

Punctuation – Why it's Interesting!

Park St. School, July, 2005



When?

Earth	(5 BYA)	5 followed by 9 zeros
Life	(3 BYA)	3 followed by 9 zeros
Bipedal Hominids	(8 – 5 MYA)	8 followed by 6 zeros
Speech	(2 MYA – 50KYA)	2 followed by 6 zeros
Writing	(4 KYA)	4000 years ago
Punctuation	(2 KYA)	2000 years ago



The First Writing, 2000 BC



Fig. 1: Wadi el-Hol Inscriptions 1 (left) and 2 (right)

Anglo-Saxon, 500 AD

No hƿæðne ælmihtig. ælra polde. adame 7 euan.
 anna of tƿon. fædri æfrymde. þæt he he him fnom
 fƿice. æc he him to fƿofne. læ hƿæðne fone þƿan.
 hynƿædne hnoƿ. halgum tunglum. 7 him gund pe-
 lan. gonne fæalde. he þam fin lupum. fæf 7 þoðan.
 tuddon tƿondra. tƿiha gehlene. toƿopuld nycte.
 ƿæfmas fedan. Geƿæton þa æftri fenne. fongful
 ne land. furo 7 edyl. unƿedigian. fnefna gehƿilne.
 þonne fe fnum fcol ƿæf. þe he æftri dæde. of adru
 fth pundon. ongunnon he þa begodf hæfe. bæn
 æfauðan. 7 þa him meod bebtid. adams 7 euan.
 afonan ƿænon. fneflicu ƿa fnum bæn cined.
 can. 7 abel. uf cyðað bec. huþa dæd fnuman. duge
 þa fnyndon. pelan 7 ƿifte. ƿill gebnodon

Transliteration / Translation

No/hwaethre aelmihtig. ealra wolde. Adam/e Euan.
 arna/ofteon. faeder aet frymthe. peah pe hie him from
 swice. ac/he/him to/frofre. letaethere forthwesan.
 hyrstedne hrof. halgum tunglum. y/him grundwe-
 lan. ginne sealde. het/pam sinhiwum. saes/y eorthan.
 tuddorteondra. teohha gehwilcre. to/woruld nytte.
 waestmas. fedan.

Yet the Almighty Father would not take away from Adam and from
 Eve, at once, all goodly things, though He withdrew His favour
 from them. But for their comfort He left the sky above them
 adorned with shining stars, gave them wide-stretching fields, and
 bade the earth and sea and all their teeming multitudes to bring
 forth fruits to serve man's earthly need.

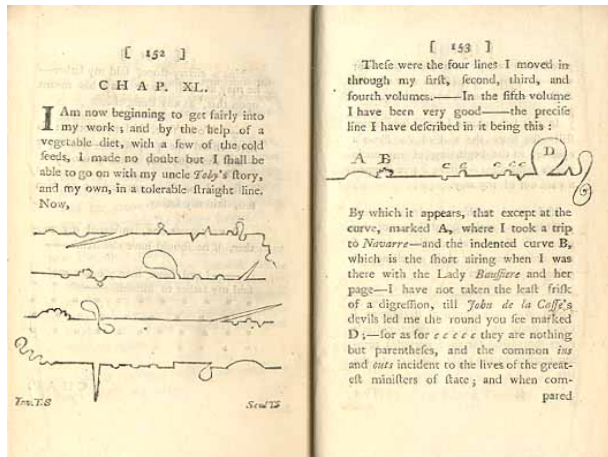


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Printing / Literacy – *Tristram Shandy* 1760

Old / Modern Punctuation

By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to Navarre,—and the indented curve B. which is the short airing when I was there with Lady Baussiere and her page,—I have not taken the least frisk of a digression...

By which it appears that – except at the curve marked A., where I took a trip to Navarre, and the indented curve B., which is the short airing when I was there with Lady Baussiere and her page – I have not taken the least frisk of a digression...



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Ambiguity: Word Boundaries

- Isawaseesawontheseashore
- Isawaseesawontheseashore
- Isawaseesawontheseashore
- I saw a seesaw on the sea shore



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Ambiguity: Garden Paths

- Charles the First walked and talked half an hour after his head was cut off
- Charles the First walked and talked. Half an hour after, his head was cut off.
- I told the girl that the boy kissed a story
- I told the girl that the boy kissed, a story.
I told the girl **who** the boy kissed a story.



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Punctuation and Speech

- Without her contributions to the school would be small.
- Without her, contributions to the school would be small.
- My great-great-great-great-grandfather | was a jockey.
- My great-great-great-great grandfather, was a jockey.
- The girl fell | the boy pushed her.
- The girl fell – the boy pushed her.
- The girl fell. The boy pushed her.



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Ambiguity: Meaning

- The teacher who I met at the parents' evening was very polite.
- The teacher, who I met at the parents' evening, was very polite.
- the teacher returned the homework cried
- ??The teacher, returned the homework, cried.
- The teacher who was returned the homework cried.



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Jane Straus, *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*

9)

a) Paul Simon sang, "I am a rock, I am an island."

b) Paul Simon sang, "I am a rock; I am an island."

c) Paul Simon sang, I am a rock; I am an island.

d) Paul Simon sang I am a rock, I am an island.

You must have studied hard. Good job!

Sorry, the correct answer is x

A Punctuation Test



Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*

It was a dark stormy night.

, / No comma

The Punctuation Game

