Full Stops, Question Marks or Exclamation Marks? Choosing the Right End Mark

In Year 2, children learn to choose the correct end mark for sentences: full stops, question marks, or exclamation marks. This guide explains how to help your child recognise whether a sentence is telling, asking, or showing strong feeling, using simple, playful checks rather than strict rules.

What it is

In Year 1, children mostly focus on using full stops and question marks. Year 2 introduces the exclamation mark as a new tool. The goal is not just to memorise symbols, but to understand why we use them. A full stop ends a statement (a fact or opinion). A question mark ends a question (something we want an answer to). An exclamation mark ends a sentence that shows strong feeling, such as surprise, anger, or excitement. This topic helps children move from simply spotting marks to choosing the right one based on the purpose of their writing.

What happens in class

Teachers usually introduce this by reading sentences aloud with different tones of voice. They might ask, 'Is this sentence asking something, telling something, or shouting something?' Children practise sorting sentences into three groups. They learn that the mark changes the meaning. For example, 'You did it' is a statement, but 'You did it!' shows surprise or anger. Teachers encourage children to read their own work aloud to hear if the tone matches the mark. It is a practical skill, often taught through games and short writing tasks rather than long lectures.

What it means for your child

Mastering these three marks helps your child become a clearer writer and reader. When they can choose the right end mark, their writing sounds more like their speaking voice. It helps them express feelings and ask questions clearly. This skill supports their understanding of sentence structure, which is part of the National Curriculum for English. It also helps them read with better expression. If your child has special educational needs or is learning English as an additional language, they may need more time or visual aids. Teachers will adapt support to fit each child’s needs.

How you can help at home

Keep it light and playful. Try 'Sentence Detectives' while reading books together. Read a sentence and ask, 'Is this asking, telling, or showing big feelings?' Let your child decide the mark. You can also play 'Tone Twister': say a sentence like 'The dog barked' in a bored voice, then a shocked voice. Ask which mark fits each version. Avoid drilling or correcting harshly. Instead, model correct usage in your own texts or notes. If your child writes 'Wow!' instead of 'Wow.', praise the feeling and gently ask if it sounds like a shout or a quiet thought. Short, daily chats work best.

Questions parents often ask

Parents often ask if exclamation marks should be used often. The guidance is to use them sparingly, mainly for strong feelings, not just for any excitement. Another common question is about dialogue. In

Year 2, children may start using speech marks, but the focus here is on the end mark inside the speech. If your child uses an exclamation mark for a normal statement, ask them to read it aloud. Does it sound like a shout? If not, a full stop might be better. If you are unsure about your child's specific progress, please ask their teacher, as expectations can vary slightly by school.

Sources

- Department for Education: English Programmes of Study for Key Stage 1
- GOV.UK: National Curriculum: English