



PUNCTUATION GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

INSTRUCTIONS

Full stops

STOP me now (EASY)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

- 1 Two volunteer children are chosen to come out the front. One is the speaker (A) and one is the punctuator (B).
- 2 A starts talking, *slowly*, about whatever subject is easiest (last weekend, a film everyone has seen, etc). Whenever he or she comes to the end of a sentence, B holds up the full stop sign.
- 3 If B misses one, the class can call out. This reinforces what full stops do.
- 4 The person who corrects becomes B.
- 5 This goes on as long as the teacher feels is appropriate.

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Spot the Dot (EASY)

What you need:

Teacher preparation: A piece of text, which must be reworked to remove all punctuation. Suggestion: something about a reasonably well know subject, eg whales.

Stopwatch

What you do:

- 1 Children are all issued with the Spot the Dot text (unpunctuated). These are placed face down on the desk.
- 2 The teacher asks children to turn over the text. He/she starts the stopwatch.
- 3 Children take a red pen or texta and add in the full stops.



4 The first person to finish calls out "Spot the Dot".

The exercise can then be revised. This can be done using several passages.

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Scrambled sentences (CHALLENGING)

What you need:

Library cards

Pens

Teacher preparation:

(a) A set of simple sentences needs to be generated. Here are examples:

The dog chased after the cat.

The first man to walk on the moon was Neil Armstrong.

Star Wars is a very famous and popular film series.

(b) The words in the sample sentences must then be written individually on the cards, so a card with "The", "dog", etc. Add cards with the right number of full stops (each has its own card).

(c) A second set of cards, with the same words is produced. If you want three or four groups, more cards must be added.

What you do:

1 All children gather around the two (or three or four) tables.

2 The full set of word cards is laid out on each table, scrambled.

3 Children must look at the cards and suggest how they could be combined into sentences.

4 The group which manages to combine the word cards into the correct sentences - with the correct punctuation - calls out "Finished".

The exercise can be rearranged so that children do the card creation. This will add quite a lot of interest to the activity.

Capital letters

Add a Cap (EASY)

Library cards

Pens

Teacher preparation: A piece of text, which must be reworked to remove all punctuation. You may do as many of these samples as you think is needed. Suggestion: something about a well known subject,

eg the history of Australia. It would be good to add in a 'non standard' variation, such as a piece of poetry (unpunctuated).

What you do:

- 1 Children are all issued with the Add a Cap text (unpunctuated). These are placed face down on the desk.
- 2 The teacher asks children to turn over the text. He/she starts the stopwatch.
- 3 Children take a red pen or texta and add in capital letters and full stops.
- 4 The first person to finish calls out "Finished".

The exercise can then be revised. This can be done using several passages.

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Spot the proper noun (EASY)

What you need:

Library cards

Pens

Teacher preparation: The point here is to emphasise proper nouns and contrast them to common nouns. A list of proper nouns must be generated, and then an equally long list of common nouns. These must be written on to cards, one at a time, with no capital letters!

What you do:

- 1 Children gather around the table, on which are the cards.
- 2 Two children can compete to find and allocate the cards into two separate stacks - proper and common nouns, taking turns.
- 3 If a player makes a mistake, then they are replaced with someone else.
- 4 The game concludes when all the cards are in two piles.

This activity can be varied by asking children to create the cards.

Commas

Crazy Commas (EASY)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: The object is to find silly (and funny) examples of missing, or ambiguous commas. Here is a link to many such examples:

[Silly commas](#)

What you do:

1 Hand out examples of such 'wrong' uses of commas. Children need to be reminded that ambiguous sentences can result from incorrect use of commas. Here's an example:

I love my parents, Kylie Minogue and Kermit the Frog.

I love my parents Kylie Minogue and Kermit the Frog.



2 Children, working individually or in groups, have to look at what the problem with the meaning of the sentence is.

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Lists to go (EASY)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

- 1 Brainstorm lists on the board - be imaginative - not just shopping lists, but lists of dream holidays, footballers, film stars, etc.
- 2 Students must now write out sentences with their own lists, with commas added in.
- 3 They should share these with their partner, or group, and self correct.
- 4 The exercise can end with a reading out of the most imaginative lists.

(For information on the Oxford comma, see the end of these instructions.)

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Talking talk (CHALLENGING)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires some class preparation. A simple solution is to go through the lesson on quotations in *Skill Builders*, and look at the last three screens, the ones explaining quotes inside sentences.

It is important to impress on children the need for a comma to separate the quote itself from the rest of the sentence.

They must understand that the comma (or some other punctuation mark) is essential when dealing with direct speech.

What you do:

1 Brainstorm a series of quotes (eg 'I love my dog.' or 'I have been with my friend Sue.' or 'Come here, or else!') Put these in the middle of the whiteboard, leaving room on either side.

2 Now, in a contrasting colour, ask children to suggest

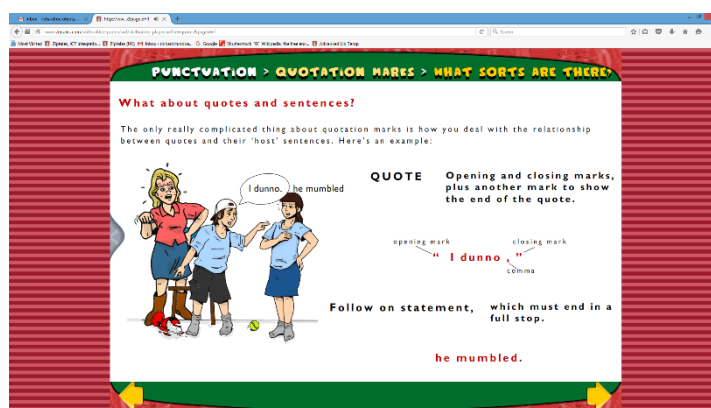
- a) *lead ins* to the quotes (eg *Maisy said*, 'I love my dog.')
- b) *add ons* to the quotes (eg 'I have been with my friend Sue,' *Julie said*.)
- c) clauses in the *middle* of the sentence (eg 'Come here,' *Mum said*, ' or else!')

3 Add in the commas and talk about why they are there.

4 Now ask children to make up their own sentences with two or more clauses, including a piece of direct speech.

5 Have these read out and select some to write up on the board.

6 A variation on this exercise which is more 'game like' is to have speed writing, using serial writers: A writes a word (She), B writes the next word (said), C writes a quote and the first word of the direct speech ('What), D writes the next word (are) etc. Do this at a modest speed first time, then speed it up. It will be lots of fun and instil the principles quite fast.



Apostrophes

Which one? (EASY)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires some preparation. There are numerous examples online, such as:

[Wrong use of apostrophe](#)



Take the best of these and put them onto a sheet, in two columns - giving both the correct and incorrect use - but scramble these so there is no clear pattern.

What you do:

- 1 Hand out the Which One sheet to the class.
- 2 Two or more teams must now go through the lists and circle the correct ones.
- 3 The team which finishes first must take the class through the list, and explain why one is right and the other wrong.

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Outrageous apostrophes (EASY)

What you need:

You can use the internet for this one. However have an appropriate selection open before working through it. Here is a link:

[Silly Apostrophes](#)

What you do:

- 1 Look at each example. Ask 'Is this right or wrong?'
- 2 Discuss the way people could get confused with the 'wrong' use.

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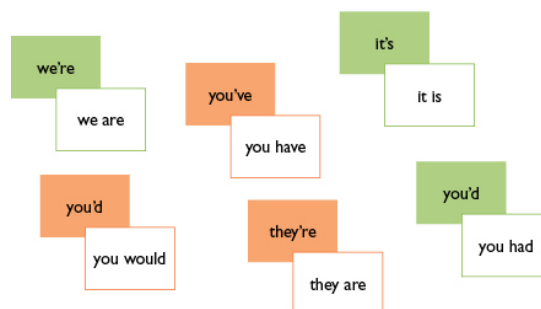
Contraction matchup (MEDIUM)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires a series of contracted and uncontracted words (as in the illustration). The best value is to have them scattered around the sheet randomly, and without any colour differentiation.



What you do:

- 1 Hand out the sheet.
- 2 Children have two minutes to match the contractions. This can be done by drawing a line between the full and contracted versions (eg "isn't" and the full form, ie "is not").
- 3 A variation on this is to have children generate their own examples and then hand them on to others to use.

Quotation marks (inverted commas)

A tale of two quotes (EASY)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

- 1 Write two headings on the board: **Direct speech** and **Indirect speech**.
- 2 Use simple examples (eg He said to stop it - vs "Stop it!" he said.). Draw the examples on the board.
- 3 Ask children to suggest more examples. Write these down under the two headings.
- 4 Discuss the way quotation marks (single or double) are used to mark the direct speech.



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Famous Quotes (EASY)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

This is a fun one, in which children compete to amuse one another with famous and even silly quotes.

1 Children use books or the internet, and find at least six quotes each that they really like.

2 In groups, they share their quotes and talk about what they mean. Each group chooses a short list of quotes.

3 As a class, these are read out and discussed.

4 An optional extra is to have children write a short piece about their favourite quote, relating it to their lives.

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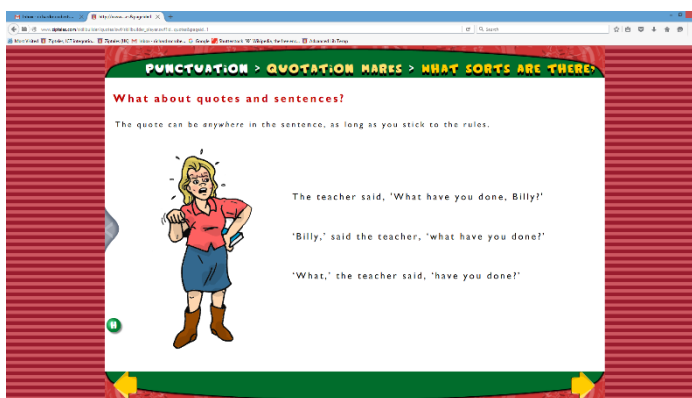
Quotes and commas (CHALLENGING)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires some work. The simplest thing is to go to the **Skill Builders** lesson on **Quotation Marks**. Revise the topic in detail.



What you do:

1 Look at the option of a *lead in* to the quote (eg The teacher said, "What have you done, Billy?").

2 Consider the option of the *add on* to the quote (eg 'What have you done, Billy?' said the teacher.)

3 Look at the *insert clause* option (eg "Billy," said the teacher, "what have you done?")

4 Ask children to generate their own examples and share them with their partners.

5 Have a selection of these read out to the class.

6 Discuss single and double quotes and the rule of consistency.

Colons and semicolons

Colon or not colon (EASY)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires the teacher to prepare a passage without punctuation. A short piece on a new children's film would be ideal. Copy the words but leave out the punctuation.

What you do:

- 1 Discuss with children the work that colons and semicolons do. Write up an example on the board.
- 2 Now ask children to punctuate the unpunctuated text. They can work in pairs or small groups.
- 3 Because colons and semicolons are complicated, this needs to be discussed in detail. It is important to note that while full stops and commas have a set use, the colons can be used or not - there are few 'wrong' answers with colons.

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What options? (MEDIUM)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

- 1 Revise the uses of colons and semicolons.
- 2 Discuss other ways the pauses can be achieved, using other marks or by recombining and using conjunctions.

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Simple or complex (CHALLENGING)

What you need:

No special equipment

What you do:

- 1 Revise the notion of simple and complex sentences. I would recommend the following SEL lessons: *What are simple sentences?* (3-4), *Expanding a simple sentence* (3-4) and *How to join sentences* (5-6).
- 2 Discuss the way meaning can be broken down into clauses and how to mark these clauses - using commas, full stops, colons and semicolons.
- 3 Ask children to write a sentence using semicolons.
- 4 Ask children to write a sentence using colons.
- 5 Share one or two of these sentences with the class.
- 6 Discuss ways to break up the sample sentences using other punctuation marks.

General Punctuation Activities

Punctuation by numbers (MEDIUM)

What you need:

Pens

Handouts

Teacher preparation: This activity requires the teacher to produce a passage with all the major punctuation marks. You will find plenty of examples online, or even borrow a passage from a Wikipedia article. (a) Count the punctuation marks (including capitals). There might be 6 full stops, 10 commas, 12 capitals, etc. (b) Now remove all punctuation.

What you do:

- 1 Write out the correct titles for the punctuation on the board. Leave a space against each.
- 2 Hand out the unpunctuated passage to the class. Tell them they have 5 minutes to count the numbers of each.
- 3 At the end of the time, ask for answers.
- 4 Now go through the passage and correct.
- 5 A variation is to have children do this in pairs themselves.

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What else could it mean? (CHALLENGING)

This one may be used with older children. It is a more sophisticated text which shows off very clearly the way punctuation can make a huge difference to meaning.

What you need:

The passage below

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is all about.

You are generous, kind, thoughtful.

People who are not like you admit to being useless inferior.

You have ruined me for other men.

I yearn for you.

I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart.

I can be forever happy.

Will you let me be yours?

Gloria



and

What you do:

1 Say, this passage could be punctuated differently and completely change its meaning. How?

2 Give children time to work it out. Here is an example of a different meaning:

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is.

All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you.

Admit to being useless and inferior.

You have ruined me.

For other men, I yearn.

For you, I have no feelings whatsoever.

When we're apart, I can be forever happy.

Will you let me be?

Yours,

Gloria



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The Oxford (or serial) comma

With the **Oxford Comma**:

We invited the rhinoceri, Washington, and Lincoln.



Without the Oxford Comma:

We invited the rhinoceri, Washington and Lincoln.



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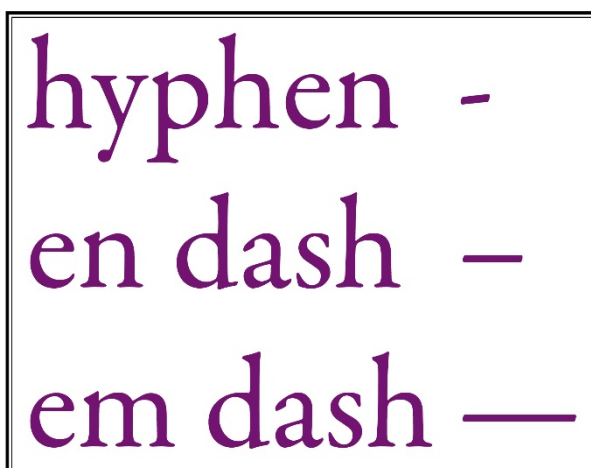
This is a variation, based on the house style of Oxford University Press, which adds in an 'extra' comma before the final 'and' in a list, as shown above.

It is very controversial. Some scholars applaud it, but most people see it as awkward, and many would regard it as simply a mistake (even when used correctly).

This webinar does not recommend it. However, it is worth teachers knowing that it is a 'respectable' mark, and should be part of what they bring to a consideration of commas.

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The en and em rule



The term 'rule' (ie straight line) is, like so many others in punctuation, based on the printer's word. However, it is quite reasonable to call them 'dashes'.

The 'en' rule was devised as a short dash – so called because it is the width of the letter 'n'. It shows a modest pause, as in 'He was happy at last – and he knew it.'

The 'em' rule was devised as a longer dash — so called because it is the width of the letter 'm', as in 'It takes two to lie — one to lie and one to listen.'

A hyphen, by contrast, is the very short horizontal 'rule' inserted inside a compound word, as in 'multi-function' or 'anti-trust', or to split up words to show key elements, like 'syll-ab-i- fic-a-tion', or where a long word is split between two lines. The latter must be a split on the syllable, of course.

It is reasonable to suggest that the en and em rules are basically the same as a comma - where a pause is needed before the sentence runs on to another element within the same block of meaning. A full stop is different, because it shows the end of a complete thought.