

Fit for the grammar test

Preparing for the grammar test in the context of real reading and real writing

Everyone is familiar with phrases like ‘**Jump through hoops**’ and ‘**It’s just jumping through a hoop**’ to describe tasks which seem pointless in themselves, but which are for some reason required. The grammar test is, arguably, just such a series of hoops. Children are asked to fill in gaps in sentences, to circle words and to pick correct answers – all out of context and in a highly prescribed way.

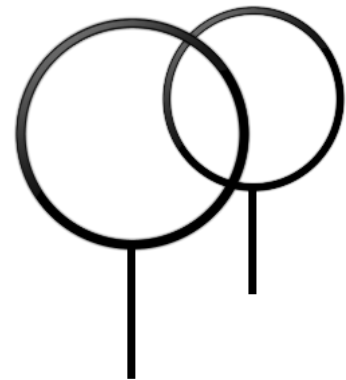
Our challenge as teachers is to prepare them for this in a way which is more than just mechanistic drilling for a test. Children need to be able to jump through the hoops not because they have become hoop-jumping machines, but because they are fit, agile, strong and confident.

Of course, **TRAINING** and **EXERCISES** are fine. (There is nothing wrong with some context-less ‘grammar gym’ and some practice hoop-jumping. In fact, this is essential preparation for the tests. These can often take the form of games and fun activities as well as question practice, and there are hundreds of these shared online and in books.)

However, real long-lasting fitness comes through meaningful work and play, and that is the focus of this document – the building of skills and understanding in CONTEXT.

Below are the main kinds of hoops with which children are presented in the test, along with JUST SOME suggestions for how they can enjoy preparing for them in the context of REAL READING and REAL WRITING.

But first...



Five principles

The importance of CONTEXT

The suggestions here are for ways of building deep knowledge and deep understanding of grammar in real contexts – in real reading and in real writing, rather than in dislocated exercises. *(Such exercises do still have real value, especially in preparing for test.)*

The importance of TALK

Discussion is essential – the working through of ideas through talk, so that children are constructing their own understandings and awareness of grammar together and with the teacher, and the repeated saying and hearing of technical terms.

The importance of ENQUIRY

Enquiry is therefore at the root of this process. Grammar knowledge will grow fast if children become used to asking and investigating *questions* about what language is doing and why – not just receiving instruction and practising what they have been told.

The importance of FUNCTION

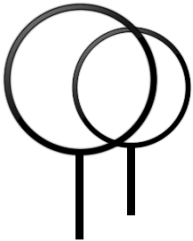
There is a lot of naming of parts in the grammar test; but this will come easily if the focus is not on what something is (a noun, an adverbial phrase...) but on what it does and how. An understanding of something's function makes remembering what it is natural.

The importance of IMMERSION

Familiarity and confidence with technical terminology will come more easily if it is used as a matter of course, without being built up as something tricky that has to be learned. Children are experts at picking up and using language that surrounds them.

Punctuation

Hoops to jump through in the test



Name punctuation marks

✎ What is the name of the punctuation mark used between the two main clauses below?

Spot correct punctuation

- ✎* Which sentence has been punctuated correctly?
- ✎* Which sentence uses an apostrophe correctly?
- ✎* Which sentence uses the hyphen correctly?
- ✎* Which sentence has the correct punctuation? (KS1)

Explain the function of punctuation

✎ Explain how the use of commas changes the meaning in the two sentences.

Insert punctuation

- ✎* Insert a colon in the correct place in the sentence below.
- ✎* Insert a pair of brackets in the correct place in the sentence below.
- ✎* Tick one box to show where a dash should go in the sentence below.
- ✎* Which punctuation mark should be used in the place indicated by the arrow?
- ✎* Write the contracted form of the underlined words in the box
- ✎* In the table, write in full each of the words with an apostrophe. (KS1)
- ✎* Write a full stop in the correct place. (KS1)
- ✎* Circle three words that must have a capital letter. (KS1)
- ✎* Tick the punctuation mark that should complete each sentence. (KS1)

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



✓ In **shared and guided reading**, investigate the way writers are using punctuation, and what effects they are creating.

Why might the writer have used...?

What is the effect of using...?

What do you notice about...?

How has the writer punctuated...?

Why do you think the writer has used a semi-colon there, rather than...?

✓ Before reading a poem or a piece of prose, turn it into **JUST the punctuation marks**. What does it suggest? This is especially effective when comparing two poems – like these two sonnets:

What do you notice? What is there a lot of? What does this suggest? Will there be talking? Will there be any questions? What sort of mood do think there will be? How long and how complicated will the sentences be?

.;,;,,,,,;,,,,,
!-,,,,,;,,-!;,,,,-,,!,-.

Which is more...? Which will be easier to read? Which will be more exciting? Which will have longer sentences?

- ✓ In a poem, or on a page of text, pick out the **'most important'** single piece of punctuation. (There won't be a 'right' answer, of course, but it gets some interesting talk going.)

What do you think is the one most important piece of punctuation? Why? What does it do?

- ✓ When reading a poem or a page of prose, get pupils to **highlight** all the different types of punctuation with different colours. How does this illuminate the style of the writer?

Look at all the commas. What does this suggest...?

What do you notice about...?

What sort of punctuation is most important? Why?

What sort of sentences is the writer using? Why?

- ✓ **'Read the punctuation'**
Re-read a passage several times, using the punctuation to add emphasis, to affect intonation and to guide expression.

How does it sound now that we've re-read it?

Can you do that in your thinking voice?

How are the commas helping you to make meaning here?

How are the commas helping your thinking voice to...?

- ✓ When children are reading, draw attention to the accurate the **placing** of punctuation. (In the test, they will lose marks if – for example – an apostrophe is too high or near the wrong letter.)

Look at the apostrophes. Where are they printed?

Look at this colon. Why is it printed...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



- ✓ During **shared writing** sessions, focus discussion on the *function* of punctuation – not just on the *rules*.
Make some deliberate errors, and get pupils to spot and correct them.

Why do we need...?

What does that comma do?

How would it be different if...?

Can we use more...?

Would it be clearer is...?

If we add... how does it...?

✓ **Edit and redraft!**

This is the main way in which children learn to be critical and evaluative of their own writing.

- When modelling the *processes* and *disciplines* of editing on the board, perhaps using a pupil's work-in-progress, focus on the function of punctuation, rather than just the rules.
- When pupils edit in pairs, get them looking specifically at the writer's use of punctuation.
- On pupils' rough drafts, indicate where there are punctuation errors or omissions and challenge pupils to work out what to change.
- Annotate drafts with questions about punctuation

✓ While they are writing, **challenge** pupils to use particular punctuation techniques.

✓ Use punctuation as a **productive constraint** in writing, with poetry or in prose. For example, pupils have to write the first sentence using three commas, or the first line of a poem using a colon.

✓ When children are writing, insist on **careful placing** of punctuation so that this becomes habitual. (In the test, they will lose marks if – for example – an apostrophe is too high or near the wrong letter.)

✓ When children are writing, insist on **careful formation** of capitals, so they don't lose marks in the test if they aren't distinct.

Where could you...?

What's missing from...?

How could we make clearer the...?

What would show the reader...?

What would help your reader to follow...?

Can you now add some...?

Where could we replace a conjunction with a semi-colon? What is the effect?

What punctuation should go...? Why?

How does it change...?

What's missing from...? Why do we need...?

If we add... will it?

Do we need...? What is the effect?

Yes, that's the rule, but why is it needed...?

Is it clearer with or without...?

Should you have used a capital for...?

Can you use a semi-colon to...?

Can you now add something that needs brackets?

Can you add a sentence which needs FOUR commas?

Your first line must contain...

Your second sentence must contain...

In the third paragraph, you have to use... and a... and two...

Check that your apostrophes are...

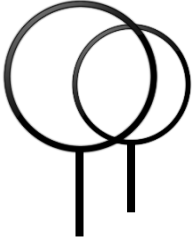
Look at this colon. Is it in quite the right place?

Your capital 'S' needs to be bigger – at the moment it looks like...

Is the 'W' a capital? It needs to be more...

Functions of words

Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify parts of speech

- Circle all the pronouns in the sentence below
- Tick all the sentences that contain a preposition.
- Circle all the conjunctions in the sentences below.
- Circle the adverb in the sentence below.
- Tick one box in each row to show whether the underlined word is an adjective or an adverb.
- Circle all the words in the sentences below that should start with a capital letter.
- What type of word is '_____' in the sentence below? (KS1)

Write words as particular parts of speech

- Write a sentence using the word 'cover' as a noun. Remember to punctuate your answer correctly.
- Write a sentence using the word 'cover' as a verb. Remember to punctuate your answer correctly.
- Complete the sentence with an adjective formed from the verb create.
- Complete the sentence below with a possessive pronoun.
- Write one joining word in the space to complete what Mary is saying. (KS1)
- Choose the best option to complete each sentence. (KS1)

Explain the function of words within sentences

- What does the word *Others* refer to in the passage below?
- Tick one box in each row to show how the modal verb affects the meaning of the sentence.

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ In **shared and guided reading**, investigate the way writers are using words for effect, always using technical terms when referring to parts of speech.

Can we find an example of the writer...?
 Why have you chosen...?
 What is the effect of...?
 How has the writer used that particular...?
 What is the function of that...?
 How would it have been different if the writer had used...?
 What does the word _____ add to...?
 Let's look at the pronouns in...
 What is your favourite...?

- ✓ Create **cloze activities** with texts which pupils are about to read, and get them to try to reconstruct the text – either from a list of words or from their own resources.

So why do you think the writer has used...?
 What is the effect of...?
 How has the writer used that particular...?
 What is the function of that...?

This is, of course, a very effective way to get them to focus on the effect of word choices. You can just remove pronouns, or verbs, or adjectives. Or it could be a mixture.

In discussion, focus on the way words are functioning within sentences and within the text.

- ✓ **Alphabeticise** all the words in a passage or poem that the pupils are about to read, using a website such as www.textfixer.com.

Ask them to highlight all the pronouns, or verbs, or adjectives, or imperatives or... How does this illuminate the style of writing, or bring out themes, or suggest what the text might be about?

This is a very effective way to practise spotting types of word in the context of thinking about a real text.

- ✓ While reading a text, ask pupils to highlight what they each think is the **most interesting** (or most important) verb/adjective/noun/adverb/conjunction on the page (or in the whole text, if it is short!)

Ask individuals to explain choices.

- ✓ **Lucky dip** – another ‘slow release’ activity.

Put the text which pupils are about to read onto an IWB or a projected Word document, with ALL the words coloured white so they are invisible. By clicking randomly on the text, you can make words appear singly. Play lucky dip, making words appear and talking about what sort of words they are, what they might be doing in the text and how. Build up ideas about what the text is like and about.

How would it have been different if the writer had used...?

Why have you decided...?

Would a different verb...?

So which modal verb would...?

What do you think the text will...?

Can you predict...?

What do you notice about the...?

Is there any pattern in...?

What sort of verbs...?

How do you think the writer feels about...?

Can you guess...?

So what do these modal verbs suggest about...?

Why have you chosen...?

What is the effect of...?

How has the writer used that particular...?

What is the function of that...?

How would it have been different if the writer had used...?

What sort of word is this? What does this sort of word do?

So what might the next word be? Why?

What word might have come before? Why?

What sort of text do you think this is, then?

Let's look at another word in the same sentence...

Now what can we say about this sentence?

Let's see if we can find another word which...

What do that modal verbs suggest about...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



- ✓ **Word power.** When discussing how to make pieces of writing successful, focus on specific types of word and how they can be used. For example, how might pupils be using adjectives, or adverbs, or conjunctions, or nouns in an interesting way, or in a way that has particular impact?

Right, let's look at how we're going to be using...

What sort of... can we use to...?

- ✓ During **shared writing** sessions, focus discussion on the *function* and *effect* of types of word.

Why do we need...?

What does that _____ do?

How would it be different if...?

Can we use a better...?

Would it be more effective if...?

If we add... how does it...?

- ✓ **Edit and redraft!**

- When modelling editing on the board, perhaps using a pupil's work-in-progress, refer to choices about named parts of speech.
- When pupils edit in pairs, get them looking specifically at the writer's use of adjectives, or adverbs, or nouns, or...
- Annotate drafts with questions specifically about their word choices.
- Give pupils specific parts of speech to concentrate on when improving a draft.

Where could you use a better...?

Look at all the _____s and see if you can change any so that...?

Are there any... that need...?

What sorts of adjectives would add more...?

Can you now add some...?

Can we find a more formal conjunction to...?

Is this the best conjunction to use here?

What is this _____ doing?

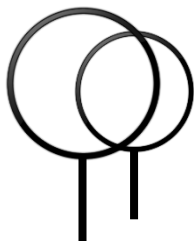
What might work better as...?

Let's try adding some...










- ✓ **Poetry writing.** Lots of poetry writing approaches naturally focus on types of word – building meaning by adding adjectives, for example. This is an opportunity to talk in a focused way about the function and impact of words in context.

Sentence construction





Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify parts of sentences

-  Tick one box to show which part of the sentence is a relative clause.
-  What is the name of the punctuation mark used between the two main clauses below?
-  Tick one box in each row to show if the underlined clause is a main clause or a subordinate clause.
-  Tick one box in each row to show whether the word after is used as a subordinating conjunction or as a preposition.
-  Circle all the determiners in the sentence below.
-  Tick the option that shows how the underlined words are used in the sentence.
 - as a preposition phrase
 - as a relative clause
 - as a main clause
 - as a noun phrase
-  Underline the longest possible noun phrase in the sentence below.
-  Tick one box in each row to show if the underlined conjunction is a subordinating conjunction or a co-ordinating conjunction.
-  Label the boxes with V (verb), S (subject) and O (object) to show the parts of the sentence.

Write sentences using specified elements of sentences

-  Rewrite the sentence below, adding a **subordinate clause**. Remember to punctuate your answer correctly.
-  Tick the correct word to complete the sentence. (coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions)
-  Complete the noun phrase below to describe the boot. (KS1)
-  Write one joining word in the space to complete what Mary is saying. (KS1)

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



✓ In **shared and guided reading**, investigate the way writers are using sentence construction for effect

Can we find an example of the writer using...?

What is the effect of...?

How has the writer used that particular...?

What is the function of that...?

How would it have been different if the writer had...?

How does the frontal adverbial phrase...?

By putting the subordinate clause first, how has the writer...?

What do you notice about the lengths of sentences? Why do you think...?

- ✓ On a text which the pupils are reading, ask them to highlight the **shortest sentence** they can find, and the longest. What can they say about their impact?

What makes this sentence so long? How could it have been broken up? How would that have...?

What is the effect of this sentence being so short? How could it have been joined to...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



✓ Edit and redraft!

- When modelling editing on the board, perhaps using a pupil's work-in-progress, refer to and discuss choices about adding, taking or moving around the parts of sentences.
- When pupils edit in pairs, get them looking specifically at how the writer might add or move around specific parts of sentences.

Where could you move _____ to, so that...?

Are there any sentences that...?

What would happen if we moved...?

Can we add a clause to...?

If we added a frontal adverbial clause, how would it...?

Could these two sentences be merged into one? How do we need to...?

What is the relative clause adding...?

✓ Sentence formulae

When pupils are writing, give them sentence 'types' to imitate.

The essential thing here is to talk about what sorts of sentence they are – how they are built in particular ways, using particular formations – and how this makes them useful or effective.

Let's look at the bank of sentence s. Can we pick one to use here? Why would that one...? What does it...?

This one starts with a prepositional phrase. Would that...?

✓ Sentence stems

Similarly, sentence stems are a powerful way to scaffold writing – supporting pupils in becoming more fluent and more sophisticated in their expression.

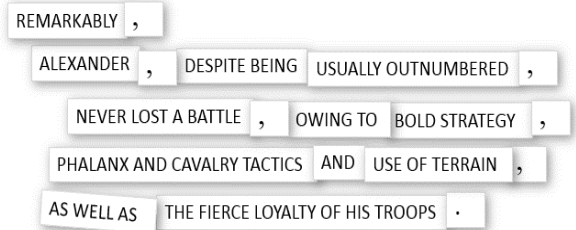
Again, talk about what the sentence stems offer is a way to make grammatical concepts explicit, in the context of making real decisions about writing.

Which sentence stem are you going to choose for...? Why?

Is there a sentence stem that uses a subordinate clause to start the sentence? Okay, how would that...?

- ✓ Before they embark on a written task, give pupils the **broken-down parts** of an on-topic multi-clause sentence to sequence. Usually, the parts can be put together in a variety of different ways, which may change the sense, or the emphasis or the elegance – all important things to **discuss**, using lots of technical terms!

This is an excellent desk-top group or pair activity, using cards. It also works well on an IWB, or on a washing line, or – best of all – with pupils holding up the bits on cards and moving around.



- ✓ **Structure poems**

Using a repeated sentence structure is a familiar and effective way of building poems; it is an opportunity both to practise sentence formation and also to **discuss explicitly the terminology function of clauses and phrases**.

It is easy to make these up: Eg...

Infinitive, imperative poems

To (verb), (imperative...)

To stand tall like a tree, believe in yourself.

To run free like a river, listen to yourself.

I (verbed), (adjective) as a...

I wandered, lonely as a cloud,

I ran, excited as the wind,

I stood, proud as a mountain...

Lonely as a cloud, I wandered.

Excited as the wind, I ran.

Proud as a mountain, I stood...

Make up some more infinitive verbs to...

Which is your favourite imperative?

How effectively is your simile, determining the...

Let's try turning the descriptions – the adverbial phrases – into fronted adjectival phrases, and see...





What is the effect of fronting the adjectival phrases?

Word formation

Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify and apply roots, suffixes and prefixes

-  What does the root struct mean in the word family below? (multiple choice)
-  Complete the table below by adding a **suffix** to each noun to make an **adjective**.
-  Draw a line to match each prefix to the correct word so that it makes a new word
-  Which word correctly completes the sentence? (suffixes) (KS1)

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ When reading new or difficult words, **talk** about suffixes, prefixes and roots.

Does the root help you to...?
What is the prefix?
How does the suffix help us to...?

- ✓ When reading, draw attention to words that children often make **mistakes** with.

Look at how 'impossible' is spelt. How does it start?

- ✓ When children are reading aloud, insist on accurate **articulation**, and refer to roots and prefixes.

Have you used the right prefix? Is it 'impossible' or...? What should it be?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



- ✓ When children misspell words, or are looking for the correct spelling, **refer** to roots, suffixes and prefixes.

Look at the prefix. How should that be...?
The suffix 'ible' is added to bits of words, like 'poss-ible'. 'able' is usually added to complete words, like 'break-able'. So which is this?

- ✓ When children are writing, **challenge** them to use, say, three listed prefixes and three listed suffixes, as a productive constraint.




In this piece of writing, your challenge is to use all of these suffixes.
Where have you used...?
How did this make you'...?

Sentence types

Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify types of sentence

-  Tick the sentence that must end with a question mark?
-  Which of the sentences is a command?
-  Draw lines to match each sentence with its correct type. (KS1)

NB. For the purpose just of this test, an exclamation has to begin with 'what' or 'how'. Exclamatory commands or statements are allowed exclamation marks, but mustn't be called exclamations.

NB. For the purpose just of this test, a question must not have the syntax of a statement (eg 'This is your pen?' is not creditworthy.)

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ When reading aloud, link sentence types to different kinds of intonation.

That's an **exclamation**, isn't it, so how can you speak it?

How do we need to read that sentence aloud? Why? What do we call a sentence which tells someone to do something, like that?

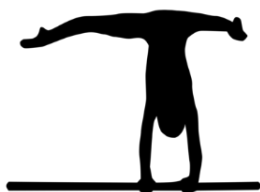
- ✓ When reading, draw attention to how **punctuation** is used to indicate exclamations and questions.

How do we know that that is a question? What punctuation could go at the end of... Why?

- ✓ When reading, draw attention to how in the **real world** questions are sometimes in the form a statement.

Why is there an exclamation mark there? Remember - in your test, that wouldn't count as an exclamation.

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



- ✓ When **editing and redrafting**, use these terms when checking and correcting punctuation.

If it's an **exclamation**, what sort of punctuation could you...?

That shouldn't have a... because it's just a **statement**.




- ✓ Use sentence types as a **productive constraint**, for example in 'slow writing'.

Your first sentence must be a question. Your second must be a command. make your third sentence a statement. The fourth must be an exclamation. Then...

Verb/subject agreement

Hoops to jump through in the test

Make verbs and subjects agree

-  Circle one verb in each underlined pair to complete the sentences using Standard English
-  Tick two sentences that are correct. (KS1)
-  Circle the correct word to complete the sentence. (KS1)

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ When reading passages of **dialogue**, draw attention to how characters might use non-standard forms such as 'We were...' or 'He was...' and talk about how this is a spoken form.

Look at how the character speaks here. What do you notice about...? When you are writing formally, like in the test, how would you...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING

- ✓ When **editing and redrafting**, draw attention to how Standard English requires particular agreements.


You've written... What does that need to be in Standard English?

Direct and reported speech

Hoops to jump through in the test



Convert from one to the other

-  Rewrite the sentence below as **direct speech**. Remember to punctuate your answer correctly.

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ When reading, **discuss** the different effects of using direct and reported speech. For example, this is very important in the way news is written.

Look at how... How is that different from...?

Why do you think the writer has used direct speech here, instead of reported speech?

How would it be different if we actually heard the character in our thinking voices?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING

- ✓ When children are writing narrative, get them to **experiment** with changing speech from direct to indirect, and discuss how it affects the pace.

Let's try changing that to reported speech. Is that better, or...?

Now try writing that as direct speech. Does that give the reader more...?

Synonyms and antonyms

Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify synonyms and antonyms



Circle the two words in the sentence below that are **synonyms** of each other.



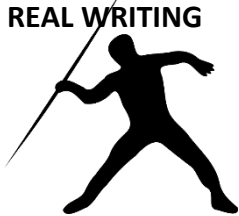
Draw a line to match each word to its correct **antonym**.

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING

- ✓ When reading, discuss the effect of word **choices**, and how they are creating effects or adding precision.

What word has the writer used to...? What other words might they have...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING



- ✓ When **editing and redrafting**, talk about finding the best possible, or most precise word.
- ✓ Teach good use of **thesauruses** to develop vocabulary when writing.

*Let's think of synonyms for...
What might be a more precise synonym for...?*

*Look up synonyms for...
Is that really a synonym, or...?*

Passive/active

Hoops to jump through in the test



Identify and use voice



Which sentence is written in the **active voice**?



Rewrite the sentence below so that it is written in the **passive voice**. Remember to punctuate your answer correctly.

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING

- ✓ When reading, notice how the passive form is used to suggest **formality** or **distance**, for example in reports.

How would this have been different if the writer had written...?






Is that passive or active? Why? What is the effect of...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING

- ✓ When writing formal accounts, **experiment** with adding extra formality and detachment by using the passive form.

*Let's try turning this into the passive.
How does that...?*

Tenses

<p>Hoops to jump through in the test</p>	<p>Spot tenses being used</p>	<p> Which sentence below is written in the past tense?  Tick to show which sentence uses the past progressive.  Underline the verb form that is in the present perfect in the passage below.</p>
	<p>Use tenses (and the subjunctive)</p>	<p> Write the past tense of the verb _____ in the space (tense agreement) (KS1)</p>

Building fitness in the context of REAL READING



- ✓ Notice how, in narrative, writers use present and past tenses to create **tension**.

*Why has the writer...?
 What is the effect of switching to the present tense there?*

- ✓ **Draw attention** to different tenses in pieces of writing, and talk about how they are different.


*Which tense is that? When do we use...?
 Why do you think that needs to be in the past progressive, rather than...?*

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING

- ✓ When pupils are writing narrative, get them to **experiment** with swapping tenses. (This is easier to do on a word processor.) What works better and why?

*So how is the past progressive different?
 When it's put into the present, is it more...?
 Let's try the present perfect. How does that change the...?*

The subjunctive

<p>Hoops to jump through</p>	<p>Use the subjunctive</p>	<p> Complete the sentence below so that it uses the subjunctive form.</p>
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Building fitness in the context of REAL READING

- ✓ Draw attention to the subjunctive where it has been used in texts, and discuss its effect..

Look at how the writer has used the subjunctive here. How else could that have been...? Why do you think...?

Building fitness in the context of REAL WRITING

- ✓ Challenge pupils to use the subjunctive, as a productive constraint. Always then discuss its effect!

*In this paragraph, try to use the subjunctive.
 How have you used...?*