Gather and Edited By

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Punctuation Rules

Best Of Luck

You Can Not Help Every one But Every One Can Help Someone

'FPSC Custom Inspectors BS16 & Preventive Officer BS16 Prepartion group

PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is used to create sense, clarity and stress in sentences. You use punctuation marks to structure and organise your writing.

You can quickly see why punctuation is important if you try and read this sentence which has no punctuation at all:

perhaps you dont always need to use commas periods colons etc to make sentences clear when i am in a hurry tired cold lazy or angry i sometimes leave out punctuation marks grammar is stupid i can write without it and dont need it my uncle Harry once said he was not very clever and i never understood a word he wrote to me i think ill learn some punctuation not too much enough to write to Uncle Harry he needs some help

Now let's see if punctuating it makes a difference!

Perhaps you don't always need to use commas, periods, colons etc. to make sentences clear. When I am in a hurry, tired, cold, lazy, or angry I sometimes leave out punctuation marks. "Grammar is stupid! I can write without it and don't need it," my uncle Harry once said. He was not very clever, and I never understood a word he wrote to me. I think I'll learn some punctuation - not too much, enough to write to Uncle Harry. He needs some help!

Use the pages in this punctuation section to learn how to make your English clearer and better organised.

PUNCTUATION RULES IN ENGLISH

- the period (or full stop in British English)
- the comma
- the exclamation mark
- the question mark
- the colon
- the semicolon
- the quotation mark
- the apostrophe
- the hyphen and the dash
- parentheses and brackets

Apostrophe Rules

Apostrophe Rules for Possessives

A lot of people get confused about when they need to use an apostrophe and when they don't. Here are a few apostrophe rules to help you decide.

Use an apostrophe + S ('s) to show that one person/thing owns or is a member of something.

- *Amy's ballet class, Lisa's car, Robert's car, Ross's room, Ross's sports teams*

Yes, even if the name ends in "s," it is still correct to add an "'s" to create the possessive form. It is also acceptable to add only an apostrophe to the end of singular nouns that end in "s" to make them possessive. In this case, that means "Ross'" would have the same meaning as "Ross's." It makes no difference whether the item owned is singular or plural. We use "Ross's" to say that the room (singular) is his and that the sports teams (plural) are his.

Use an apostrophe after the "s" at the end of a plural noun to show possession.

- *The parents' bedroom, the Joneses' lives*

It is not necessary to add another "s" to the end of a plural noun.

If a plural noun doesn't end in "s," add an "'s" to create the possessive form.

- *The children's rooms*

*Remember, a possessive noun needs an apostrophe and an "s" at the end. If there's already an "s" there, you can just add the apostrophe. If there's no "s," you have to add both - first the apostrophe, and then the "s."

Apostrophe Rule for Contractions

When you combine two words to make a contraction, you will always take out some letters. In their place, use an apostrophe.

- *they + have = they've; are + not = aren't; they + will = they'll*

Imagine you're on a submarine that is diving deep into the ocean. As you dive deeper and deeper, the water pressure becomes greater. If you go too deep, the water will squeeze the submarine so hard that it will begin to leak, and you will need to put something into the hole to stop the leak. The same thing happens when you squeeze two words together. Something pops out. And wherever it comes out, you put an apostrophe in to plug the hole. The one exception to this rule is the contraction "won't," which is "will + not." English apostrophe rules are not difficult to master. Just remember that all

possessives need an apostrophe and an "s" at the end. If the word already has an "s," it only needs an apostrophe. If the word does not already have an "s," it needs the apostrophe followed by the "s."

As for contractions, the only apostrophe rule you need to remember is the same rule you learned as a teenager when you snuck out of the house and put pillows under your sheets to make it look like you were still sleeping: If you take something out, replace it with something else. Then squish everything together so it looks like one body.

-

Punctuation Must Be Parallel

- When punctuation is parallel, this means that interrupting a main clause with a dash or a comma requires using the same punctuation at the beginning and end of the clause.
- Incorrect: The teenagers, students from Mrs. Smith's art class - went on a field trip to the museum. Correct: The teenagers, students from Mrs. Smith's art class, went on a field trip to the museum. Correct: The teenagers - students from Mrs. Smith's art class - went on a field trip to the museum.
- This rule also means that you may not use a semicolon to set off just one item in a list.
- Incorrect: I have lived in Des Moines, Iowa, Seattle, Washington; and Boise, Idaho. Correct: I have lived in Des Moines, Iowa; Seattle, Washington and Boise, Idaho.

A Dash is a Strong Comma

- Essentially, a dash is used for many of the same purposes as a comma. However, since it is more emphatic then a comma, a dash should only be used to add extra emphasis to an important piece of information.
- A dash can be used to draw attention to the last item in a list.
- For his birthday, Mark received a sweater, a jacket, a savings bond - and a new bike!
- A dash can also be used to set off an initial position free modifier that begins with the word "these."
- Pizza, chocolate, and ice cream - these are my favorite foods.

A Colon Appears at the End of a Completed Main Clause

- If you have trouble deciding when to use a colon in your writing, it helps to ask yourself if a period or question mark would be appropriate in the same location. If the sentence is already complete, you may use a colon to add a list, elaboration, or restatement.
- List: I have three brothers: David, Kent, and Jacob. Elaboration: I have decided not to move to San Francisco: I have been offered a job in Milwaukee. Restatement: Jenny couldn't decide who was to blame for yesterday's fight: She couldn't decide whether to blame herself or her best friend Annie for the argument.

A Semicolon is Used for Equal Emphasis

- In a compound sentence that has no coordinating conjunction, a semicolon joins related independent clauses that are of equal importance.
- Sarah answered my question abruptly; she seemed preoccupied.
- A semicolon can also be used before a conjunctive adverb used to join the two clauses in a compound sentence.
- The restaurant was very crowded; however, the waitress took our order immediately.

Parentheses Show Related, Nonessential Elements

- Parentheses can be used to show elements in a sentence that are related, yet not necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence. Parentheses can be replaced by commas in most cases, although the use of parentheses tends to de-emphasize a particular piece of information.
- My family visited several countries (Italy, France, and Spain) on our vacation last year.
- If the information inside the parentheses forms a complete sentence within the larger sentence, no punctuation is necessary.
- The snow (April saw it when she passed the window) completely covered the trees.

Apostrophes Show Possession or Indicate an Omission

- An apostrophe is used to indicate possession or ownership. An apostrophe and an -s should be added to singular possessive nouns, plural possessive nouns that do not end in -s, and singular possessive nouns that end in -s. Only an apostrophe should be used when showing possession or ownership for a plural possessive noun that ends in -s.
- Singular possessive noun: Susan's bookSingular possessive noun ending in -s: Chris's car Plural possessive nouns: the children's school Plural possessive noun that ends in -s: my parents' house
- An apostrophe can also be used to show that a letter has been omitted from a word to form a contraction. For example, "it's" is a contraction for it is. "Its" is a possessive pronoun.

Colons, Semicolons and Dashes

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COMMA
The **comma (,)** is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence. Additionally, it is used in letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Separating elements within sentences: *Suzi wanted the black, green, and blue shoes.*
Letter Salutations: *Dear Uncle John,*
Separation of two complete sentences: *We went to the movies, and we went to the beach.*

PERIOD
The **period (.)** is placed at the end of declarative sentences, statements thought to be complete and after many abbreviations.

As a sentence ender: *Jane and Jack went to the market.*
After an abbreviation: *Her Mar. birthday came and went.*

QUESTION MARK
Use a **question mark (?)** to indicate a direct question when placed at the end of a sentence.

When did Jane leave for the market?

SEMICOLON;
The **semicolon (;)** is used to connect independent clauses. It shows a closer relationship between the clauses than a period would show.

John was hurt; he knew she only said it to upset him.

EXCLAMATION POINT
The **exclamation point/mark (!)** is used when a person wants to express a sudden outcry or add emphasis.

Within dialogue: *"Holy cow!" screamed Jane.*
To emphasize a point: *My mother-in-law's rants make me furious!*

DASH
An **endash (–)** is a symbol that is used in writing or printing to connect numbers or to connect elements of a compound adjective, such as *1880 – 1945* or *Princeton – New York trains.*

The **emdash (—)** looks like the endash but has more complicated grammatical use. The symbol of a used to:
• Indicate a break in thought or sentence structure.
• Introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition, or explanation.
• Separate two clauses.
We only wanted to get two birds - but the clerk talked us into four pregnant parakeets.

COLON
A **colon (:)** has two main uses. After a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series. It is also often used after the salutation of a business letter. Within time expressions. Within time, it is used to separate out the hour and minute: *12:15 p.m.*

HYPHEN
A **hyphen (-)** is the same symbol as the endash. However, it has slightly different usage rules. A hyphen is used between the parts of a compound word or name or between the syllables of a word, especially when divided at the end of a line of text. Examples of a hyphen in use include:
Between a compound name: *Mrs. Smith - Reynolds*
Within a compound word: *back - to - back*

PARENTHESES
Parentheses (( )) are curved notations used to contain further thoughts or qualifying remarks. However, parentheses can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning in most cases.
John and Jane (who were actually half brother and sister) both have red hair.

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Braces ({ }) are used to contain two or more lines of text or listed items to show that they are considered as a unit. They are not commonplace in most writing, but can be seen in computer programming to show what should be contained within the same lines.

"QUOTATIONS MARKS"
Quotations marks ("") are a pair of punctuation marks used primarily to mark the beginning and end of a passage attributed to another and repeated word for word. They are also used to indicate meanings and to indicate the unusual or dubious status of a word.

Single quotation marks (') are used most frequently for quotes within quotes.

ELLIPSES ● ● ●
The **ellipses** mark (. . .) is generally represented by three periods, although it is occasionally demonstrated with three asterisks (***).

Ellipses are used:
• In writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words.
• Within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning.
• Students writing research papers or newspapers quoting parts of speeches will often employ ellipses to avoid copying lengthy text that is not needed.

APOSTROPHE
An **apostrophe (')** is used to indicate the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case, or the plurals of lowercase letters. Examples of the apostrophe in use include:

Omission of letters from a word.
An issue of not? importance.
Possessive case: *Sara's dog bites.*
Plural for lowercase letters:
Six people were told to mind their p's and q's.

It should be noted that, according to Purdue University, some teachers and editors enlarge the scope of the use of apostrophe, and prefer their use on symbols (&'s), numbers (7's) and capitalized letters (Q&A's), even though they are not necessary.

Colons, semicolons and dashes are perhaps the three most misunderstood punctuation marks in the English language. For starters, it seems no one can keep straight which is the colon and which is the semicolon, so let's start there. Imagine that the first letter of each word is its head. Now imagine both words doing a head-stand. The Os in the words are the dots. "Colon" just has the two dots with little else (:). The semicolon has the two dots with a bunch of extra letters at the bottom, forming a sort of tail (;). There you go.

Now, here's some info on how to use colons, semicolons and dashes. Check out the YourDictionary Punctuation Jungle infographic for an easy-to-understand visual explanation.

Colon (:)

We use colons for five things:

1. At the end of an independent clause (a group of words that could feasibly stand alone as a complete sentence) that is followed by a list. This is the perfect example. "We use colons for five things" would make a perfectly good sentence. It doesn't need anything more to complete it, but following it is a list of the five times we use colons, so to introduce the list, we used a colon.
2. When you are introducing a formal statement or a quotation, you can use a colon in much the same way you would use a comma to do the same job. The only difference is that the colon emphasizes the statement or quotation more strongly. *My 9th grade Sunday School teacher always told gave us this advice: "You never know who's watching you."*
3. If you say something, and then you feel like it needs to be restated, explained or clarified in another independent clause, you can put a colon between them. When you do this, you'll need to capitalize the first letter of each independent clause as though they were separate sentences. *The power company turned off your electricity for one simple reason: You haven't paid your bill in months.*
4. In the salutation of a formal business letter, use a colon rather than a comma. *Dear Mr. Hudson:*
5. When you write the time, of course, you use a colon. *It's 4:37.*

Semicolon (;)

We use semicolons to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). These independent clauses are always closely related, but the second is not usually an explanation or clarification of the first. Often the second independent clause will begin with what is called a conjunctive adverb (however, moreover, additionally, therefore, thus, consequently, otherwise, etc.).

- I'm going out; however, I'll be home by nine.

If you have a list, and some or all of the items in the list have commas in them, then separating the items with additional commas is just terribly confusing. Separate them with semicolons instead.

- The meeting attendees included Mrs. Perkins, the kindergarten teacher; Mr. Shumate, the sixth grade teacher; Ms. Wallace, the PE teacher; and Mrs. Barber, the principal.

Also, if you have two independent clauses that each include several commas, you can join them with a semicolon and a conjunction.

- When you go to the conference, you will hear presentations on research and development, implementation, and management; and you will meet people from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Dash (–)

Think of a dash as the punctuation you need when you interrupt yourself. Use it when you need to [interject](#) something, and you want to draw attention to it, or when you need to explain or clarify something, but you don't want to be so formal as to use a colon.

- I looked up, and there he was–the same hot guy from the gym and the party.
- We made eye contact–the hot guy and I–and he started walking my way.
- There was only one possible word to describe how I felt at that moment–mush.

Colons, Semicolons and Dashes in Real Life

The thing one must be careful about with regard to any one punctuation mark is to use it sparingly. Writing that is filled with colons tends to look overly formal, too many semicolons comes off as pretentious, and an excess of dashes makes a story feel choppy. Try to vary the types of punctuation marks you use; it will make your writing clearer and more lively.

Comma Rules

Comma rules can be confusing, not necessarily because they're difficult, but because no one can seem to agree on what they are. One teacher will tell you one rule for using commas while another will tell you exactly the opposite, and the frustrating truth is that they're probably both right. The rules for comma use are, for the most part, firmly set, but there are a few gray areas as well, and it's helpful to know what they are so that you understand where you absolutely need a comma, where you absolutely shouldn't put one, and where you can fiddle around a bit.

10 Key Rules for Commas

1. **Use a comma to separate items in a list (nouns and adjectives).** If you have more than two nouns or more than one adjective, you need to separate them with commas. In a list of nouns, you will separate the final two with the word "and" or the word "or" like this:

Janet went to the store to buy pasta, broccoli, lemons and beans.

You don't need a comma after "lemons," but if you put one there, it's not incorrect. It's just up to you. If you like a comma there, use one. If not, don't worry about it.

2.   **In a list of adjectives, you only need two to use a comma, and if the adjectives come before the noun, don't use "and." You only need to use "and" in a list of adjectives if the list comes after the verb "be."** Look at the following sentence:

I have a big, old, warm quilt on my bed.

3. **DON'T separate a subject from its verb with a comma.** Even if the subject is very long and you feel like you need a comma because anyone reading it would have to pause for a breath, don't do it.

The president of the largest company in North America and his most trusted and esteemed board of advisors (no comma here) wish to see you immediately.

The quilt on my bed is big, old and warm.

4. **Use a comma to separate [clauses](#), both [dependent](#) and [independent](#).**

Betty walks to work every day, talks to clients, makes appointments, eats lunch, has afternoon meetings, and walks back home.

Just like in the first rule, the final comma (after "meetings") is not necessary in a list of dependent clauses, but as the clauses get longer, leaving out that last comma can get confusing, so it is often better to put it in just to clear things up.

Betty gets home at 5:30, she and her husband have dinner together, they watch TV for a few hours, and they go to bed around 11:00.

When your clauses are independent (they could stand alone as complete sentences), it is absolutely necessary to use both the comma and the "and" before the final one.

5. **Use a comma to set off a non-defining subordinate clause or an appositive.** A non-defining subordinate clause gives some information about a noun, but the information is not necessary for identifying that particular noun. These clauses usually begin with "which" or "who."

The Empire State Building, which was built in 1972, is still New York's tallest building.

The non-defining subordinate clause, "which was built in 1972" gives some information about the Empire State Building, but we don't need that information to identify the building or distinguish it from any other Empire State Buildings. It's just extra information.   An appositive is similar, but it doesn't include "which" or "who." It's a word or phrase which can be substituted for a name.

Bob Vance, the president of Vance Refrigeration, married my coworker Phyllis.

Here, you could identify Phyllis's husband as either "Bob Vance" or "the president of Vance Refrigeration." They are the same person. You will notice that short or one-word [appositives](#) such as in the phrase "my coworker Phyllis" do not have to be set off with commas. If you think a sentence or phrase would be clearer by setting off a short appositive with commas, then by all means, do it. However, it is not absolutely necessary.

6. **Use a comma to set off expressions of contrast.**

It was his money, not his looks, that first attracted me to him. He doesn't look for charm in a restaurant, but service.

7. **Use a comma to set off a quote.**

So she said to the guy, "Look, I don't have to take this – not from you," and then she turned and walked away.

"Please," he begged, "can't we just talk about this?

" She stopped and turned around slowly. "It's too late," she replied. "You had your chance. Use a comma to set off a direct address.   *The people are most grateful, Your Honor, for your years of continued service. "And I want to thank you, [Ray Don](#), on behalf of all the women of the world, for your unfailing attention and concern."*

8. **Use a comma to signal that the main, independent clause is about to begin (when the sentence begins with something else) or that it is being interrupted.** Words that may be used to introduce or interrupt a sentence are: in fact, on the other hand, to tell the truth, yes, no, indeed, well, nevertheless, however, in my opinion, etc.

The truth, in my opinion, is that we are all guilty in part. Indeed, I know that I am. However, I didn't pull the trigger. Mrs. Peacock, on the the other hand, did. If you have any doubts about this fact, please check her purse. You will find the gun there, I believe.

9. **Use commas in addresses, dates and large numbers.**

Portland, Oregon

December 13, 2009

1,945,687,238,400

10. **Use commas in the salutation and the closing expression of a letter.**

Dear Aunt Carol,

If you're writing a [business letter](#) that is very formal, you might substitute a colon (:) for the comma in the greeting. The closing, however, will always use a comma.

Sincerely,   Holly

Comma Usage

Ah, the comma- one of the most confused grammatical tools of all time. There are so many ways you can go wrong with the comma: serial commas, comma splices, commas and conjunctions. Who isn't confused by a comma: this winking grammar tool, this half-a-semicolon, subscripted apostrophe! You may be convinced that the comma was invented purely to plague English students everywhere? Fortunately, these simple comma rules should help clear things up and eliminate confusion.

What the Heck Is a Serial Comma Anyway?

Commas are used to separate items on a list when you have 3 or more items. Seems simple enough, right… wrong! There are some [caveats](#) to this comma rule. For example, a list usually has an "and" somewhere in it:

- I like fish, chicken, AND shrimp.

So, if you have to use items to separate commas in a list, do you use a comma before that and or not? The answer depends on whether you want to use serial commas or not.

The Associated Press Style guide used by newspaper reports everywhere says a big No to serial commas, but The Chicago Manual of Style disagrees. With all the confusion, this is one situation where you usually can't go wrong, no matter what you do. Good thing, because there are lots of other strict rules for comma usage, so at least this is one less rule to remember.

Conjunction Confusion

Commas sometimes seem as though they belong before conjunctions. For example, if you use for, and, nor, but, or, or so, you may want to put a comma before the conjunction. This is OK, unless the sentence on the other side of the conjunction couldn't be an independent clause even without the conjunction. For example, if I said

- "Mary read the paper and watched TV"

a comma clearly does not belong. On the other hand, if I said

- "Mary read the paper, and Mary watched TV"

the comma is optional and it would not be incorrect. The difference is that "*and watched TV*" can't stand by itself, but "*Mary watched TV*" could.

Introducing A Clear-Cut Comma Rule

Finally, with all these unclear situations, here is an easy one… If you have an introduction, a comma should be used to set it off (Much like in this very sentence).For example, if I said:

- Hoping to be on time, Mike ran to catch the bus.

The point of this sentence is that Mike ran to catch the bus. The fact that he was hoping to be on time just introduces that main thought.

Unnecessary Info?

Knowing about the comma isn't unnecessary info, but if you do decide to include some elements that aren't essential to the sentence, such as an example, you need to offset it with commas. There are a lot of fancy words to describe this unnecessary info, such as appositives or parenthetical elements, but all these grammar terms boil down to the fact that if the meaning of the sentence would remain the same without the info, the info needs to be surrounded by commas. For example:

- My father, who is a teacher, is smart.

The point of this sentence is that my father is smart. The fact that he's a teacher is nice to know, but it isn't necessary information for the point I'm making here.

This unnecessary info could come anywhere in the sentence, including at the end, such as this example:

- I had lunch, which was nice.

Regardless of the placement of the unnecessary info, the commas are necessary so don't forget them!

It's a Matter of Degree

If you use a number of adjectives to describe something, you sometimes have to put commas between them. Whether or not a comma is required depends on the weight of the adjective. Adjectives are, in order: Number, quality, size, age, color, origin, and type.So, if you say you have *ten large books*, you do not need a comma since *ten* is a number and *large* is a size. The adjectives are of the same weight or degree. If, on the other hand, you say you have a *shiny, sparkling ring*, you will need to put commas between them since shiny and sparkly both describe the quality of the ring.Well there are some other rules for commas as well, these are the basic elements that should get you well on your way to befriending the comma.

How to Use a Bracket in Grammar

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Of the [fourteen different punctuation marks](#) in English, learning how to use a bracket in grammar should be one of the easiest. Punctuation marks are a [basic part of English grammar](#) and must be understood. This particular punctuation mark has very limited usage in academic writing. Writers use brackets to add information to a sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence. This means that the writer can add words if necessary to make the sentence read more clearly or add a correction or comment to quoted material.

Brackets By Any Other Name

There are a few different types of symbols that can technically be considered brackets. Each pair of marks has its own rules for academic use. Outside of [academic writing](#), they may all be interchangeable with few repercussions.

Check out the YourDictionary [Punctuation Jungle infographic](#) for an easy-to-understand visual explanation of brackets.

Parentheses or round brackets ( )

The most commonly used bracket in English is the parentheses. This pair of round brackets is used when a writer wants to add information to a sentence that will give greater detail to the information presented. However, the information is extra and not really necessary, which means that it can be removed with ease and without damaging the original information. Items placed in parentheses can often be set off with [commas](#) as well.

Sentence examples using parentheses:

- George Washington (the first president of the United States) gave his farewell address in 1796. (In this sentence, the parentheses is giving additional information about George Washington.)
- NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) launched its first Mars probe (Viking I) back in 1976. (In this sentence, the parentheses is explaining what NASA stands for and giving additional information about the Mars probe.)
- Task representations can sometimes differ between student and instructor (Flower, 1994) and even from novice student to more experienced student. (In this sentence, the information in parentheses is a citation for a book written in APA format. Similar types of line references are used other citation systems as well.)

Square brackets ([ ])

Square brackets have important usage in academic writing, especially when the writer needs to add information to a quotation. Normally, a quotation must be presented exactly as it was spoken or written. The square bracket allows the writer an opportunity to fix mistakes, add explanatory information, change a quote to fit in a sentence, or add emphasis to a word through bold or italics. Similar to the parentheses, the information in the bracket cannot alter the meaning of the [quoted material](#).

Example of square bracket use in grammar:

- "Books used [in classes] show *methods of finding information* but not much information in preparation of the review [italics added]" (Libutti & Kopala, 1995, p. 15).

In this example, the words "in classes" do not appear in the original quotation but the writer wanted to add this information to make the sentence read more clearly. To add emphasis a set of words, italics were added by the writer that were not there in the original quote.

Angled brackets (< >)

Angled brackets have very limited use in writing. They primarily set off highlighted material. The most common use for angled brackets is for placing URL's (Universal Resource Locator) into text.

Examples of Angled brackets:

- Fishman, Stephen M., and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice*. The Practitioner Inquiry Series. New York Urbana, Ill.: Teachers College Press, National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. Web.
- This is an example of an MLA citation. While MLA rules no longer require URLs to be presented due to their ever changing status, many professors may still require students to include the URL. If this is the case, then the web address needs to be set between a pair of angled brackets.

Braces or curly brackets ({ })

This mark has extremely limited usage and mostly for poetry or music. An exception to this would be if a writer wanted to create a list of items that are all equal choices. Otherwise, this punctuation mark would not be used in academic writing.

How to Use a Bracket in Grammar

In all of these examples, the brackets set off, add emphasis or further explain information presented to a reader. The different brackets all have slightly different functions and overall limited usage in academic writing, but learning how to use a bracket in grammar is as easy as recognizing and marking the extra information in a sentence.

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How to Use Quotation Marks

MANAGING THE

PUNCTUATION
JUNGLE

COMMA

The **comma** (,) is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence. Additionally, it is used in letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Separating elements within sentences: *Suzi wanted the black , green , and blue shoes.*

Letter Salutations: *Dear Uncle John ,*

Separation of two complete sentences: *We went to the movies, and we went to the beach.*

PERIOD

The **period** (.) is placed at the end of declarative sentences, statements thought to be complete and after many abbreviations.

As a sentence ender: *Jane and Jack went to the market.*
After an abbreviation: *Her Mar. birthday came and went.*

QUESTION MARK

Use a **question mark** (?) to indicate a direct question when placed at the end of a sentence.

When did Jane leave for the market?

SEMICOLON;

The **semicolon** (;) is used to connect independent clauses. It shows a closer relationship between the clauses than a period would show.

John was hurt ; he knew she only said it to upset him.

EXCLAMATION POINT

The **exclamation point/mark** (!) is used when a person wants to express a sudden outcry or add emphasis.

Within dialogue: *"Holy cow!" screamed Jane.*
To emphasize a point: *My mother-in-law's rants make me furious!*

DASH

An **endash** (–) is a symbol that is used in writing or printing to connect numbers or to connect elements of a compound adjective, such as 1880 - 1945 or *Princeton - New York trains*.

The **emdash** (—) looks like the endash but has more complicated grammatical use. The symbol of a used to:
• Indicate a break in thought or sentence structure.
• Introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition, or explanation.
• Separate two clauses.
We only wanted to get two birds - but the clock ticked us into four pregnant parakeets.

COLON

A **colon** (:) has two main uses. After a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series. It is also often used after the salutation of a business letter. Within time expressions. Within time, it is used to separate out the hour and minute: *12:15 p.m.*

HYPHEN

A **hyphen** (-) is the same symbol as the endash. However, it has slightly different usage rules. A hyphen is used between the parts of a compound word or name or between the syllables of a word, especially when divided at the end of a line of text. Examples of a hyphen in use include:
Between a compound name: *Mrs. Smith - Reynolds*
Within a compound word: *back - to - back*

PARENTHESES

Parentheses (( )) are curved notations used to contain further thoughts or qualifying remarks. However, parentheses can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning in most cases.

John and Jane (who were actually half brother and sister) both have red hair.

BRACKETS

Brackets ([ ]) are the squared off notations used for technical explanations. YourDictionary uses them when you look up word definitions. At the bottom of each definition page, brackets surround a technical description of where the word originated.

BRACES

Braces ({}) are used to contain two or more lines of text or listed items to show that they are considered as a unit. They are not commonplace in most writing, but can be seen in computer programming to show what should be contained within the same lines.

"QUOTATIONS MARKS"

Quotations marks ("") are a pair of punctuation marks used primarily to mark the beginning and end of a passage attributed to another and repeated word for word. They are also used to indicate meanings and to indicate the unusual or dubious status of a word.

Single quotation marks (') are used most frequently for quotes within quotes.

ELLIPSES ●●●

The **ellipses** mark (. . .) is generally represented by three periods, although it is occasionally demonstrated with three asterisks (***).

Ellipses are used:
• In writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words.
• Within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning.
• Students writing research papers or newspapers quoting parts of speeches will often employ ellipses to avoid copying lengthy text that is not needed.

APOSTROPHE

An **apostrophe** (') is used to indicate the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case, or the plurals of lowercase letters. Examples of the apostrophe in use include:

Omission of letters from a word.
An issue of not? importance.
Possessive case: *Sara's dog bites.*
Plural for lowercase letters:
Six people were told to mind their p's and q's.

It should be noted that, according to Purdue University, some teachers and editors enlarge the scope of the use of apostrophe, and prefer their use on symbols (&'s), numbers (7's) and capitalized letters (Q&A's), even though they are not necessary.

There seems to be some confusion over how to use quotation marks correctly. Let us take a moment to clear things up. There are two reasons to use quotation marks in English writing.

- You are quoting someone; that is to say you are using someone else's exact words, and you are giving that person credit for having said them.
- You are being sarcastic.

Read on to find out more and check out the YourDictionary Punctuation Jungle infographicon punctuation for an easy-to-understand visual explanation.

Using Quotation Marks to Quote Someone

Maybe you're writing a research paper, and you need to quote a source, or perhaps you're writing an article about the Gettysburg Address, and you need to quote Abraham Lincoln, or maybe you're writing an email to your bff about your date last night, and you need to quote what he said to you. In any of these cases, you need to use quotation marks (" ").

Quite simply put, you just surround the quoted text with quotation marks. Any words that are not your own original words should be inside the quotation marks. *"Four score and seven years ago..."*Generally speaking, however, when you use a quote, you will put it into some sort of context so it's not standing all alone. If this is the case (and it usually is), then we need to talk about punctuation.

Punctuating a Quote

Basically, any punctuation that comes before the beginning of the quote goes outside of the quotation marks, and any punctuation that comes at the end of the quote stays inside the marks. Study these examples:

- *Then he said, "How would you like to get some ice cream after the movie?"*

In this sentence, there is a lead-in to the quote. Notice that at the end of the lead-in, before the quote begins, there is a comma. And at the end of the quote, still inside the quotation marks, is the question mark.

- *"I would love to," I replied, "but I really ought to go home."*

Here, the quote is divided into two phrases - "I would love to" and "but I really ought to go home." This is one sentence, that has been split up to identify the speaker in the middle. You can break up a quote like this as long as you split it at an appropriate place, and there are three appropriate places to divide a quote:

1. Between clauses - *She buys in bulk / because it's cheaper.*
2. Before the main clause starts - *In the spring, / I like to sit outside and read.*
3. Before the verb - *The man in the tuxedo / had been staring intently into his bourbon for the better part of an hour.*
- *"Oh," he said sadly and turned to walk away.*

In this final sentence, the quote comes at the beginning. If the quote would normally end with a period like this one, use a comma inside the quotation marks, and then continue the sentence outside. If the quote would end with a question mark or an exclamation point, use that inside, and then continue the sentence outside the quotation marks.*"Where are you going?" she asked."I love it!" he exclaimed.*

If your quoted text is a complete sentence (or multiple sentences), capitalize the first letter of the sentence(s) regardless of where you put the quote within the larger sentence. *"We went to the movies," she said.*

She said, "We went to the movies."

Using Quotation Marks to Show Sarcasm

The other reason one might use quotation marks in English is to show sarcasm. For example, let's say Natalie and Mike are friends. They hang out a couple of times a week to watch their favorite TV show or play Rock Band. Natalie's girlfriends suspect that something more is brewing between the two of them. Natalie is chatting online with her friend Kendra. Observe:

Kendra: What are you doing tonight?

Natalie: I'm going over to Mike's to watch Lost.

Kendra: Yeah right.

Natalie: What?

Kendra: Nothing. You just seem to be over there "watching Lost" an awful lot.

In this case, Kendra does not believe that Natalie and Mike are actually watching *Lost* together. She is implying by the use of her quotation marks that the two of them are actually doing something else.

Or here's another example: *Leaf is an avant-garde, hippie artist who gave up his internal combustion engine some time in the late 90s. He has been experimenting lately, however, with vehicles that run on compost and human excrement, but he can't get a date because no girl wants to be seen in his "car."* Girls, you see, do not see this vehicle as a legitimate car, so when they discuss it, they use the quotation marks to indicate their sarcasm.

Hopefully this clears up any confusion you may have been experiencing about how to use quotation marks. For information on how to use other kinds of punctuation, see *What Are the Fourteen Punctuation Marks in English Grammar?*, *Comma Rules*, and *Colons, Semicolons and Dashes*.

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Hyphen Rules

Hyphens are one of those argument-inducing areas of the English language that has vocal parties on either side of any issue. Is the glass half full or is it half-full? Do we go over the proposal with a fine-tooth comb, or with a fine tooth-comb? (Or is it a finetooth comb?) Any set or rules, even ones that are discussed in a formal style manual, will likely end up being refuted in another style manual of equal clout.

Rules & Guidelines for Hyphens

The fact is, there's really no set of hyphen rules on which every person can agree. Following are a few of the more common rules, and some guidelines to follow when deciding yourself whether or not to use a hyphen.

Before a Noun

A hyphen should be used in order to create an adjective if the phrase comes before the noun in a sentence. However, the hyphen should not be used if the phrase follows the noun in the sentence.

- A well-respected CEO gets a hyphen, whereas a CEO who is well respected does not.
- A widely-known author is a hyphenated author, but an author who is widely known gets no hyphen at all.

This is the most common rule of hyphenation, and among the most misunderstood, but nearly all authorities would agree on it.

Related Words

If two words are inextricably linked, you can choose to hyphenate them (or you may combine the words together). The hyphen is necessary if the words are not combined into a single compound word.

- Book-case may properly be written as bookcase.
- The prefix "anti" is sometimes used with or without a hyphen, as in anti-discrimination (or antidiscrimination).

There are, of course, exceptions to the rule:

- Most prefixes, such as ex- and sometimes anti-, are used with hyphens instead of making the words compound.
- When one of the words is a proper noun, always hyphenate. Un-American never becomes unAmerican; the hyphen is necessary to avoid confusion.

Avoiding Confusion

Hyphens can be useful to avoid confusion. For example:

- "Tom pulled an issue off the dirty magazine-rack" has a dramatically different meaning than "Tom pulled an issue off the dirty-magazine rack."
- "The baseball player re-signed his contract" is almost the exact opposite of "The baseball player resigned his contract." In this instance, the meaning of the sentence would be ambiguous, at best, without the addition of the hyphen.

Simply put, use your common sense.

Other Common Instances

Some nouns, such as attorney-at-law, require hyphens in order to make the noun look complete.

Compound numbers and fractions use hyphens all the time: three-fifths and twenty-five should contain hyphens.

Other compound words, especially when they appear before nouns in a sentence, will be hyphenated. These include such common phrases as:

- on-the-fly
- on-the-go
- out-of-date

Hyphens are also used to break words apart between syllables at the end of a line.

If you're a stickler for hyphenation, it's best not to use spell-check, or to justify the words in the center of a page. The hyphens created by your computer will at best be awkward, and at worst completely incorrect. Let the computer leave hyphens to you, the hyphen expert.

Consult a Dictionary

This leads us to a final word. Compound words are tricky things, and the way they're written changes over time. Often, a compound word will start out as two words and then become a hyphenated phrase before it ultimately ends up as a true one-word compound.

The newest version of any dictionary of merit will help you to make the distinction. For example, in the instance of fine-tooth comb:

- The most commonly accepted hyphenation occurs between "fine" and "tooth."
- According to English novelist Sir Kingsley Amis, this commonly accepted form is incorrect: the expression, according to him, was originally "fine tooth-comb."

In this case, feel free to use whichever you prefer. In most cases, you'll simply want to follow your dictionary's instructions on matters of compound words.

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When to Use Exclamation Marks

In a famous Seinfeld episode, the Elaine character had a fight with her boyfriend that ultimately led to a breakup when he did not use an exclamation mark in a message he left her about her friend having a baby. Clearly, he could have been helped by some guidance on exactly what the rules are for proper exclamation point usage. Fortunately, this guide below should save your relationship from a similar fate by helping you learn just when and how to use an exclamation point to punctuate your sentences.

What Is an Exclamation Point?

An exclamation point is a type of punctuation mark that goes at the end of a sentence. Other examples of related punctuation marks include periods and question marks, which also go at the end of sentences. An exclamation point, also called an exclamation mark, essentially looks like a period with a vertical line over it: !

Although exclamation marks were introduced into the English language in the 15th century, exclamation marks did not even exist as a separate key on standard typewriters until the 1970's

(apparently, people just weren't as excited back then!). Fortunately, exclamation points now have a (somewhat) prominent place on computer keyboards right above the number one key--- yes, you have to hit shift to get it, but it's on the number 1!

When Should Exclamation Points Be Used

Exclamation points were originally called the "note of admiration." They are still, to this day, used to express excitement. They are also used to express surprise, astonishment, or any other such strong emotion. Any exclamatory sentence can be properly followed by an exclamation mark, to add additional emphasis. After all, isn't it a lot more exciting to say "I am excited!" then to say "I am excited."

They are commonly used after interjections (words or phrases that are used to exclaim, command or protest). Interrogatories include words such as "oh, wow, and boy" For example, Wow! This grammar stuff is interesting. Boy! I wish I'd learned it before. Oh! That's right, I did.

When used in a quote, exclamation points should be inside the quotation marks: Joe said, "I like pizza a lot!"

Multiple Exclamation Point Madness!

Exclamation points go at the end of sentences. Typically, only one exclamation point is used. In informal writing, many people often use one (or many) to emphasize their excitement. For example: "No!!! I told you metal can't go in the microwave" certainly gets the point across and has a lot more impact as you run for the fire extinguisher. Exclamation points can also be used with question marks to express shock, protest or dismay. For example:What do you mean you forgot the plane tickets?!?!?!!?

There is some dispute in regards to whether exclamation points belong in formal writing or not. Most conventional grammar rules and grammarians say that they really don't belong, or at a minimum that they should be used sparingly. All sorts of arguments have been made against the exclamation point- everything from the fact that the writing should create its own emphasis to the belief that an exclamation point will distract the reader. However, some prolific writers do use exclamation points freely in their work and one best selling author, Tom Wolfe, is known for being a big fan of the exclamation point.

Comic books frequently use exclamation points for emphasis and to add excitement to their pages. Certain famous brands have branded the exclamation point right along with their name- for example Jeopardy! Is a lot more exciting then just Jeopardy, and Yahoo! Really has to have to that exclamation mark accompanying it.

Examples of Exclamation Marks

Here are some example sentences that use exclamation marks:

- Yes! I will marry you.
- Oh! That is a great new dress.
- Wow! I can't believe I ran into you here.
- No! I did not intend to lock myself out of the house.
- Stop! I really don't want to get wet, don't throw me in the pool!
- The cat said meow! loudly and I couldn't sleep.