

# Passing the Literacy Skills Test

**5th  
Edition**

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# Contents

About the authors	vii
Acknowledgements	vii
Series introduction	viii
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Why is the knowledge of English of intending teachers being tested?	1
The National Curriculum	
What is the test like?	3
Spelling; Punctuation; Grammar; Comprehension	
How to prepare for the test	7
How to use this book	7
Revision checklist	
<b>1 Spelling</b>	<b>10</b>
Introduction	10
Essential knowledge	10
Double consonants; Spelling and pronunciation; Homophones;	
Words best learned by heart; Chunking and patterns in words;	
Prefixes and suffixes; ‘i’ before ‘e’?	
General tips	17
Key strategies for spelling	18
Questions	19
<b>2 Punctuation</b>	<b>25</b>
Introduction	25
The main ways of marking ‘units of meaning’	25
Paragraphing; Full stop; Commas	
Additional ways of marking ‘units of meaning’	28
Colon; Semicolon; Question mark; Brackets or parentheses	
Punctuation which indicates the status of the language being used	30
Punctuation within words	31
Hyphens; Apostrophes; Capital letters	
Questions	34
<b>3 Grammar</b>	<b>36</b>
Introduction	36
Consistency with written Standard English	36

## Contents

Failure to observe sentence boundaries; Abandoned or faulty constructions and sentence fragments; Lack of cohesion; Lack of agreement between subject and verb; Should have/of, might have/of; Inappropriate or incomplete verb forms; Wrong or missing preposition, e.g. different from/than/to; Noun/pronoun agreement error; Determiner/noun agreement error; Inappropriate or missing determiner; Problems with comparatives and superlatives; Problems with relative pronouns in subordinate clauses; Inappropriate or missing adverbial forms	
Sense, clarity and freedom from ambiguity	50
Lack of coherence; Wrong tense or tense inconsistency; Unrelated participles; Attachment ambiguities; Vague or ambiguous pronoun references; Confusion of words, e.g. imply/infer	
Professional suitability and style	57
Non-parallelism in lists; Inconsistent register and tone; Shift in person within sentences or across sentences; Excessive length and rambling sentences; Redundancy/tautology; Inappropriate conjunctions (also known as connectives)	
Key grammar tips	62
Questions	63
<b>4 Comprehension</b>	<b>69</b>
Introduction	69
Questions	70
<b>5 Literacy Skills Practice Test</b>	<b>77</b>
Introduction	77
Spelling	78
Punctuation	80
Grammar	81
Comprehension	87
<b>6 Answers and key points</b>	<b>91</b>
Spelling	91
Punctuation	96
Grammar	99
Comprehension	101
Literacy Skills Practice Test	110
Further reading	127
Glossary	128

# Introduction

You need to pass a test of your own literacy skills before you can be admitted to a course of teacher education. This applies to all candidates, whether you see yourself as having an English specialism or not. This book is designed to help you to pass that test. The necessary knowledge is explained, examples of questions are provided and answers to those questions are supplied, along with *Key points* to indicate the main things that need attention.

The areas covered in the book – spelling, punctuation, grammar and comprehension – are the ones that appear in the test. The particular aspects of spelling, etc., are also the ones that are in the test. The actual form of the questions is also similar. Everything you will be tested on is explained; examples are given and the questions give you plenty of practice for the test. The questions in the test will be a selection from the types of question shown here in each section.

## Why is the knowledge of English of intending teachers being tested?

Teachers need to have a confident knowledge of English. A teacher who has a sound idea of how the English language is organised can help children to use it well. Some approaches – especially guided writing – can only be successful if the teacher knows, for example, what it is about a child's writing that makes it good and also knows how it could be improved.

Teachers receive a great deal of written information and have to be able to understand it and act on it with assurance. They often have to write, or collaborate in writing, documents such as school policies, reports on their children, information for parents, etc.

Teachers and their use of English are very much in the public eye. Parents, governors, inspectors and others see them in their professional role and, inevitably, make judgements. Teachers need to know enough and be competent enough to deal confidently with the world they move in.

Finally, the right of children to be taught by somebody who knows enough about English to be able to help them is the basis of the test and of this book.

## The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum was introduced in the UK (except in Scotland) in 1988. Before that, religious education (RE) was the only compulsory subject, and schools were free to decide what would be taught, guided mainly by the requirements of examinations and employers. The National Curriculum was designed to fulfil four main purposes:

## Introduction

1. To ensure that the same education entitlement was given to every child, irrespective of social background, culture, race, gender, differences in ability and disabilities.
2. To assess and measure children's progress against set standards.
3. To ensure continuity in the transition between primary and secondary schools, and when children transfer between schools at the same level.
4. To establish an education system that could be clearly understood by all.

All local authority maintained schools in England must follow the National Curriculum. The curriculum documents set out the programmes of study and attainment targets for four key stages:

- **KS1 (Years 1–3, ages 5–7).**
- **KS2 (Years 4–6, ages 8–11).**
- **KS3 (Years 7–9, ages 12–14).**
- **KS4 (Years 10–11, ages 15–16).**

At KS1 and KS2 the compulsory subjects are: English, maths, science, design/technology, history, geography, art/design, music, PE, computing, and modern foreign languages (KS2). Schools must also provide religious education, but parents are allowed to ask for their children to be taken out of these lessons. Academies and independent schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum, but they must teach a broad and balanced curriculum including English, maths, science and religious education. Most schools also teach personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and citizenship. You can view the programmes of study and other details about the curriculum for England at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum).

In primary schools children are assessed at the end of KS1 (teacher-marked assessment not reported nationally), and at the end of KS2 in English and maths (externally marked and published nationally). Assessment at KS4 is via GCSEs.

Since devolution, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the curriculum has been the responsibility of the respective devolved bodies – the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly. As such, the curricula in each area are different (although similar in many areas) from that in England. You can read the relevant curriculum at the following websites:

- **Scotland:** <https://education.gov.scot/>
- **Wales:** <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/arevisedcurriculumforwales/?lang=en>
- **Northern Ireland:** <http://ceea.org.uk/curriculum>

A thorough and confident knowledge of English is very important in teaching all areas of the curriculum. Although the Literacy Skills Test does not test your knowledge of the curriculum for English, it is important for aspiring teachers to be aware of and understand the detail of the curriculum you will be required to teach in whichever country of the UK you work in.

## What is the test like?

The test will be carried out online. For the spelling test, you will use headphones (multiple-choice spelling options will be available for candidates with hearing impairment). The test has four sections: Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar and Comprehension.

You will be asked to:

- **type in or select your answers for Spelling;**
- **type in characters, including amendments to capitalisation, for Punctuation;**
- **drag and drop multiple-choice options into text for Grammar;**
- **drag and drop options in order to: match statements to categories; complete a list; sequence information; identify points; match text to summaries; identify meaning of words/phrases; evaluate statements; select headings; and identify readership for Comprehension.**

You will not be tested on the National Curriculum nor on how to teach English. You will be tested on four main sections of knowledge about literacy: spelling, punctuation, grammar and comprehension.

The spelling section of the test *has* to be attempted first. Once the spelling section is done, you must go on to the other sections and cannot return to spelling. There is no restriction on how you go about the other three sections. You can do them in any order; tackle questions within each section in any order; and move about within each section as much as you like. It may make more sense to do the grammar test last but that is up to you.

In the Literacy Skills Test, each test has a unique pass mark, dependent on the questions that are included. The total number of marks available for each test varies from 45 to 49, again dependent on the questions that are included. Spelling has a total of 10 marks, Punctuation 15, Grammar 10–12 and Comprehension 10–12. If, as is likely, the test has 48 questions, 31 correct answers can gain you a pass.

This is what the four sections cover and how they are approached in the test:

### Spelling

Teachers are expected to spell correctly. That includes the words that are likely to appear in their professional work. The emphasis on correct spelling is justified because it avoids ambiguity (for example, advise/advice; affect/effect) and is easier to read than incorrect spelling. In the test, you are expected to use British English spelling but either *-ize* or *-ise* verb endings will be allowed.

You will need to wear headphones for this part of the real test. You will see ten sentences on the screen. One word has been deleted from each sentence. Where a word has been deleted, there appears an icon for *Audio* . When you reach that word in your reading, click the icon and listen through your headphones. You will hear the deleted word. Decide how you think it is spelled and type your decision directly into the box provided in the deletion space. If you need to have the word repeated, click the audio icon again. You can do this as many times as you want, even if you are only part of the way through spelling the

## Introduction

word, or have finished and just want to check. You may also make several attempts to spell a word but you should keep in mind that the whole test allows only about 45 minutes.

A multiple-choice spelling option is available for candidates with hearing impairment. As this is a book, not a computer, the practice questions follow the same rubric and format as the hearing impaired multiple-choice questions in the Literacy Skills Test:

Select the correctly spelled word from the box of alternatives. Write your answer in the space in the sentence.

- 1 As I had used the school's petty cash to buy some materials, I kept all the \_\_\_\_\_ to give to the head.

receipts  
receits  
reciepts  
reciets

- 2 Teachers used their \_\_\_\_\_ judgement when selecting topics for discussion.

profesional  
professional  
proffessional  
professionel

## Punctuation

Teachers are expected to be able to read and use punctuation correctly, especially in those texts that they are likely to encounter or to produce as part of their professional work. Punctuation that is consistent and that follows the conventions makes a text easy to read. Errors in punctuation not only give a reader more work to do but can also change the meaning or create ambiguity in the text. They can also create a bad impression, especially if the error is caused through obvious carelessness. Knowing what punctuation is needed, and where it should go, reveals both an awareness of the reader's needs and, fundamentally, a high degree of literacy.

Unlike spelling, there is a personal element in punctuation. By the time you have finished this book, you might have noticed that we use more semicolons than most people. Many writers never use semicolons at all. The point is that, if they are used, they should be used consistently.

The point about consistency is such a key one that it is worth considering it here. Suppose you have written this sentence:

*My early experience with the class has led me to modify my medium-term plans.*

Now suppose that you want to add something to that sentence to express, however mildly, your feelings about having to make the changes. You decide to add the word

*unfortunately.* That word can go at the beginning of the sentence (with a comma immediately after it) or at the end (with a comma immediately before it) or in the middle, between *me* and *to*. That is an interruption in the grammatical structure of the sentence and such interruptions are marked by commas. A common failing is to put just one comma, either before or after the interruption, but you actually need two, one before and one after the interruption, like this:

*My early experience with the class has led me, unfortunately, to modify my medium-term plans.*

Consistency means that you do not put just one comma in this case but that you use both. They are partners.

In the online test, you will see a text that has some punctuation omitted. Your task is to identify where to place a punctuation mark, change a lower case letter to an upper case one or create a new paragraph. You will not be asked to delete or rewrite any text. An onscreen counter will appear showing how many pieces of punctuation need to be added to the text. As you start the test, the counter will read 15, and it will then count down by one each time you add a piece of punctuation, until it reaches zero, to help you keep track of where you are up to in the test. Once you get to zero, you won't be able to add any more punctuation changes unless you delete one that you have already made.

When you have decided what change to make, double click on the word you have chosen to edit and a dialogue box will appear. The word you clicked will appear in a box, alongside a list of punctuation marks to choose from. Make sure your cursor is in the right place in the word box for where you want the punctuation to appear (i.e. at the beginning of the word to insert an inverted comma or opening bracket, or the end of the word to insert a comma or full stop). Then click on the punctuation you want to add and click 'OK'. The box will disappear and the word and your punctuation choice will appear in the text but will now be blue.

To add a new paragraph, double click on the word after the point where you want the paragraph break to appear. Then click 'Paragraph', then 'OK'. To capitalise a word, double click the word then click 'Capitalise', then 'OK'. You can change your answer if you think you should. To do this, double click your chosen word again, and then click 'Reset' – the punctuation you added will then be removed and you can choose another option from the list.

Sometimes, although it is possible to insert a punctuation mark, it may not be necessary or even appropriate. You have to decide. What is very important is that you create a text whose punctuation is wholly consistent. Your criterion is to ask yourself what would be *consistent with the punctuation in the text*. Keep an eye on the onscreen counter, and remember there are only 15 correct amendments. This is the sort of question you are likely to meet in the book. As this is a book, not a computer, you cannot type in your chosen punctuation mark; instead, you simply note which punctuation mark or other change in punctuation is necessary at which point to make the whole consistent. There will be passages like this for you to practise your knowledge of punctuation; your job is to make it appropriate and consistent in its use of punctuation:

*although the teaching of literacy had been working well some staff wondered how to maintain the good work they had done in other areas of the curriculum could drama and pe be retained at the same level as previously*

## Grammar

Teachers need to be able to see whether a piece of writing is, or is not, in Standard English, the variety of English that is required in formal texts and, therefore, in almost all writing. They also need to be able to say if the text makes sense and, if not, what prevents it from making sense. Finally, they need to be aware of the style that is appropriate to a particular type of text and to understand what, if anything, is wrong with the style.

The test is multiple-choice. You will see a passage that is not quite complete; bits of language are missing. The decision about what should be inserted to complete the passage is a grammatical choice. You will be shown a range of possible bits of language to insert, only one of which would complete that part of the passage satisfactorily. The choice of that insertion will depend on your reading the whole passage carefully as well as the sentence that has to be completed. You insert your choice simply by clicking and dragging it into position.

Below is an example of a sentence that is incomplete. Four possible ways of completing the sentence are offered. Your task is to choose the one that fits grammatically:

*The assembly focused on the current playground incidents*

Now choose one of the following to complete the sentence:

- a. *that were making life difficult for the infants.*
- b. *that was making life difficult for the infants.*
- c. *that are making life difficult for the infants.*
- d. *that is making life difficult for the infants.*

## Comprehension

Teachers receive a good deal of written material that they must understand and to which they must respond. This test puts an emphasis on close, analytical reading of a passage of text. You will need to read the passage with attention to the main ideas, with an awareness of its arguments and, sometimes, with an idea of how it affects your existing ideas. You might need to make judgements about the text and to organise and reorganise its content. Since that is what being a teacher now involves, the test assesses your ability to read in this way.

The comprehension test uses a range of multiple-choice style questions. You will be expected to drag and drop selected options in order to:

- **match statements to categories;**
- **complete a list;**
- **sequence information;**
- **identify points;**
- **match text to summaries;**
- **identify meaning of words/phrases;**
- **evaluate statements;**
- **select headings;**
- **identify readership.**

The test will present you with the sorts of text that teachers are likely to see and read as part of their professional lives. You will be expected to identify key points, read between the lines, tell fact from fiction, make judgements, etc. Not every test will examine every aspect!

At its simplest, the test might ask you to identify the meaning of words and phrases. Remember that no one test will test every aspect of every one of the four sections. In the following short passage, for example, you are asked to identify from a given list of options who you think is the intended audience for the text:

*You will have seen from the local press, where results are published from every school in the Authority, that this school has had a consistently high standard of performance in the annual SATs over several years. This fine record is expected to continue for some years, at least. A consequence of this success is that the school is oversubscribed each year and, regretfully, it is not always possible to offer a place to every child whose parents apply to us.*

## How to prepare for the test

- Use this book to get a good grasp of what understanding is demanded by the test.
- Go to the DfE website (<http://sta.education.gov.uk/professional-skills-tests/literacy-skills-tests>) to read their advice, familiarise yourself with the test and what it looks like, and try the practice tests.
- From that practice, identify which areas you need to improve on and refer to this book.
- Remember that doing well in spelling and punctuation can take you close to the pass mark.
- Read again the Hints in each section of this book.

## How to use this book

For the purposes of the test, literacy is seen as comprising the four sections detailed above: Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar and Comprehension. Each section has its own chapter. There you will find an explanation of the knowledge required, examples of the features of literacy being tested and explicit direction about what to do in the test. There are practice questions for each section.

Chapter 5 is a complete literacy practice skills test for you to work through, and Chapter 6 contains answers and explanatory key points, hints and tips for all the questions in the main chapters, and for the practice test.

## Revision checklist

The following chart shows in detail the coverage of the four main chapters. You can use the checklist in your revision to make sure that you have covered all the key content areas.

<b>SPELLING</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Spelling questions will cover the main spelling rules and include words used by people involved in teaching.	.....
<b>PUNCTUATION</b>	
Paragraphing	.....
Full stop	.....
Commas	.....
Colon	.....
Semicolon	.....
Question mark	.....
Brackets/parentheses	.....
Speech marks	.....
Quotation marks	.....
Hyphens	.....
Apostrophes	.....
Capital letters	.....
<b>COMPREHENSION</b>	
Attributing statements to categories	.....
Completing a bulleted list	.....
Sequencing information	.....
Presenting main points	.....
Matching texts to summaries	.....
Identifying the meanings of words and phrases	.....
Evaluating statements about the text	.....
Selecting headings and subheadings	.....
Identifying possible readership or audience for a text	.....
<b>GRAMMAR</b>	
<b>Consistency with written Standard English</b>	
Failure to observe sentence boundaries	.....
Abandoned or faulty constructions and sentence fragments	.....
Lack of cohesion	.....
Lack of agreement between subject and verb	.....
Should have/of, might have/of	.....
Inappropriate or incomplete verb forms	.....
Wrong or missing preposition, e.g. different from/than/to	.....
Noun/pronoun agreement error	.....

Determiner/noun agreement error	.....
Inappropriate or missing determiner	.....
Problems with comparatives and superlatives	.....
Problems with relative pronouns in subordinate clauses	.....
Inappropriate or missing adverbial forms	.....
<b>Sense, clarity and freedom from ambiguity</b>	
Lack of coherence	.....
Wrong tense or tense inconsistency	.....
Unrelated participles	.....
Attachment ambiguities	.....
Vague or ambiguous pronoun references	.....
Confusion of words, e.g. imply/infer	.....
<b>Professional suitability and style</b>	
Non-parallelism in lists	.....
Inconsistent register and tone	.....
Shift in person within sentences or across sentences	.....
Excessive length and rambling sentences	.....
Redundancy/tautology	.....
Inappropriate conjunctions	.....