

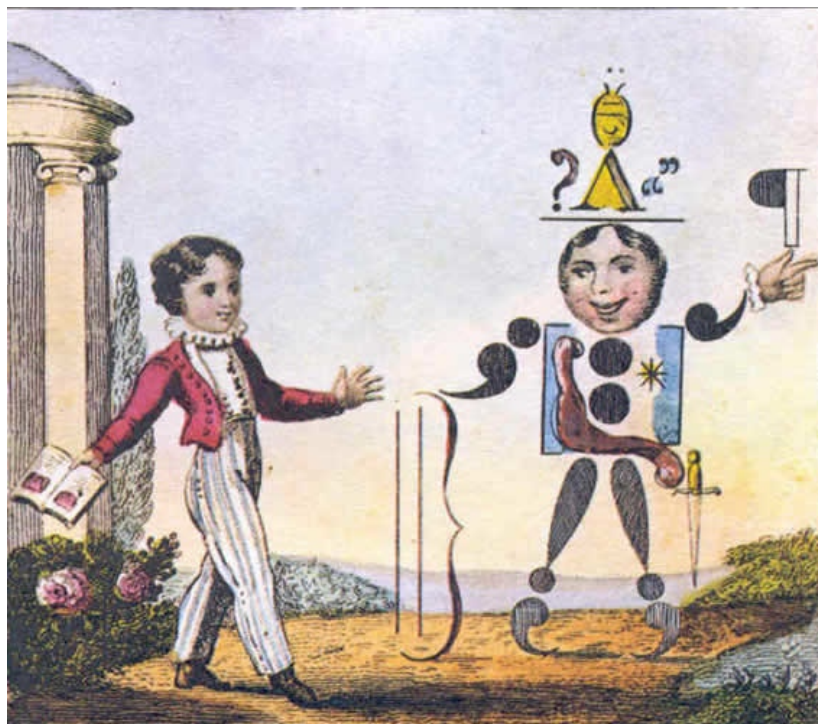
A level ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Component 1 Section B

Language Issues

Punctuation

Sample introductions: analysis of stimulus material



Sample question: analysis of stimulus material

Read through the following extracts from the beginning of some sample responses and think about the strengths and weaknesses in each case.

You should consider:

- the style
- the content
- the use of appropriate terminology
- the selection of apt examples.

RESPONSE 1

Nowadays using the wrong punctuation in formal contexts is often seen as lazy or uneducated, but some people would argue that it isn't needed in signs because you can understand St Andrews and St Andrew's just the same and if ambulances get lost because of punctuation then it's better not to have it at all. In some ways if all councils decided not to have apostrophes then it wouldn't matter. However, there is still a very prominent and clear view point on the use of standard punctuation and therefore on the person using the form.

RESPONSE 2

In their book 'An Introduction to English Grammar', the linguists Sidney Greenbaum and Gerald Nelson state that punctuation is a set of conventions developed by printers and publishers to help break down text into manageable units on the page. It is designed to help us understand the written word. In the light of this, it would be possible to argue that punctuation in road signs is not needed because in each of the examples given in the question the meaning is clear. The road sign naming a particular street uses the noun phrase "St Andrews Court" without a possessive apostrophe and without a full stop to mark the abbreviated 'Saint', but the lack of punctuation does not affect our ability to interpret the sign. If statistics suggest that the emergency services can be misdirected by the addition of punctuation, then this sign is an example of language change in action. Pragmatically, it is better to eliminate linguistic features that can cause problems in communication. It is also probably better to have no punctuation than to have council signs that break the rules such as the misuse of an apostrophe in the plural noun "camera's" and the confusion about where to put an apostrophe in an irregular plural noun like 'children'.

RESPONSE 3

In this essay I will be writing about punctuation in different types of language such as signs and newspapers. I will address key features of written language as well as the lexis and grammar. After looking at the context which is public its clear the writing should be formal so apostrophes should be in the right places and the anger is right.

RESPONSE 4

The newspaper article makes attitudes to punctuation very clear—it is a topic that gets people angry. This can be seen in the emotive language used in the article: the noun phrase “the lowest common denominator”, the evaluative adjective “dreadful” and the idiom “a slippery slope” clearly reflect the emotional response to Cambridge Council’s decision to remove apostrophes from their road signs. In this context, it is possible to understand the council’s reasons because the absence of punctuation does not affect meaning, and the argument that Sat Navs are confused by punctuation leading to errors by the emergency services is persuasive. However, punctuation is needed in longer written texts to help readers. As the American professor Paul Robinson argues punctuation is all about “clarity and simplicity” and we need it to make sure that written texts are easy to read and are not ambiguous. Apostrophes are not “superfluous” as Kathy Salaman says in the article and removing them from public signs sends the wrong kind of message to students at schools. In fact, it is important that students see them in everyday life if they are to learn how to use them accurately. Dr Sian Harris, a lecturer in English, points out in a ‘Guardian’ report that the best way for students to learn is to see “practical examples” of language in use on a day-to-day basis.

RESPONSE 5

Punctuation is part of written language. It is a set of signs that are used to divide up words on a page to make it easier for the reader. David Crystal says it is easier for people to argue about punctuation because there is only 12 signs to learn but David says there are far more words and meanings so grammar and spelling is more difficult to get correct. The signs can’t decide where to put the apostrophe for childrens and this is wrong because councils should get it right. The word “ban” makes it legal and the proper nouns “National Land and Property Gazeter” make it sound formal. The subject mainly revolves round apostrophes and these are difficult for lots of people so leaving them out can make sense. For the Prescriptivists this would not be a good example because the signs are breaking the rules.

RESPONSE 6

English is a complicated language and punctuation is the method we use to organise and control words on the page. The twelve major marks allow writers to guide readers so that meaning is clear and ambiguity is avoided. As Lowth writes in his 18th century grammar book, originally written so that his son would have a good educational background, if we had more punctuation symbols it would become too complicated for both writers and readers who would be ‘very perplexed’ and more likely to be embarrassed rather than helped by the system. Punctuation gives us a consistent methodology, but it is often made up of general rather than specific rules so writers need to be aware of the context and prepared to make personal judgements when necessary. This is evident in the newspaper article, where Cambridge council have decided to remove apostrophes from possessive noun phrases in road signs to simplify the information they provide. This can be seen in the sample sign: ST ANDREWS COURT. This is different from unintentional omission of punctuation as can be seen in the simple sentence ‘This wood is a childrens learning area.’ because it is an error.