

2.10 PUNCTUATION MARKS

Punctuation marks are visual indicators used in a written or printed text in order to separate sentences or a part of a sentence from another. They are used to make an idea readable. Look at the following example:

to make sense

1. I can't do it he said speaking at the top of his voice she listened to it and said ok go to hell.

Would you like to read something of this sort? Of course, it would be quite a challenge to read a thing like that. Can you make out what is wrong with the above expression? The sentence does not have any commas, inverted commas, full stop, or exclamation marks, in brief, the signs that are known as **punctuation marks**.

In this section, we shall learn how to use punctuation marks correctly. Given below are the important punctuation marks which are normally used in written English:

1. Full stop (.)
2. Comma (,)
3. Dash (—)
4. Hyphen (-)
5. Semicolon (;)
6. Double inverted commas (" ")
7. Single inverted commas ('')
8. Colon (:)
9. Apostrophe (')
10. Parentheses ()

11. Sign of interrogation/Question mark (?)
12. Exclamation mark (!)

Let us see all these punctuation marks in detail.

2.10.1 Full Stop

The **full stop** (.) is used to mark the end of an affirmative, negative, or imperative sentence. For example:

1. Marie Curie was a great scientist.
2. She did not know the way to the market.
3. Listen to me.

It is also used in abbreviations, such as the following:

1. He is an M.B.B.S. doctor.
2. She works for I.D.B.I.
3. Our teacher is pursuing his Ph.D.

Not long ago, it was customary to write *Mr.* and *Mrs.* in English, that is, with a full stop at the end of these words. In current usage, however, we write these abbreviations as *Mr* and *Mrs*, that is, without a full stop since they are now seen as full spellings.

2.10.2 Comma

Just as a full stop marks the end of a sentence, a **comma** (,) suggests a pause in the writing. Following are the main uses of a comma:

It indicates omission of a word, especially a verb.

1. You can do that; I, never.
2. Her mother was an English; her father, an American.
3. She got her prize; I, my punishment.

It separates the co-ordinate clause(s) in a compound sentence.

1. I came, I saw, I conquered.
2. Father is in the office, mother is in the kitchen.
3. Men may come and men may go, but I go on for ever.

It separates the subject and the long preceding phrase that characterizes it.

1. Harassed and distraught right from the early days of her marriage, she decided to embark on a journey of her own.
2. Contrary to the notion that it consumes a lot of your time and gives you only a little, reading gives you an opportunity to look not just beyond but inside you as well.

It separates the same parts of speech used in the same sentence.

1. She was tall, slim, and beautiful.
2. Books, chairs, tables, desks, and settees could be seen in the lawn.
3. Unwilling to go to school, the child whined, cried, groaned, and protested whichever way he could.

It separates the parenthetical ideas from the core ideas in a sentence.

1. Your suggestion, however, is quite tempting.
2. The villain, having trapped the hero, gave a malicious smile.
3. No such efforts, therefore, are going to yield fruit.

It marks a non-defining clause. It is used to contribute to the original idea in a parenthetical way and can be omitted without doing any harm to the core meaning of the sentence.

1. My friend, who is a journalist, doesn't think so.
2. The poet, the one who always defied the system, decided not to comply with the king's orders.
3. His book, the one that he wrote at the fag end of his career, is likely to create a stir.

It is used to separate two or more nouns in apposition.

1. Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of all times, was born in 1564.
2. Indira Gandhi, the only woman Prime Minister of India so far, was a great politician.
3. Sam, my uncle, is returning from England.

It is used to address people.

1. Sir, I am indebted to you.
2. How are you, my dear?
3. Come here, little girl.

It marks off direct quotations from the rest of the sentence.

1. Mother said to her children, 'Have your food.'
2. 'What do you think,' said he, 'is the cause of your failure?'
3. 'Come in and tell what happened,' the fat man said and moved away from the door.

It is used to separate an adverbial clause from the principal clause.

1. When we came back, we found the doors open.
2. If you do not work hard, you cannot succeed.
3. Though it is none of my business, I cannot force myself into aloofness on this issue.

It is used before and after words, phrases, or clauses that are introduced to the main thought in a parenthetical way.

1. This, in no way, is my problem.
2. The poor little children, when they first saw him, thought he was an angel.
3. Your story, in all probability, is fairy tale.

2.10.3 Dash

A **dash** (—) indicated by a long horizontal line is often used in place of a colon or parenthesis.

Here are its uses:

It is used to emphasize the idea anticipated in the sentence.

1. Finally, we got what we had all along desired—our first television set at home.
2. He is what you expect him to be—the greatest fool on earth!
3. They told us whatever was to be told—nothing could be done.

At times, much like a comma, a dash is used to separate an expression from the rest of the sentence.

1. He is—after all—his mother's son.
2. In the end—to be precise—I would say that all that shines is not gold.
3. We are—generally speaking—people of short memories.

It is also used after the colon to indicate something that follows.

1. These are some of the views—
2. He says—*frailty thy name is woman!*

It is also used to indicate an abrupt change of idea.

1. Had he not boarded the plane—but what is the use of thinking like that?
2. Once you reach here—but wait, you are coming, aren't you?
3. Only if we were a little more educated—but how would that have changed our lives?

2.10.4 Hyphen

A **hyphen** (-) is a shorter line than a dash. The uses of a hyphen are as follows:

It is used to join two or more words in a compound word.

1. She was truly tormented by her daughter-in-law.
2. The commander-in-chief refused to sanction any leave to the sergeant.
3. The ex-director of the company is paying a visit this afternoon.
4. These days, in the name of scholars, you will see jack-of-all-trades but master-of-none.

2.10.5 Semicolon

A **semicolon** (;) stands for a longer pause than a comma. Following are the uses of a semicolon.

It is used to separate clauses.

1. Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.
2. Man proposes; God disposes.
3. Not that I loved Caesar less; but that I loved Rome more.
4. It is easy to be difficult; but difficult to be easy.

It is used to express different ideas without writing a new sentence.

1. Today, we don't do anything regarding global warming; tomorrow there is nothing we can do about it.
2. In the morning, he fought with his wife; in the afternoon, he reconciled with her.
3. One man kept her in good humour; the other kept her in the need of the first.

2.10.6 Colon

A **colon** (:) is used to list examples and enumeration.

1. Following are the examples of parts of speech: noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, etc.
2. These are the points to be kept in mind: ...
3. The team consists of eleven players: Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, V.V.S. Laxman, ...

2.10.7 Single and Double Inverted Commas

Double inverted commas (“ ”) are used to quote the exact words of the person being quoted.

1. He said, “You are my friend.”
2. “One cannot fool oneself for a long time,” cleaning his glasses he spoke, “but you have tried to keep yourself foolish enough for a pretty long time.”
3. Eliot begins by saying, “April is the cruelest month.”

Single inverted commas (‘ ’) are used to cite a quotation within another quotation.

1. “There is no point in keeping a pulled face”, said he, “even if you are perturbed by the ‘to be or not to be’ conundrum.”
2. “What sort of movie was that—so loud and so pompous?” felt she, “they seem to have forgotten that ‘art lies in concealing art.’”

Many publications, including this book, follow the exact opposite of the rules mentioned in the examples, as per their individual house-style guidelines.

2.10.8 Apostrophe

The **apostrophe** (') is used to indicate the possessive of a noun. If the noun is singular, the apostrophe is followed by an **s**; if the noun is plural, the **s** is followed by the apostrophe, except when the plural does not end in **s**, as in the case of a few irregular nouns, for example, children's:

1. The children's books are lying there.
2. Brown's house is next to ours.
3. Waugh's captaincy is still appreciated.

- It is also used to show words in a contracted form.

1. I feel it's time to move out of the house. (*it's* stands for *it is*)
2. It's been ages since we met her. (*it's* stands for *it has*)
3. Let's go and watch some play. (*let's* stands for *let us*)

- It is sometimes also used to show the letters and figures in the plural form to avoid confusion.

1. In 1970's was seen the first wave of Parallel Hindi Cinema.
2. Articulate your s's and sh's properly.
3. Round off all the 0.25's and 0.50's in the final total.

4. The girl's purse was lost. (the purse of a girl)
5. The girls' purses were stolen. (purses of many girls)

4. You're just a complete fool. (*you're* stands for *you are*)
5. Won't you come inside? (*won't* stands for *will not*)
6. Don't you dare speak to him like that! (*don't* stands for *do not*)

2.10.9 Parentheses

Parentheses () are used by writers to indicate an afterthought by introducing some words, a phrase, or a clause:

1. The great man (this is how he is seen to be in the area) is reported to have killed his wife.
2. The development (so it seems) was achieved by turning the poor out of their huts.

2.10.10 Sign of Interrogation/Question Mark

The **sign of interrogation/question mark** (?) is used after a direct question or a tag question that is appended to a statement:

1. Do you understand what I say?
2. Shall we take some rest?

3. You are stupid, aren't you?

Remember that a question mark is not used after an indirect question.

1. I am not sure what to do in life.
2. The inspector could not make out if she was telling a lie.
3. They asked their children whether they are doing good parenting.

2.10.11 Exclamation Mark

The **exclamation mark** (!) is used in phrases and sentences that express sudden, strong emotion or a wish:

1. May you live long!
2. What a terrible sight!

3. O Hamlet, speak no more!
4. Oh, you fool! Listen to me first and then do

2.10.12 Capital Letters

Capital letters are used for various purposes. To begin with, we start a sentence with a capital letter:

1. We can't do anything about it.
2. No problem.
3. Has he come?

They are used to begin a sentence inside inverted commas.

1. It is said, 'To err is human.'
2. Shakespeare says, 'One may smile and smile, and still be a villain.'

- They normally begin a proper noun and the adjectives we form from it.

1. Pinter is known for his theatre language popularly known as Pinteresque idiom.
2. Italy is a place of intellect; the Italian thinker Machiavelli is still well known.
3. Though *Maqbool* does try to recreate Shakespeare's classic *Macbeth*, the sweep of imagination and grandeur of spectacle is hardly Shakespearean.

- They are used to refer to a person's title or degree.

1. Pandit Nehru was the first prime minister of India.
2. Sir V.S. Naipaul is visiting India next year.
3. Dr R.P. Pareek, an MD, is an expert in diabetics.

- They are used to refer to the names of festivals.

1. Christmas falls on 25th December.
2. Diwali is the single most important festival in our family.

- They are used to refer to the names of days, weeks, months, and events.

1. On Sundays, we generally get up quite late.
2. North India is quite cold in January.
3. The Trojan War has acquired mythical significance in our collective unconscious.

- They are used to mark the important words in a title. Normally, the head words, such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, are written in capital letters, whereas conjunctions, prepositions, and articles are written in small letters.

1. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is a great poem by John Keats.
2. The title of my book, *Language as Stratagem in Pinter's Plays*, has won me laurels on many occasions.
3. His sister is pursuing her research and is currently busy in the writing of a project entitled *Rediscovering Indian Diaspora: A Study of Postmodern Fiction in English with Special Reference to the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, and Jaishree Mishra*.

- They are chosen to refer to the word *God* and the pronouns replacing it.

1. God is great.
2. No one knows His ways.
3. Don't worry; He knows that you are innocent.

- They are used in words of exclamations.

1. Oh! You are back.
2. This is the solution, Eh!
3. Ugh! I forgot to call you.

- The personal pronoun *I* is always written in capital letter.

1. I can't see you.
2. 'It is doubtful,' I said to her.
3. I will not say I have won the battle unless I am convinced that I have done it.