Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

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Punctuation

- Commas separate items in a list, follow a fronted adverbial ('Later that day, ...') and mark off extra information.
- Apostrophes show possession (the girl's bag; the girls' bags) or missing letters (don't; it's = it is or it has). 'Its' (belonging to it) has no apostrophe.
- A **semicolon** joins two closely related main clauses; a **colon** introduces a list or an explanation. Dashes and brackets add extra information.
- Speech: start a new line for each new speaker, and put the punctuation inside the speech marks.

Common spelling errors

- **Homophones**: there, their and they're; your and you're; to, too and two; where, were and wear; affect (usually a verb) and effect (usually a noun).
- Tricky words: definitely, separate, necessary, embarrass, rhythm, accommodation, occasionally, beginning and believe.

Grammar

- Keep tenses consistent, and make subjects and verbs agree ('the group of students was').
- Write 'could have', not 'could of', and 'we were', not 'we was' (**Standard English**).

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Exam tip

- Accuracy is worth 16 marks on each of AQA's writing questions. Leave 5 minutes to check spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and sense, reading your work in your head as if out loud.
- Use one **semicolon** or **colon** that you're sure of, rather than five you aren't.

Common mistakes

- **Comma splices**: two full sentences can't be joined with just a comma. Use a full stop, a **semicolon** or a conjunction.
- Forgetting paragraphs because you're writing quickly: a new idea, place, time or speaker means a new paragraph.
- Using 'long' words you aren't sure how to spell. A precise, simple word scores better than a misspelled one.

Key terms

Homophone	A word that sounds the same as another but has a different meaning and spelling.
Apostrophe of possession	An apostrophe showing that something belongs to someone.
Apostrophe of omission	An apostrophe showing where letters have been missed out.
Semicolon	A punctuation mark that joins two closely related main clauses.
Colon	A punctuation mark that introduces a list or an explanation.
Comma splice	The mistake of joining two sentences with only a comma.
Standard English	The widely accepted form of English used in formal writing.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which sentence uses there, their and they're correctly?
2. What does 'it's' mean?
3. Which shows something belonging to one girl?
4. What does a semicolon do?
5. What does a colon often do?
6. What is a comma splice?

Your notes

7. Which of these is written correctly?
8. Which sentence is in Standard English?

Answers

1. They're going to their house over there.
2. It is, or it has
3. The girl's bag
4. Joins two closely related main clauses
5. Introduces a list or an explanation
6. Wrongly joining two sentences with just a comma
7. I could have gone.
8. We were late.

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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