

Common SPaG issues

Here are some common SPaG issues that occur in many GCSE pieces:

Run-on sentence	The writer uses two sentences one after the other with no punctuation between: <i>Harry waved at her he was happy to see her.</i> <i>Harry waved at her; he was happy to see her.</i>
Comma splice	The writer uses a comma where there should be a semi-colon or full stop: <i>Sarah was happy, Kelly was not.</i> <i>Sarah was happy; Kelly was not.</i> <i>Sarah was happy but Kelly was not.</i>
Your/you're	The wrong homophone is used. <i>Your a silly boy.</i> <i>Open you're books.</i> <i>You're a silly boy.</i> <i>Open your books.</i>
One-sentence paragraphs	The writer composes a paragraph that covers many lines, but is only one sentence long.
Repetition	The writer repeats specific words – usually connectives like 'and' or opening words like 'I'.
Incorrect dialogue marking	The writer fails to use the correct dialogue markers, specifically speech marks to show direct speech.
They're/their/there	The wrong homophone is used. <i>He is sitting over their.</i> <i>They're books are old.</i> <i>There really kind to me.</i> <i>He is sitting over there.</i> <i>Their books are old.</i> <i>They're really kind to me.</i>
Apostrophes	Apostrophes are used incorrectly, or not at all. <i>The boys book was ruined.</i> <i>The boys books were ruined.</i> <i>The boy's book was ruined.</i> <i>The boys' books were ruined.</i>

Rectifying SPaG issues

These issues arise because the writer lacks the appropriate understanding – so here are some pointers!

Semi-colon ;	Used to separate MAIN CLAUSES. You know that a sentence should use a semi-colon and not a comma if you can replace it with 'and'. <i>The king died; the queen cried.</i> <i>The king died AND the queen cried.</i>
Comma ,	Used to separate a main clause from a SUB-CLAUSE. You know that a comma should be used if the preceding or following clause does not make sense on its own. <i>Henry was late, which wasn't surprising.</i> <i>Later tonight, we will go to the cinema.</i>
Your/you're	It is YOUR if it can be replaced with OUR <i>Take out your book.</i> <i>Take out our book.</i> It is YOU'RE if it can be replace with YOU ARE <i>You're very helpful.</i> <i>You are very helpful.</i>
They're/there /their	THERE can be replaced with HERE <i>Be there at seven.</i> <i>Be here at seven.</i> THEY'RE can be replaced with THEY ARE <i>They're kind people.</i> <i>They are kind people.</i> THEIR can be replaced with MY. <i>Give them their ice-cream.</i> <i>Give them my ice-cream.</i>
Apostrophes	Replace missing letters in contractions: I AM = I'M DO NOT = DON'T Or show ownership. <i>Billy's book. Chris' ball.</i> When the preceding noun ends in an S, the apostrophe comes after the S with no second S.

Making your writing better

The following tricks could help to make your writing better:

Sentences for effect	<p>Try using a single-word sentence at the beginning or end of a paragraph (or both!).</p> <p>Vary your sentences to ensure that the reader doesn't get bored – use a range of simple, compound and complex sentences.</p>
Avoid banned words	<p>Remove the following words from your vocabulary: GOOD – BAD – BIG – SMALL – NICE – SAID</p> <p>Use synonyms that pack more of a punch.</p>
Use figurative techniques	<p>Use metaphors, similes, personification, alliteration, hyperbole and more to create a strong image in the reader's mind.</p> <p>Use an easily identifiable comparison point.</p>
Show, don't tell	<p>Try describing a feeling or situation, rather than simply telling the reader about it –</p> <p><i>I was hungry.</i> <i>My stomach rumbled like an impending avalanche; I felt dizzy and my hands trembled violently.</i></p>
Grab the reader at the start	<p>When writing non-fiction especially, make sure you grab your reader with an engaging opening sentence.</p>
AFORREST	<p>Revise AFORREST and use these to support your non-fiction pieces.</p> <p>ANECDOTE – FACT – OPINION – REPETITION – RHETORICAL QUESTION – EMOTIVE LANGUAGE – STATISTICS – THREE IN A ROW</p>
One-word or one-sentence paragraphs	<p>You might want to use a single (short) sentence, or even a single word, in place of a paragraph to put across an important feeling or moment.</p> <p><i>Oh no.</i></p>

Revising SPaG

If you want to revise SPaG, try the following:

<p>Photocopy a page from a novel and highlight all of the punctuation. Reflect on why the punctuation has been used, and what the effect created is (if it is something for effect, like ellipsis).</p>
<p>Use Grammarly (www.grammarly.com) to revise key constructions and specific punctuation.</p>
<p>Practise re-writing stories, changing the punctuation to create different meaning.</p>
<p>Imagine you are explaining the punctuation or grammar to a small child. How would you explain it to them?</p>
<p>Give each punctuation mark a movement that reflects their job – for example, a full stop could be a punch. What would each punctuation mark's movement be?</p>
<p>If you had to teach a lesson that explained the role of punctuation and grammar, what would you do or say?</p>
<p>Think about how you might manipulate punctuation and grammar to suit a specific need. How can you punctuate these sentences, for example, to change the meaning?</p> <p><i>Let's eat Grandma.</i> <i>I want to thank my parents Tiffany and God.</i> <i>I find inspiration in cooking my family and my dog.</i></p>
<p>Watch YouTube videos that explain each punctuation mark in detail, with examples – some of them even have songs!</p>