

# **BUSINESS ENGLISH**

## **Formal Email Writing**

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English with Logan

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### **Cheat Sheets #5**

### **EMAIL PUNCTUATION**

## Punctuation - General Rules

### Formal *mixed punctuation*

Use a comma after the greeting

*Dear Mr. Harris,*

Use a colon after the greeting (US, very formal)

*Dear Mr. Harris:*

No comma after *dear* because it's an adjective

Use a comma after the interjecting greeting

*Hello, Mr. Harris,*

Use a comma after the closing statement

*Best regards, Your Name*

### Informal *open punctuation*

No comma after the interjection or the greeting

*Hi John*

No comma in the closing statement

- There are three types of dashes: a hyphen, an en-dash, and an em-dash
- The em-dash can serve the same function as commas, parentheses, and colons
- Dashes are considered more intrusive than commas
- Use more commas and fewer dashes

- Apostrophes are used in place of missing letters in contractions

- Do not use contractions in formal writing

*won't = will not*

*int'l = international*

- Do not use multiple punctuation marks in formal emails

*??? !!! !!!??*



## Punctuation - Comma

The listing comma separates items in a list of three or more words or phrases.

It is also known as a serial comma or an Oxford comma.

Place a comma before the last item in the list.

This is a guideline, not a rule, but be consistent – either use it or don't.

*We have tuna, beef, and vegetable sandwiches.*

The opener comma separates independent clauses from introductory elements.

*Now that I think about it, we should have a holiday party.*

*In my opinion, this plan is not going to work.*

The interrupter comma is used for interrupting a sentence with a word or a phrase.

This is typically information that is non-essential, a nonrestrictive clause.

Removing this information doesn't change the meaning of the sentence.

*Your customer reviews are, quite honestly, not good enough.*

The compound or joining comma connects two independent clauses.

You can't just add a comma – you have to add a coordinating conjunction first.

Use the acronym FANBOYS to remember them: For And Nor But Or Yet So.

*Jerry sent his proposal yesterday. I haven't had time to read it.*

*Jerry sent his proposal yesterday, but I haven't had time to read it.*

### BONUS grammar tip

Use that for restrictive clauses, those that are an integral part of the sentence.

Use which for nonrestrictive clauses, those that can be removed.

*All our products, which are priced under \$100, are sold out.*

*All our products that are priced under \$100 are sold out.*



## Punctuation - Apostrophe

Apostrophes are most commonly used for contractions.

Don't use contractions in formal email writing.

*don't = do not      it's = it is      b'day = birthday*

Apostrophes are also used for forming possessives.

Take a singular noun, add an apostrophe, and add an S.

*a worker / a worker's pay      the boss / the boss's wife*

If the noun is plural, it's the same – add an apostrophe, and add an S.

If the word ends in an s, just add the apostrophe, without the S.

*children / children's toys      boys / boys' room*

There are two ways to create possessives from proper nouns that end with an S.

- 1 - You can use an apostrophe by itself
- 2 - You can add both an apostrophe and an S.

The best way to decide is to base it on pronunciation.

If you would normally pronounce the extra S, like in Mr. Jones's, then write it. If you would normally pronounce Texas' governor without the extra S, then you would just add an apostrophe. Otherwise, the simplest way is to always spell it without the extra S, and then deal with the pronunciation separately. Sometimes you can avoid the problem altogether by rearranging the word order (*the governor of Texas.*)



## Punctuation - Apostrophe (continued)

*It's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*.

*It's a cold day. It's been raining.*

*Its* is a possessive adjective of the pronoun *it*: *his, her, its*.

Just like there's no *he's* and *she's*, there is no *it's* for possessive.

*His dog, her cat, its tail*

There is no such word as *its'* because *its* is already a possessive.

*You're* is a contraction of *you are*.

There is no contraction of *you were*.

*You're late. You were here.*

*Your* is a possessive adjective of *you*.

It modifies a noun to describe it as something that belongs to you.

*This is your book.*

*Yours* is a possessive pronoun of *you*.

It can stand on its own and it refers to a thing that belongs to you.

*This book is yours. It's yours.*

There is no such word as *your's*.

*Your* is a possessive adjective, so there's no need for the possessive S.



## Punctuation - Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks:

to set off directly quoted material

*"I have a dream..."—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

for titles of shorter works – articles, songs, poems

*"How to Fix a Car" "Gangnam Style" "The Road Not Taken"*

to avoid formatting in an email (normally, you would use italics for movies and books)

*Titanic* / "Titanic" *Lord of the Rings* / "Lord of the Rings"

to show that the word is being used with a different meaning, usually sarcasm

*"Real" beef burgers!*

**Do not use quotation marks for emphasis.**

- Double quotes are used in the US and single quotes in the UK.
  - *"The Gettysburg Address" 'Their Finest Hour'*
- If you need to place quotation marks inside quotation marks, use the single ones within double in the US, and double within single in the UK.
  - *She said, "I've read 'The Gettysburg Address.'"*
  - *She said, 'I've heard "Their Finest Hour"'.*
- In the US, commas and periods are placed inside the quotation marks.
- In the UK, commas and periods are placed outside the quotation marks.
- When introducing a quotation with verbs such as *say, ask, yell, think*, you need to use a comma to separate the quote.

