

## Oxford comma missing from Brexit coin

1st February, 2020



Image: The Royal Mint

The United Kingdom officially left the European Union on January the 31st, three-and-a-half years after the British people voted to leave. The U.K. government issued a special coin to mark the occasion.

However, the coin is

at the centre of an argument about punctuation. The new 50-pence coin became available yesterday. It has the words: "Peace, prosperity and friendship with all nations" on its reverse side. A famous British writer, Sir Philip Pullman, is unhappy with the punctuation. He believes the phrase is incorrectly punctuated. Mr Pullman said there should be a comma after the word "prosperity". Such a comma is called an Oxford comma. He said the coin, "should be boycotted by all literate people".

The Oxford comma gets its name from the Oxford University Press, which makes common use of the punctuation mark. In the USA, it is called the serial comma. It is used before the final "and" or "or" in a written list of three or more items. Many people say there is no need for an Oxford comma in the phrase on the 50-pence coin because the meaning is very clear. Word expert Susie Dent said the Oxford comma is useful if it makes it easier to understand the writer's meaning. A U.K. citizen said the comma issue wasn't important. She tweeted: "It doesn't matter if there is a comma or not on the 50p coin. The most important thing is that there is peace, and prosperity, and friendship with all nations."

Sources: [thesun.co.uk](https://www.thesun.co.uk) / [abcnews.go.com](https://www.abcnews.go.com) / [scotsman.com](https://www.scotsman.com)

## Writing

The comma is the most important punctuation mark. Discuss.

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

United Kingdom / European Union / coin / punctuation / Oxford / comma / literate / serial / list / phrase / meaning / understand / peace / prosperity / friendship / nations

## True / False

- The British people voted to leave the EU two years ago. T / F
- The new coin has an argument in its centre. T / F
- The front of the new coin has a message about peace on its front. T / F
- A writer asked people who can read to boycott the coin. T / F
- The Oxford comma was named because of the Oxford University Press. T / F
- The Oxford comma is used with a written list of two or more items. T / F
- The article said the meaning of the phrase on the coin is unclear. T / F
- A woman tweeted that the comma did not matter. T / F

## Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- |                      |               |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. <b>leave</b>      | a. widespread |
| 2. <b>phrase</b>     | b. specialist |
| 3. <b>prosperity</b> | c. educated   |
| 4. <b>boycotted</b>  | d. last       |
| 5. <b>literate</b>   | e. expression |
| 6. <b>common</b>     | f. crucial    |
| 7. <b>final</b>      | g. shunned    |
| 8. <b>items</b>      | h. depart     |
| 9. <b>expert</b>     | i. wealth     |
| 10. <b>important</b> | j. things     |

## Discussion – Student A

- What do you know about Brexit?
- Will the UK be more successful outside of the EU?
- What special coins has your government issued?
- Will coins soon be a thing of the past?
- Do you think the phrase on the coin needs a comma?
- Why do people get excited about commas?
- What is punctuation like in your language?
- What would change if the word 'prosperity' had a comma after it?

## Phrase Match

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. The United Kingdom officially        | a. incorrectly punctuated  |
| 2. issued a special coin to             | b. by all literate people  |
| 3. Peace, prosperity and friendship     | c. or more items           |
| 4. He believes the phrase is            | d. the writer's meaning    |
| 5. the coin should be boycotted         | e. mark the occasion       |
| 6. which makes common use               | f. in the phrase           |
| 7. in a written list of three           | g. left the European Union |
| 8. there is no need for an Oxford comma | h. there is a comma        |
| 9. it makes it easier to understand     | i. with all nations        |
| 10. It doesn't matter if                | j. of the punctuation mark |

## Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of your country's coins
- What do you think about what you read?
- Why do we use commas in English?
- What punctuation marks are difficult to use?
- What would happen if we didn't use punctuation?
- When will there be peace, prosperity and friendship between nations?
- What did your teachers teach you about punctuation?
- What questions would you like to ask the British writer?

## Spelling

- lifyifcloa left the European Union
- eisuds a special coin
- at the centre of an agnuremt about punctuation
- Peace, proptriyes and friendship
- incorrectly catpeuudnt
- boycotted by all eilterat people
- makes omconm use of the punctuation mark
- a written list of three or more mtesi
- no need for an Oxford comma in the hsrape
- Word xperte Susie Dent
- A U.K. zticine
- friendship with all nonisat

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. h	2. e	3. i	4. g	5. c
6. a	7. d	8. j	9. b	10. f

## Role Play

### Role A – Comma

You think a comma is the most important punctuation mark. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their marks. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): parentheses, question mark or full stop.

### Role B – Parentheses

You think parentheses is the most important punctuation mark. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their marks. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): comma, question mark or full stop.

### Role C – Question Mark

You think a question mark is the most important punctuation mark. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their marks. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): parentheses, comma or full stop.

### Role D – Full Stop (Period)

You think a full stop is the most important punctuation mark. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their marks. Also, tell the others which is the least important of these (and why): parentheses, question mark or comma.

## Speaking – Punctuation

Rank these with your partner. Put the most important at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                    |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| • exclamation mark | • comma              |
| • colon            | • question mark      |
| • quotation mark   | • full stop (period) |
| • parentheses      | • semi colon         |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	F	c	F	d	T	e	T	f	F	g	F	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.