

OLYMPIAD STUDY GUIDE 2019

EXPANDED STUDY GUIDE FOR LANGUAGE SECTION

LANGUAGE SECTION

The language section of this Olympiad focuses on **punctuation**. All written texts need to be punctuated to provide clarity of meaning. When we speak we use pace, tone, pitch, modulation, facial expression and body language to add to our meaning. Punctuation marks replace these in our writing.

Punctuation is not an exact science and sometimes there can be slight differences in usage. A semicolon can, for instance, sometimes be used instead of a comma, but one cannot use, say, a bracket instead of a full stop to end a sentence. Like vocabulary, punctuation usage dates with time, but generally there are rules that can be applied to make our writing clearer and precise.

There is plenty on the Internet about the usage of punctuation. Much of it is written from an American English point of view. Here is a humorous extract (complete with American spelling) that you may find by going to the following link:

<https://www.thetranscriptionpeople.com.au/2015/04/14/a-humorous-look-at-how-punctuation-can-change-meaning/>:

A Humorous Look at how Punctuation can Change Meaning

April 14, 2015 [Blog](#), [Language](#) [No comments](#) [TTP](#)

According to the Oxford Dictionary, punctuation is defined as “the marks, such as full stop, comma, and brackets, used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and to clarify meaning”. Columbia University Press states: “In English, stress, pausing, and tonal changes interlock in a set of patterns often called intonations. Such features are represented by punctuation, indicated by signs inserted usually between words, and often following the feature they mark.”

It is clear from these definitions that punctuation serves an important purpose in writing, allowing us to separate sentences, showing us where to pause, where to place emphasis on particular words, and in clarifying the meaning of written language. Missing or overused punctuation marks can change meaning and/or confuse the reader. In extreme cases, ambiguous sentences that are hard to decipher can be misinterpreted, putting lives at risk. For example, unclear instructions on the use of mechanical equipment, or on medication packaging, could lead to fatal errors.

Fortunately, most of the time, poor use of punctuation creates amusement rather than life-threatening danger. Here are a few well-known humorous examples found on the Internet:

“Most of the time, travellers worry about their luggage” versus “Most of the time travellers worry about their luggage”. In reading the second sentence one could be excused for thinking of time-travellers who are concerned about losing their luggage while crossing the boundaries of the time and space continuum!

“We’re going to learn to cut and paste kids!” versus “We’re going to learn to cut and paste, kids!” Commas certainly do make a difference.

“Let’s eat, grandpa” versus “Let’s eat grandpa”. Punctuation can potentially save lives!

The rogue use of a full stop after the second sentence in the following example (from a sign on a building) has changed the meaning of the message, and instead of conveying a kind thank you has concluded it with a rather rude directive: “Thank you! Your donation just helped someone. Get a job.” I am sure that causing offence was not the intention of the writer!

For many modern employers, poor spelling and punctuation received on job applications is a source of constant frustration. Here is a contemporary example from someone’s résumé:

“Interests include: Cooking dogs, shopping, dancing, reading, watching movies ...” The missing comma after “cooking” makes this person look rather sinister (or at least quite silly), don’t you think?

Following is another popular demonstration of the way that punctuation can change meaning. This example has gone viral on the Internet: “An English professor wrote the words: ‘A woman without her man is nothing’ on the chalkboard and asked his students to punctuate it correctly. All of the males in the class wrote: ‘A woman, without her man, is nothing.’ All the females in the class wrote: ‘A woman: without her, man is nothing.’ Punctuation is powerful.” You can definitely say that again!

Perhaps one of the most academically debated punctuation marks is that of the ‘Oxford comma’. The Oxford comma is an optional comma before the word ‘and’ at the end of a list:

Please bring me a cup, saucer, and spoon.

The origins of the Oxford comma are difficult to determine, however it has traditionally been used by printers, readers, and editors at the Oxford University Press. Although not standard protocol for all writers and publishers, it can clarify the meaning of a sentence when the items in a list are not single words:

These scarves are available in black and white, pink and purple, and blue and green.

Omitting the Oxford comma can sometimes result in odd misunderstandings:

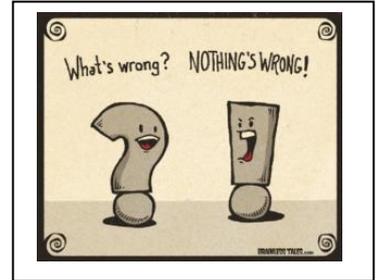
I love my parents, Kylie Minogue and Kermit the Frog.

Without the Oxford comma, the sentence above could be interpreted as stating that you love your parents, and your parents are Kylie Minogue and Kermit the Frog!

Here is the same sentence with the Oxford comma:

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

As these examples show, mastering the use of punctuation is as relevant today as it was many centuries ago!



.....
A wonderfully amusing, and yet erudite, text on punctuation is the following:

Truss, Lynne. 2006. *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: A Zero Tolerance approach to Punctuation*. New York: Penguin Random House LLC

The puzzling title is explained in the blurb on the back cover that reads as follows:

A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.

“Why?” asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.

“I’m a panda,” he says at the door. “Look it up.”

The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.

“**Panda**. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.”

So, punctuation really does matter, even if it is only occasionally a matter of life and death.

Sticklers, unite!

If the phrase were corrected to “Eats shoots and leaves” what part of speech would “shoots” and “leaves” now be? Note how the simple omission of a comma has significantly changed in meaning.

Now read the following “Punctuation Chart” written by a SACEE member, a former teacher of English and now a retired headmistress. We gratefully thank Mrs Natalie Stear for permission to reprint it.

PUNCTUATION CHART

1	COMMA ,	3	COLON :	7	ELLIPSIS DOTS ...	10	BRACKETS () or []
a	Indicates a slight pause within the sentence.	It introduces: a) a quotation b) a speech or summary c) a list or series of ideas d) an explanation or definition e) a title or reference f) It may also replace a semicolon to balance two parts of a sentence in contrast (antithetical clauses)		a	Indicate omitted words in extracts or quotations	a	Indicate parenthesis (additional information)
b	Indicates words in apposition.			b	Mark interruptions.	11	INVERTED COMMAS (or) QUOTATION MARKS ‘ ’ or “ ”
c	Used before or after a participial phrase.			c	Indicate words understood.	a b c d	Used for: quotations announcements titles (titles of books should be underlined) direct speech.
d	Marks off a person addressed or spoken to (nominative of address).			8. DASH	11	APOSTROPHEE ’	
				a	Emphasises what precedes or follows.	a	Indicates possession (ownership).
				b	Provides a dramatic pause.	b	Marks missing letters in contracted words or phrases.
				c	Interrupts abruptly.	c	used before plural ‘s’ in abbreviations, numbers or letters.
				d	Sets apart an afterthought or reflection		
				e	Indicates hesitant speech.		

e	Separates a list of items or series of words or phrases (replaces 'and').	4 FULL STOP . a) Marks the end of a sentence. b) Used after initials and certain abbreviations, in which the last letter of the abbreviation is <i>not</i> the last letter of the word	f	Hints at an unexpected thought in an incomplete sentence.		
			g	Indicates omitted words or letters		
			h	Indicates parenthesis more decisively than commas or brackets		
f	Used after 'yes' or 'no' when they begin a sentence in answer to a question.	5 QUESTION MARK ? Used at the end of a direct question to: a) indicate a query b) express doubt	9	HYPHEN -		
g	Separates expressions or exclamations	6 EXCLAMATION MARK !	a	Divides a word to 1 carry on an incomplete word to the next line 2 clarify pronunciation 3 indicate precise meaning.		
h	Introduces direct speech.	Ends: a) a sentence b) an interjection c) a command				
i	Indicates an ellipsis (omitted words).					
j	May be used to indicate parenthesis.	Indicates tone in a) strong emotion b) determination c) astonishment d) irony	b	Forms compound nouns. adjectives		
k	Marks off a non-defining relative clause.		c	Indicates stammering		
2	SEMICOLON ;		d	Used in place of 'to' between places, dates, times.		
a	Separates one part of a sentence from another, when a longer pause than that of a comma is required.		e	Helps to avoid ambiguity		
b	Replaces a					

	connective (conjunction, adverb) between clauses.						
c	Does the work of a comma when there are too many commas in a sentence.				THE CAPITAL LETTER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used at the beginning of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a sentence - direct speech - a line of verse (optional) - a book title • First letter in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - proper nouns - proper adjectives - titles of people • And used or <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - initials - some abbreviations - pronoun 'I' 		
d	Separates clauses in which one is elliptical						
e	Precedes certain connectives within a sentence, e.g. however, moreover, therefore.						
f	May be used instead of a colon to balance parts of a sentence, or separate antithetical clauses.						

Read the following light-hearted piece and use the above "Punctuation Chart" to answer the questions.

THE PUNCTUATION PEOPLE'S PARTY

<p>"Let's party!" said Mr Hyphen. "I just love a party."</p>	
<p>"But who's going to host this party?" asked Mr Full Stop, who was stifling a yawn. "It takes quite a lot of work to host a party and I don't know who would be prepared to take it on. I'm not a go-getter; on the contrary, I usually put a stop to things."</p>	
<p>"Oh, but you could do it – you are the most well-known of all the Punctuation People and the one person everyone learns to know from the start."</p>	5
<p>Mr Full Stop, who was clearly pleased with this compliment, answered, "Well ... if you put it that way, perhaps I could try"</p>	
<p>And so the party went ahead and representatives of all the twelve punctuation marks used in English were invited. Mr Hyphen and Mr Full Stop considered asking the other foreign punctuation marks (such as those used in Spanish and Russian) but decided against it as they did not have a big enough venue.</p>	10
<p>When Mrs Colon entered the party venue, she noticed that Mr Comma was sitting alone on a sofa, looking dejected. Now, Mrs Colon was one of those sophisticated punctuation people who reflected on what had come before. She knew that in these current times of Twitter, Facebook, emails, SMS texts, etc. things had gone awry.</p>	15
<p>"But what's wrong?" asked Mrs Colon as she sat down beside him. "Why are you looking so depressed?"</p>	
<p>"Nobody likes me," replied Mr Comma. "They say I'm awfully common and don't do anything important like the Mr Brackets and Ms Question Marks. I think I'm misunderstood."</p>	20
<p>"Nonsense!" retorted Mrs Colon. "If anyone is common, misunderstood and overused, it is those noisy Mr Exclamation Marks. Look at the way they creep into the writing of youngsters and even the tweets of Donald Trump. They have positively taken over from the rest of us. It is they who are common. Look at them here. They can't even behave themselves at this party. They've invaded the dance floor and quite dominated the dance. They've turned it into a dance macabre."</p>	25
<p>Ms Semicolon, who had often helped Mr Comma in the past, observed this little tableau from across the dance floor and paused a moment. "Should I intrude and help make things clearer?" she wondered. "Mr Comma is often used too frequently; I, too seldom – but he has a vital role to play." With that, she decisively stepped over and said, "My dear Mr Comma, I cannot stand by and see you so sad. Remember that you direct our lives and give us breathing space. You are a steadying and wise friend who helps us make sense of the world."</p>	30
<p>Upon hearing such shining and previously hidden truths, Mr Comma positively glowed with joy.</p>	
<p>"If anyone is misunderstood," continued Ms Semicolon, "it's Mr Apostrophe. Just this weekend I was encouraged on Twitter to 'Enjoy the weekends braai's' and sent 'lot's of love'."</p>	35
<p>At this point, Mr Dash came rushing over to them. "Did you see that?" he cried out in alarm. "Dear Mr Full Stop has been pushed off the dance floor and that loud-mouthed Mr Exclamation</p>	

Mark has taken over his partner (the curvaceous Miss Question Mark) and is now cuddling up far too close to her.”	
Mr Full Stop had, indeed, been ousted from the dance floor – and it was he who was hosting this party. Mr Comma, who now felt quite rejuvenated and strong said, “This has gone too far. A Punctuation People’s dance ought to be a work of art – like a painting, a song or a poem. Let’s again play our parts and re-enter the dance to create something beautiful, graceful and filled with meaning.	40
With that, all the Punctuation People took to the dance floor and swung into elegant movements. The Exclamation Marks joined in, too, but taking their rightful place and without overwhelming the others.	45
“Well,” sighed Mr Full Stop at the end of the evening. “I’m so glad I didn’t put a stop to it all at the beginning. It’s been such a wonderfully illuminating dance filled with meaning, emotive expression and ... a touch of class.”	50

1	Explain the use of the	
1.1	exclamation mark in line 1	1
1.2	apostrophes in “who’s” (line 2), “don’t” (line 3) and “I’m” (line 3)	1
1.3	semicolon in line 4	1
1.4	dash in line 5	1
2	What do we call words that are formed by using a hyphen such as “go-getter” (line 4) and “well-known” (line 5)?	1
3	There are two sets of ellipsis dots in rows 7 and 8.	
3.1	Why are they used?	2
3.2	Why has the set in line 8 got four dots?	1
3.3	Is it ever permissible to use more than three dots?	1
4	Consider why the writer states that “Mrs Colon was one of those sophisticated punctuation people who reflected on what had come before”. Use the following sentences to explain your reason:	
4.1	Sibongile and Mike are typical of those scholars who enter the English Olympiad: resourceful, deep-thinkers and intelligent.	2
4.2	Being a teenager is the same problem everyone faces in some way or another: balance. It’s important to socialise, but also to be engaged and focused on our studies and be loving children to our parents.	2
5	Explain the use of the following punctuation marks in line 28.	
5.1	the semicolon	1
5.2	the dash	1
6	The abbreviations “Mr”, “Mrs”, “Miss” and “Ms” have no full stops after them.	
6.1	Explain why this is correct.	1
6.2	Write out each of these abbreviations in full.	4

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| 7 | Correct the two tweets in line 35. | 4 |
| 8 | Explain the use of the dash in line 40. | 1 |
| 9 | With which punctuation marks could the dashes in line 42 be replaced? | 1 |
| 10 | Explain the use and effect of the ellipsis dots in line 50. | 2 |
| 11 | Explain the use and effect of the ellipsis dots in line 50. | 2 |

TOTAL MARKS = 30

See the SACEE website: <http://sacee.org.za/> for the answers.

The above are the type of questions you can expect in the examination. Mark your answers and see how you would have done if this were in the examination.

SOME MORE PUNCTUATION POINTS

The following should be read in conjunction with the “Punctuation Chart” above. It expands on some points.

Contractions

Contractions are abbreviated words that reflect how we **say** the words when we are speaking: **I’ve** for **I have** ; **we’ll** for **we will**; **Lucy’s arrived** for **Lucy has arrived**. Contractions should not be used in formal writing.

Contractions are formed by the use of apostrophes that show that a letter has, or letters have, been left out. One inserts the apostrophe where the missing letter has, or letters have, been omitted.

1 Write out the following contractions in full:

I’ll, there’s, they’d, shouldn’t, she’s

2 Write contractions for the following:

It is, would have, might not, we will not

It’s and Its

Note that **it’s ALWAYS** stands for **it is** or **it has**.

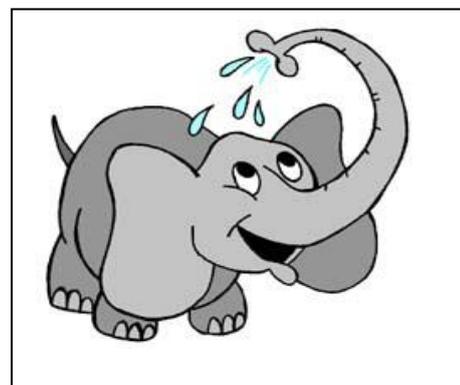
e.g. **It’s** great weather.

It’s been hot here.

The possessive form **its NEVER** has an apostrophe.

e.g. The dog chased **its** tail.

The elephant squirted water on **its** head.



3 Correct the following incorrect usages of *it's* and *its* and tick the correct ones:

(Hint: When in doubt say "it is" or "it has" to yourself to decide whether or not it is correct.)

Natalie: The car is making a dreadful noise in it's engine.

Mark: It's the exhaust. Its got a hole in it.

Natalie: It's done that before and it was very expensive to fix!

Mark: It's because we bought a cheap one last time. They corrode very quickly here near the sea.

Natalie: Shouldn't it's guarantee be valid still? I'm sure that its within a year since we bought it.

Mark: You're right – its worth looking up.

Natalie: Where did you put that guarantee?

Mark: Its in the dresser in the lounge.

Natalie: Oh, that's where it is! Its been worrying me that I couldn't find it.

Mark: Let's see if it's still under guarantee.

Natalie: Its probably one week over the time limit! My dad always said a thing is made with a shelf-life to last just until it's guarantee time expires.

Mark: Here, I've found it – it's time has expired!



Capitals

The use of capitals differs from one language to another. Note the following rules that apply to English:

- **The first letter of names of people, places, languages, and countries are capitalised:**

Boris, Cape Town, Zulu, the West Rand, Italian, Manhattan Island, Rose Cottage, 9th Ave, The Tabby Cat shop, the islands of Japan, Mike's Kitchen, Zimbabwe, the Sorbonne University, The Little Shop on the Hill, Xhosa, Palestine, The University of the Witwatersrand, Wits, Collegiate Girls' High School, the Transkei coast, You magazine, etc.

- **The first letter of titles are capitalised:**

Prof. Gxowa, Mr Jacobs, Ms Ahmed, Dr L.C. Duncan, Judge Makhubele, Nurse McGregor, etc.

Hyphens

Hyphens are used

- to join words together to make one compound word:
bother-in-law, well-dressed, cross-examine, Morubane-Mhlahlo, fork-lift truck, co-operator, heart-hearted villain, ten-year-olds, two-day pass, a twelve-year-old girl, etc.
- to form numbers:
twenty-two, one hundred and fifty-one, three thousand, eight million, four hundred and thirty-one, forty-four, Seventy-three rand and thirty-two cents, etc.
The rule, here, is to hyphenate numbers below a hundred, but not above.
- to form fractions:
nine-tenths, four-fifths, etc.
- to carry on an incomplete word at the end of a line. This must be done between syllables.
Never leave only one letter at the end of a line. Monosyllables cannot be divided.

Read the letter written to a local newspaper in Port Elizabeth by a school principal. Miss ffolllott was most particular about the spelling of her surname.

“It’s” a source of great irritation

I feel **it’s** time that the *Herald* editorial staff enlightened **its** reporters about the correct use of **“its”** and **“it’s”**! **It’s** setting a very poor example to **its** readers, especially **its** young readers.

It’s becoming a regular habit of some reporters to use **“it’s”** (contraction of “it is”) instead of the possessive adjective **“its”**.

It is (**its**) a source of great irritation to me and, no doubt, many others!

Daphne ffolllott
Centrahill
Port Elizabeth

The following entry is taken from
Fowler’s Modern English Usage.

ff. In old manuscripts the capital F was sometimes written *ff*. This is the origin of the curious spelling of some English surnames: *ffolllott*, *fforde*, *ffoulkes*, *ffrench*, and others. The distinction of possessing such a name is naturally prized: readers of *Cranford* will remember Mrs Forrester’s cousin Mr *ffoulkes* who always looked down on capital letters and said they belonged to lately invented families; and it was feared he would die a bachelor until he met a Mrs *ffarrington* and married her, ‘and it was all owing to her two little *ffs*’.

- 1 Explain why “it’s” in the heading to the letter is in inverted commas. 1
- 2 If you were writing the letter by hand, how would you indicated the name of the newspaper? 2
- 3 Explain the use of the comma after “readers” (line 4). 1
- 4 Explain the use of the two commas in the last two lines of the letter. 1
- 5 Fowler has used a colon twice in the entry. In both cases, they are used to introduce

	something. Use the punctuation chart to explain each usage.	2
6	Fowler has made use of the Oxford comma. After which word does it occur?	1
7	Why has Fowler used a semicolon after “families”?	1
8	Fowler has used single inverted commas to indicate the quotation at the end of the entry. Could he have used double?	1

TOTAL MARK = 10

See the SACEE website: <http://sacee.org.za/> for the answers.

Defining and non-defining relative clauses

A relative clause is connected to the subject noun by the relative pronouns such as: who, whose, whom, that and which.

There are **NO** commas at either end of the **defining clause**:

e.g.



- The grade 11 girls who studied hard passed well. (all grade 11 girls studied hard)
- My brother who annoys me intensely is really good at maths. (he only has one brother and he annoys him.)
- The soccer players who wore pink bows in their hair were booed by the crowd. (all soccer players wore pink bows in their hair)

There **ARE** commas at either end of a **non-defining clause**:

e.g.

- The grade 11 girls, who studied hard, passed well. (only those grade 11 girls who studied hard, passed well)
- My brother, who annoys me intensely, is really bad at maths. (the implication is that he has more than one brother)
- The soccer players, who wore pink bows in their hair, were booed by the crowd. (only those who wore pink bows in their hair were booed by the crowd)

The sense of the non-defining clause is thus parenthetical, as though the words had been enclosed in brackets. The sense is like a stage “aside”, and thus implying that they contain gratuitous information.

Now imagine the following scenario:

The multi-millionaire Percy writes his last will and testament without any legal assistance, but it is signed by his faithful retainers, thus making it legal.

My estate is to be shared equally between my sons who are wonderful rugby players and their sister, Matilda, who is a wonderful cook.

There are three sons and one daughter.

The will is disputed by

- 1 Matthew who has hardly played any rugby and whom his two brothers want to exclude from the inheritance
- 2 Matilda, the sister, who is sure that the word “between” implies that she should get half the estate and her brothers share the other half.



How would the lawyers representing the various parties argue their clients' cases?

Punctuation and clarity of language matters!

Spot the illiteracies:

1

DRIVE SLOWLY
Be considerate of our learner's
live's

(perhaps the school is for a cat)

2

TODAY'S SPECIAL'S

Avo's @ R6.99 each

Bean's R5.59 @ kilo

Apple,s R12.99 a bag

Tomato's R8.99 @ kilo

(some very large beans sold here)

The @ symbol in English is the “at sign” that is used in e-mail addresses. It has a delightful name in Afrikaans. Do you know what it is called in Afrikaans?

3 Would you use an apostrophe when writing plurals such as: DVDs, TVs, PCs, CVs, etc?

4 Which of the following are correctly written?

vetoos or veto's; videos or video's; grade 12s or grade 12's; MPs or MP's; bananas or banana's.

Possessives

- The **singular possessive** is formed by adding an apostrophe 's to the word.
- The plural possessive is formed by adding only the apostrophe ' **after the s** if the word ends in s.
- If the **plural** does **not** end in s then apostrophe 's is added.

Here are some examples:

SINGULAR	PURAL
the girl's instincts	the girls' instincts
the school mistress's classroom	the three school mistresses' classrooms
the horse's mouth	the horses' mouths
the school's policy	the schools' policy
a rand's worth	five rands' worth
the child's shirt	the children's shirts
a bachelor's degree	the people's rights
everyone's ideas	men's possessions
Anne's book	the mosquitoes' bites

NOTE: Possessive determiners and possessive pronouns do NOT take an apostrophe:

Possessive Determiners		Possessive Pronouns	
my	our	mine	ours
your	your	yours	yours
his, her, its	their	his, hers, its	theirs

1 Form possessives: the women ... statement; another ... interests; Bob ... shoes; the babies ... bibs; three week ... notice; somebody else ... ideas; the soccer team ... victory; the three learner ... pens; your ... team; the two doctor ... patients; Sipho ... good results; everyone ... ideas.

2 Correct the following sentences.

- My mother in law, Mrs. Squire Howe, is arriving to stay with us to-day.
- It, ll be her birthday on the 16'th.
- She s re-covering from an operation, but since she is an exnurse she is careful to co operate with the Doctor and should heal soon.

- I've just recovered my lounge suite in a lovely blue grey floral. I hope my Mom in law will approve of it.
- While she is here I hope to relax on the stoep so I can attain that long legged, sun tanned look that you see in the Fashion magazines.

See the English Olympiad website, <http://www.saenglisholympiad.org.za>, or the SACEE website: <http://sacee.org.za/> for the answers.

