

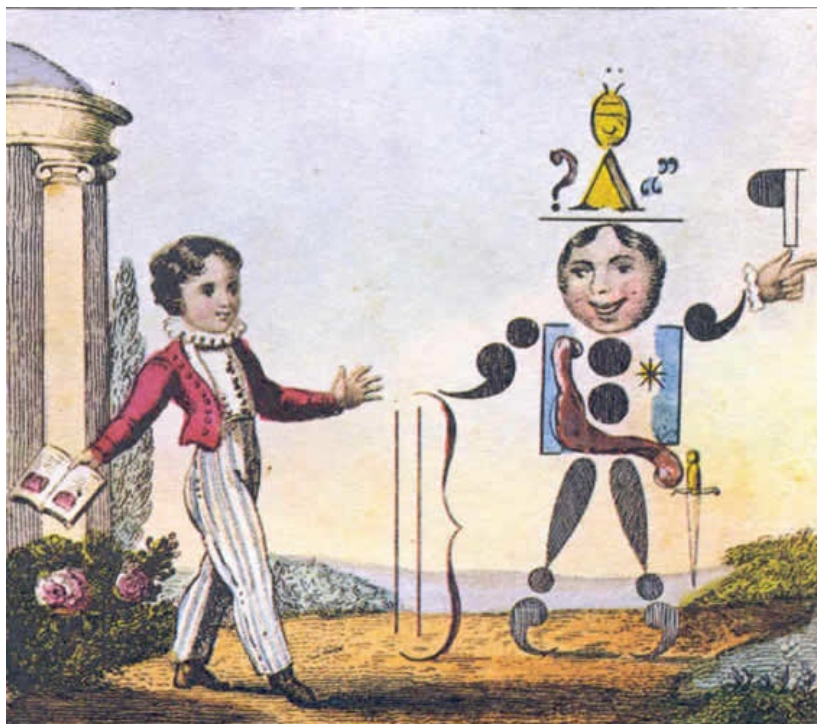
A level ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Component 1 Section B

Language Issues

Punctuation

Sample Marking Guidelines



Marking guidelines

Component 1 Section B: language issues

AO1	AO2	AO3
20 marks	20 marks	20 marks

Overview

The question focuses on a specific kind of language use (the way different writers use punctuation) and responses should analyse and evaluate the ways in which contextual factors affect the choices made. Examining the data given and/or selecting relevant points from the extract will provide a starting point for most responses, but there should also be evidence of wider reading (e.g. reference to theorists, commentators, linguists), awareness of the social implications of language use (e.g. attitudes to non-standard punctuation; assessment in academic settings), and linguistic knowledge (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; appropriately used terminology). Responses should be logically organised with clear topic sentences and a developing argument.

Additional 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. smiles ;)
- 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)