Year 6 Survival Guide: Grammar and Punctuation

Nouns

A noun is a word that denotes somebody or something. In the sentence '*My younger sister won some money in a competition', 'sister', 'money'* and *'competition'* are nouns.

A **collective noun** is a word that refers to a group. For example, *crowd, flock, team.* Although these are singular in form, we often think of them as plural in meaning and use them with a plural verb. For example, if we say *The team have won all their games so far*, we think of *'the team'* as *'they'* (rather than *'it'*).

Proper nouns are the names of people, places, organisations, etc. These normally begin with a capital letter: *Amanda*, *Birmingham*, *Microsoft*, *Islam*, *November*.

Noun phrase is a wider term than 'noun'. It can refer to a single noun *(money)*, a pronoun *(it)* or a group of words that functions in the same way as a noun in a sentence, often containing an adjective, for example:

- *a lot of money*
- *my younger sister*
- *a new car*
- *the best team in the world*

Pronouns

There are several kinds of pronoun, including:

personal pronouns
I/me, you, he/him, she/her, we/us, they/them, it
I like him. They don't want it.

possessive pronouns
mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs, its
*Is this book yours or mine?*

Verbs

A verb is a word that expresses an action, a happening, a process or a state. It can be thought of as a 'doing' or 'being' word. In the sentence '*Mark is tired and wants to go to bed', 'is', 'wants'* and *'go'* are verbs. Sometimes two or more words make up a verb phrase, such as *are going, didn't want, has been waiting*.

Auxiliary verbs

These are verbs that are used together with other verbs. For example:

- *we <u>are</u> going*
- *Lucy <u>has</u> arrived*
- *<u>can</u> you play*
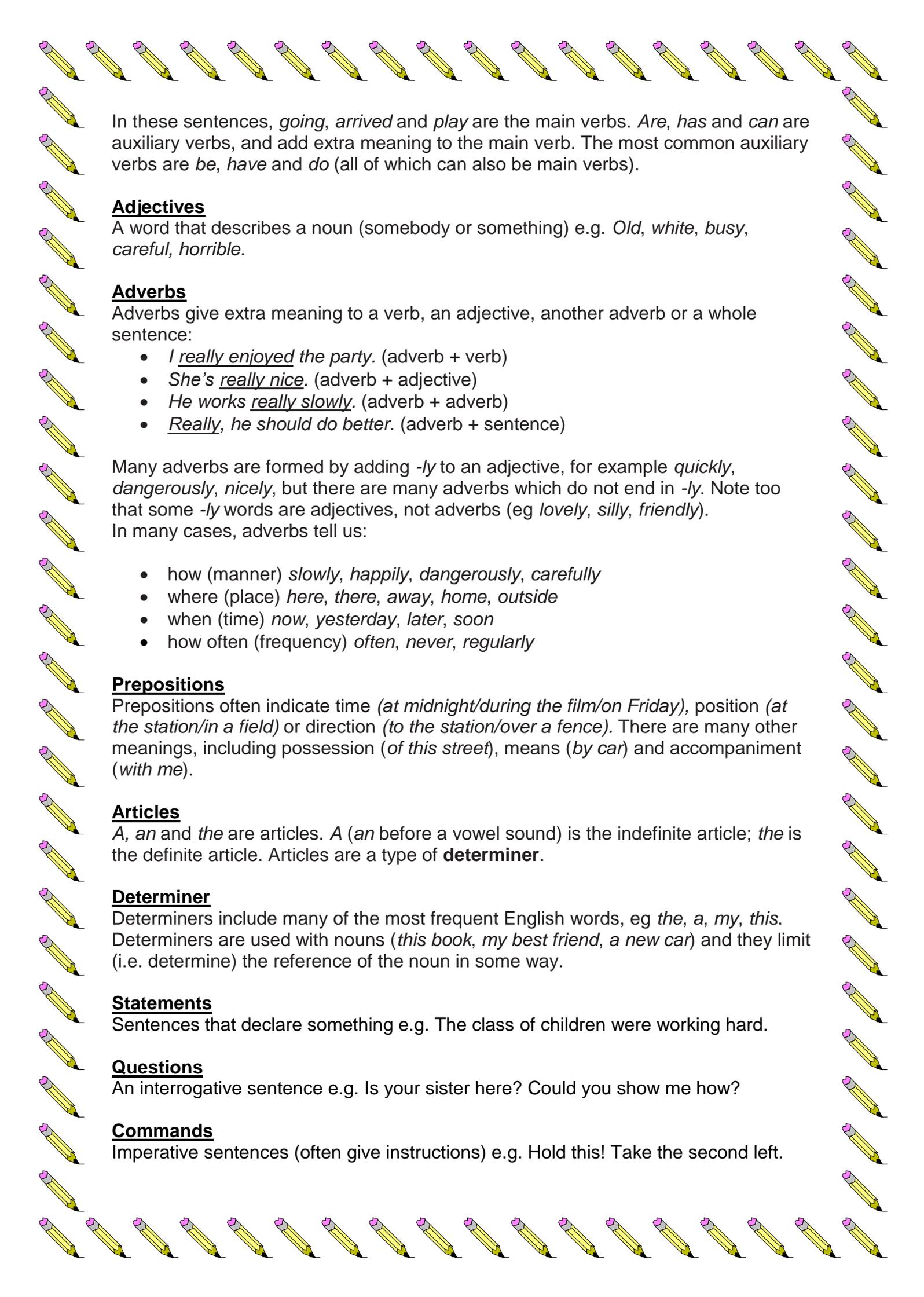
In these sentences, *going*, *arrived* and *play* are the main verbs. *Are*, *has* and *can* are auxiliary verbs, and add extra meaning to the main verb. The most common auxiliary verbs are *be*, *have* and *do* (all of which can also be main verbs).

Adjectives
A word that describes a noun (somebody or something) e.g. *Old*, *white*, *busy*, *careful, horrible.*

Adverbs
Adverbs give extra meaning to a verb, an adjective, another adverb or a whole sentence:
- *I really enjoyed the party.* (adverb + verb)
- *She's really nice.* (adverb + adjective)
- *He works really slowly.* (adverb + adverb)
- *Really, he should do better.* (adverb + sentence)

Many adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective, for example *quickly*, *dangerously*, *nicely*, but there are many adverbs which do not end in *-ly*. Note too that some *-ly* words are adjectives, not adverbs (eg *lovely*, *silly*, *friendly*).
In many cases, adverbs tell us:

- how (manner) *slowly*, *happily*, *dangerously*, *carefully*
- where (place) *here*, *there*, *away*, *home*, *outside*
- when (time) *now*, *yesterday*, *later*, *soon*
- how often (frequency) *often*, *never*, *regularly*

Prepositions
Prepositions often indicate time *(at midnight/during the film/on Friday),* position *(at the station/in a field)* or direction *(to the station/over a fence).* There are many other meanings, including possession (*of this street*), means (*by car*) and accompaniment (*with me*).

Articles
A, an and *the* are articles. *A* (*an* before a vowel sound) is the indefinite article; *the* is the definite article. Articles are a type of **determiner**.

Determiner
Determiners include many of the most frequent English words, eg *the*, *a*, *my*, *this*. Determiners are used with nouns (*this book*, *my best friend*, *a new car*) and they limit (i.e. determine) the reference of the noun in some way.
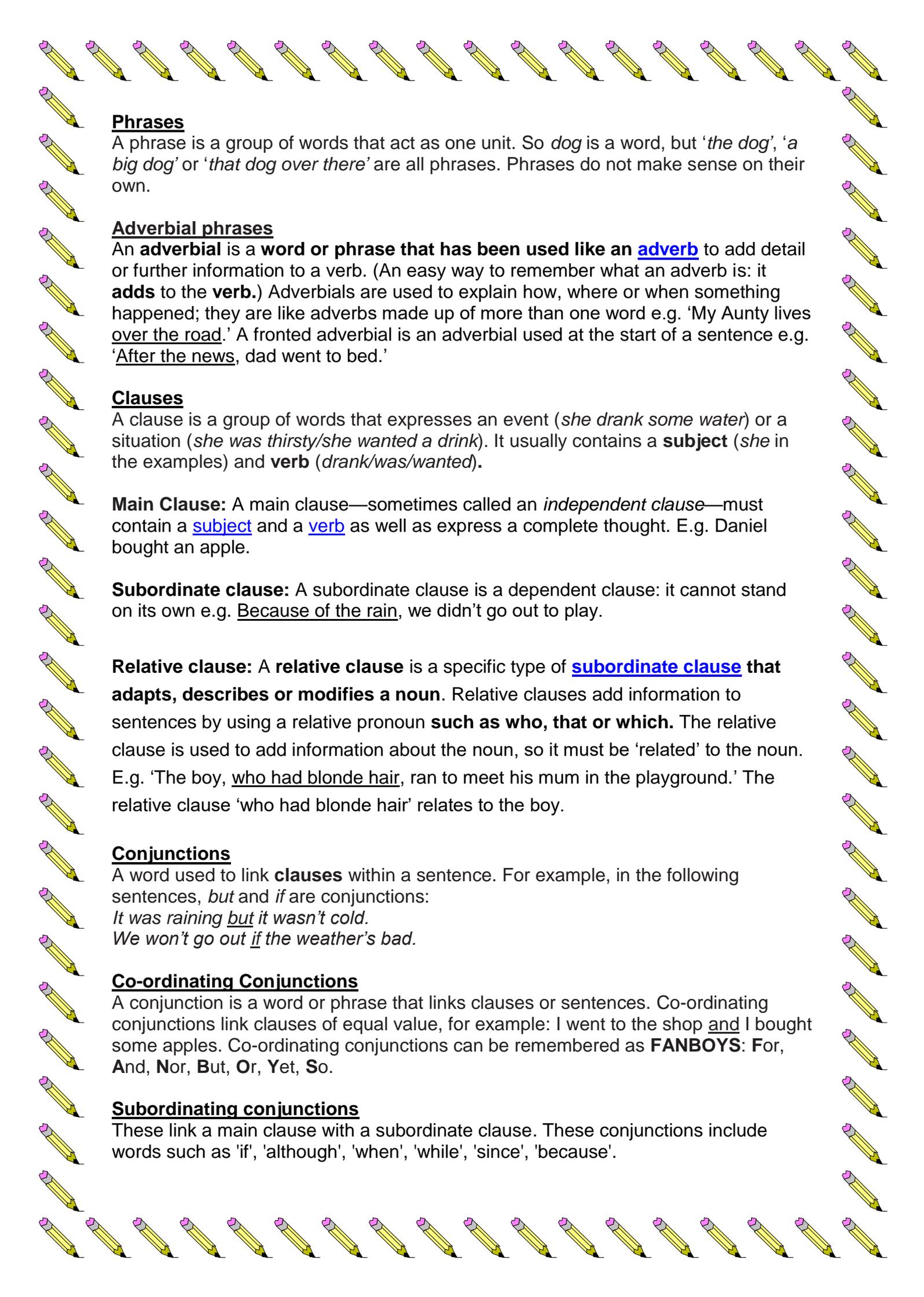
Statements
Sentences that declare something e.g. The class of children were working hard.

Questions
An interrogative sentence e.g. Is your sister here? Could you show me how?

Commands
Imperative sentences (often give instructions) e.g. Hold this! Take the second left.

Phrases

A phrase is a group of words that act as one unit. So *dog* is a word, but '*the dog'*, '*a big dog'* or '*that dog over there'* are all phrases. Phrases do not make sense on their own.

Adverbial phrases

An **adverbial** is a **word or phrase that has been used like an adverb** to add detail or further information to a verb. (An easy way to remember what an adverb is: it **adds** to the **verb.**) Adverbials are used to explain how, where or when something happened; they are like adverbs made up of more than one word e.g. 'My Aunty lives over the road.' A fronted adverbial is an adverbial used at the start of a sentence e.g. 'After the news, dad went to bed.'

Clauses

A clause is a group of words that expresses an event (*she drank some water*) or a situation (*she was thirsty/she wanted a drink*). It usually contains a **subject** (*she* in the examples) and **verb** (*drank/was/wanted*)**.**

Main Clause: A main clause—sometimes called an *independent clause*—must contain a subject and a verb as well as express a complete thought. E.g. Daniel bought an apple.

Subordinate clause: A subordinate clause is a dependent clause: it cannot stand on its own e.g. Because of the rain, we didn't go out to play.

Relative clause: A **relative clause** is a specific type of **subordinate clause that adapts, describes or modifies a noun**. Relative clauses add information to sentences by using a relative pronoun **such as who, that or which.** The relative clause is used to add information about the noun, so it must be 'related' to the noun. E.g. 'The boy, who had blonde hair, ran to meet his mum in the playground.' The relative clause 'who had blonde hair' relates to the boy.

Conjunctions

A word used to link **clauses** within a sentence. For example, in the following sentences, *but* and *if* are conjunctions:
*It was raining but it wasn't cold.*
We won't go out if the weather's bad.

Co-ordinating Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word or phrase that links clauses or sentences. Co-ordinating conjunctions link clauses of equal value, for example: I went to the shop and I bought some apples. Co-ordinating conjunctions can be remembered as **FANBOYS**: **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et, **S**o.

Subordinating conjunctions

These link a main clause with a subordinate clause. These conjunctions include words such as 'if', 'although', 'when', 'while', 'since', 'because'.
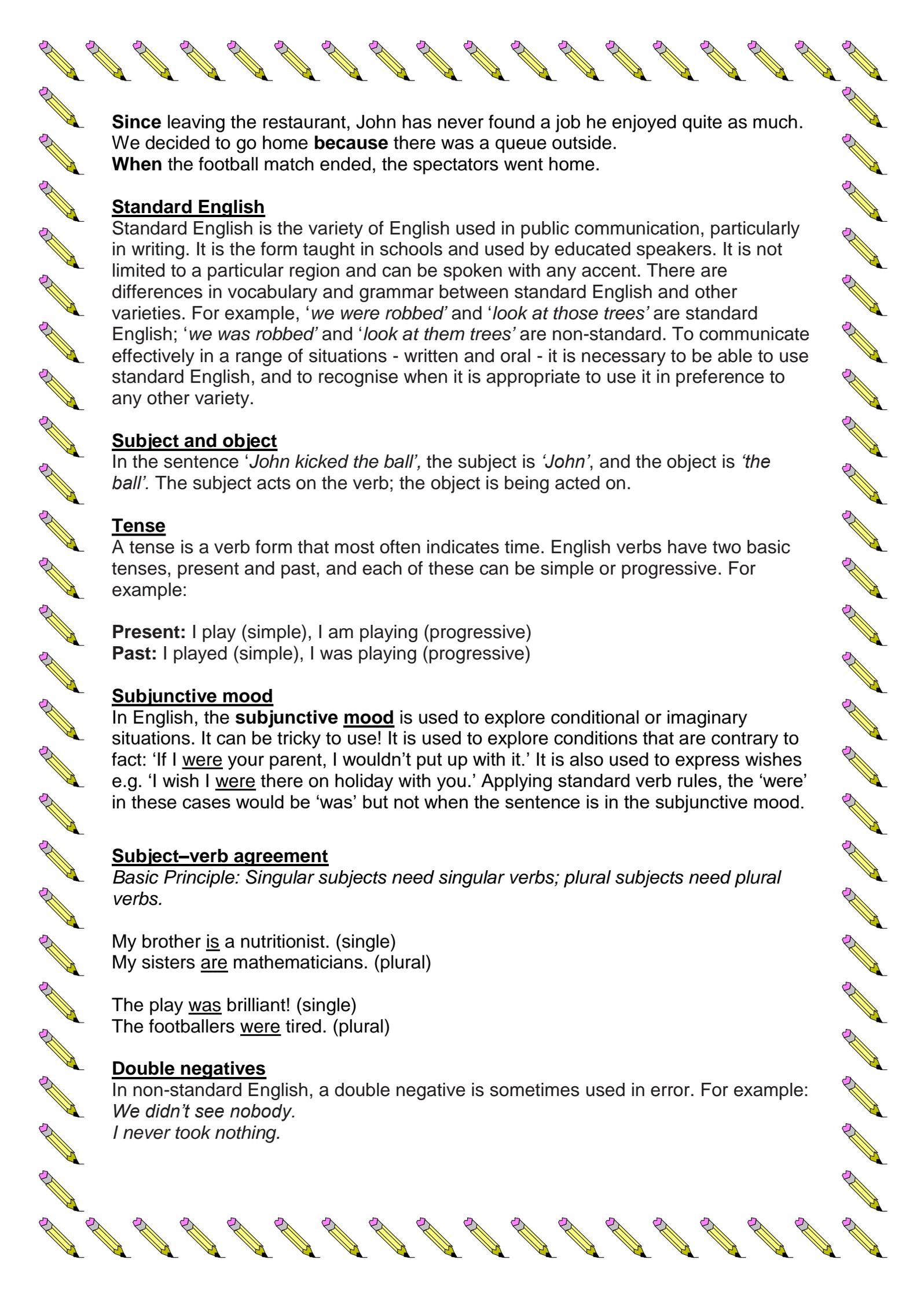
Since leaving the restaurant, John has never found a job he enjoyed quite as much.
We decided to go home **because** there was a queue outside.
When the football match ended, the spectators went home.

Standard English
Standard English is the variety of English used in public communication, particularly in writing. It is the form taught in schools and used by educated speakers. It is not limited to a particular region and can be spoken with any accent. There are differences in vocabulary and grammar between standard English and other varieties. For example, '*we were robbed'* and '*look at those trees'* are standard English; '*we was robbed'* and '*look at them trees'* are non-standard. To communicate effectively in a range of situations - written and oral - it is necessary to be able to use standard English, and to recognise when it is appropriate to use it in preference to any other variety.

Subject and object
In the sentence '*John kicked the ball',* the subject is *'John'*, and the object is *'the ball'.* The subject acts on the verb; the object is being acted on.

Tense
A tense is a verb form that most often indicates time. English verbs have two basic tenses, present and past, and each of these can be simple or progressive. For example:

Present: I play (simple), I am playing (progressive)
Past: I played (simple), I was playing (progressive)

Subjunctive mood
In English, the **subjunctive** **mood** is used to explore conditional or imaginary situations. It can be tricky to use! It is used to explore conditions that are contrary to fact: 'If I were your parent, I wouldn't put up with it.' It is also used to express wishes e.g. 'I wish I were there on holiday with you.' Applying standard verb rules, the 'were' in these cases would be 'was' but not when the sentence is in the subjunctive mood.

Subject–verb agreement
Basic Principle: Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs.

My brother is a nutritionist. (single)
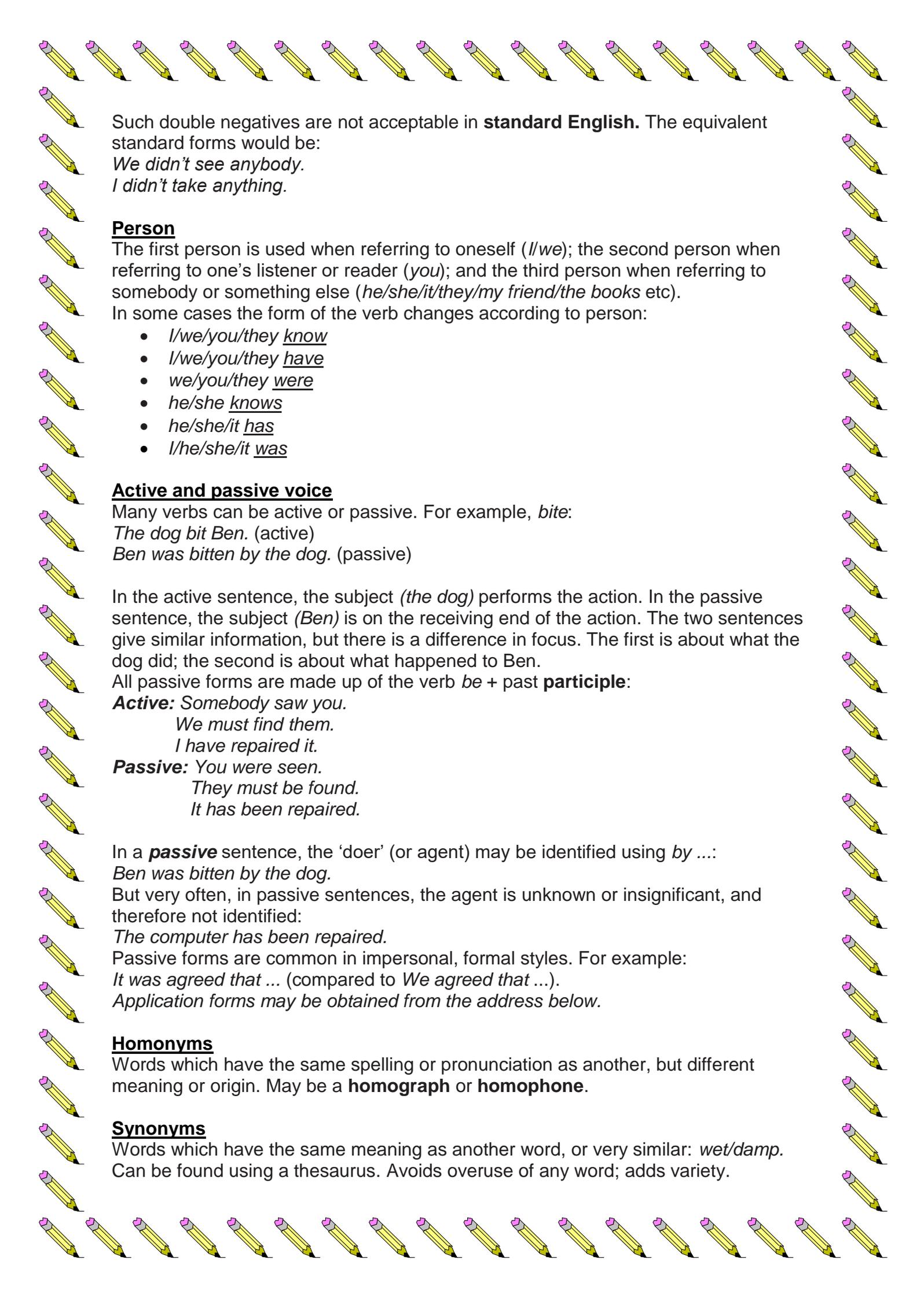My sisters are mathematicians. (plural)

The play was brilliant! (single)
The footballers were tired. (plural)

Double negatives
In non-standard English, a double negative is sometimes used in error. For example:
We didn't see nobody.
I never took nothing.

Such double negatives are not acceptable in **standard English.** The equivalent standard forms would be:

We didn't see anybody.
I didn't take anything.

Person

The first person is used when referring to oneself (*I/we*); the second person when referring to one's listener or reader (*you*); and the third person when referring to somebody or something else (*he/she/it/they/my friend/the books* etc).
In some cases the form of the verb changes according to person:

- *I/we/you/they <u>know</u>*
- *I/we/you/they <u>have</u>*
- *we/you/they <u>were</u>*
- *he/she <u>knows</u>*
- *he/she/it <u>has</u>*
- *I/he/she/it <u>was</u>*

Active and passive voice

Many verbs can be active or passive. For example, *bite*:
The dog bit Ben. (active)
Ben was bitten by the dog. (passive)

In the active sentence, the subject *(the dog)* performs the action. In the passive sentence, the subject *(Ben)* is on the receiving end of the action. The two sentences give similar information, but there is a difference in focus. The first is about what the dog did; the second is about what happened to Ben.
All passive forms are made up of the verb *be* + past **participle**:

Active: *Somebody saw you.*
       We must find them.
       I have repaired it.
Passive: *You were seen.*
       They must be found.
       It has been repaired.

In a *passive* sentence, the 'doer' (or agent) may be identified using *by ...*:
Ben was bitten by the dog.
But very often, in passive sentences, the agent is unknown or insignificant, and therefore not identified:
The computer has been repaired.
Passive forms are common in impersonal, formal styles. For example:
It was agreed that ... (compared to *We agreed that ...*).
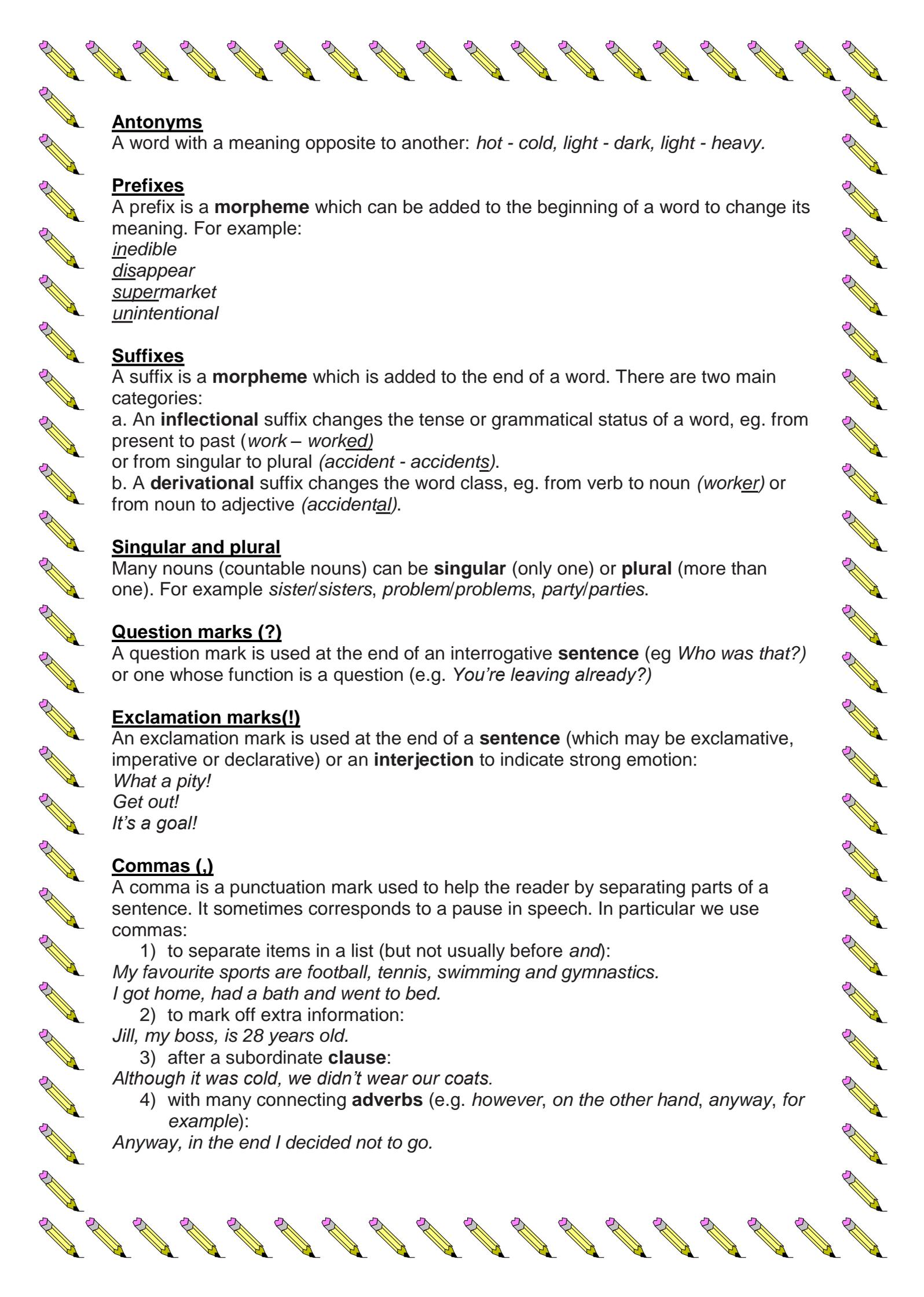*Application forms may be obtained from the address below.*

Homonyms

Words which have the same spelling or pronunciation as another, but different meaning or origin. May be a **homograph** or **homophone**.

Synonyms

Words which have the same meaning as another word, or very similar: *wet/damp.*
Can be found using a thesaurus. Avoids overuse of any word; adds variety.

Antonyms

A word with a meaning opposite to another: *hot - cold, light - dark, light - heavy.*

Prefixes

A prefix is a **morpheme** which can be added to the beginning of a word to change its meaning. For example:

*in*edible
*dis*appear
*super*market
*un*intentional

Suffixes

A suffix is a **morpheme** which is added to the end of a word. There are two main categories:

a. An **inflectional** suffix changes the tense or grammatical status of a word, eg. from present to past (*work – work*ed)
or from singular to plural *(accident - accident*s).

b. A **derivational** suffix changes the word class, eg. from verb to noun *(work*er) or from noun to adjective *(accident*al).

Singular and plural

Many nouns (countable nouns) can be **singular** (only one) or **plural** (more than one). For example *sister/sisters, problem/problems, party/parties.*

Question marks (?)

A question mark is used at the end of an interrogative **sentence** (eg *Who was that?*) or one whose function is a question (e.g. *You're leaving already?*)

Exclamation marks(!)

An exclamation mark is used at the end of a **sentence** (which may be exclamative, imperative or declarative) or an **interjection** to indicate strong emotion:

What a pity!
Get out!
It's a goal!

Commas (,)

A comma is a punctuation mark used to help the reader by separating parts of a sentence. It sometimes corresponds to a pause in speech. In particular we use commas:

1) to separate items in a list (but not usually before *and*):

My favourite sports are football, tennis, swimming and gymnastics.
I got home, had a bath and went to bed.

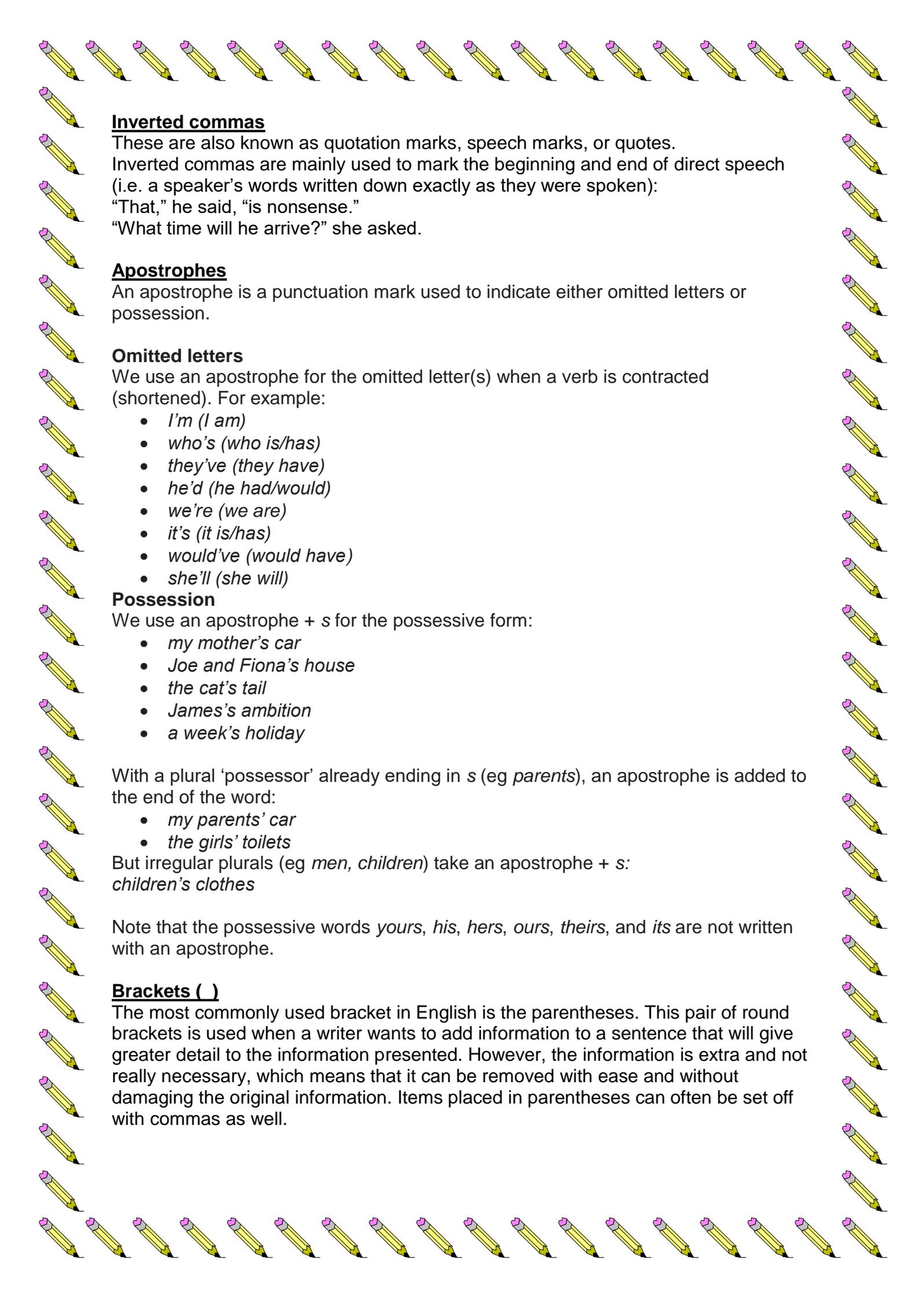2) to mark off extra information:

Jill, my boss, is 28 years old.

3) after a subordinate **clause**:

Although it was cold, we didn't wear our coats.

4) with many connecting **adverbs** (e.g. *however*, *on the other hand*, *anyway*, *for example*):

Anyway, in the end I decided not to go.

Inverted commas

These are also known as quotation marks, speech marks, or quotes.
Inverted commas are mainly used to mark the beginning and end of direct speech
(i.e. a speaker's words written down exactly as they were spoken):
"That," he said, "is nonsense."
"What time will he arrive?" she asked.

Apostrophes

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark used to indicate either omitted letters or possession.

Omitted letters

We use an apostrophe for the omitted letter(s) when a verb is contracted (shortened). For example:
- *I'm (I am)*
- *who's (who is/has)*
- *they've (they have)*
- *he'd (he had/would)*
- *we're (we are)*
- *it's (it is/has)*
- *would've (would have)*
- *she'll (she will)*

Possession

We use an apostrophe + *s* for the possessive form:
- *my mother's car*
- *Joe and Fiona's house*
- *the cat's tail*
- *James's ambition*
- *a week's holiday*

With a plural 'possessor' already ending in *s* (eg *parents*), an apostrophe is added to the end of the word:
- *my parents' car*
- *the girls' toilets*

But irregular plurals (eg *men, children*) take an apostrophe + *s:*
children's clothes

Note that the possessive words *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *theirs*, and *its* are not written with an apostrophe.

Brackets ( )

The most commonly used bracket in English is the parentheses. This pair of round brackets is used when a writer wants to add information to a sentence that will give greater detail to the information presented. However, the information is extra and not really necessary, which means that it can be removed with ease and without damaging the original information. Items placed in parentheses can often be set off with commas as well.
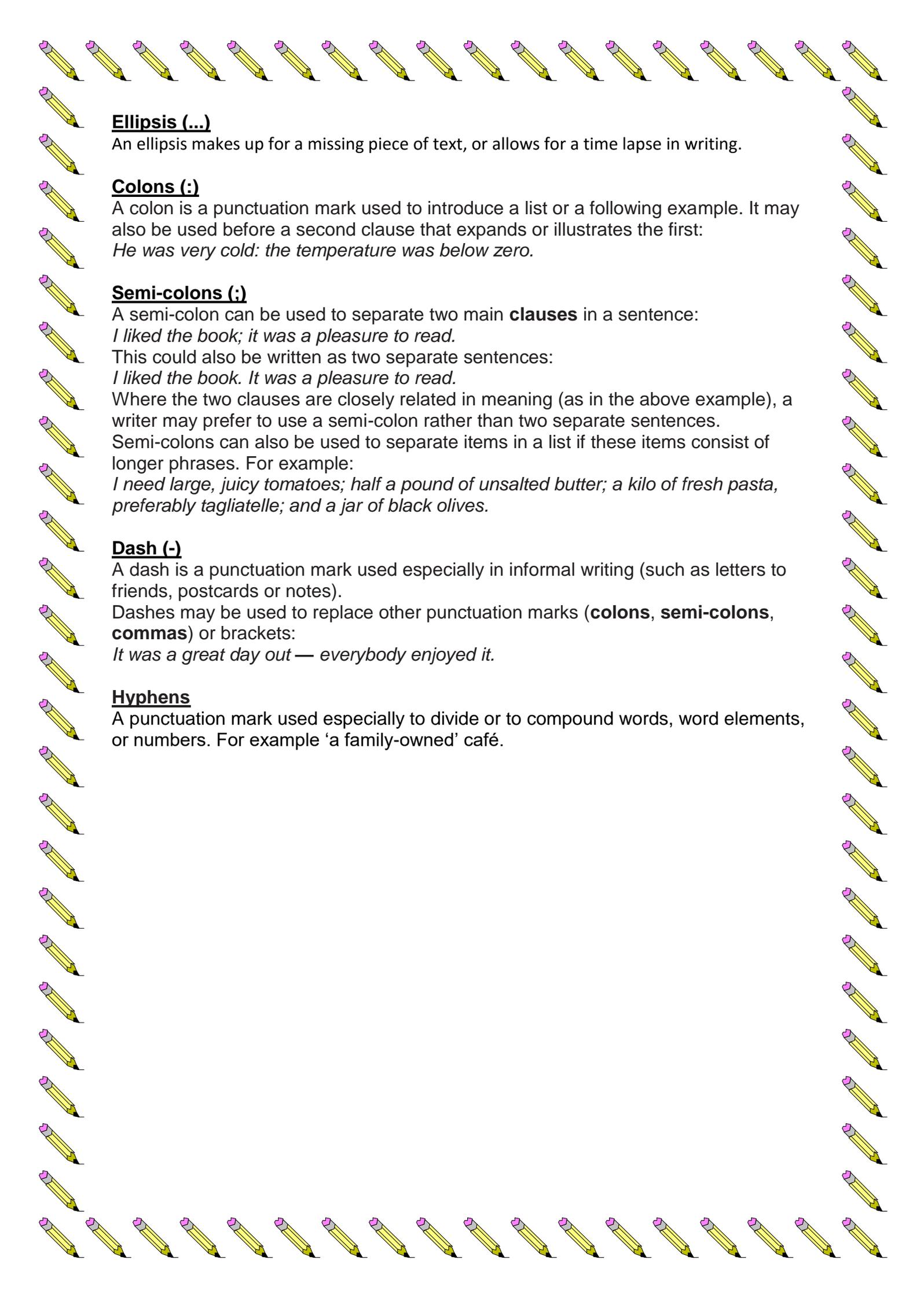
Ellipsis (...)
An ellipsis makes up for a missing piece of text, or allows for a time lapse in writing.

Colons (:)
A colon is a punctuation mark used to introduce a list or a following example. It may also be used before a second clause that expands or illustrates the first:
He was very cold: the temperature was below zero.

Semi-colons (;)
A semi-colon can be used to separate two main **clauses** in a sentence:
I liked the book; it was a pleasure to read.
This could also be written as two separate sentences:
I liked the book. It was a pleasure to read.
Where the two clauses are closely related in meaning (as in the above example), a writer may prefer to use a semi-colon rather than two separate sentences.
Semi-colons can also be used to separate items in a list if these items consist of longer phrases. For example:
I need large, juicy tomatoes; half a pound of unsalted butter; a kilo of fresh pasta, preferably tagliatelle; and a jar of black olives.

Dash (-)
A dash is a punctuation mark used especially in informal writing (such as letters to friends, postcards or notes).
Dashes may be used to replace other punctuation marks (**colons**, **semi-colons**, **commas**) or brackets:
It was a great day out — everybody enjoyed it.

Hyphens
A punctuation mark used especially to divide or to compound words, word elements, or numbers. For example 'a family-owned' café.