

Rules for Punctuation

The Period

1. Use a period at the end of a statement or command.

The government has promised to reduce inflation.

Pick up the lug wrench.

2. Use a period after abbreviations.

A.M. Mr. U.S. B.C.

The Comma

1. Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.

We went to the campsite as soon as we arrived, but it was already full.

Note: If the clauses are quite short, the comma may be omitted.

He studied hard and he passed the test.

2. Use a comma to separate words, phrases, or clauses in a series.

We took our tent, our sleeping bags, food, and fishing poles.

He drinks milkshakes in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening.

We enjoyed ourselves before we took the boat ride, while we were on the boat ride, and after we left the lake.

3. Use a comma after introductory phrases or clauses.

Because we had wanted to see all of the interesting sights in the city, we agreed to spend our entire vacation there.

With the worst of the winter over, the people began to make plans for spring.

Note: If the clauses or phrases are quite short, the comma may be omitted.

After we arrived we had a beer.

- ✧ 4. Use a comma after transitional words and phrases, mild interjections, and *yes* and *no*.

On the other hand, no effort has been made to help the stranded people.

Oh, I do not think that is the answer.

Yes, he said he was coming.

- ✧ 5. Use commas to set off nonrestrictive clauses and phrases and appositives.

President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963, was an eloquent speaker.

The boat, tied securely to the dock, rode out the storm well.

Mr. Benninger, a well-known physicist, received the key to the city.

6. Use commas to set off contrastive elements or elements that interrupt a sentence.

We chose the moderately priced one, not the most expensive one, because we were short of funds.

It is a good idea, therefore, to study this book thoroughly before the test.

- ★ 7. Use commas to set off absolute constructions. (An absolute phrase is a noun followed by a modifier. It modifies a whole sentence, not a particular element in the sentence.)

Night falling, the lights of the town slowly began to appear.

- ✧ 8. Use commas in direct address and quotations.

He said, "Mary, did you steal the money?"

9. Use commas with degrees, titles, dates, places, addresses, and numbers.

Mr. Ross Charleston, M.F.A., is the chairman of the English Department.

Mr. Cyrus Leary, chairman of the board, made a number of changes in policy.

We decided to have the wedding reception on Friday, October 8, because of our vacation.

We arrived in this country in May of 1979.

We arrived in this country on May 24, 1979.

The water in Chicago, Illinois, comes from Lake Michigan.

They sold over 100,000 pounds of rice in 1979.

Please send it to Mr. Harold Bobbs, 1230 Smith Place, New Orleans, Louisiana 70124.

Note: As in the preceding example, there is no comma placed between the state and the zip code.

10. Use a comma to prevent misreading.

Inside, the building was beautiful.

Before eating, the dog barked three times.

The Semicolon

1. Use a semicolon between two main clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction.

This floor polish does not work; I have already tried it.

2. Use a semicolon between coordinate elements with internal commas.

After we arrived, Mr. Buris, the manager of the plant, showed us the main assembly lines; but he neglected to show us the warehouse where most of the products, waiting to be shipped overseas, are stored.

3. Use a semicolon between items in a series when the items themselves contain commas.

Present at the meeting were Charles Jones, chairperson; Lydia Jones, vice-chairperson; and Roger Smaltz, treasurer.

The Colon

1. Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second one explains the first.

There is only one thing to say: He did not deserve it.

2. Use a colon to introduce an appositive.

“There are three sources of belief: reason, custom, inspiration.”

—Blaise Pascal

3. Use a colon to formally introduce a quotation.

Kennedy eloquently reminded us: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

4. Use a colon in a time reference, after the salutation of a formal letter, in biblical references, and in bibliographical entries.

1:30 A.M.

Dear Dr. Runch:

Genesis 6:2

New York: Macmillan, 1980

Note: Do not use a colon after a linking verb or preposition.

Incorrect:

Present at the meeting were: Mr. Jones, Mr. Osgood, and Ms. Blake.

Correct:

Present at the meeting were Mr. Jones, Mr. Osgood, and Ms. Blake.

The Dash

1. Use a dash to indicate a sudden interruption in thought.

He confessed to the crime—but why?

2. Use a dash to set off abrupt parenthetical elements (particularly ones containing commas).

He took the letter angrily—or was he really happy?—when the letter carrier arrived.

We saw him huffing, puffing, and snorting—trying to break loose.

3. Use a dash to set off an appositive or a brief summary.

There is one poem I love more than any other—“The Waste Land.”

Persistence, agility, and strength—all of these are needed to learn tennis.

Parentheses

1. Use parentheses to enclose a loosely related comment or explanation.

The car (it had been purchased only the day before) needed new brakes, a tune-up, and new tires.

2. Use parentheses to enclose figures numbering items in a series. The government tried to (1) increase employment, (2) reduce inflation, and (3) cut taxes.

Brackets

1. Use brackets to enclose editorial corrections or additions in a quotation.

Dirkson reports: "When we came upon him [General Lee], we found that he had been badly wounded in the leg."

2. Note that the word *sic* in brackets means that the preceding word is an error and that the error appeared in the original.

The editor asserted: "When I read the Bibel [sic], I was enlightened."

Quotation Marks

1. Use double quotation marks to enclose a direct quotation.

He said, "I cannot study anymore."

Note: Indirect speech is not put within quotation marks.

He said that he could not study anymore.

2. Use single quotation marks to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

May reported, "When Bob said, 'I cannot see you anymore, my sister was heartbroken.'"

Smith argues that, "Hamlet's 'to be or not be' has an entirely different meaning."

3. Use quotation marks to set off titles of songs, poems, short stories, articles, essays, chapters in longer works, paintings, and statues.

My favorite song is "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head."

He recites "Mending Wall" for each of his classes.

Have you read "The Blue Stocking" yet?

Note: Quotation marks are essentially used to enclose short works of art. For longer works of art, use italics (or underlining).

4. Use quotation marks to denote a special meaning of a word.

Her “pet” was a small round stone.

- ★ 5. Put commas and periods inside quotation marks.

He answered, “I cannot watch television tonight.”

- * Although he answered with a “yes,” he did not seem enthusiastic.

- ✂ 6. Put colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.

I am always sad when I see “The End”; it means the movie is over.

7. Put question marks, dashes, and exclamation points that are part of a quotation inside the quotation marks. Put question marks, dashes, and exclamation points that are not part of a quotation outside the quotation marks.

Her father asked, “What time will you be home?”

Did he just say, “We will not have school tomorrow”?

He shouted, “Help! I cannot get out!”

Do not shout “help”!

Italics

Italics are a special kind of print found in most publications. The letters in italics slant to the right. In handwritten or typed papers, use underlining for italics.

1. Use italics for the titles of books, magazines, newspapers, periodicals, plays, motion pictures, longer musical compositions, and other works published separately.

The Grapes of Wrath (book)

the Atlantic Monthly (magazine)

the New York Times (newspaper)

TESOL Quarterly (periodical)

Rocky (motion picture)

The Iceman Cometh (play)

The Rite of Spring (musical piece)

2. Use italics for ships, trains, and airplanes.

the Queen Elizabeth (ship)

the Zephyr (train)

the Spirit of St. Louis (airplane)

3. Use italics for foreign words and phrases that have not yet been accepted into English.

The *piece de resistance* was his poached fish with hollandaise sauce.

4. Use italics to call attention to words as words and letter as letters.

The word *fluffy* reminds me of a cloud.

The teacher said, "Now put the letter *X* in the margin."

Note: This is an ineffective method of emphasis if it is overused.

The Apostrophe

1. Use the apostrophe to indicate possessive.

- a. For all proper nouns, add apostrophe and *s*.

the girl's book

Jesus's birth

Charles's house

Kansas's weather

- b. For plural nouns, add an apostrophe after the plural *s*.

The boys' books

- c. For compound words, use the apostrophe after the last word.

his mother-in-law's house

everyone's concern

- d. For joint possession, use the apostrophe after the last noun. For individual possession, use the apostrophe after both nouns.

✗ Charley and Bill's car

Sheila's and May's cameras

2. Use the apostrophe to form the plural of letters.

Only two A's were given in the class.

Note: Omit the apostrophe to form the plural of numerals and words referred to as words.

There were three 12s in the average.

Her two-page essay included twenty-five *of courses*.

Note: Omit the apostrophe when forming the plural of abbreviations, numbers, and periods of time expressed in years.

SATs

VCRs

fours

1990s

3. Use the apostrophe to indicate the omission of a letter or number.

wouldn't

Jack-o'-lantern

the '60s

The Hyphen

1. Hyphenate a compound of two or more words when it is used as a modifier before a noun.

He is a well-liked politician.

He is well liked.

Note: Do not use the hyphen when the first word of the group is an adverb ending in *-ly*.

a half-eaten apple

a partly eaten apple

Note: Certain words are permanent compounds. They always use a hyphen. Consult your dictionary to determine which words are permanent compounds.

She is old-fashioned.

2. Hyphenate spelled-out compound numbers from twenty-one through ninety-nine.

sixty-four

eighty-three

3. Hyphenate words of more than one syllable when they occur at the end of a typewritten line, when necessary. Hyphenate according to accepted syllabification. Consult your dictionary to determine where the syllable breaks are. Do not divide words of only one syllable, and do not set off single letters. Do not

divide words that already contain a hyphen elsewhere. Attempt to hyphenate in the approximate middle of the word.

Correct:

satis-faction water-melon

Incorrect:

bou-ght prett-y

Numbers

1. Spell out numbers that can be written in one or two words.

one million

forty-three

2. Use figures for other numbers.

145

2 1/2

\$456

3. Use numerals for figures in a series and for tabulations and statistics.

Bill weighed 180 pounds; Steve, 150 pounds; and John, 100.

He bought 125 pencils, 30 erasers, and 6 pens.

4. Use figures for street numbers, page references, dates, percentages, money, and hours of the day with A.M. and P.M.

But:

101 Main Street

Tenth Street

Look at page 45.

We arrived on January 10,
1980.

I have twenty pages ready.

The interest was 15 percent.

We paid \$15 for the tickets.

He gets up at 7:30 A.M.

He got up at seven o'clock.

Note: Do not use figures to begin a sentence. Spell out the number or rephrase the sentence.

Rules for Capitalization

1. Capitalize the first word in a sentence.

Where did he go?

2. Capitalize the pronoun *I*.

Although he said so, I did not believe him.

3. Capitalize proper names and nouns used as proper names.

- a. Capitalize a title preceding a proper noun.

President Bush

Dr. Gonzalez

- b. Capitalize the names of people and races.

Bob

Luis Marcos

Oriental Caucasian

African-American

Note: Do not capitalize the words *black* and *white*.

The blacks and whites in our neighborhood are well integrated.

- c. Capitalize the names of religions, deities, and sacred terms.

Catholic

Moslem

Buddhist

God

- d. Capitalize geographic locations.

New York

Mont Blanc

the Ohio River

- e. Capitalize the words *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* when they refer to a section of the country usually considered to constitute a region.

the Midwest

the South

- f. Capitalize nationalities and names of languages.

Vietnamese Spanish French Japanese

- g. Capitalize the complete names of specific churches and buildings.

the Statler Hotel

the First Baptist Church

- h. Capitalize the days of the week, months, and holidays.

Wednesday

August

the Fourth of July

- i. Capitalize the specific names of college courses (as the name would appear in the college catalog).

I am taking French, American History 102, and a science course.

- j. Capitalize all the words in a title except articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Capitalize articles, prepositions, and conjunctions if they are the first or last word in the title or if they are of five or more letters in length.

Gone with the Wind

"We're Through with Heartache"

"He Comes In"

- k. Capitalize nouns, adjectives, and prefixes in temporarily hyphenated compounds.

The Twentieth-Century Ideal But: Twenty-five Brave Men

- l. Capitalize the names of documents, historical events, and organizations.

The Bill of Rights

the Vietnam War

the National Organization for Women

Note: Do not capitalize the names of the seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter.

A Rough Guide to Punctuation

Good punctuation is crucial for successful academic writing. Many students' essays use little punctuation beyond commas and full stops. But to be restricted to just two forms of punctuation mark, when writing your essay, is like building a house using only a hammer and a saw: you can do it; but not very well. By learning to use more, or all, of the available forms of punctuation you will be able to communicate and express your ideas, and arguments, more clearly.

Full Stop (.) Full stops have three distinct uses: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To mark the end of a sentence2. To indicate abbreviated words (unless first and last letters of the word are shown).3. To punctuate numbers and dates	Examples: <i>The cat is completely black.</i> <i>The teacher will be John Smith (B. Sci.).</i> <i>All assignments should be submitted by 6. 6. 03.</i>
Colon (:) A colon can be used to indicate that a list, quotation or summary is about to follow. A colon can also be used to separate an initial sentence/clause from a second clause, list, phrase or quotation that supports the first in a particular way.	Examples: <i>Buy these things: a packet of peanuts, two loaves of bread and a kilogram of steak.</i> <i>Writing an assignment is not easy: to begin with you have to do a lot of research.</i> <i>The Television set, as the icon of the information age, represents the realisation of a dream for humankind: that knowledge and experience can be transmitted and shared across the boundaries of time and space.</i>
Semi-Colon (;) Separates two complete sentences that are, however, closely linked. The semi-colon can be replaced by a full stop, but the direct link between the two parts is lost. A semi-colon also serves as a second level of punctuation in a series of words or phrases which already have commas, making some internal divisions.	Examples: <i>To err is human; to forgive, divine.</i> <i>Don't go near the lions; they could bite you.</i> <i>She came out of the house, which had a long drive, and saw him at the end of the path; but instead of continuing towards him, she hid until she left.</i>
Comma (,) Commas are used in longer sentences to separate information into readable units. A single comma ensures correct reading of a sentence which starts with a long introductory element. Pairs of commas help in the middle of a sentence to set off any string of words which is either a parenthesis, or in contrast, to whatever went before. Sets of comma act as a means of separating items in a list	Example: <i>When Australia celebrated its sesquicentenary in 1938, there was a little of the confidence or enthusiasm of the centennial celebrations of 1888.</i> <i>Yet in representing ourselves to ourselves, as film and television and television do, these media are constantly introducing and reinforcing the assumptions.</i> <i>Ward traced the origins of the type through the common man's response to the bush, through convicts, outback workers, gold diggers, trade unions, and the Bulletin.</i>
Question Mark (?) A question mark is used at the end of a sentence which is a question.	Example: <i>Have the students completed the exam?</i>

<p>Apostrophe (‘)</p> <p>There are two uses for the apostrophe:</p> <p>1. Contractions</p> <p>A contraction is a shortened version of a word. An apostrophe is used to show that something has been left out, and where it has been left out.</p> <p>2. Possessives</p> <p>An apostrophe is used to indicate ownership/possession with nouns. To show ownership by a single individual, insert the apostrophe between the noun and the ‘s’. To show ownership by more than one individual, use the apostrophe at the end of the word.</p> <p>Be careful: <i>It’s</i> is the contraction of ‘it is’. <i>It’s</i> is not a possessive (a possessive denotes ownership).</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p><i>don’t (do not) It’ll (It will) she’ll (she will)</i></p> <p><i>It’s too cold to go swimming today.</i></p> <p><i>I don’t think she’ll come to the party.</i></p> <p><i>the dog’s tail</i> (belonging to a single dog)</p> <p><i>the women’s magazines</i></p> <p><i>boys’ football boots</i> (belonging to more than one boy)</p> <p><i>Einstein’s theory of relativity</i></p> <p><i>The dog is chasing its own tail!</i></p>
<p>Hyphen (-)</p> <p>When used correctly, a hyphen links two or more words, that normally would not be placed together, in order that they work as one idea and these are called compound nouns.</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p><i>Stonier’s post-industrial economy is a service economy.</i></p> <p><i>There are four types of information-related machines.</i></p>
<p>Dashes (—)</p> <p>Hyphens are not the same as dashes. Dashes are like brackets; they enclose extra information. A colon and semi-colon would work just as well in the example opposite. Dashes are rarely used in academic writing.</p> <p>Although often used in pairs, dashes can also be used singularly.</p>	<p>Examples:</p> <p><i>To the three divisions of the economy—agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries—Jones has added a fourth.</i></p> <p><i>Have an orange—or would you prefer a banana?</i></p> <p><i>While the importance of sport to Pay TV is clear, the opposite perspective is less certain—the importance of Pay TV to sport.</i></p>
<p>Parentheses ()</p> <p>Parentheses are brackets used to include extra or nonessential material in sentences. Parentheses should be used sparingly and always appear in pairs.</p> <p>In citation systems like Harvard, parentheses are used to include in-text references.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p><i>It was unusual to see Paul awake so early (as he often studied late into the night) and Jane greeted him with amazement.</i></p> <p><i>Larsen and Greene (1989) studied the effects of pollution in three major cities.</i></p> <p><i>“Australia is a settler society” (Hudson & Bolton 1997, p. 9).</i></p>
<p>Exclamation Mark (!)</p> <p>An exclamation mark is used at the end of a sentence and indicates surprise, anger, or alarm.</p> <p>Exclamation marks should be used very sparingly and are not often used in academic writing.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p><i>The police stormed in and arrested her!</i></p> <p><i>How disgraceful!</i></p>
<p>Ellipsis (...)</p> <p>An ellipsis consists of three full stops. It indicates that material has been left out of a quotation.</p> <p>When quoting, it is sometimes necessary to leave out words or lines for reasons of relevance or length. Using an ellipsis makes any omissions known to your reader.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p><i>“But to be restricted to just two forms of punctuation mark ... is like building a house using only a hammer and a saw: you can do it; but not very well.”</i></p>