

Section A: Spotting the Correct Punctuation

1. a) My uncle (who lives in Leeds) is visiting us next week.

Why: Only one bracket is needed around the whole extra phrase (who lives in Leeds) — the other options split it incorrectly or mix brackets with commas.

2. a) The recipe – which takes an hour to make – serves six people.

Why: A pair of dashes must go around the whole extra phrase, one before it and one after it — a single dash or a dash mixed with a comma doesn't mark parenthesis correctly.

3. a) The dog, a scruffy terrier, barked at the postman.

Why: The extra phrase (a scruffy terrier) needs a comma both before and after it. If you remove it, the sentence should still make sense: The dog barked at the postman.

4. a) Sam's favourite subject (surprisingly) is maths.

Why: The brackets should surround only the extra comment (surprisingly) — the rest of the sentence must still make sense on its own.

5. a) The storm – the worst in years – flooded the village.

Why: Dashes for parenthesis always come in pairs around the extra information. A single dash only works when it comes at the very end of a sentence.

6. a) Our teacher, Miss Patel, set us a maths challenge.

Why: Miss Patel is extra information naming the teacher, so it needs a comma on both sides: Our teacher, Miss Patel, set us a maths challenge.

7. a) The film (which lasted three hours) was excellent.

Why: The whole extra clause (which lasted three hours) goes inside the brackets, leaving the main sentence — The film was excellent — able to stand alone.

8. a) The bridge – built in 1920 – is still in use today.

Why: The extra detail (built in 1920) sits between two dashes so it can be lifted out, leaving: The bridge is still in use today.

Section B: Adding the Parenthesis

1. My sister (who is only seven) can already ride a bike.

Why: who is only seven is extra information about the sister, so it is enclosed in a single pair of brackets.

2. The match – despite the rain – went ahead as planned.

Why: despite the rain interrupts the main sentence, so a dash goes on each side of it.

3. The castle, a popular tourist attraction, was built in the twelfth century.

Why: a popular tourist attraction renames the castle, so commas mark it off on both sides.

4. The museum (which opened in May) has already had thousands of visitors.

Why: which opened in May adds detail that could be removed, so it sits inside brackets.

5. Our head teacher – Mr Osei – always greets us at the gate.

Why: Mr Osei identifies the head teacher and is set off with a dash before and after.

6. The novel, written by a local author, has become a bestseller.

Why: written by a local author is extra detail about the novel, so commas go around it.

Section C: Commas for Clarity

1. Let's eat, Grandma!

Why: Without the comma it reads as if Grandma is the meal. The comma shows Grandma is being spoken to.

2. Most of the time, travellers worry about delays.

Why: Without the comma, time travellers reads as one phrase (people who travel through time), instead of most of the time meaning usually.

3. While we were eating, a wasp flew into the kitchen.

Why: Without the comma it could briefly read as while we were eating a wasp, which changes the meaning.

4. The dog ran to its owner, who was calling loudly.

Why: The comma makes clear it is the owner who was calling loudly, not the dog.

5. I spent the afternoon with my grandparents, an artist and a chef.

Why: The comma shows the grandparents are the artist and the chef, rather than four separate people.

6. Outside, the school gates were closed.

Why: Without the comma, outside the school could be read as one phrase, making the sentence briefly confusing.

Section D: Fix It!

1. My cousin, who lives in Cardiff, is coming to stay.

Why: The extra phrase who lives in Cardiff needs a comma before it as well as after it, not just one.

2. The bakery (which opens at six) sells fresh bread every morning.

Why: which opens at six is extra information, so it needs to be enclosed in brackets (or a pair of commas).

3. The concert – which was sold out – finished late.

Why: A pair of dashes is needed, one on each side of the extra information — the sentence was missing the second dash.

4. I helped my friend, Tom, fix his bike.

Why: Without commas it could suggest two people (a friend and Tom). The commas show Tom is the friend's name.