

# Functional Skills

## English

### Level 2 Writing W5c

Accurately Punctuate Written Text using Inverted Commas  
v1.0

**Functional Skills English:**

Level 2

**Skill Standard:**

Writing W5c

**Coverage and Range:**

Accurately punctuate written text using inverted commas.

‘This builds on the requirement for accuracy in the use of full stops, capital letters and question marks at previous levels, including correct use of standard punctuation.

‘A high level of accuracy is essential if the writing is to be functional – not only to be understood but presented in the most effective way with no negative impact on the outcome or reader.

‘Learners should understand how incorrect punctuation can alter the meaning and emphasis of written text and is likely to reduce both comprehension and interest.’<sup>1</sup>

## Inverted Commas

Along with several minor uses, inverted commas, also known as *quotation* or *speech* marks, are used to identify direct quotes and direct speech (the actual words someone has spoken). They can be written either as singles ('...') or doubles ("..."). In British newspapers doubles tend to be favoured for speech and singles for quotes, but as both are widely considered correct all you need to be is consistent in your own writing. Note that when encountering a quote within a quote (or speech within speech), the suggested response is to use whichever style you don't normally use to mark off the second distinct section. Inverted commas in such a situation are said to be *nested*. For example:

*'David said he heard the touch judge say that, "His foot was over the line.'"*

Additionally, punctuation within sentences involving inverted commas should be included in an appropriate place. If the punctuation relates to the quote or speech itself, include it *inside* the commas. If it relates to the sentence as a whole, e.g. an additional terminating exclamation or question mark, place it *outside*.

Lastly, written quotes should be reproduced with the capitalisation exhibited in the original, whilst spoken sentences should be treated as if they were written, i.e. normal capitalisation of the first word and all proper nouns. For example, *A Scandal in Bohemia*, the very first Sherlock Holmes adventure, begins with the lines:

*'To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name.'*

If we were to quote this *within* a sentence we could write it in several ways, but in each interpretation the capitalisation would remain unaltered:

*'To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name,'* are the first two lines of *A Scandal in Bohemia* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The first two lines of *A Scandal in Bohemia* are: *'To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name.'*

Below are examples that you might come across in your subsequent reading. The rules that are stated apply to both *direct quotes* and *direct speech*, even though in the interests of simplicity only the word 'quote' is included in the explanatory paragraphs. Beneath each specimen is also a question, highlighted in grey, for you to punctuate.

## Examples and Questions

- 1) Where a direct quote ends a broader sentence, the **terminating punctuation within the quote itself** should go inside the inverted comma. There is no need for an extra full stop:

*H. L. Mencken quotes Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington, as saying: "I don't know what effect these men will have on the enemy, but by God, they terrify me."*

*"Please," I asked irritably, "will you turn that music down?"*

- 1a) Joseph said, Try not to excite the dog or he may well bite you
- 

- 2) Where a direct quote does not end a broader sentence, but would itself have finished with a **full stop**, replace it with a **comma** inside the closing inverted comma:

*"I don't think that's the right answer," I said.*

*"All rise," the bailiff said, as the judge entered the courtroom.*

- 2a) The incident is closed exclaimed Helen, folding her arms huffily
- 

- 3) Where the quote is interrupted by a dialogue tag or other text, insert a **comma** inside the first closing inverted comma, and **another after the interruption**:

*"I really don't believe," added Georgie, "what you have just told me."*

*"If you believe that," guffawed the interviewer, "you'll believe anything."*

- 3a) I believe, the duchess remarked with a raise of her eyebrow, that this is checkmate
-

- 4) Where a quote does not end a broader sentence, but would itself have finished with a question or exclamation mark, place the original punctuation inside the inverted comma. There is no need for an extra comma after the quote:

*'Look out for that hole!' shouted Stefan.*

*'What?' asked Jacob, before he fell in head first.*

- 4a) He struck the ball on the volley and it hit the net like a rocket! said the commentator
- 

- 5) For a quote within a quote, use whichever style of inverted comma you don't tend to use to distinguish the quoted text from the rest of the sentence:

*'David said, "Is everything OK?"' Frank claimed.*

- 5a) Robert said, I like Abraham Lincoln's quote, Whatever you are, be a good one
- 

- 6) Where both the quote and the broader sentence end in a question and/or exclamation mark, treat the quote as normal and add the extra punctuation mark afterwards:

*"She didn't really just say, 'I hate chocolate!' did she?"*

*"Did you not hear him shout, 'I'm going to get a taxi!'"*

- 6a) Jasmine asked, Did Helena really exclaim, I have nothing to wear for tonight
- 

- 7) Conversational use of inverted commas is just as you would expect from the above. Each separate piece of speech is treated as an independent sentence and should be punctuated accordingly:

*"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.*

*"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"*

...

*"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"*

*"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."*

7a) There seemed a strange stillness over everything; but as I listened I heard as if from down below in the valley the howling of many wolves. The Count's eyes gleamed, and he said:

Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make! Seeing, I suppose, some expression in my face strange to him, he added:

Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter. Then he rose and said:

But you must be tired. Your bedroom is all ready, and to-morrow you shall sleep as late as you will. I have to be away till the afternoon; so sleep well and dream well!

8) Longer quotations which feature multiple paragraphs from the **same speaker** use inverted commas in the manner below, in that they appear at the start of each paragraph but at the end of only the final one:

“How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!

“How cheerfully he seems to grin,  
How neatly spread his claws,  
And welcome little fishes in  
With gently smiling jaws!”

*Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

8a) Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

## Indirect & Internal Speech

If you are ever called upon to write *internal* speech, i.e. your own or a character's *thoughts*, do not encapsulate it with inverted commas. Instead, the recommended course of action is to *italicise* such text in order to distinguish it from speech:

*I really fancy some cheese on toast*, thought Roger. "Hey, Alice! Is there any cheese left in the fridge?" he shouted down the stairs.

Also note that only direct quotes and speech require inverted commas. Indirect quotes in which a person's meaning is included but their precise word-for-word phrasing is not, do not require punctuating in this way. Also be aware that indirect speech often includes **changes of tense, time and pronoun** to suit the needs of the person reporting what has been said:

**Direct speech:** "The weather outside is beautiful."  
**Direct quote:** "The weather outside is beautiful," Michael said.  
**Indirect quote:** He says that the weather is lovely.

**Direct speech:** "I can attend, even though I am ill."  
**Direct quote:** "I can attend," Lauren said, "even though I am ill."  
**Indirect quote:** Lauren says she'll go, even though she's ill.

**Direct speech:** 'Please don't touch!'  
**Direct quote:** He sternly told them, 'Please don't touch!'  
**Indirect quote:** He ordered them not to touch.

### Exercise 1

Complete the missing sections in the questions below. You are the speaker in each case and there are many potentially correct ways of framing the answers:

Direct speech: 'I am going to play hockey.'  
Direct quote: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indirect quote: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct speech: 'Amelia is so annoying.'  
Direct quote: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indirect quote: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct speech: 'What's the issue that we face here?'  
Direct quote: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indirect quote: \_\_\_\_\_

Direct speech: 'Sir Karl Popper is my favourite philosopher.'  
Direct quote: \_\_\_\_\_  
Indirect quote: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 2

In order to test your understanding, insert inverted commas into appropriate places in the sentences below.

- 1) What on Earth is going on in here? demanded the teacher.
- 2) The woman asked, Would you mind if I opened a window?
- 3) I think, exclaimed Suzie, that we've got all six numbers!
- 4) It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen, is the first line in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
- 5) My other piece of advice, Copperfield, said Mr. Micawber, you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen, nineteen and six, result: happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds, ought and six, result: misery.
- 6) Who just said, I don't believe it!? The teacher stared at us. Come on, own up!
- 7) I told the policeman that, Where are you going? was the last thing I heard.
- 8) I stood on the platform and pondered the departures board.

When will the next train leave? I asked myself.

A guard walked by. Excuse me, I asked, could you tell me what time the next train to Newark is please?

Yes, the next one is in 15 minutes at half past, he said.

Thank you very much.

- 9) The first point that I would like to raise today is the issue of the national deficit. It is, to put it bluntly, unsustainable, and something drastic will have to change.  
  
Beyond that, the bulk of my remarks will be directed towards the lack of savings that we as a society currently have – or do not have – as the case may be.
- 10) A local man has today slammed the council for failing to properly maintain local pavements. Philip Smith, 46, a father of two, recently twisted his ankle after tripping over a paving slab that had been upended by a tree root.

The council chairman, Ted Arnold, responded by saying that the district council, is not responsible for surface repairs, even to the road and pavement outside the council chambers. That responsibility lies with the county council, and as a result local councillors' hands are tied with regard to this matter.



However, Mr Smith, a resident of Brownlow Road, was still unhappy. It beggars belief that the public are exposed to injury through council neglect, and no one in a position of power takes responsibility for it, he said.

The county council were approached, but no one was available for comment.

- 11) The most famous line in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is Blanche DuBois', I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.
- 12) David, I thought you'd fixed this TV. Eva jabbed the remote. It's on the blink – *again!*

### Exercise 3

Identify whether these sentences contain direct or indirect speech. For those which include *direct speech*, insert the appropriate punctuation when you re-write them in the spaces.

- 1) What's the score in the United-City game, please

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- 2) May I have a second helping of Brussels sprouts, please asked Gemma.

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- 3) When in Rome, do as the Romans said the tour guide.

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- 4) Cross the ball shouted Giles. Jordan's unmarked in the box.

---

- 5) The mayor was directly quoted as saying that the situation was, under control.

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**Exercise 4**

Identify if neither, one or both of these sentences are correctly punctuated circle your answers.

1. A) Dave said that tomorrow's high tide will occur at 8:42am.  
B) "Tomorrow's high tide will occur at 8:42am," said Dave.

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

2. A) "Quick," he shouted, "follow that cab!"  
B) "Quick", he shouted, "follow that cab!"

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

3. A) 'The Australian flag', said Jill, 'has six stars and the Union Jack on it'.  
B) 'The Australian flag', said Jill, 'has six stars and the Union Jack on it.'

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

4. A) 'Why,' I inquired politely, 'is that the case?'  
B) 'Why?' I inquired politely, 'is that the case.'

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

5. A) Nathaniel said, "I believe "Rock Around the Clock" is a great song."  
B) Nathaniel said, 'I believe 'Rock Around the Clock' is a great song.'

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

6. A) The song asks, "Would you like to swing on a star?"  
B) The song asks, "Would you like to swing on a star"?

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

7. A) I noticed her looking at me. "Would you like to dance?" I asked.  
B) I noticed her looking at me. "Would you like to dance", I asked?

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

8. A) I must remember to get some bread, I thought to myself.  
B) "I must remember to get some bread," I thought to myself.

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

9. A) Do you believe the headline, 'Aliens land in Woking!?'  
B) Do you believe the headline, 'Aliens land in Woking!?'?

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

10. A) "I was wondering whether to have pizza or not?" she thought.  
B) "I was wondering whether to have pizza or not?" she thought?

First sentence only    Second sentence only    Both sentences    Neither Sentence

## Minor Uses

Whilst it is strongly recommended that you do **not** mimic the following examples, one way in which you may see inverted commas used is to indicate irony, sarcasm, allegations or exaggeration:

Ian went to pay but then ‘remembered’ that he had ‘forgotten’ his wallet.

I have literally ‘nothing’ to wear.

I ‘enjoyed’ that film as much as my last dentist’s appointment.

It was ‘the’ stand-out performance of the evening.

She was in ‘that’ dress again.

Those traffic lights ‘know’ when I’m in a rush, and they deliberately turn to red.

In print, the above form of inverted comma is known as a *scare quote*. In speech, you may also see some people imitating inverted commas with their fingers to indicate that what they are saying should not be taken literally. In your own writing, however, it would be more appropriate to use italics to indicate these same meanings:

Ian went to pay but then *remembered* that he had *forgotten* his wallet.

I have literally *nothing* to wear.

I *enjoyed* that film as much as my last dentist’s appointment.

It was *the* stand-out performance of the evening.

She was in *that* dress again.

Those traffic lights *know* when I’m in a rush, and they deliberately turn to red.

Some writers additionally use inverted commas to offset the titles of literary or artistic works, novel, technical or other non-standard terms, colloquialisms or other words which they believe their audience may not be overly familiar with. As before, if no one is actually speaking these words it would be preferable to see this function performed by italics:

- ✗ Stephen Crane’s “The Red Badge of Courage”...
- ✓ **Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*...**
- ✗ “Low”, David Bowie’s 1977 album, contains the song “Sound and Vision”.
- ✓ ***Low*, David Bowie’s 1977 album, contains the song *Sound and Vision*.**

- ✗ A “phablet” is a smartphone with a screen larger than average but not quite as big as a tablet PC.
- ✓ **A *phablet* is a smartphone with a screen larger than average but not quite as big as a tablet PC.**
- ✗ “Cryotherapy”, from the Greek for “cold” and “cure”, refers to medical treatments which involve low temperatures.
- ✓ ***Cryotherapy*, from the Greek for *cold* and *cure*, refers to medical treatments which involve low temperatures.**

Old habits do die hard, though, and many writers still follow a convention whereby the full titles of TV shows, books and albums are italicised, whilst the episodes, chapters and tracks within them are put into inverted commas. These inconsistencies are longstanding and persistent, but as long as you are consistent in your own work you should find that those marking it will have few, if any, complaints:

“Let It Be” is the seventh song on the Beatles’ album of the same name.

*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* opens with “The Boy Who Lived,” a chapter in which the little wizard’s awful step-family are introduced to us.

I think that “The Werewolf Transformation” from season five is the funniest episode of *The Big Bang Theory*.

Lastly, the emphasising of a nickname is one area where the use of double inverted commas to show non-direct speech is routinely acceptable:

Elvis “The Pelvis” Presley

Eddie “The Eagle” Edwards

“Gazza” (Paul Gascoigne) scored 10 goals for England.

“Gentleman Jim” Corbett defeated the great John L. Sullivan.

Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale”, was a 19<sup>th</sup> century opera singer.

### Exercise 5

Where necessary, correct the punctuation within these sentences and then rewrite them:

1) Zack was in “double denim” yesterday. Call the fashion police!

---

2) Suzie’s profile is just full of her “selfies”.

---

3) Have you tried the new “click and collect” service?

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4) Lester Joseph Gillis, a.k.a. “Baby Face” Nelson, was a notorious 1930s’ criminal.

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5) James “Buster” Douglas knocked out Iron Mike Tyson on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1990.

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6) YOLO is an acronym for “You Only Live Once.”

---

7) I was really strapped for cash, but then I got a loan from the bank of mum and dad.

---

8) What a headline this is: False widow spider ATE my arm!

---

9) Have you tried a cakepop at all? It’s like a piece of cake on a lollipop stick!

---

10) Everything that could have gone wrong did. It was a total omnishambles.

---

11) The death of breakfast is a modern phenomenon that I think needs challenging.

---

12) You’re Beautiful is the highest charting song on James Blunt’s Back to Bedlam album.

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## Exercise 6

Below is part of a transcript from the House of Commons. Insert the missing inverted commas in their appropriate places.

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### House of Commons

Wednesday 3 September 20\_\_

*The House met at half-past eleven o'clock*

### PRAYERS

*[Mr Speaker in the Chair]*

### Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that, owing to a misunderstanding, the two Opposition day debates today were put on the Order Paper in the wrong sequence. I am content that the order in the debate should be reversed, as the Opposition intended. The House will therefore debate the motion relating to energy... first and the motion relating to infant class sizes second.

### Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Humanitarian Situation (Northern Iraq)

1. Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the needs of people affected by the humanitarian situation in northern Iraq; what steps her Department is taking to help people affected by that situation; and if she will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): Before I reply, may I welcome the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), to his role? May I also pay tribute and give warm thanks to his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), who did an outstanding job in that role and is well known across the House for his expertise on the Middle East?

The Department for International Development is deeply concerned about the situation in northern Iraq; the UN's latest estimate is that 1.8 million people are displaced across Iraq. My Department has played a leading role in the response. I visited both Baghdad and Erbil last week and announced a further £10 million of funding, bringing our total UK support now to £23 million.

Paul Flynn: I did not hear an answer, but I would have been grateful if I had. I am sure we look forward to seeing the new Minister, and I hope we appreciate his performances as much as we have appreciated his silence over the past years.

The NATO summit will start tomorrow in the splendid city of Newport, and it will be followed by a Newport declaration. Will the Secretary of State give us an assurance that although the Newport declaration will contain some military recommendations, there will be an emphasis on soft power? Military power leaves a legacy of antagonism; soft power—the one she is mainly responsible for—leaves a legacy of good will.





