

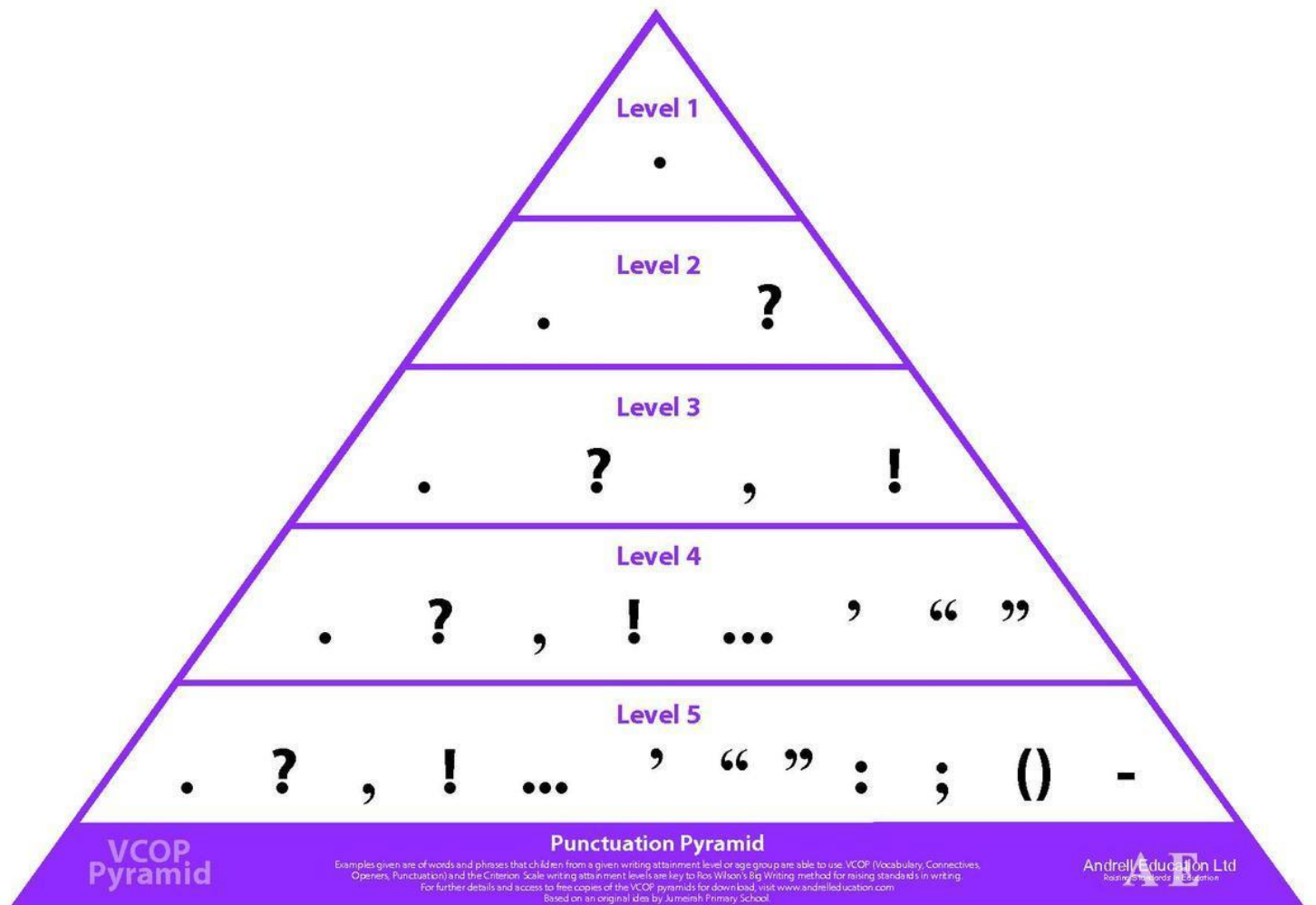
Punctuation

Helping your child with
punctuation at home.

It is important that children use a wide range of punctuation, in order to clearly structure their writing, clarify meaning and add impact. This guide will provide information on the use of each punctuation mark, along with examples that can be discussed with your child.

The Punctuation Pyramid

The pyramid below shows differentiation in punctuation. It starts at the top with basic punctuation and progresses down to complex punctuation, such as speech marks, colons and brackets. To achieve a level 5 in their writing, children must be confident using the full range of punctuation.



Capital letter (A)

Used to denote the beginning of a sentence or a proper noun (names of particular places, things and people).

e.g. Joel has karate every Monday afternoon.
In January, the children visited London Zoo.

Full stop (.)

A mark used to end of a sentence, when the sentence is not a question or statement. e.g. Terry Pratchett's latest book is not yet out in paperback.
I asked her whether she could tell me the way to Sheffield.

Question mark (?)

Used at the end of a question, or to indicate disbelief. e.g. Where is my bag?
Is this really Thomas?

Comma (,)

A comma is a punctuation mark used to help the reader by separating parts of a sentence. It sometimes corresponds to a pause in speech.

There are different specific uses of the comma:

Commas in a list (,)

To separate items in a list (but not usually before and):

e.g. My favourite sports are football, tennis, swimming and gymnastics. I got home, had a bath and went to bed.
The giant had a large head, hairy ears and two big, beady eyes.

Commas to mark phrases or clauses

Where the phrase adds relevant information:

e.g. Jill, my boss, is 28 years old.
Mr Hardy, aged 68, ran his first marathon five years ago.

To mark a subordinate clause:

e.g. Although it was cold, we didn't wear our coats.
Shaking with nerves, Tom stepped on to the stage.
The recipe, which we hadn't tried before, is very easy to follow.

After connecting adverbs:

e.g. Anyway, in the end I decided not to go.
Unfortunately, the bear was already in a bad mood and, furthermore, pink wasn't its colour.
First of all, I want to say ...
I didn't think much of the film. Helen, on the other hand, enjoyed it.

After introductory or opening phrases:

e.g. Quietly, Charlotte made her way down the stairs.
On the whole, snakes only attack when riled.

Exclamation mark (!)

An exclamation mark is used at the end of a sentence to show strong feelings. e.g. I've just about had enough!
We've won!

Exclamations can be interjections: e.g. Oh dear!
Good grief! Ow!

Ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis is used to show that something has been omitted or is incomplete, and can be used to create suspense.

An ellipsis can be used in the middle or at the end of a sentence.

Here are some of the ways to use an ellipsis:

The intentional omission of words:

e.g. The ceremony included twelve brilliant athletes... visiting the U.K.

The original sentence read:

The ceremony included twelve brilliant athletes from the Caribbean who were visiting the U.K.

A pause in speech:

e.g. "I think I just got an... interview!" "The sight was awesome... truly amazing."

An unfinished thought/ a sentence that trails into silence: e.g. "Now, where on earth did I put that...?"

At end of a sentence to create suspense:

e.g. Mr Daily gritted his teeth, swallowed hard and slowly advanced...

Apostrophe (')

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark used to indicate either omitted letters or possession (ownership).

Apostrophe for omitted letters:

We use an apostrophe for the omitted letter(s) when a verb is contracted (shortened). e.g. I'm (I am) who's (who is/has) they've (they have) he'd (he had/would)

In contracted negative forms, not is contracted to n't and joined to the verb: isn't (is not), didn't (did not)

In formal written style, it is more usual to use the full form.

Apostrophe for possession:

We use an apostrophe + s to show possession (i.e. belonging to)

With nouns (plural and singular) not ending in an s add 's: e.g. the girl's jacket, the children's books

With plural nouns ending in an s, add only the apostrophe: e.g. the boys' changing room, the Jones' house, my parents' car

With singular nouns ending in an s, you can add either 's or an apostrophe alone: e.g. James's ambition / James' ambition (be consistent)

Apostrophe NOTES:

The regular plural form (-s) is often confused with possessive -'s: e.g. I bought some apples. (not apple's)

Note the difference between its (= 'belonging to it') and it's (= 'it is' or 'it has'): e.g. The company is to close one of its factories. (no apostrophe)

The factory employs 800 people. It's (= it is) the largest factory in the town. (apostrophe necessary)

Inverted Commas

Inverted commas, also known as speech marks, mark the beginning and end of direct speech (the words being spoken) in a piece of writing.

e.g. Helen said, "I'm going home."

"What do you want?" he asked.

"If I turn right here," George said, "will I get to the post office?"

"I need to get to the post office," George said. "Should I turn right here?"

They are also used to indicate words that are defined, or that have special meaning. e.g. 'Buch' is German for book.

The 'free gift' ended up costing us forty pounds!

Colon (:

Here are some of the ways to use a colon:

Used to introduce a list or a following example:

The colon comes at a point in the sentence where the sentence could come to a complete end.

e.g. I'm going to tell you the names of my breakfast foods.

This is a main clause and makes sense so a full stop works. We know, however, what's going to come after the full stop - that's right, a list of breakfast foods!

I'm going to tell you the names of my breakfast foods: porridge, jam on toast, cornflakes and pickled onions.

Used before a second clause that expands or illustrates the first: e.g. He was very cold: the temperature was below zero.

As a student living in London I know all about money pressures: part-time jobs barely cover the cost of accommodation and there is no money left for going out.

Used before a quotation:

e.g. Mother Teresa said: "Peace begins with a smile."

Semi-Colon (;)

Here are some of the ways to use a semi-colon:

Used to separate two main clauses in a sentence (like a conjunction): e.g. I liked the book; it was a pleasure to read.

This could also be written as two separate sentences:

I liked the book. It was a pleasure to read.

However, where the two clauses are closely related in meaning (as in the above example), a writer may prefer to use a semi-colon rather than two separate sentences.

Some people do their best work in the early morning; others perform best late at night. Jane likes fruit; however, she does not like apples.

Used to separate items in a list if these items consist of longer phrases:

e.g. I need large, juicy tomatoes; half a pound of unsalted butter; a kilo of fresh pasta, preferably tagliatelle and a jar of black olives.

In a simple list, commas are used:

I need tomatoes, butter, pasta and black olives.

Brackets (())

Brackets can be used to separate off extra information, added into a sentence. e.g.

The chicken (followed carefully by her chicks) crossed the busy road. Sam and Emma (his oldest children) are coming to visit him next week.

Dash (-)

A dash is a punctuation mark used especially in informal writing (such as letters to friends, postcards or notes).

A dash 'holds words apart.' It is stronger than a comma but not as strong as a full stop.

e.g. She got home, put the kettle on and sat down — then, she remembered.

Dashes may be used to replace other punctuation marks (colons, semi-colons, commas or brackets):

Semi-colon e.g. It was a great day out — everybody enjoyed it.

Colon e.g. There is only one meal worth eating — spaghetti!

Brackets/Commas e.g. Sam and Emma — his oldest children — are coming to visit him next week.

Parenthesis (())

A parenthesis is a word, or a group of words (phrase), inserted into a sentence to add information (explain or elaborate). It is enclosed between a pair of punctuation marks.

The marks may be:

A pair of commas to set information apart in the lightest possible way: e.g. Her mother, she knew, would be beginning to worry.'

A pair of brackets to suggest that the information, albeit interesting, is not essential: e.g. Gemma (who had a habit of being tardy) slept through her alarm once more.

A pair of dashes to emphasise the information, drawing it to the reader's attention: e.g. On the contrary — and this is the important point — it was only because he did not know what he was doing that he succeeded.

How can you help?

- Look at different types of punctuation with your child in their reading book. Discuss why the author has chosen to use it.
- Ask your child to use a highlighter pen to highlight different forms of punctuation in old newspapers/magazines.
- Give your child a piece of punctuation and ask them to give you a sentence using it.
- For older children, ask them to write a short story/article and try to use all the punctuation on the bottom row of the pyramid!

Punctuation Game Websites

Useful Website for children to practise adding missing punctuation:
<http://www.funenglishgames.com/grammargames/punctuation.html>

Apostrophes for contraction: <http://www.oswego.org/ocsd-web/match/matchgeneric.asp?filename=jwildecontractions>

A collection of games based on a range of punctuation:
<http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/interactive/literacy2.htm>