



Commas to Indicate Parenthesis

Simple and Complex Sentences



When you include different punctuation in your writing you must always keep in mind that you are trying to get your points, your message and your story across to the reader. Every choice you make in terms of words, sentences, arrangement, punctuation, has an effect — good, bad, or mediocre — on the reader. Try to plan your choices for the best effect.

Today we are going to focus on using paired commas. To fully understand how to include paired commas we must first understand simple and complex sentences.

Simple Sentences



A simple sentence is made of one main clause = **subject** + **verb**.

A simple sentence is usually straightforward and it must make sense on its own, as it expresses a complete thought.

A simple sentence can have phrases, adjectives, and adverbs, but no subordinate clauses.

The **students** **were** sleepy.



The **helicopter** **frightened** the dogs.



Complex Sentences



A complex sentence has at least:

- **One subordinate clause.**
- **A main clause.**

Subordinate Clauses:

- Must have their own subject and verb.
- Do not make sense on their own.
- Can come before, after, or inside of the main clause.

Main Clauses:

The more important information should always go in the main clause because the main clause always “carries” more emphasis than the subordinate clause.

The **students were** sleepy because **they** had been **partying** all night.



Can you identify the **main clause**?



The **helicopter** **frightened** the dogs so **they** **barked** loudly.

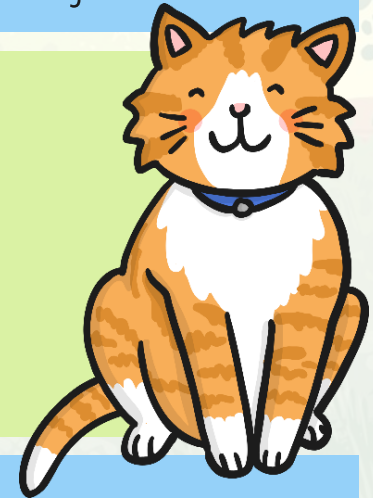
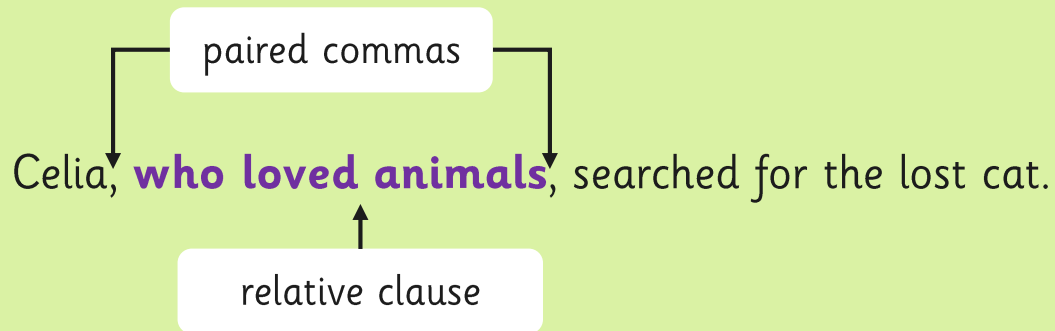
Can you identify the **main clause**?

Relative Clauses



The word relative means 'related to'.

An relative clause is another way of using a subordinate clause – by dropping it into the middle of a sentence. This time you need two commas, one either side of the clause.



The relative clause is a **parenthesis**.

Parenthesis = a word or phrase inserted as an explanation or afterthought into a passage which is grammatically complete (the sentence makes sense) without it.

Relative Clauses

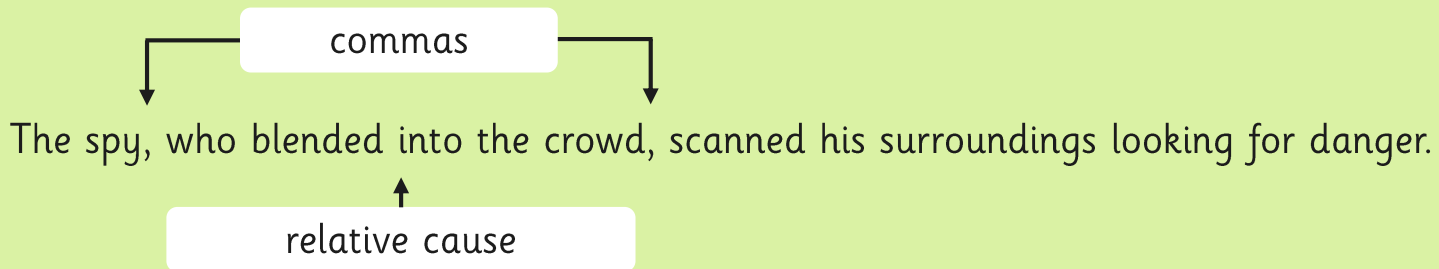


Commas are used before and after relative clauses (a group of words that includes a subject and a verb). The relative clauses are put into a sentence to add additional detail for the reader. The relative clauses do not make sense by themselves. Starting the relative clause with where, which, who or when is a useful tool to help when first using relative clauses. When we start the clause in this way we call it a relative clause.

Example:

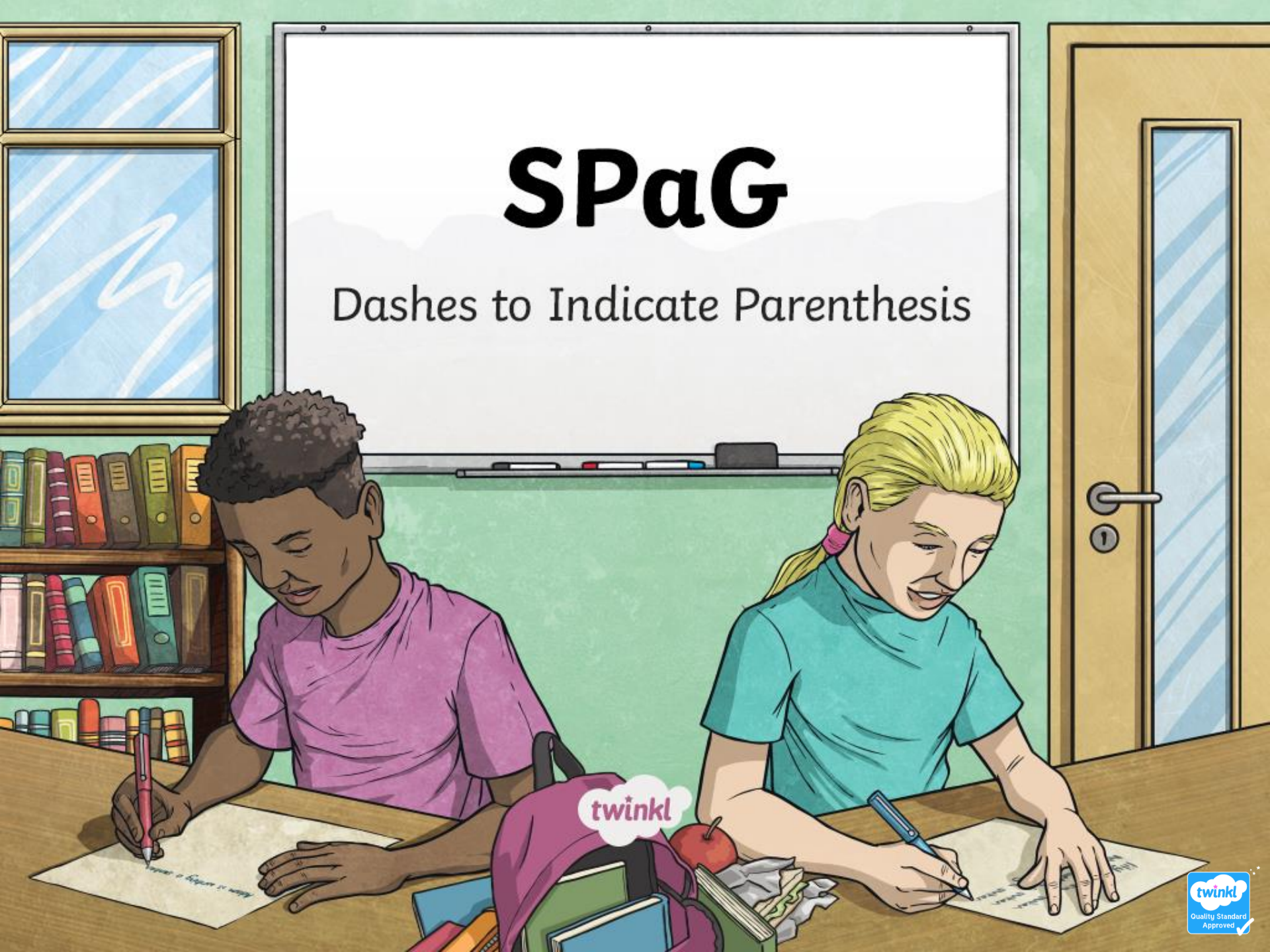
The spy scanned his surroundings looking for danger.

Is changed to:



SPaG

Dashes to Indicate Parenthesis



The Double Dash



Definition of a Dash

Dashes can perform a similar function to brackets, surrounding additional information in a sentence.

Example: The train – which was late – was heading to Paris.

Take care not to confuse dashes and hyphens.

Interesting Fact

On old-fashioned typewriters, two hyphens typed one after the other were used instead of a dash.

Hyphens are used in the middle of words with no spaces.



The Double Dash



We use a dash to add additional information. This extra information is called a parenthesis.

When a parenthesis is completely removed, the sentence is still grammatically correct.

Example:

The man was plainly dressed in a black suit.

A parenthesis can be separated from the rest of the sentence by commas, dashes, or brackets (all called parentheses).



The Double Dash



Two dashes can mark out extra information inserted into a sentence which is grammatically complete without it, similar to brackets.

Example

James Bond – though I can't quite believe how – jumped straight over the car, rolled and ran off into the woods.

The dashes here could be replaced by brackets, but they draw more attention to what has been added.

Brackets to Show Parenthesis



Round Brackets



Types of Brackets

There are **two** main kinds of brackets, both of which come in pairs – **round brackets ()** and **square brackets []**. We are going to focus on round brackets.

CAUTION!

A round bracket is also known as a parenthesis.
Parenthesis can also mean a word, phrase or clause inserted into a sentence which is grammatically complete without it.

To help us to be clear, we will call () round brackets and call the additional word or phrase a 'parenthesis'.

Round Brackets



Parentheses are words, phrases or clauses inserted into sentences which are grammatically complete without them.

The information, which can be removed and the sentence still make sense, goes inside the brackets.

Example: Andrew (our best goalkeeper) saved the goal.



Quiet Parenthesis



Let's focus on those **quiet parentheses**. You use them to surround something that **seems a bit out of place in the sentence**—an aside, a extra detail, or an intrusion. You can add the information into the brackets to change the impact of the sentence.

Sentence without brackets – That morning he dressed in a grey tracksuit and trainers.

Aside - That morning (which was to change his life forever) he dressed in a tracksuit and trainers.

Extra detail - That morning he dressed in tracksuit (new, grey) and trainers.

An authorial intrusion – That morning he dressed in a tracksuit (he was as fit as a fiddle) and trainers.

Other Uses for Round Brackets



Remember - Parentheses are words, phrases or clauses inserted into sentences which are grammatically complete without them. Here are some ways that information, which could be removed and the sentence still make sense, can be added using round brackets:

1. **An extra detail** – The passenger train (which was late) pulled up at the station.
2. **To offer the reader an aside** – I'm heading out (movie night), but I'll call you in the morning.
3. **An authorial intrusion** – Trainspotting (what a unique past time) was her favourite hobby.
4. **A list which interrupts a sentence** – The three busiest train stations in Great Britain (Waterloo, Victoria, Liverpool Street) are all based in London.
5. **A date, or the birth and death of a person** – William Tate (February 1798 – 20 April 1873) was the architect who designed Waterloo Bridge Station.
6. **A Latin name used after a common name** – The film 'My Fair Lady' opens with Eliza Doolittle selling violets (violas) outside Covent Garden.

The Difference Between Dashes, Brackets and Paired Commas



The choice of dashes, brackets or commas depends on the level of importance of the additional information in the middle of the sentence.

Use brackets when the information is an aside or non-essential to the reader.

Use commas when the information is of (roughly) equal priority to other facts in the sentence, and is something you'd like your reader to note and know.

Use dashes when you want to emphasise the information.

