

# The Literacy Toolkit

Improving students'  
speaking, listening,  
reading and writing skills

Amanda Sara

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*Illustrations by Helen Clare Brienza*



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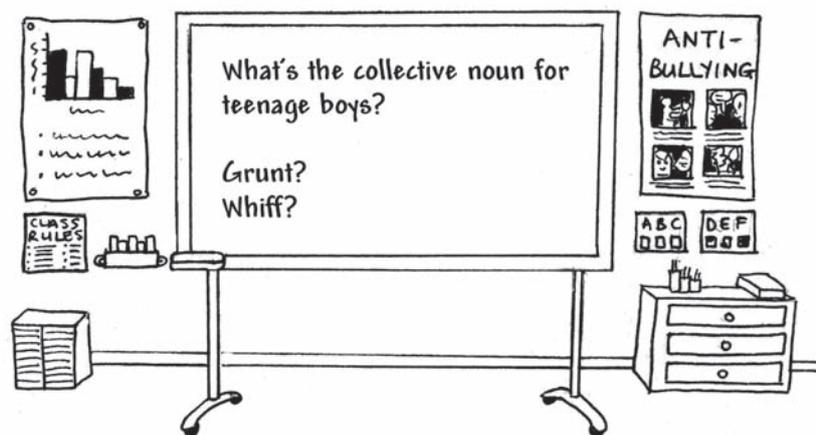
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# Preface



Welcome to *The Literacy Toolkit*. In the following pages you will find information on tools and strategies that I have used successfully to help raise literacy levels in schools and academies.

Raising literacy levels is not the remit of English department teachers alone. It is a target that we as teachers, across all age groups and subject areas, have to address in varying levels of complexity. Ideally, we all want a resource (or two) that allows us to locate strategies that will work (or can be adapted to work) with a range of students in a range of settings; strategies that address the literacy issues teachers encounter every day.

*The Literacy Toolkit: Improving Students' Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing Skills* is a journey into understanding literacy in our society, its impact upon our schools and the practical and creative strategies we can use to develop literacy in all subjects. It embraces what we know about literacy learning and demonstrates how we can move things forward creatively in the classroom and beyond, so that students, learners and teachers can have a positive impact upon learning.

It also highlights the notion that literacy needs to be addressed by all, in order for all students to succeed. It looks at the key issues and approaches needed to address literacy in a creative, fun and purposeful manner.

The principles that underpin *The Literacy Toolkit* are accessible for all teachers to adopt. They are divided into four chapters:

1. Literacy in our society – the importance of it and how we put that into practice in our schools.
2. Fifty generic literacy strategies for teachers to use in the classroom.

3. Whole school literacy strategies:
  - \* Effective literacy
  - \* Leading cross-curricular literacy, training staff, monitoring outcomes and assessment
  - \* All staff involvement in developing literacy across the curriculum
  - \* Using ICT and media to develop students' literacy
  - \* The role of oracy in form time to transform literacy
  - \* The role of reading in developing and raising literacy
  - \* The role of writing in developing and raising literacy
  - \* The role of EAL in transforming literacy
  - \* Level 3 learners and transforming their learning through literacy
  - \* The role of parents in transforming literacy
  - \* Boys and literacy
  
4. A selection of generic tools that can to be used to assess literacy development .

By weaving these strategies together this book provides a supportive toolkit for schools and should increase student motivation to master literacy.

I hope you enjoy using *The Literacy Toolkit* as much as I have enjoyed my journey writing it.

**Amanda J. Sara  
London**

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## 2 Capital letters and full stops



*Language is the dress of thought.*

Samuel Johnson (1709–84), English author

Capital letters begin new sentences and are used for all proper nouns (e.g. days, places, months, names of people, names of buildings, organisations, institutions, periods in history, book titles, play titles, song titles). However, when they are used as adjectives capital letters are not needed.

Full stops are punctuation marks to show a strong pause. They are used at the end of a full sentence, except when the sentence is an exclamation or a question. Full stops are also used in some abbreviations, for example *e.g.*

What follows is a fun way for students to address their use of capital letters and full stops.

- Brainstorm the meaning of capital letters and full stops.
- After students have completed a piece of written work ask them to proofread their work focusing on their use of capital letters and full stops.
- After proofreading their work, ask students to decide whether their use of full stops and capital letters is OK, good or excellent. Students must be able to justify their choice.
- Now to make this strategy fun, students will transfer the OK, good or excellent comments to car types. The OK comment represents a go-kart, the good comment represents a rally car and the excellent comment represents a Formula 1 car. In order for students to progress to a car of a higher level (provided they are not at the Formula 1 level) they must improve their use of capital letters and full stops. The aim is for all students to achieve Formula 1 status. Students who achieve Formula 1 status (and this is agreed by the teacher) will be known as capital letters and full stops experts—their role will be to guide the other students' understanding of capital letters and full stops.
- The teacher asks students to pair up and explain to their partner their choice of car and how and why they reached that decision. A time limit of three minutes is given for this task.
- Afterwards, students will have to explain to the whole class the rationale for their car choice.
- The class is allowed to interject with suggestions and targets to help that student improve their use of capital letters and full stops.
- Students to fill out the 'Capital letters and full stops pit stop' proforma (see below). This will allow them to document their understanding of capital letters and full stops, as well as set targets for themselves.

### Cross-curricular:

- Spend time after each piece of work getting students to check their use of full stops and capital letters.
- Display definitions of capital letters and full stops in your classroom—make students realise that it is not only the responsibility of English teachers but also for them as students.
- Give students a chart which allows them to check their use of grammar and punctuation over the course of the term (see 'Capital letters and full stops pit stop' proforma below).
- Have grammar and punctuation prefects whose responsibility it is to check that these areas are correct in students' writing.
- Print grammar and punctuation rules in homework diaries and encourage parents to help their child revise these.

### Why use this strategy?

- It is essential that students are using capital letters and full stops correctly. By using this strategy, we are reinforcing the importance of capital letters and full stops in students' work at all times.
- It's fun and gets everyone involved.
- Often it is frustrating for students to have to wait for the teacher to check their class-work, so this strategy encourages students to take a more proactive approach to their own learning. Hopefully, this will encourage them to do this of their own accord.

### Creativity and critical thinking - learning to learn skills:

- Developing memory
- Learning with and from others

## ■ Capital letters and full stops pit stop

**Subject:**

**Term:**

Which are you ... a go-kart, a rally car or a Formula 1 car?

**Capital letters** start a new sentence and are used for all proper nouns (e.g. days, places, months, names of people, names of buildings, organisations, institutions, periods in history, book titles, play titles, song titles). However, when they are used as adjectives no capital letters are needed.

**Full stops** are punctuation marks to show a strong pause. They are used at the end of a full sentence, except when the sentence is an exclamation or a question. Full stops are also used in some abbreviations, for example e.g.

Go-kart	Rally car	Formula 1 car
<p><i>Date:</i></p> <p><i>Work title:</i></p> <p><i>What puts me in this category?</i></p> <p><i>Target:</i></p>	<p><i>Date:</i></p> <p><i>Work title:</i></p> <p><i>What puts me in this category?</i></p> <p><i>Target:</i></p>	<p><i>Date:</i></p> <p><i>Work title:</i></p> <p><i>What puts me in this category?</i></p> <p><i>Target:</i></p>

*Good luck, how quickly will you get onto the track and out of the pit stop?*

# 14 Sentences



*Writing is the best way to talk without being interrupted.*

Jules Renard (1864–1910), French author

It is essential that students can recognise a good and a bad sentence. In order to do so, they must be familiar with the key ingredients: noun, verb, adverb and possessive pronoun.

Possessive pronoun    Noun    Verb    Adverb  
↓                    ↓                    ↓                    ↓  
e.g. Their cat meows loudly.

- As a class discuss the key ingredients needed for a perfect sentence.
- Students to be in groups of four.
- Each group is given four envelopes which contain a list of words—one envelope consists mostly of nouns, one of verbs, one of possessive pronouns and one of adverbs.
- Teacher to explain that in their groups the students should make the perfect sentence.
- The aim of the task is for each group to make complete sentences using all the words from the envelopes.
- If a group completes the task accurately, according to the teacher, these group members are disbanded and they become the sentence experts and are to help other groups.

## Cross-curricular:

- Irrespective of the subject, students need to write sentences correctly.
- This game can be made up of facts from a particular subject. To make the game subject-specific, the words in the envelopes could be facts about the topic being studied at present.
- At the start of each topic, allow a couple of students to be known as the experts of the literacy area. Their role is to ensure that all students are up to speed with the specific literacy skills being developed.
- Remember to display information on your classroom walls about how to write a correct sentence.

### Why use this strategy?

- It is vital that students can construct sentences correctly and this is a good way of reinforcing the rules of sentences.
- It encourages teamwork and develops groupwork skills—it is therefore excellent for learning to learn.
- It's fun.
- It's a good way to revise cross-curricular literacy.
- It's a good way to revise a topic.

### Creativity and critical thinking - learning to learn skills:

- Learning with and from others
- Thinking
- Investigating resources

*The Literacy Toolkit* provides an understanding of literacy, its impact upon our schools and the practical and creative strategies we can use to ensure that every pupil's literacy skills progress rapidly in all subjects. It embraces the fundamental concept that literacy skills need to be addressed by all policy makers, school leaders and teachers, irrespective of their specialism, for students to succeed. This teacher's resource is divided into four sections:

1. Literacy, the importance of it and how we teach it.
2. Fifty generic practical strategies for improving literacy in the classroom.
3. Whole school strategies for literacy to flourish.
4. A selection of generic tools for assessing literacy.

This highly regarded resource also contains a free CD of the worksheets needed to carry out the exercises and activities.

"The genius of Amanda Sara's *Literacy Toolkit* is that it satisfies the teacher and the student's intellectual curiosity whilst providing both with stimulating strategies to raise levels of literacy."

**David Onllwyn-Jones MBE, Teacher of the Year in a Secondary School in London 2006, Comenius Ambassador British Council**

"A wealth of practical, cross-curricular activities and resources for the classroom. For literacy co-ordinators it sets out clearly how to strategically plan and lead a whole-school approach, while tailoring it to the school's individual circumstances. A book of tricks to motivate and engage staff and students alike!"

**Fiona Tierney, Teacher Leader for Literacy, North Oxfordshire Academy**

"Anyone involved in education will know the immense value of high quality tools for teaching and learning. With this book Amanda has crafted a clear, compelling and useful toolkit for the most fundamental of issues."

**Sebastian Bailey, The Mind Gym**

"Whoever you are and whatever you teach, you are a member of your school's literacy development team; I'm sure that you will find Amanda's ideas illuminating, motivating and empowering."

**Sharon Ginnis, author of *Covering the Curriculum with Stories* and independent trainer**

"*The Literacy Toolkit* is packed full of ideas which classroom teachers can use to inspire students to love words."

**Bill Lucas, Professor of Learning, University of Winchester and Trustee, The English Project**

"This is a timely, thorough and very practical book filled with approaches to literacy that can work in all sorts of classrooms with all sorts of learners. All teachers will find something of use here along with a reiteration of how literacy is right at the heart of what education should be all about – the opening up of worlds for young people."

**Ian Gilbert, Founder of Independent Thinking Ltd**

"A very practical and worthwhile volume for all classroom practitioners."

**Gino Carminati, Head Teacher, Worth School**



Amanda Sara is Deputy Head at Westminster Academy and in charge of literacy across the academy. She is also literacy consultant for The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and a Fellow of The Royal Society of Arts.

Education/Literacy Strategies Secondary



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