

# IGCSE English Language

## Technical Skills: Punctuation

# Why learn punctuation

The written word is a form of communication sometimes the reader needs help with good punctuation to make the meaning clear

Stop stinky breath

Come in and eat my friend

**Correctly punctuate the title and the four sentences so that each can be read more clearly and the meaning of the text is understood.**

# Why learn punctuation?

## Why, learn punctuation!

The written word is a form of communication.  
Sometimes the reader needs help with good punctuation  
to make the meaning clear.

Stop, stinky breath!

Stop stinky breath!

Come in and eat, my friend.

# Punctuation matters because ...

- It helps to make written words clear and easy to understand.
- It gives the reader a better understanding of the mood or feelings behind the text.
- It can physically make the reader pause, use emphasis, ask a question or make an exclamation, or use inflection to make meanings clear.

# Punctuation Checklist

- ✓ Apostrophe
- ✓ Brackets or parentheses
- ✓ Capital letters
- ✓ Comma
- ✓ Colon and semi-colon
- ✓ Dash
- ✓ Ellipsis
- ✓ Exclamation mark
- ✓ Hyphen
- ✓ Question mark
- ✓ Quotation marks, speech marks, or inverted commas
- ✓ Period or full stop

# Punctuation Rules for English (1)

## Apostrophe '

It is used to indicate possession and is placed before **s** in the singular and after **s** in the plural.

**The man's hair was flecked with grey.**

**The dogs' tails wagged with happiness.**

If the plural does not end in **s**, the apostrophe is added before the **s** :

**Pick up the children's toys.**

The apostrophe is never used in the possessive adjective **its**.

**Look at its speed on the track!**

Apostrophes can also be used to abbreviate words to show where letters have been omitted:

**didn't (did not)      couldn't (could not)**

**I'll (I will)**

# Punctuation Rules for English (2)

## Brackets or parentheses ( ) [ ]

Brackets or parentheses are used to enclose words (or numbers) that explain meaning, clarify points, or add an aside, without interrupting the flow of the sentence.

**I often go to the beach (usually only when daydreaming) if I have time to unwind.**

Parentheses ( ) are more commonly used, but square brackets can be used on their own or in conjunction with parentheses. The rounded brackets (or parentheses) are used first, and then if there is more bracketing needed, the square brackets are used.

**I was reading an article (“How to understand txtspeak” [instant messaging text language] by T. Nayjer) whilst waiting for my child to pass her driving test.**

*Note: Parentheses is the American English term for ( ) whereas British English uses the term rounded brackets. Square brackets [ ] is the common term used in both British English and American English.*

# Punctuation Rules for English (3)

## Capital letter

Use capital letters:

To begin sentences; **I am a clown.**

for proper nouns; **Fiona is a lovely Scottish name.**

for the pronoun I;

at the beginning of directed (quoted) speech; **“It was hot today,” said the teacher.**

to begin words in titles; **Much Ado About Nothing (Shakespeare)**

for days of the week, months of the year and festivals/holidays; **Monday, October, Christmas, Fourth of July**

to begin words of exclamation; **Oh! Wow!**

for relatives' names if their title is used as their name; **Where is Dad going?**

and

for pronouns referring to God. **I think that God, in creating man, somewhat overestimated His ability. (Oscar Wilde)**



# Punctuation Rules for English (4)

## Comma ,

The main rule is that commas are used to separate parts of a sentence to make meanings clearer. So, use commas:

To separate items in a list\*; **milk, eggs, butter, and bread**

to separate consecutive adjectives; **The craggy, wizened old lady was wise.**

to separate names of people spoken to; **I cannot tell you, Anna, how proud I am of you.**

to separate the parts of a sentence that contain two complete statements joined by ‘but’, ‘nor’ or ‘for’ (and depending on preference with ‘and’ or ‘or’); **Hugo wanted to go to sleep, but the dogs would not stop barking.**

to separate a tag question; **You have the map, don’t you?**

to separate words and phrases – ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘thank you’; **Yes, of course you are right.**

to indicate a pause or to avoid confusion; **I had the choice of fish, chicken, or beef, and the fish was delicious.**

to set off direct quotations from a sentence. **The girls said, “We are going now.”**

\*Serial commas are used before ‘and’ and the last item in a list to avoid confusion, and in American English. It is not the usual convention in British English. Whatever you choose, be consistent.

# Punctuation Rules for English (5)

## Colon and semi-colon : ;

Colons are used:

To introduce lists; (**see the example above**)

before directed speech, or quotations; **She quoted Gandhi: ‘In a gentle way, you can shake the world’.**

to separate two main clauses in a sentence where the first clause is an introduction to the second. **I love cycling: it has helped me improve my health.**

Semi-colons are used:

To join two sentences closely linked in meaning or to complement each other; **Mary did not like spiders; therefore she skipped the Arachnid Zoo.**

to show main divisions in lists of longer items; (**see the examples shown**)

to divide more complex sentences. **When putting together a 2000-piece jigsaw, remember to do the following: find a clear space, where the puzzle can stay undisturbed; start with the outer edges, so that you know the actual size of the puzzle; and don’t forget to take breaks.**

# Punctuation Rules for English (6)

## Dash —

Not usually used in formal writing, dashes are used to replace commas, brackets, parentheses, semi-colons and colons. Dashes add emphasis, indicate an interruption or an abrupt change of thought.

I want to go—right now. (comma)

You can wear the blue shirt—or aqua shirt—to complement your eyes. (brackets or parentheses)

He has to work—his dog wants to play. (semi-colon)

For safety, before you ride—put on a helmet, check your tyres, and tell someone where you are going. (colon)

# Punctuation Rules for English (7)

## Ellipsis ...

Ellipsis marks are used when omitting words and consist of a space before and after three dots.

Use an ellipsis to omit words, sentences, lines, or paragraphs from a quoted passage.

**I love the Chinese proverb, “Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand.” (original)**

**I love the Chinese proverb, “Tell me ... show me ... involve me and I’ll understand.” (abbreviated with ellipses)**

Use an ellipsis to show pause in thought or in the flow of a sentence.

**I was just wondering ... why she was standing on her head.**

**“If you don’t mind ...” Angela said as I stood on her foot.**

# Punctuation Rules for English (8)

## Exclamation mark !

Use an exclamation mark in place of a period or full stop to show emphasis, surprise, when giving commands, for warnings, exclamations, and interjections.

**There is a frog in my soup!**

**What a surprise!**

**Put that down!**

**Don't touch that hot stove!**

**Oh, my!**

**Dear me!**

Do not overuse exclamation marks (called exclamation points in American English), and do not use them in formal writing.

# Punctuation Rules for English (9)

## Hyphen –

Use a hyphen:

to join words that form a single adjective;

**Well-dressed man**      **chocolate-coated raspberry**

To join compound numbers;

**Twenty-one**              **sixty-six**              **thirty-nine**

To avoid confusion with similar sounds between first syllable and second syllable;

**co-operation** (but **cooperation** in American English)

**re-sign** (to sign again, instead of **resign** [to leave a job])

with certain prefixes and suffixes;

**mid-October**              **T-shirt**              **self-image**

# Punctuation Rules for English (10)

## Question mark ?

A question mark replaces a period or full stop to indicate an interrogative sentence.

**What has four legs, a back, and you sit on?**

You can also use a question mark with a sentence that is half-statement and half-question.

**You are going to eat that, aren't you?**

# Punctuation Rules for English (11)

## Quotation marks, speech marks, or inverted commas “ ”

Use quotation marks for direct speech, quotations, and titles.

“Did you know,” said the erudite professor, “that the word ‘queue’ is the only word in the English language that is pronounced the same way when the last four letters are removed?”

My favourite book at the moment is “Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix”.



# Punctuation Rules for English (12)

## **Period or full stop .**

Use a full stop or period at the end of a sentence. A sentence consists of words that express a complete thought, and will contain a subject and predicate.

**Go over there, please.**

**It was a lovely day to go hiking.**

Periods are also used when abbreviating words, though only one period is used if the abbreviated word is the last in a sentence.

**He is a Ph.D ‘Doctor’, not an M.D.**

## Where to go from here...

There are many more rules to govern punctuation and changes in practice (especially between American English and British English). Try to be consistent when using punctuation and, if in doubt, research the specific punctuation symbol yourself.

You can:

Look in grammar and English Language books or on the Internet. (see the resources guides on the next two slides)

Check over your work for punctuation mistakes or inconsistencies. If you create documents on the computer, do not rely on the program checking your work.

Do not settle for punctuation mistakes in your work. Punctuation exists to help make your writing more clearly understood to the reader.

# Punctuation Resources

## INTERNET SUGGESTIONS:

[www.davidappleyard.com/english/punctuation.htm](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/punctuation.htm)

[www.grammarbook.com/punctuation\\_rules.asp](http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation_rules.asp)

[www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic/punctuation](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic/punctuation)

[owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/6/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/6/)

# Punctuation resources

- Worksheets created by Eddis Tutorial Services, LLC.
- Reading good books to improve punctuation and vocabulary (see book lists for IGCSE English Literature, for example)