

Because, When, If: Joining Ideas in Year 2 Sentences

In Year 2, children learn to join two ideas into one sentence using small linking words like 'because', 'when', 'if' and 'that', instead of relying only on 'and' and 'then'. This helps them write sentences that show cause, time or condition, which is a normal and expected step in their writing development. This guide explains what the skill is, how it's taught, why it matters, and some simple, low-pressure ways you can notice and support it at home.

What it is

This is about a type of word called a 'subordinating conjunction' — a linking word that joins two parts of a sentence so one part depends on the other. Common examples taught in Year 2 are 'because' (showing a reason), 'when' (showing time), 'if' (showing a condition) and 'that' (adding extra information). For example, 'I put on my coat because it was raining' links two ideas with a clear reason, rather than just saying 'I put on my coat and it was raining.' Using these words well is part of the National Curriculum for English in Year 2 (ages 6 to 7), under the grammar and punctuation requirements for this age group.

What happens

Teachers usually introduce these linking words through speaking first, then writing. Your child might practise finishing sentences out loud, such as 'I was happy when...' or 'We stayed inside because...', before writing similar sentences themselves. Teachers often model good examples on the board, then ask children to build their own, sometimes using picture prompts or simple sentence starters. Children are also encouraged to notice these words in the books they read. The exact activities, resources and pace will vary from school to school and even class to class, so if you'd like to know exactly how it's being taught to your child, it's worth asking their teacher — they'll be happy to explain their approach.

What it means for your child

Many young writers lean heavily on 'and' and 'then' because they're simple and familiar — this is completely normal, not a sign of a problem. Learning words like 'because', 'when' and 'if' gives children new ways to express reasons, timing and conditions, which makes their writing clearer and more interesting to read. It also supports their thinking: explaining 'why' or 'when' something happened encourages them to connect ideas logically. This is a gradual skill that develops with practice over time, so don't expect instant or perfect use — occasional slips or sentences that don't quite work are a normal part of learning, not something to worry about.

How you can help at home

The best support is playful and part of everyday life, not extra 'work'. Try chatting using these words naturally: 'Why do you think that happened?' or 'What will we do if it rains?' You could play a simple game finishing sentences together, like 'I like weekends because...' or 'We'll have a snack when...', taking turns to add silly or sensible endings. When your child tells you a story or writes something, you might gently ask 'why' or 'when' questions to prompt them to add a linking word themselves, rather than correcting their sentences. Keep it light and short — a few minutes during a car journey, bath time or bedtime chat is plenty, and enjoying the words together matters more than getting every sentence perfect.

Questions parents often ask

Should my child be using these words correctly by the end of Year 2? Many children will be using 'because', 'when' and 'if' with growing confidence by the end of Year 2, but every child progresses differently, and some will need more time — this is normal. My child only uses 'and' — should I worry? Not at all; this is a common starting point, and gentle, playful practice (rather than correction) usually helps over time. Is this the same as learning punctuation like commas? It's related but different — this is about joining ideas with words, while comma use in longer sentences is often introduced a little later. If you're ever unsure how your child is getting on, their teacher can give you the clearest picture, as they'll know your child's particular stage and the school's own approach.

Sources

- Department for Education (DfE) — 'National curriculum in England: English programmes of study, key stages 1 and 2' (GOV.UK), Appendix 2: Vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, Year 2 requirements