

Basic punctuation revision

In the QTS Literacy Skills Test you will be expected to know how to place 15 missing items of punctuation accurately into a passage. Here are the rules along with some examples of how they are used.

The full stop (.)

This is the basic unit of punctuation – it marks the end of a sentence – the end of one idea.

It is important to check that each of the sentences in the test piece has a full stop at the end – if not put it in. As you read the passage look carefully, but also listen to how the sentence is working – your instinct will tell you where the sentence ends – trust it.

For example: where would you put the full stops?

This morning in assembly we will be announcing the winners of the inter-house rounders cup each member of the winning team (Gold) will receive their medals

***In this example there is also a capital letter missing.** Read the whole thing through.*

Ask yourself:

What are the pieces of information in this writing?

Where does one idea end and the other begin?

This is a simple example but the same principle should be applied to more complex sentences.

The colon (:)

Colons precede a list, an explanation or an example. You do not put a space before a colon, but you do need a space after one.

For example:

"There are two main shopping areas in Nottingham: Broadmarsh Centre and Victoria Centre."

The comma (,)

Commas point out brief pauses in a complex sentence or separate items in long lists. They are useful for breaking up long sentences, but only to show a natural break. You do not put a space before a comma, but you do put one after.

For example:

There were a lot of people in the room, teachers, students and parents. The teachers were sitting, the students were listening and the parents were just worrying.

Note - We don't usually put a comma before the word 'and' when it comes before the last item in a list.

The semicolon (;)

Semicolons are used to separate two sentences that would otherwise be joined with a word such as 'and', 'because', 'since', 'unless' or 'while'. You do not put a space before a semicolon, but you do need a space after one.

For example:

"I'm looking forward to our next lesson; I'm sure it will be a lot of fun."

Brackets (.....)

Used within a sentence to separate or help to emphasise distinct pieces of important and related information. In the test look out for a missing bracket – if you see one in the passage make sure that you find its twin and put it in if it's not there. You will be able to see where the bracket should go because of the sense of the sentence.

For example:

The children always go outside for playtime (unless the weather is very bad and they are looked after by teams consisting of teachers and classroom assistants).

Where would you put the second bracket? – explain to yourself why.

Question Mark (?)

Used at the end of a sentence to denote a **direct** question – it acts as a full stop, so the next sentence should begin with a capital letter. Make sure when you read the passage that you spot sentences that are direct questions and check that the ? placed at the end.

For example:

Can the children go out at playtime today?

Take care with sentences like this:

She asked the headteacher if the children were going to be able to go out.

This **does not** need a ? – because it is not a **direct** question.

Apostrophes. (')

Apostrophes have important two uses

- 1 – they are used to show omission
- 2 – they are used to show possession

Refer to:

PowerPoint 2 – pages 5 - 9

PowerPoint 3 – page 8

For a detailed explanation if you are unsure how to use them:

Inverted commas ('.....')

In the context of this test you need to be able to spot where a phrase or a word has been placed in inverted commas for emphasis – they always come in pairs, so if you spot one you need to check where the other one should be.

For example:

A dialogue box will appear. Press 'Reset' and 'OK' and the text will reappear.
