

2<sup>ND</sup> EXAMINATION

Read each of the selections below and then answer the accompanying questions to the best of your ability. If something doesn't make sense to you, come to the front of class and ask for guidance.



1

[1] The whisper the city council heard in the autumn of 1988 wasn't mine. [2] Or at least not mine alone. [3] It was the voices of the people bubbling up, the voices that were usually never heard: those of the older residents, the mothers, the children.

from Vicki Meyer. *Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2008. (66)

In terms of grammar, sentence 2 is not complete: it is not a clause. Suggest why Meyer separated it from the first sentence anyway. Remember to frame your answer in terms of the effects of punctuation.

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Meyer could have connected the first two sentences with a comma or semicolon. What would have been the effect if she had done so?

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Explain the need for the colon in sentence 3; discuss its use in relation to the commas that come before and after.

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2

[1] If you hammer a nail into a piece of wood, the wood has a different resistance according to the place you attack it: we say that wood is not isotropic. [2] Neither is the text: the edges, the seam, are unpredictable. [3] Just as (today's) physics must accommodate the non-isotropic character of certain environments, so structural analysis (semiology) must recognize the slightest resistances in the text, the irregular pattern of its veins.

from Roland Barthes. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. (36-37)

**Isotropic.** Having a physical property that has the same value when measured in different directions.

Discuss both uses of parentheses in this passage; how do they differ?

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3

[1] From no man's life, perhaps, is hope more rigidly excluded than from that of the Irish peasant of a poor district. [2] The shipwrecked mariner upon his raft, the convict in his cell, the lingering sufferer on a sick bed, may hope; but he must not.

from Charles Lever. *St. Patrick's Eve*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1845 (47)

Why does Lever use the final comma in sentence 2? “. . . a sick bed, may hope . . . .” Is its use necessary?

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Discuss the semicolon in sentence 2. What would be the effect if Lever had used a comma instead of a semicolon here?

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4

[1] The lake is flat calm—mirror condition—and the sky cloudless. [2] It is seven-thirty. [3] We load up and go. [4] Early in the trip, we tied almost nothing to the canoes, but now every pack is secured with thongs, ropes, and strings. [5] Our boots are tied to the thwarts, since we launch and paddle without them.

from John McPhee. *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*.  
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975. (92)

Discuss the use of the em dashes in sentence 1. Why does McPhee separate “mirror condition” in this way? What if he had used commas instead?

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Argue that the terminal comma in sentence 4 is necessary. How? Why?

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5

[1] The nine basic marks of punctuation—comma, dash, hyphen, period, parenthesis, semi-colon, colon, space, and capital letter—seem so apt to us now, so pipe-smokingly Indo-European, so naturally suited in their disjunctive charge and mass to their given sentential offices, that we may forgivably assume that commas have been around for at least as long as electrons, and that while dialects, cursive styles, and typefaces have come and gone, the semi-colon, that supremely self-possessed valet of phraseology, is immutable.

from Nicholson Baker. *The Size of Thoughts: Essays and Other Lumber*.  
New York: Random House, 1996. (70)

Would it be a good idea to place a comma after “charge”: “. . . charge, and mass to their given . . . .” Explain why or why not.

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[1] Since the first dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. [2] Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction.

from John Ruskin. *The Stones of Venice*. New York: Peter Fenelon Collier & Son, 1900. (15)

Explain the effect of the second and third commas in sentence 1.

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Discuss the use of semicolons in sentence 2.

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Light fell through the colors of the stained glass beyond the altar.  
Through the windows ajar on the side aisle came the sweetness of  
blossom, of bruised grass, of river mud.

from Robert Penn Warren. *Flood*. New York: Random House, 1964. (78)

Discuss the effect produced if a comma were used in sentence 1 after “glass.”

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Discuss the progression of commas in sentence 2.

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8

[1] Shouting into his car, standing on the pebble driveway, the sweat  
on me which is really alcohol gone through me and bubbled out. [2] I  
said I didn’t want to be a remnant, a ladder for others. [3] So Crawley  
knowing, nodding. [4] I asked him about Nora, tells me that she’s  
living with Cornish. [5] And I’ve always thought of her as sad Nora,  
and my children, all of this soft private sentiment I forgot to explode,  
the kids who grow up without me quite capable, while I sit out this  
drunk sweat, thinking along a stone path.

from Michael Ondaatje. *Coming Through Slaughter*.  
New York: Vintage International 1976. (102)

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Explain the effect of the comma in sentence 3.

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How does the use of the comma in sentence 4 differ from the use in sentence 3? Your answer should take into account the meaning of each sentence.

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Taking into consideration your discussion of sentences 3 and 4, discuss the effects of the commas used in sentence 5.

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10

[1] Life in the quarter. Our *bistro*, for instance, at the foot of the Hôtel des Trois Moineau. [2] A tiny brick-floored room, half underground, with wine-sodden tables, and a photography of a funeral inscribed “*Crédit est mort*”; and red-sashed workmen carving sausage with big jack-knives; and Madam F., a splendid Auvergnat peasant woman with a face of a strong-minded cow, drinking Malaga all day “for her stomach”; and games of dice for *aperitifs*; and songs about “*Les Fraises et Les Framboises*,” and about Madelon, who said, “*Comment épouser un soldate, moi qui aime tout le regiment?*”; and the extraordinary public love-making. Half the hotel used to meet in the *bistro* in the evenings. I wish one could find a pub in London a quarter as cheery.

from George Orwell. *Down and Out in Paris and London*.  
New York: Harcourt Brace & Col, 1933. (10)

For ten points worth of credit, discuss aspects of this punctuation that interest you.

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