Tricky Punctuation in Cartoons

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For Lucas,
not because his writing wasn't perfect,
but because it *was*.

Contents

Introduction to Educators and Parents 7

1. Why We Need Punctuation 11

2. Capital Letter 17

3. Full Stop 41

4. Exclamation Mark. 55

5. Question Mark. 61

6. Listing Comma 69

7. Serial (Oxford) Comma 75

8. Name-Separating Comma 79

9. Clause the Santa Claus 87

10. Comma Separating Clauses. 95

11. Main and 'Sub' Clauses 101

12. Comma after Fronted Adverbials. 115

13. Commas 'Hugging' a Subordinate Clause 121

14. Relative Clauses and Puppies 125

15. Two or More Main Clauses 135

16. Commas – Putting It All Together 141

17. Colon. 151

18. Semicolon 157

19. Dash 165

20. Brackets 171

21. Parenthesis 177

22. Ellipsis 183

23. Hyphen 187

24. Inverted Commas 197

25. Possessive Apostrophe 205

26. Contracting Apostrophe 213

27. How to Solve a Problem like Zed?. 223

28. Zed Has the Last Word 229

Answer Key 231

Further Reading 263

Index 267

Introduction to Educators and Parents

Correct punctuation:
the difference between
a sentence that's well-written
and a sentence that's, well, written.

Anonymous

Why another reference guide?

This book does not aspire to be another English language reference guide. Its purpose is to make the correct use of punctuation marks achievable for those who rarely use them in places other than the end of a sentence. The book's humour-packed content is designed to be easily processed and hard to put down. References to social media humour make it relevant to young people's everyday experience of electronic literacy.

Most of all, the book's aim is to demystify a belief that punctuation, like spelling and grammar, is difficult to learn if one does not have strong academic skills, is less of a logical thinker, or has a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia. Punctuation does make a lot of sense, but that may not be obvious to someone who does not find traditional SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) classroom instruction or reference guides helpful. This book hopes to ignite, or re-ignite, curiosity about punctuation that might have been lost on some academic journeys.

Who is this book for?

The book is for anyone, but should particularly help learners in Key Stage 2 and 3 (aged 9–15) who:

- prefer to learn by seeing and doing, not extensive reading and/or listening
- have tried traditional SPAG strategies but with limited success
- find it difficult to remember and generalise punctuation rules

- have attentional difficulty and/or poor sequential processing skills
- have dyslexia or other specific learning difficulty (SpLD).

I have used the multisensory strategies (building blocks for complex and compound sentences, thumbs for possessive apostrophes, and folded paper for contracting apostrophes) with Year 5 (aged 9–10) and Year 6 (aged 10–11) children, who worked very enthusiastically and were certainly not too young to grasp the complexities of written English language.

If introduced at any point during Key Stage 3, the book can support effective GCSE revision. In the words of the parents of a student I tutored, 'the penny has to drop' before the learner has the confidence to engage with structured SPAG tasks.

How does the book work?

The book assists in development of punctuation skills via enquiry-based learning (also known as problem-based learning), where cartoons are problems to work out in order to understand how punctuation works, and also to make the reader smile. The humorous drawings make the book a visual guide that demands immediate focus and provides humour. Most importantly, the cartoons assist readers in working out punctuation problems themselves before referring to written summaries of rules.

Humour is a kind of play used in the book to challenge the learner's way of thinking about punctuation. Unexpected punch lines suddenly make the dreaded subject funny, thus less daunting. Continuous elements of surprise strengthen the process of self-discovery and consolidate learning when 'Aha!' moments are shared, the way jokes are passed around. The student does not need to read the book 'from cover to cover' but can dip in and out, as they would treat a traditional joke book.

Tricky Punctuation in Cartoons is a visual guide and workbook in one. It encourages a flexible approach to working with punctuation rules, shifting the focus away from deductive to inductive learning. This bottom-up approach enables the learner to move from something specific to more general, to detect patterns from examples and to infer rules. Instead of a rule-driven approach, it is a rule-discovery one. Using problem-based learning, the learner gradually becomes proficient in generalising their new knowledge onto other areas of literacy. Without abandoning elements of deductive teaching altogether, in order to help consolidate newly discovered knowledge, summaries and additional explanations are provided in text boxes.

English and SEN teachers are likely to agree that it is not possible to teach punctuation marks without placing them within the context of grammatical structures. In the second part of the book, alongside implicit humour, concrete

props are introduced in the form of building blocks, the student's hands and folded paper. These have positive association with play that effectively bridges the gap between the concrete and more abstract contents. The book replaces the auditory/oral instruction with a visual/practical one, putting the student in control, particularly those with SpLD/dyslexia. The Answer Key at the end of the book is available to download from www.jkp.com/catalogue/book/9781787754027.

The book is not a structured literacy programme. It does not replace any part of current literacy instruction at school. It is intended to complement it to equip the learners with additional ways to remember tricky punctuation rules.

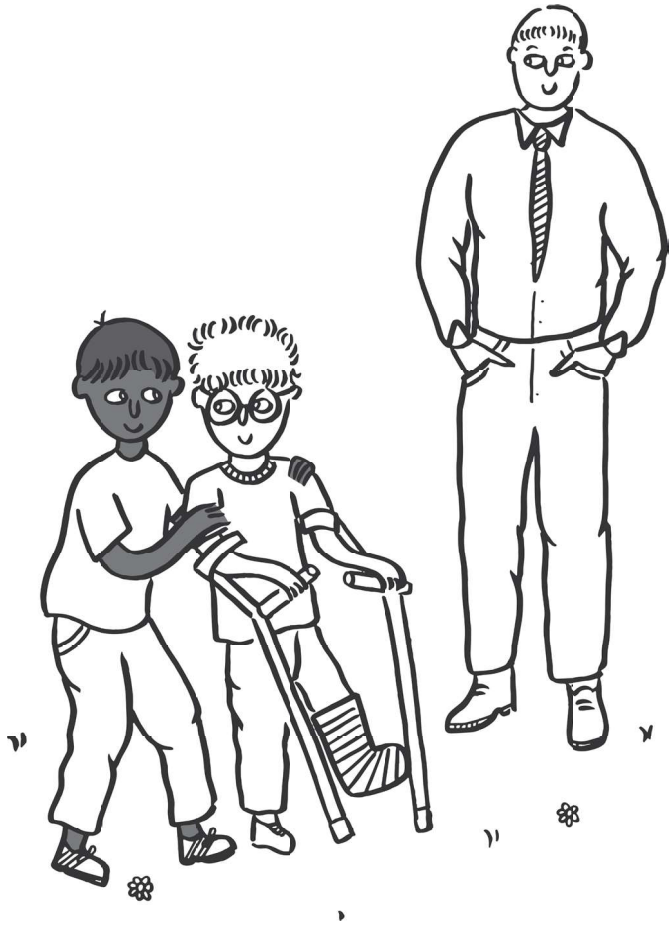
1

Why We Need Punctuation

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll... Actually, Zed, my robot assistant, will read you a story.



THANKS FOR HELPING BILLY GET OUT OF THE HOUSE



Thanks for helping Billy get out of the house.

Wait! That's a wrong story. Billy is not a boy and he definitely doesn't have a leg in plaster. Billy is a mad dog that always gets into trouble.



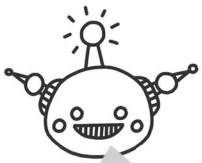
Thanks for helping**,** Billy**.** Get out of the house**!**



STOP AND THINK

How did Zed mix the two stories?

It read the two sentences as one because it didn't see the full stop. It didn't read the comma or exclamation mark, either.



YOU CANT READ PUNCTUATION MARKS