

Hints and Tips: English



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Apostrophes

Apostrophes are one of the most commonly used punctuation marks and often appear where they shouldn't! Apostrophes are used to show that letters are missing or to show that something or someone belongs to the subject of the sentence (e.g. a person or organisation).

Missing letters

An apostrophe can be used to show that letters have been missed out of words.

- Isn't (Is not)
- There's (There is)
- Don't (Do not)
- Who's (Who is).

These contractions are used when writing informally and should be avoided in formal writing, such as reports and assignments.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

It's or Its?

It's is short for 'it is' or 'it has', and an apostrophe should therefore be included:

- There is no way it's going to be ready on time. (It is)
- It's been ready for weeks! (It has)

Its (without an apostrophe) is used when something belongs:

- The organisation has recently introduced its new equality and diversity policies.
- A report was published this year and its findings suggested that 1 in 10 children have a diagnosable mental health condition.

Possession: Singular – 's

If something belongs to one person/thing, an apostrophe goes before the 's':

- The organisation's policy (when talking about one organisation and their policy)
- Yesterday's weather was lovely (the weather that belonged to yesterday).

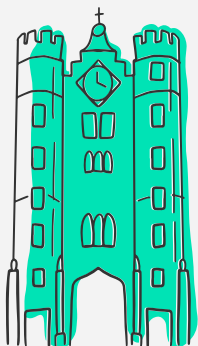


Apostrophes

Names that end in '-s'

With personal names that end in 's', add an extra 's' with the apostrophe on the inside of it:

- Thomas's brother was injured in the accident.
- St. James's Palace has been the setting for some of the most important events in royal history.



Possession: Plural - s'

If it belongs to more than one person or thing, an apostrophe goes after the 's'.

- The teacher was always losing her pupils' books. (The teacher loses the books that belongs to more than one pupil)
- The politicians' expenses were reported last year. (The expenses which belonged to more than one politician)

It is important that the apostrophe is correctly placed, otherwise it can change the meaning of the whole sentence:

- The patient's meals were served on time by the healthcare assistants. (One patient)
- The patients' meals were served on time by the healthcare assistants. (Lots of patients)

There are some words that are plurals (more than one) but do not end in 's', such as children (more than one child) and people (more than one person).

If you want to show that something belongs to them, add 's:

- The children's ward received many donations this year.
- The people's vote has decided who is the winner.

When nothing belongs to a plural, an apostrophe should not be used:

- 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s
- GPs, MPs
- DVDs, CDs.

Capital Letters

Beginning of a sentence:

It is important that health and safety is taken seriously in the workplace.

When using 'I':

I have worked within this role since 2009 and I have enjoyed the challenges that it has given me.

Titles (course titles, books, films, articles, newspapers and songs):

In titles, capitalise only the important words, not minor connective words such as 'and', 'the' and 'but'.

I have completed a Level 3 qualification in Health and Social Care.

Days of the week and months of the year:

I will attend college every Wednesday afternoon in May.

A capital letter is not used for seasons:

I am looking forward to going away for the summer.

Elderly people are more vulnerable to illness during the winter.



Countries and languages:

Half a million people in Wales can speak Welsh; 19% of the population.

A capital letter is needed for languages but not for school subjects:

German is his first language, although he learnt English whilst at school.

She has got exams in English, French, history and geography this year.

Companies, organisations and institutions:

The Skills Network
The University of Manchester

Places:

The Houses of Parliament
Loch Ness



Capital letters are not needed for places that are not proper nouns:

I go to university three times a week.

Jobs:

Capital letters are not needed when you are talking about a general role.

All store managers will need to ensure that their staff have been fully trained.

When you are referring to a specific person/role, capital letters are used:

The Store Manager, Rachel Jones, will be conducting interviews all day.

Command Verbs

Analyse

An analysis should take time, and consider all aspects of the topic or situation to ensure that every point has been covered. Your answer to a question that asks you to analyse should be very detailed and should look at both positive and negative aspects. You should also try to make comparisons when analysing.

Assess/Evaluate/Discuss

A question beginning in this way requires you to weigh up a topic, considering the strengths and weaknesses or arguments for and against an idea. This kind of question will usually require a longer response so that points can be explored in depth. Evidence may be required to support your points.

Clarify

When you are asked to clarify something, you will need to state precisely what the correct answer to a situation or question is, or provide a solution to a situation if you are given one. For example, if you are provided with two case studies and asked to 'Clarify which case study shows best practice', you will need to state within your answer which case study showed best practice and why.

Compare/Distinguish/Differentiate

This type of question is looking for an answer that examines the similarities and differences between two or more items or concepts. This answer will need to be detailed as the question may be asking for evidence and a conclusion.

Complete

Here you will need to enter your answer into a specified area, such as a partially completed table, diagram or list.

Consider/Take a moment/Think

This type of question will be asking you to think about a particular subject area in more depth before answering. An example might be 'Take a moment to recall your experiences with customer service. What would you expect good customer service to include?'

Define

This type of question will require a concise explanation of a subject or idea to show you have fully understood a term or topic. It will usually be no longer than a paragraph.

Demonstrate/Carry out/Show

Means just that. Show someone what you do.

Describe

If you are asked to describe something, you should state the features in such a way that another person could recognise what you are describing if they saw it. An example might be: 'Describe a donkey.' It would be insufficient to state 'has four legs and a back' as this could be a chair. A description stating 'a four-legged animal, long tail, mane, similar to a horse but generally smaller, makes a unique sound like 'eeyor' often repeatedly' would probably allow another person to recognise your description as a donkey.

Draw

This question is asking for a visual answer, which may be a simple illustration or diagram.



Estimate

This question will provide you with some numerical information to calculate an answer that may be rounded to the nearest integer or expressed as an approximate fraction or percentage.

Explain/Discuss

Give details which make what you are trying to say clear to the reader. This type of question requires an in-depth answer, and you should include a variety of points or reasons within your answer to strengthen what you are trying to say and provide clarity to the reader.

Give/Provide/Name/Include

This question will require you to provide one or more pieces of evidence or information regarding a specific topic. This will usually be discrete, quantitative information. An example might be 'Give three examples of proper nouns.'

Identify

This means to give sufficient detail so that someone else can recognise your description. This is sometimes used instead of 'state', so think what the question is asking for.

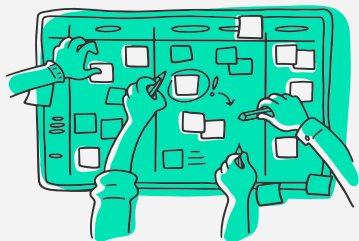
Command Verbs

Illustrate

This requires you to provide evidence to support a theory or argument. An example might be 'Person-centred care is important in managing dementia.' Illustrate your argument for this statement with at least three supporting points.

List

If you are asked to list information, you will need to write it in numbered or bulleted points, possibly to indicate an order or a multi-step process.



Outline

This type of question needs a brief answer which does not include much detail, but covers all steps, stages or parts involved. A question asking you to outline how to catch a train would require an answer along the lines of 'check train times, choose train, go to station, buy ticket and board train'. It would not expect you to include the detail of how you would do these things.

Plan

Some questions could ask you to make a plan for yourself or another person. Answers should include a lot of detail. If a template of the plan is provided, you should complete this in as much detail as you can. Some of the things you may be asked to plan could be a recipe, event, fitness activity, risk assessment or medical procedure.

Produce/Make/Create/Keep

For this question, you will need to create something as part of your assessment. This could be a written document such as an essay, diary, report, or diagram.

Review

When you are asked to review something as part of a question, you need to reflect on a particular task, situation or topic and provide your thoughts on this. You should try to mention both positive and negative aspects within your answer, as a review should consider both good and bad points.

Select/Pick/Choose/Tick

This requires you to choose one or more options from those that have been given.

State

Usually requires a shortened answer, which could be a list or a single sentence. The following is an example of such a question: 'State what the letters 'BBC' stand for'. The answer would simply be 'British Broadcasting Corporation'.

Summarise

If a question asks you to summarise an idea, concept, situation or topic, you should provide a brief description and ensure that it is clear and informative for another person to understand. For example, you may look at a five-step process in great detail within your learning resources, and then be asked to summarise the process. You would need to provide a brief description of each step involved in the process in order to summarise it.

Suggest

Questions that ask you to suggest require you to put some ideas forward within your answer. You will need to mention different ideas within your answer to show that you can confidently make appropriate suggestions in relation to a particular topic or situation.

Use/Read/Look

This question will provide some information or a resource which you will need to use to write your answer. This may be in the form of a case study, to test how you would respond to a 'real' situation.

Write/Record

This type of question will require you to write a detailed, in-depth response. This may possibly take place over a number of days or weeks, such as a food diary or an ongoing observation.



Commas

Commas can help to make the meaning clear in a sentence and ensure that the information is easy to read. A comma also acts as a brief pause. If you read your sentences aloud, it is often easy to identify where one should go.

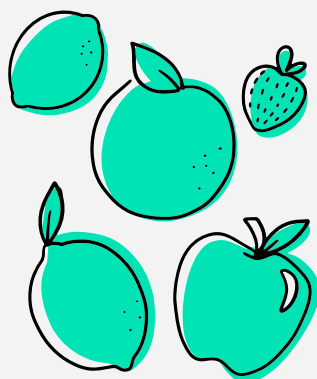
Lists

Commas are used to divide items in lists, but are not required before the and/or at the end.

- The flavours available are orange, lemon, apple, strawberry and lime.

This rule applies when writing in the UK and using British English. There is an exception – where the items in a list may also contain the word ‘and’ and commas are used to clarify the actual list entries.

- The colour options available are greyscale, black and white, and full colour.



Separating parts of a sentence

Commas are used to separate an introductory word or phrase from the main sentence.

- However, policies have been adapted in response to these changes.
- On reflection, my placement has been a positive experience and I have learnt a lot.



Bracketing information

Commas can be used to bracket information, when you wish to add additional information to your sentence but do not want to interrupt its flow.

- Roald Dahl, who was born in Wales, was a fighter pilot and a spy during WW2.
- The car, which looked like it had been in an accident, was parked outside the house all week.



The commas act like invisible brackets. To check that you have them in the right place, read the words on either side of the commas and the sentence should still make sense.

- The car [which looked like it had been in an accident] was parked outside the house all week.

Joining

Commas are used when two complete sentences are joined together to form one. The connecting words and, but, or, while and yet must follow the comma.

- You must submit your assignment by Friday, or it will be late.
- The boys wanted to stay up until midnight, but they grew tired and fell asleep.

Beware the comma splice!

A comma can't be used on its own to join two independent sentences. This is known as 'comma splicing'.

For example:

Dyslexia is a popular subject amongst teachers, it is very interesting.

There are several ways to avoid comma splices:

- Create two sentences using a full stop e.g. Dyslexia is a popular subject amongst teachers. It is very interesting.
- Use a semicolon to suggest a link between the two sentences e.g. Dyslexia is a popular subject amongst teachers; it is very interesting.
- Use a conjunction (joining word) to connect the sentences e.g. Dyslexia is a popular subject amongst teachers as it is very interesting.



Commonly Confused Words

Noun – A word that refers to a person, place, thing, event, substance, or quality.

Verb – A doing word.

Accept (to agree to receive or do)

We accepted their invitation to the wedding.



Except (not including; apart from)

He works every day, except for Sundays.

Adverse (harmful)

Smoking has an adverse impact on your health.

Averse (opposed to something)

Although initially averse to the prospect of directing a script that she wrote, she eventually agreed.

Advice (noun – a suggestion)

Their grandmother always provides great advice.

Advise (verb – the act of providing the advice)

She advised them to save their money.



Affect (verb – to influence or impact something)

Her depression started to affect the family life.

Effect (noun – the result of something)

The beneficial effects of exercise are evident.

Altogether (in total)

There are four managers altogether within this department.



All together (all in one place or all at once)

They arrived at the party all together.

Complement (to add to in a way that improves)

The new brown rug would complement the décor in the bedroom.

Compliment (to express admiration or praise)

The team was complimented on their work.

Cue (a signal for action; a wooden rod)

He gave the team their cue to begin.

A snooker cue can be bought locally.



Queue (a line of people or vehicles)

The queue for the bus was very long.

Dependant (a person who relies on another for support)

Allowances may also be higher for those with dependants.

Dependent (determined or influenced by; relying on)

Whether I get into university or not is dependent on how good my grades are. It's very easy to become dependent on sleeping pills.

Commonly Confused Words

Noun – A word that refers to a person, place, thing, event, substance, or quality.

Verb – A doing word.



Elicit (to draw out a reply or reaction)

The questionnaire was intended to elicit information on eating habits.

Illicit (forbidden by custom, law or rules)

An illicit love affair was reported in the news.

Empathy (the ability to understand another person's feelings)

He photographed the immigrants with great dignity and empathy.

Sympathy (the feeling of compassion, sorrow or pity for someone)

There was a lot of sympathy for the family.



Its (belonging to it)

Turn the phone on its side.

It's (it is/it has)

It's been terrible working in this cold weather.

Practice (noun – action)

The course allows the students to put their ideas into practice.

Practise (verb – to rehearse or train)

She practised playing the guitar daily.
He practised medicine for 20 years.

Stationary (not moving)

The car was stationary outside the house.

Stationery (writing materials)

The stationery order had to be in by next week.

Loose (not fastened)

His clothes were loose on him once he had lost weight.

Lose (misplace or no longer have possession of)

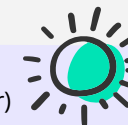
Please be careful not to lose your belongings.

Quiet (making little or no noise)

The restaurant was very quiet on Monday night.

Quite (moderately)

His response was quite rude!



Weather (conditions in the air)

The weather looked good for the weekend.

Whether (to express doubt, or choice between alternatives)

She asked the man sitting opposite whether he'd mind if she opened the window.

Who's (who is or who has)

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

Whose (belonging to which person)

Whose coat is this?



You're (you are)

You're late again!

Your (belonging to someone)

Your course materials are online.

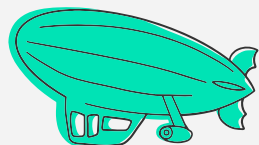
Semicolons

A semicolon is used to add a pause which is stronger than a comma but not as final as a full stop. It connects two complete sentences to form one single sentence and is used instead of a conjunction (and, also, but).

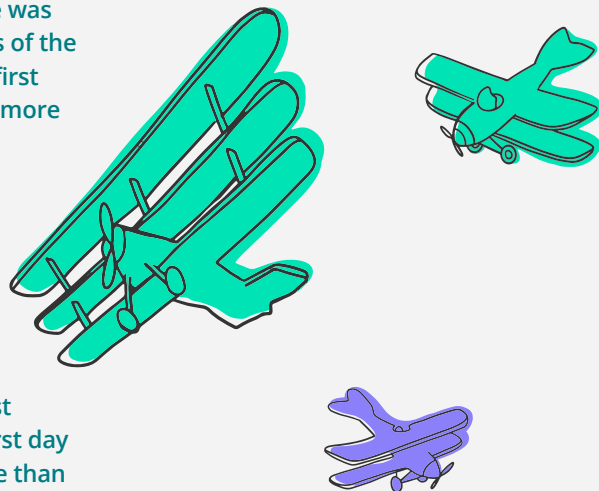
1. The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War. On the first day, the British suffered more than 57,000 casualties.

The full stop divides the two sentences, but, as a result, they may appear abrupt and do not flow.

2. The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War and on the first day the British suffered more than 57,000 casualties.



A conjunction has been used to help make this sentence flow and connect these two separate points.



3. The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War; on the first day, the British suffered more than 57,000 casualties.

A semicolon connects these two separate sentences and creates a dramatic pause.

A useful test to work out when to use a semicolon is to ask yourself whether the two parts of the sentence could be written as separate sentences. If the answer is yes, then you can use a semicolon.

Colons

A colon is used to direct attention to a specific item or to introduce something within a piece of text, such as a list or a quote.

In front of a list:

Students are expected to carry out a range of activities: attend lectures, take part in tutorials, produce written work, meet deadlines for assignments and sit examinations.

Make sure you wear clothes that are suitable for working with patients: clean, tidy and appropriate for the task.

A way to check if a colon should be placed before a list is to read the first part of the sentence (e.g. 'Make sure you wear clothes that are suitable for working with patients') If it makes sense on its own, then a colon can be inserted.



To introduce a direct quotation:

The NHS states that: 'Many deaths could be prevented if first aid was given before emergency services arrive'.

If the words following the colon are a quotation, a capital letter needs to be used for the first word after the colon. However, a dash (-) does not need to be included next to the colon.



Sentence Structure

A sentence should make sense on its own and should always contain a subject (a person, place or thing the sentence is about) and a verb (a doing word). A subject and verb must agree for the sentence to be grammatically correct.

Subject-Verb Agreement

A singular subject (she, it, car) takes a singular verb (is, goes, shines), whereas a plural subject (we, they, many) takes a plural verb (are, have, were):

She is ready for work every morning at the same time.

Singular subject **Singular verb**

They are ready for work every morning at the same time.

Plural subject **Plural verb**



It is sometimes difficult to work out the subject if there are a lot of words between the subject and the verb:

Noah, who has just returned from Australia, does not intend to go back.

Singular subject

Singular verb



Careful planning and a clear mind are vital when administering medication

Plural subject

Plural verb

The best way to identify if your sentences have correct subject-verb agreement is to read them out loud. This will help to highlight any sentences that may not sound right.

Tenses

Tenses are verbs which tell the reader when something happened:

- He **loved** his new job. (Past)
- He **loves** his new job. (Present)
- He will **love** his new job. (Future)



These are the 'simple' tenses – there are many more. It is important that the correct tense is used in writing so that the reader is aware of when the event being referred to took place.

Paragraphs

Sentences can vary in length, but it is best if they aren't too long as the meaning can become lost and difficult to understand.

Sentences can be grouped together to form a paragraph. This paragraph should be focused on one topic. A topic sentence often begins a paragraph and indicates to the reader what the theme is. Paragraphs shouldn't be too short or too long. A new paragraph should be started when moving on to a new topic, which includes a transition sentence (this helps to link to the previous paragraph).

For example:

Topic sentence

Stress affects us in a number of ways, both physically and emotionally, and in varying intensities. Research has shown that stress can sometimes be positive. It makes us more alert and helps us perform better in certain situations. However, stress has only been found to be beneficial if it is short-lived. If it is persistent, this can lead to more serious long-term difficulties.

Concluding sentence

It is okay to ask for professional help, if you feel that you are struggling to manage on your own. It is important to get help as soon as possible so that you can begin to get better.

Transition sentence

Another condition which affects many people is anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is a long-term condition that causes you to feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event.



Hints and Tips: English

For support and advice, contact The Skills Network's
Learner Support Team on:

Main phone line:	01757 210022
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