

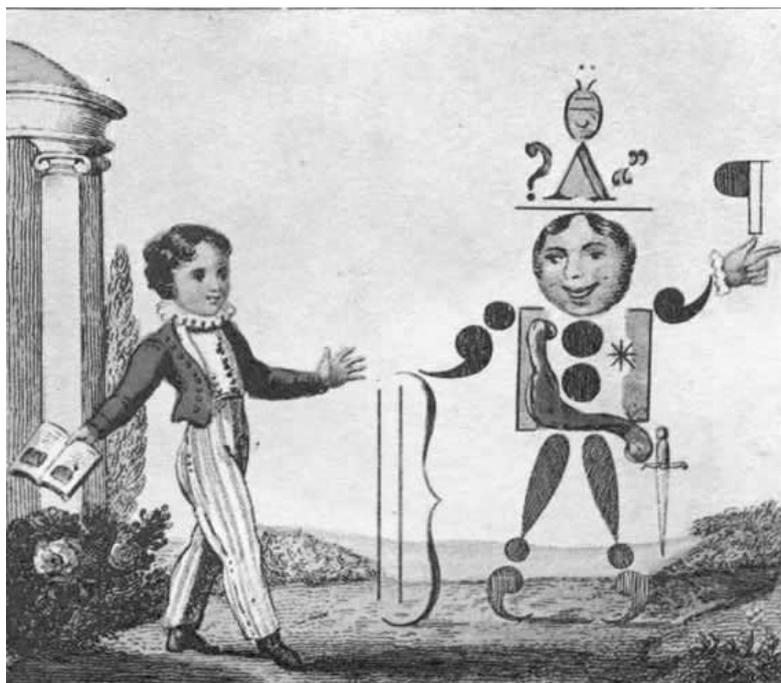
## AS ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### Unit 2

#### Language Issues and Original & Critical Writing

'Language and Situation' resources

#### Punctuation



# Punctuation

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## TEXT 1

An extract from *Examine Your English* (1964) by N. Maison & K. Kumar, a book which gives advice about English grammar and writing for students in Indian universities

... the importance of good punctuation cannot be over emphasized. To regard punctuation as a mere nuisance and necessary evil is quite absurd. As an English Archbishop once declared, "Intellectually, stops matter a great deal. If you are getting your commas, semi-colons, and full-stops wrong, it means that you are not getting your thoughts right, and your mind is muddled." The confusing effects of bad punctuation can sometimes be very comic ... but such muddles can also be very serious—innumerable court-cases have been brought about, lives and money have been lost and careers ruined through mistakes in punctuation.

## TEXT 2

An extract from *An Essay on Punctuation with Incidental remarks on Composition* (1842) by F. Francillon, a solicitor who became interested in punctuation after giving a talk about it to members of the Banbury Mechanics' Institute

POINTING or PUNCTUATION is the art of placing, in a written or printed work, certain points, marks, notes, or signs ; whereby the author hopes to make his sentences more easily to be understood by *his* readers and their *hearers* ; and consequently more correctly to convey his ideas to them.

## TEXT 3

An extract from 'Lousy at punctuation? Fear not—so was Wordsworth' (2015), a *Guardian Online* book blog by the linguist David Crystal

I think people feel they can get to grips with punctuation more readily than with other linguistic topics, and so are more prepared to speak out about it. Grammar has hundreds of rules and a lot of abstract terminology. Vocabulary and spelling are problems because there are tens of thousands of words that all have to be spelled and used correctly. By contrast, punctuation seems very manageable. There are only a dozen or so marks to be learned, and they are frequently used and easy to see.

#### TEXT 4

An extract from a university guide to punctuation for students

##### COMMAS

The comma is probably the most abused mark of punctuation. Not a small portion of the abuse is due to the high school teacher's maxim "If you pause when you read the sentence, put a comma in that place." The comma does not function, however, as a mark of elocution; the comma gives grammatical information, not elocution information. You must learn the function of the comma; we use it to separate grammatical units and to indicate interruptions of syntax.

#### TEXT 5

An extract from *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) by Robert Lowth

PUNCTUATION is the art of marking in writing the several pauses, or rests, between sentences, and the parts of sentences, according to their proper quantity or proportion, as they are expressed in a just and accurate pronunciation. [*text omitted*]

... the doctrine of Punctuation must needs be very imperfect : few precise rules can be given, which will hold without exception in all cases : but much must be left to the judgment and taste of the writer.

On the other hand , if a greater number of marks were invented to express all the possible different pauses or pronunciation ; the doctrine of them would be very perplexed and difficult , and the use of them would rather embarrass than assist the reader.

It remains therefore , that we be content with the Rules of Punctuation , laid down with as much exactness as the nature of the subject will admit : such as may serve for a general direction , to be accommodated to different occasions ; and to be supplied , where deficient , by the writer's judgement.

#### TEXT 6

An extract from *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (2003) by the writer and broadcaster Lynne Truss

Taking our previous analogies for punctuation, what happens when it isn't used? Well, if punctuation is the stitching of language, language comes apart, obviously, and all the buttons fall off. If punctuation provides the traffic signals, words bang into each other [*text omitted*]. And if you take the courtesy analogy, a sentence no longer holds the door open for you to walk in, but drops it in your face as you approach.

## TEXT 7

An extract from 'The Philosophy of Punctuation' by Paul Robinson, a professor at an American University

My punctuation is informed by two ideals: clarity and simplicity. Punctuation has the primary responsibility of contributing to the plainness of one's meaning. It has the secondary responsibility of being as invisible as possible, of not calling attention to itself. With those principles in mind, and on the basis of reading what now passes for acceptable writing, I have developed a set of emotional responses to individual marks of punctuation. [text omitted]

Periods and commas are lovely because they are simple. They force the writer to express his ideas directly, to eliminate unnecessary hedges, to forgo smart-aleck asides. They also contribute to the logical solidity of a piece of writing, since they make us put all our thoughts into words. By way of contrast, a colon can be used to smooth over a rough logical connection. It has a verbal content ranging anywhere from "namely" to "thus," and it can function to let the writer off the hook. Periods and commas, because of their very neutrality, make one an honest logician.

Semicolons are pretentious and overactive. These days one seems to come across them in every other sentence. [text omitted]

Before leaving the realm of epidemics, I want to mention two other practices that are out of hand: the use of italics for emphasis and of quotation marks for distancing. These are ugly habits because of the intellectual tone they set. Italics rarely fail to insult the reader's intelligence. More often than not they tell us to emphasize a word or phrase that we would emphasize automatically in any natural reading of the sentence. Quotation marks create the spurious impression of an aristocracy of sensibility.

## TEXT 8

An extract from 'Council considers ban on apostrophes in street signs' (2013), a Guardian *Online* article

Dr Sian Harris, lecturer in English literature at the University of Exeter, said the proposals to ban apostrophes were likely to lead to greater confusion.

She said: "Usually the best way to teach about punctuation is to show practical examples of it—removing them from everyday life would be a terrible shame and make that understanding increasingly difficult.

"English is a complicated language as it is—removing apostrophes is not going to help with that at all."

She said the proposals reflected "changes in the way people communicate".

"On Twitter, for example, you cannot use punctuation in hashtags," she said.

"Perhaps, for branding purposes on social media, people don't want to have punctuation in their names."

The former culture secretary and journalist Ben Bradshaw, Labour MP for Exeter, took to Twitter to condemn the plans. He wrote: "Tory Mid Devon Council bans the apostrophe to 'avoid confusion' ... Whole point of proper grammar is to avoid confusion!"

## TEXT 9

An extract from *The Stories of English* (2004), by the linguist David Crystal

Early manuscripts had no punctuation or, even, spaces between words. The earliest conventions were introduced as a guide to phrasing when reading aloud became an important activity, such as on literary and liturgical occasions. There was a great deal of experiment: over thirty marks—various combinations of dots, curls, and dashes—can be found in medieval manuscripts, most of which disappeared after the arrival of printing. Some of them look like modern marks, but their function was not the same: a point, for example, represented a pause, rather than a sentence ending, and the height of the point could vary to express degrees of pause.

## TEXT 10

An extract from *The State of the Language* (1984) by Philip Howard, a journalist with a keen interest in the English Language

The truth is that there are as many varieties of punctuation as there are varieties of English; and the prudent man uses the variety suited to his purpose. When writing for the newspapers, which are going to be read in a hurry and with incomplete concentration, or when giving instructions to a computer or a platoon of infantry, the prudent man will use short sentences and plenty of full stops. When writing a learned article or book for educated readers, the writer can afford to indulge in longer sentences and more elaborate punctuation, which will allow him finer distinctions and greater flexibility of meaning. The man who uses a variety of punctuation in the wrong context is liable to excite misunderstanding and derision.

## TEXT 11

An extract from *Introduction to English Language* (1993) by the linguists N.F. Blake & Jean Moorhead

An important difference between earlier and modern punctuation is that the former is used for **rhetorical** purposes, particularly to help the reader to know where to pause if reading aloud, whereas the latter is more **grammatical** in its application, i.e. to mark off grammatical units such as clauses and sentences. Because of its rhetorical nature modern readers often find older punctuation puzzling and apparently arbitrary. Even capital letters may be used to note emphasis, which is why they may be found on many nouns in older texts.

## TEXT 12

An extract from *Don't Even Think About It!: 101 Dangerous Things NOT To Do Before You Grow Old* (2009), by the actor, director and broadcaster Richard Wilson

Going around openly correcting people's punctuation is not a public service; it's not a brave thing to do, it's just stupid. It's asking for a smack in the mouth just as much as challenging a litter lout to pick up their discarded bargain bucket. ...  
 ... I want nothing to do with the rules of punctuation any more. It's a way of looking down and sneering at people—but the truth is far more young and working-class people use punctuation properly than don't.

## TEXT 13

An extract from an article published in *The Telegraph Online* 'Culture' section (2014) by the author and journalist Harry Mount

Without precise punctuation, who could tell the difference in meaning between these two sentences? (a) "My favourite things in the world are Abba, tartare sauce, and fish and chips on the last fairway." (b) "My favourite things in the world are Abba, tartare sauce and fish, and chips on the last fairway." It's the Oxford comma there that distinguishes the keen gourmet from the keen golfer.

Punctuation seems more complicated than it is because of some of the names used. But something like that Oxford comma, which shouts out its exclusivity and complexity, is in fact extremely easy to learn – and to teach. There's no reason why every child – and every grocer – in the country shouldn't know it.

At first hearing, an expression such as "the non-restrictive comma" will freeze all but the biggest brains. But explain the difference between "Sailors, who are drunks, are dangerous" and "Sailors who are drunks are dangerous", and most children will get it in a second. Insert the non-restrictive commas and you're being rude to all sailors; take them away, and you're being rude only to the restricted group of sailors who are drunk.

## TEXT 14

An extract from an online editorial style guide for writers producing resources for Cambridge University

### Dashes

Use shorter en-dashes (–) for dates such as **1995–96** and longer em-dashes (—) for terms of equal weight (the Franco—Prussian War) or to represent a pause in text. Use single spaces after a full stop, not double spaces. (This is a throwback to the days of typewriters. All word processing packages automatically insert the correct amount of space with a single tap of the space bar.)

## TEXT 15

An extract from an article in the online ‘Cultural Studies’ section of the *New York Times* (2015) by the journalist Jessica Bennett

... Recently, a friend I had dinner plans with sent a text to ask “what time” we were meeting. We’d been organizing this meal for weeks; a half-dozen emails back and forth. And yet the question — sans the mark — felt indifferent, almost cold. Couldn’t she at least bother to insert the necessary character?

Of course, had she inserted too *many* marks, that may have been a problem, too, as there is suddenly a very fine line between appearing overeager (too much punctuation) and dismissive (not enough).

Even the period, once the most benign of the punctuation spectrum, now feels aggressive. And the exclamation point is so ubiquitous that “when my girlfriends don’t use an exclamation point, I’m like ‘What’s wrong, you O.K.?’ ” said Jordana Narin, a 19-year-old student in New York.

“Girlfriends” may be a key word there, as women are more likely to use emotive punctuation than men are. Yet lately I’ve tried to rein my own effusiveness in, going as far as to insert *additional* punctuation into existing punctuation in an effort to soften the marks themselves.

So instead of responding to a text with “Cant wait!!” I’ll insert a space or two before the mark — “Cant wait !!” – for that extra little pause. Sometimes I’ll make the exclamation point a parenthetical, as a kind of after thought (“Can’t wait (!)”). A friend inserts an ellipses — “Can’t wait ... !!” — so, as she puts it, “it’s less intense.”

## TEXT 16

An extract from *An Introduction to English Grammar* (2002) by Sidney Greenbaum and Gerald Nelson

### 9.1 Punctuation rules

The rules for punctuation are conventions that have been developed by printers and publishers. In large part, punctuation helps the reader to understand the written communication by breaking it down into smaller components. The conventions also contribute to the appearance of the printed page, notably through paragraphing.

The conventions establish a measure of consistency for writers. Some conventions are obligatory: if we break them, we have made mistakes in punctuation. Others are optional: we can make better or worse choices in particular circumstances, depending on the effects we wish to convey. To that extent, punctuation is an art.

## TEXT 17

An extract from an article in *The Telegraph* 'Education' section (2016) by the journalist Emily Gosden

### Nonsense! Backlash over new school rules on exclamation marks

Primary school pupils will only get credit for using exclamation marks in sentences beginning with 'what' or 'how', under strict new Government rules.

Ministers have been accused of "taking writing back to the 19th century" after issuing the restrictive new guidance over what counts as an "exclamation".

"For the purposes of the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test, an exclamation is required to start with What or How," the guidance for Key Stage 1 and 2 national curriculum tests states.

Children are expected to be able to recognise and write examples of exclamation sentences, and will not get any credit for using exclamation marks in other ways, examiners have been told.

The guidance suggests "What a lovely day!" or "How exciting!" as acceptable examples.

"A sentence that ends in an exclamation mark, but which does not have one of the grammatical patterns shown above, is not considered to be creditworthy as an exclamation (e.g. exclamatory statements, exclamatory imperatives, exclamatory interrogatives or interjections)," it says.

A source at the Department for Education denied the move was intended to curb the proliferation of the exclamation marks in text messages and social media.

## TEXT 18

An extract from *Punctuation personified: or, pointing made easy* (1824) by Mr. Stops, an instruction book for children

Young Robert could read , but he gabbled so fast :  
 And ran on with such speed , that all meaning he lost ,  
 Till one Morning he met M<sup>r</sup>. Stops , by the way ,  
 Who advised him to listen to what he should say.  
 Then entering the house , he a riddle repeated ,  
 To shew , WITHOUT STOPS , how the ear may be cheated.  
     "Ev'ry lady in this land  
     "Has twenty nails upon each hand  
     "Five & twenty on hands and feet  
     "And this is true without deceit ."  
 But when the stops were plac'd aright ,  
 The real sense was brought to light.

## TEXT 19

An extract from an academic research paper about teaching writing in secondary schools

Not surprisingly, this study found that accuracy in punctuation decreased with declining grade, particularly in terms of the demarcation of sentence boundaries and in the use of apostrophes. Writers at both C and F grade found marking sentence boundaries challenging, but C grade writers tended to make errors through splicing two sentence together with a comma, whereas F grade writers were more likely to omit the punctuation altogether. Only A grade writers demonstrated an ability to use a range of internal sentence punctuation, though C grade writers appeared confident in using commas to demarcate clauses and lists. F grade writers tended to make very limited use of internal sentence punctuation. A table summarising the differences is provided below:

| GRADE              | A  | C  | F  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>PUNCTUATION</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accurate;</li> <li>• includes variety of devices;</li> <li>• commas used to support meaning;</li> <li>• use of commas parenthetically;</li> <li>• omissive apostrophe correct.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generally accurate;</li> <li>• comma splicing evident;</li> <li>• commas used to demarcate some clauses and in lists, but rarely parenthetically;</li> <li>• omissive apostrophe correct; greater use of contractions;</li> <li>• errors in possessive apostrophe.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generally accurate use of capital letter;</li> <li>• widespread omission of punctuation, especially the full stop;</li> <li>• sparse use of commas;</li> <li>• errors in both omissive and possessive apostrophes.</li> </ul> |

## TEXT 20

Examples of ambiguity caused by punctuation

1. A woman without her man is nothing.
2. Let's eat Jack.
3. Most of the time travellers have no problems with their bookings.
4. Celebrities find inspiration in cooking their families and their pets.
5. No don't stop
6. Stop clubbing, baby seals
7. I love my parents, Doctor Who and James Bond.
8. Thank you! Your donation just helped someone. Get a job.