



2.2: Punctuation

EN 2106 - COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Level I - Semester 2

PERIOD (Full stop)

Rule 01

Use a period at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement.

Example: *I like to eat ice cream.*

Rule 02

If the last item in the sentence is an abbreviation that ends in a period, there is no need to follow it with another period.

Correct: *Eat the soup, buns, etc. We will enjoy the lunch.*

Rule 03

Question marks and exclamation points replace at the end of a sentence.

Example: *I just can't believe this !*

What is your name ?

COMMA

Commas indicate a brief pause; they do not end sentences.

Rule 01

Use commas to separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items

Example: *I have to buy butter, eggs, flour, and sugar for the cake.*

Note: When the last comma in a series comes before *and* or (after flour in the above example), it is known as the **Oxford comma**. Some people drop the Oxford comma in a simple series, However, omission of the Oxford comma can sometimes lead to misunderstandings.

Absence of the Oxford comma can sometimes lead to misunderstandings such as;

Example:

I enjoy chocolate, fruit and nut and vanilla ice-creams.

Adding a comma after nut makes it clear that fruit and nut represents one flavor. In cases like this, for clarity, we use the Oxford comma.

I enjoy chocolate, fruit and nut and vanilla ice-creams.

Therefore, it is clear that omitting the Oxford comma could cause confusion as in the fruit and nut example.

Rule 02

In sentences where two independent clauses are joined by connectors such as *and*, *or*, *but*, etc., put a comma at the end of the first clause.

Incorrect: *He painted the walls and he fixed the door.*

Correct: *He painted the walls, and he fixed the door.*

- Some writers omit the comma if the clauses are both quite short:

Example: *I paint and he writes.*

Rule 03

Use a comma after certain words that introduce a sentence, such as *well, yes, why, hello, hey*, etc.

Examples:

Why, I can't believe this!

No, you can't have my fish.

Rule 04

Use commas immediately after expressions that interrupt the sentence flow (*nevertheless, after all, by the way, on the other hand, however*, etc.).

Example:

I am, by the way, very nervous about this.

Rule 05

Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year, and it is important to put one after the year.

Example: *It was in the The Island's June 5, 2003, edition.*

No comma is necessary for just the month and year.

Example: *It was in a June 2003 article.*

Rule 06

A

Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations.

Examples:

He said, "I don't care."

"Why," I asked, "don't you care?"

This rule is optional with one-word quotations.

Example: *He said "Stop."*

Rule 06

B

If the quotation comes before *he said, she wrote, they reported, Sunimal insisted*, or a similar attribution, end the quoted material with a comma, even if it is only one word.

Examples:

"I don't care," he said.

"I saw him running away," Fanny reported.

"Stop," said Dan.

Rule 06

C

If a quotation functions as a subject or object in a sentence, it might not need a comma.

Examples:

Is "I don't care" all you can say to me?

Saying "Stop the car" was a mistake.

Rule 07

Use a comma to separate a statement from a question.

Example: *I can eat now, can't I?*

Rule 08

Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence.

Example: *That is my house, not yours.*

Rule 09

A

Use a comma before and after certain introductory words or terms, such as *namely, that is, i.e., e.g.,* and *for instance*, when they are followed by a series of items.

Example:

You may be required to bring many items, e.g., sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.

Rule 09

B

A comma should precede the term *etc.*

Example: *Sleeping bags, pans, warm clothing, etc., are in the tent.*

QUOTATION MARKS

Rule 01

Use double quotation marks to set off a direct (word-for-word) quotation.

Correct: *"I hope you will be here," he said.*

Incorrect: *He said that he "hoped I would be there."*

(The quotation marks are incorrect because *hoped I would be there* does not state the speaker's exact words.)

Rule 02

Quotation marks are used for components, such as chapter titles in a book, individual episodes of a TV series, songs from a music album, titles of articles or essays in print or online, and shorter works such as short stories and poems.

Example:

Rivini performed the song "Walakulu" in the school concert.

- *"Walakulu" the song takes quotation marks because **it is** part of a larger work— the school concert.*

Rule 03

A

Periods and commas **ALWAYS** go inside quotation marks.

Examples:

The sign said, "Walk." Then it said, "Don't Walk," then, "Walk," all within thirty seconds. He yelled, "Hurry up."

Rule 03

B

Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Example:

Dan said: "In a town outside Brisbane, I saw 'Tourists go home' written on a wall. But then someone told me, 'Pay it no mind, lad.' "

- Note that the period goes inside both the single and double quotation marks. Also note that, as a courtesy, there is visible space between adjacent single and double quotation marks.

Rule 03

C

Always capitalize the first word in a complete quotation, even in midsentence.

Example:

Rivini said, "The song I sang at the school concert was praised by all."

Quotation marks are often used with technical terms, or other expressions that vary from standard usage.

Examples:

In archaeology, shaping a piece of stone by striking it (to make a stone tool) is known as “knapping.”

I received a call from my “beloved” aunt who told me to leave this house.

Rule 05

When quoted material runs more than one paragraph, start each new paragraph with opening quotation marks, but do not use closing quotation marks until the end of the passage.

Examples:

She wrote: "I don't dance anymore. For a while I thought it was just a phase that I'd get over.

"Now, I don't even think about it."

QUESTION MARK

Rule 01

Use a question mark only after a direct question.

Correct: *Will you marry me?*

Incorrect: *I'm asking if you will marry me?*

Rule 02

A

A question mark replaces a period at the end of a sentence.

Incorrect: *Will you marry me?.*

Rule 02

B

Because of Rule 2a, capitalize the word that follows a question mark.
Some writers overlook this rule in special cases.

Example: *Will you play with me? with Saman? with anyone?*

Rule 03

A

Do not use question marks with **indirect questions**, which are statements that contain questions. Use a period after an indirect question.

Incorrect: *I wonder if he would help me?*

Correct: *I wonder if he would help me.*

OR

I wonder: Would he go help me?

Rule 03

B

Some sentences are statements—or demands—in the form of a question. They are called **rhetorical questions** because they don't require or expect an answer. Many should be written without question marks.

Examples:

Why don't you take a break.

Would you kids get lost.

What wouldn't I do for you!

Rule 04

Use a question mark when a sentence is half statement and half question.

Example: *You do care, don't you?*

Rule 05

A

If a question is within the quoted material, a question mark should be placed inside the quotation marks.

Examples:

She asked, "Will you still help me?"

The question *Will you still help me?* is part of the quotation.

Do you agree with the saying, "All's fair in love and war"?

The question *Do you agree with the saying?* is outside the quotation.

Rule 05

B

If a quoted question ends in midsentence, the question mark replaces a comma.

Example: *"Will you still be my friend?" she asked.*

EXCLAMATION MARK

Rule 01

Use an exclamation point to show emotion, emphasis, or surprise.

Examples:

I'm truly shocked by your behavior!

Yay! We won!

Rule 02

An exclamation point replaces a period at the end of a sentence.

It also replaces a midsentence comma.

Incorrect: *I'm truly shocked by your behavior!.*

Correct: *I'm truly shocked by your behavior!*

Incorrect: *"I'm truly shocked by your behavior!," I told her.*

Correct: *"I'm truly shocked by your behavior!" I told her.*

Rule 03

Avoid using an exclamation point in formal business writing.

Rule 04

Overuse of exclamation points is a sign of undisciplined writing. The writer F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, "An exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke." Do not use even one of these marks unless you're convinced it is justified.