

## Learning about sentences

As children begin to write sentences rather than single words, and particularly as they start to write several sentences, they need to be able to mark the sentence boundaries with punctuation. It is difficult to give a meaningful explanation of what a sentence is, but through experiences such as shared reading and particularly shared writing, and the discussion of sentence punctuation, children can develop a sense of what sentences are. **The Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage** (ref: 00266-2008BKT-EN), pages 59–60 sets out some basic elements of the developmental pathway that leads from early mark making to the early learning goal for five year olds: **Write their own names and other things such as labels and captions, and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation.** Practitioners may support this development by using relevant terminology in context: 'Let's read the next sentence now,' or 'I'm going to think about what to say in my sentence,' or 'Have I finished my sentence yet?'

This developing understanding can be enhanced by quick group activities, such as the following.

### Human sentences

Write each word of a sentence, and the full stop, on separate cards. Give each card to a child, and ask the children to sequence the words to make a sentence (*Letters and Sounds*, DCSF 2007, has examples of sentences at each phonic phase). All the children then read the sentence together.

### Beginnings and ends

Write out some sentences on cards, and cut each sentence into two parts. The sentences could be taken from a familiar book or from *Letters and Sounds*. Give each child a card, and ask them to find the other part of their sentence. Each pair should show their sentence and read it to the rest of the group.

Example sentences from *Letters and Sounds* Phase 3:

- I can hear an owl/hoot at night.
- Nan is sitting/in the rocking chair.
- The farmer gets up/at six in the morning.

### Is it a sentence?

Write some sentences and non-sentences on strips of card. For example:

*Sam sat on the.*

*The dog ran up the hill.*

*The cat and the fish.*

*Jumps on the bed.*

*The doll is in the cot.*

