting, underlining, marking or circling the features of a piece of text. Used when pupils are beginning to learn about a certain text type.
Thesaurus	A dictionary of synonyms used to help pupils make good vocabulary choices in their writing.
Traditional tale	A fairy story that has been told for many years and which most people know, for example Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk or Goldilocks and the Three Bears.
Transcription	The act of putting writing down on the page. Differs from composition in that its main focus is spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting.
WAGOLL	Stands for ' What a Good One Looks Like '. Teachers will often display examples of well-written texts in order for children to model their own writing on the features of the WAGOLL.

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Word bank	A set of words made available to pupils to support them with their writing. It may contain words specific to the type of text they are writing, or words which they are learning to spell correctly in their work.
Wow words	Powerful vocabulary choices which improve a piece of writing by making it more vivid or interesting.
Writing frame	A worksheet which sets out the structure of a particular text type so that children learn to organise their writing correctly by filling in sections. For example, a writing frame for a recipe may have a box for the title, one for the list of ingredients, a numbered list for the instructions and possibly a space for a picture or diagram. See also scaffolding .