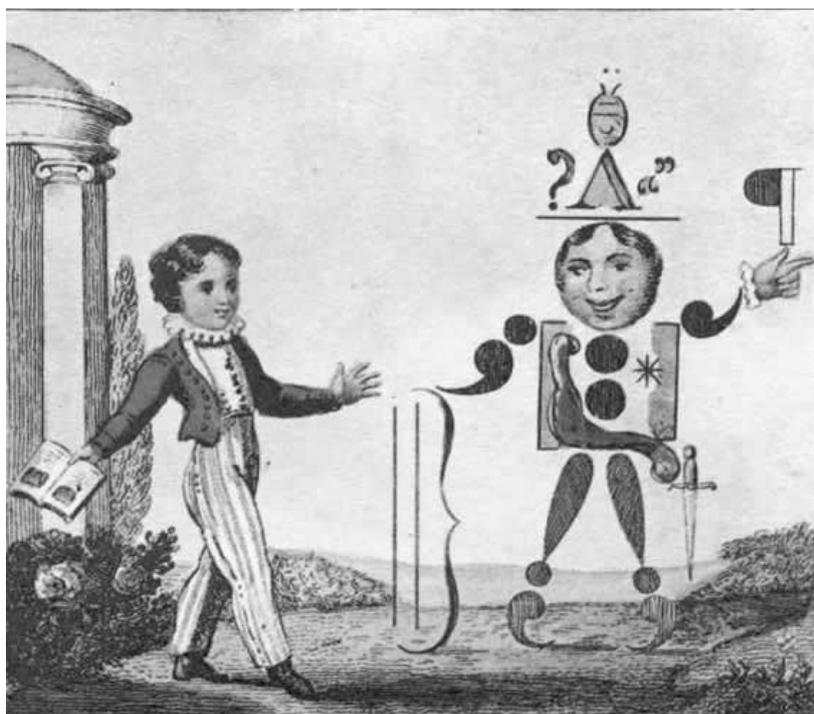# AS ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Unit 2

Language Issues and Original & Critical Writing

'Language Issues' essay: punctuation

Sample Marking Guidelines

Marking guidelines

Part (a)

Overview

In all responses, there should be an explicit demonstration of language knowledge. It will be important to judge the relevance of theories or theorists cited in context and this should be succinct, showing clear critical understanding of the relationship between a specific theory or attitude, and the focus of the question. Discussion of key concepts will address recognisable language use e.g. use of parenthetical commas, omission/misplacement of apostrophes, comma splices, the link between effective punctuation and the clarity of communication, the simplification of punctuation over time. Discussion of key issues will address the social implications of language use e.g. attitudes to inaccurate punctuation, judgements made about writers based on the punctuation they use, informalisation.

The question focuses on a specific area of language use (e.g. the ways in which different writers use punctuation) and responses should show an understanding of how context affects a writer's choices (AO3). All responses will show some awareness of the influence of genre, audience, purpose, situation and occasion.

Analysing the data given or selecting relevant points from the extract will provide a starting point for most responses (AO1).

Notes

The following notes address features of interest which may be explored, but it is important to **reward all valid discussion**.

As the question asks learners to identify and interpret the ways in which different writers use punctuation, it is likely that they will use the newspaper article and the issue of public road signs as their starting point. This may include reference to the importance of pragmatics: the council's claim that apostrophes can lead to mistakes by the emergency services would suggest that this is an example of language change in action—meaningful communication is more important than tradition (although a Google search of *St Giles, Oxford* and *St Giles', Oxford* produce almost identical results). Discussion may be developed by reference to the four sample signs, to the strong attitudes expressed in the article (in particular the issues of standards and value judgements, and of setting an example for school students), and to the value of apostrophes. Learners could then move on to a wider consideration of the function of punctuation in written language, the difference between public and private writing, distinctive use in different genres, and the ways in which punctuation has changed over time.

Responses may make some of the following points:

- the role of punctuation in written language e.g. guiding a distant (often unknown) reader, where feedback is delayed; opportunities for planning, crafting and editing; marking grammatical boundaries
- parallel to prosodic features in spoken language i.e. shaping meaning

- the teaching of 'rules' vs personal preference ('taste')—with an awareness of the difference between optional/obligatory conventions
- punctuation as an 'art', where choices are based on knowledge of the conventions and an understanding of the effects created
- the link between clarity and accurate punctuation (particularly in formal writing)
- the role of tenor in assessing the importance of conventional punctuation e.g. informal context— as long as meaning is clear, accuracy is less important; formal context—lack of conformity to conventions is likely to incur negative assessment (e.g. SPaG at Key Stage 2, and SSPS for GCSE)
- distinctive genre use: e.g. legal language where punctuation is kept to a minimum to avoid any ambiguity; literature where writers can be experimental in order to create distinctive effects; academic writing where punctuation tends to be very traditional (a more-rather-than-less approach e.g. comma after any foregrounded phrase or clause at the beginning of a sentence)
- private writing (e.g. diaries, personal letters) will be less affected by the need for accurate/traditional punctuation, but public writing may be judged for deviation from 'rules' (e.g. university essay writing guides for undergraduates)
- the effect of electronic English e.g. informalisation (link to spoken language); personalised variations; the adoption of punctuation marks as a means of making tone explicit i.e. multiple exclamation marks or asterisks to reflect strong emotion; constructions from multiple marks e.g. smileys ;)
- public signs—accurate use of punctuation can be a practical model for usage; inaccuracy gives rise to complaints ('grammar guerrillas')
- reduced punctuation where space is at a premium e.g. headlines, small ads
- the use of a house style (consistency) e.g. publishing, newspapers
- changes over time:
  - ME and EME (particularly pre-Caxton 1476 printing press)—rhetorical function i.e. marks for reading a written text aloud
  - ModE, LME, PDE—grammatical function i.e. boundary markers between sections of a sentence
  - PDE—simplification i.e. more sparing use of the comma (e.g. often not used after fronted prepositional phrases, for nouns in apposition, addresses); reduction of hyphens in compound nouns (e,g. *bodyguard*, *checkout*) and adjectives (e.g. *nonstandard*, *coordinated*); more limited use of semicolon
- the problems of ambiguity (often comic) where punctuation is inaccurate
- attitudes/judgements—references to slipping standards (prescriptive approach)

Part (b)

This response should have an appropriate content, form and tenor for the target audience (11-14 year olds). Learners must produce a speech with a clear focus on the purpose (the importance of accurate writing) and a clear sense of the appropriate balance of technical and phatic lexical choices which will enable them to communicate important information **and** engage with the students they are addressing. Learners may make use of the extract in part (a) as a source of examples or background information.

Approaches should include:

- some sense of genre i.e. a written version of something that is to be spoken
- an awareness of the needs of the audience
- focused content e.g. information, explanations, justifications, examples
- effective stylistic choices e.g. clear and unambiguous, persuasive
- appropriate and engaging expression (perhaps with humour).

Part (c)

BAND	AO2	AO3
	10 marks	**10 marks**
5	**9-10 marks** • Confident interpretation of the task e.g. genre and purpose • Confident understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	**9-10 marks** • Confident analysis of contextual factors • Productive discussion of the construction of meaning • Perceptive evaluation
4	**7-8 marks** • Effective awareness of the task e.g. genre and purpose • Secure understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	**7-8 marks** • Effective analysis of contextual factors • Some insightful discussion of the construction of meaning • Purposeful evaluation
3	**5-6 marks** • Sensible awareness of the task e.g. genre • Sound understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	**5-6 marks** • Sensible analysis of contextual factors • Generally clear discussion of the construction of meaning • Relevant evaluation
2	**3-4 marks** • Basic awareness of the task e.g. genre • Reasonable understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	**3-4 marks** • Some valid analysis of contextual factors • Undeveloped discussion of the construction of meaning • Inconsistent evaluation
1	**1-2 marks** • Some general awareness of the task e.g. genre • Some understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	**1-2 marks** • Some general awareness of context • Limited sense of how meaning is constructed • Limited evaluation
0	**0 marks:** Response not credit worthy or not attempted	