

Punctuation Guide: Part III

This guide contains rules on basic punctuation and presents an overview of the various punctuation marks.

Apostrophe ‘

Usage

1. To show possession

Example:

girl's book

John's house

2. To denote a missing letter or letters in contraction

Example:

can't

don't

it's

rhythm 'n blues

'80s

singin'

Note: The apostrophe comes before a comma.

3. To form plurals for individual letters or numbers

Example:

Dot your i's and cross your t's.

The three 6's

Punctuation

- Is followed by an 's' in most cases

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Example:

Gilbert's notes

- Is not followed by 's' in the case of words ending in s

Example:

students' boys'

Exception: If 's,' which is the last letter of a word is silent, an 's' is added after the apostrophe

Example:

Descartes's

- In the case of closely linked nouns, a single unit is considered while forming the possessive.

Example:

my aunt and uncle's house

- In case of separate ownership, however, both nouns take the possessive form.

Example:

our son's and daughter's friends

- In the case of expressions based on genitives, the apostrophe is used to suggest 'having.'

Example:

Peter was annoyed by Carrie's reading the letter.

- In hyphenated words and compound nouns, the apostrophe is added at the end.

Example:

daughter in law's the mayor of Chicago's.

Don't

An apostrophe should not be used in the following circumstances:

- Before the 's' in an absolute possessive pronoun
Example:
This hat is hers (not her's).
- To form plurals
Example:
the 1950s (not 1950's) NGOs (not NGO's)
- To form double possessives involving 's, if it can be avoided
Example:
The opinion of Freud's followers (not Freud's followers' opinion).

Brackets [], { }, < >

Usage

1. In quotations
 - To enclose editorial interpolations, insertions, corrections, explanations, translations or comments
 - To distinguish material added to a quotation, such as disclaimers of responsibility for a misspelling in the original text
 - Example:**
“It was a separate [sic] meeting.”
 - To further explain quoted matter
 - Example:**
He said, “I read my favorite novel [War and Peace] every year.”
2. As parentheses within parentheses in text
3. As parentheses around parentheses in complex mathematical equations
4. Square brackets set off phonetic symbols.
Example:
Phone begins with an [f] sound.
5. Angle brackets (< >) are sometimes used for these same purpose, but less often.

Punctuation

- Format:
If the text enclosed is in italics, brackets/parentheses are italicized.

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- With periods:
 - Periods are enclosed when brackets/parentheses contain an independent sentence.
 - Periods are left out if the enclosed matter comes at the end of an including sentence
- With commas:
When the content calls for a comma at the end of enclosed material, it comes outside the brackets/parentheses.
- With exclamation/question marks:
The brackets/parentheses enclose exclamation and question marks.
- In mathematical copy: The order of enclosures is as follows: $\{[(\{[()\})]\}$

Parentheses ()

Usage

1. To set off amplifying, explanatory, or digressive elements that have a rather remote logical connection to the rest of the sentence

Example:

The final sample that we collected (under extremely difficult conditions) contained an unexpected impurity.

2. To set off a defining or enumerating complementary element inserted in a sentence

Example:

He had long suspected that the inert gases (helium, neon, argon, krypton, xenon, radon) could be used to produce a similar effect.

3. To identify proper names over which there might be some confusion

Example:

New York (city) New York (state).

4. To provide the meaning for a foreign word or phrase

Example:

The word she used was not une poêle (frying pan) but un poêle (stove).

5. To enclose abbreviations or acronyms

Example:

National Recovery Act (NRA)

6. To enclose numerals or letters that mark divisions or enumerations/lists/footnotes within text

Example:

He had, in effect, discovered a remarkable similarity among (1) Strigiformes, (2) Caprimulgiformes, and (3) Psittaciformes.

7. To enclose mathematical equations

Example:

$$(x + y)^2$$

8. To cite the source of material included in substantive notes

Example:

1. Although the matter has been thoroughly and excellently discussed elsewhere (Manuel Moyado, *Turbulent Confabulations* [Memphis, Tenn.: Warburton, 1992], 96-123), it seems appropriate here to offer corroborative evidence.

9. To enclose facts of publications, i.e., place, publisher, and date of publication, in note references

Example:

Olga Porkola, *Contemporary Finnish Design and Architecture* (Cleveland: Cuyahoga Press, 1990)

10. To cite a source in a text which does not have separate notes

Example:

...curtain raisers to the 'really expressive' music of the nineteenth century" (Ralph Kirkpatrick, Domenico Scarlatti [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953], 280)

Ellipsis ...

Usage

1. To indicate omission within a quoted sentence.

Example:

Original: "Fatal Attraction is just about the worst dating movie imaginable—a movie almost guaranteed to start sour, unresolvable arguments—but long lines of people curl around the block waiting to see it." --Pauline Kael

Quoted: Pauline Kael writes that "Fatal Attraction is just about the worst dating movie imaginable ... but long lines of people curl around the block waiting to see it."

2. Occasionally used to indicate a reflexive pause or hesitation within text. (minimally used in formal writing.)

Example:

"Like Reagan, Baudrillard prefers a higher form of banality, and 'astral America,' an America suspended in the heavens, lost in the cosmos, a constellation, a starry night, a myth, a ... movie."

"I ... I ... that is, we ... yes, we have made an awful blunder!"

3. In citations:

- Titles, which are excessively long, may be shortened by omitting various phrases, and the omissions are indicated by ellipsis.

Example:

Ray John. *Observations Topographical, Moral, and Physiological: Made in a Journey Through part of the Low- Countries, Germany, Italy, and France: with A Catalogue of Plants not Native of England ... Whereunto is added A brief Account of Francis Willughby, Esq., his voyage through a great part of Spain*. [London], 1673.

Punctuation

- Within a sentence:

Other punctuation may be used on either side of the three ellipsis dots if it helps the sense or better shows what has been omitted.

Example:

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Original: “Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

Quoted: “To you it is commanded ... that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, ... all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image ... : and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall ... be cast into ... a burning fiery furnace.”

- In between sentences:

- When the last part of a sentence is omitted and what remains is grammatically complete, four dots—a period followed by an ellipsis—are used to indicate an omission.

Example:

Original: The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless: it is not loving, it has no ulterior and divine ends; but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Quoted: The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless. ... the conservative party ... is timid, and merely defensive of property.

- When the last part of a sentence is omitted and what remains is not grammatically complete, the period is omitted.

Example:

Original: same as above

Quoted: American radicalism ... the conservative party ...

- When the last part of a sentence is omitted and the sentence ends with a question mark or an exclamation mark, that punctuation is followed an ellipsis.

Example:

Whether her criticism is valid or note, shall I capitulate to her? ... And shall I be subject to her ridicule the rest of my life!

- In titles:

Within the title, use an ellipsis, and use four, including the period, at the end.

Example:

[Beverley, Robert]. *The History and Present State of Virginia ... by a Native of the Place*. London, 1705.

- In mathematics:
If commas or operation signs are required they should come after each term and after the ellipsis if a final term follows them.

Example:

x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n $y = 0, 1, 2, \dots$

Don't

Ellipses should not be used in the following circumstances

- At the beginning or end of a quotation even if you start or stop in the middle of the quoted sentence.

Example:

Original: The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless: it is not loving, it has no ulterior and divine ends; but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Quoted: the conservative party ... is timid, and merely defensive of property.

- Before or after an obviously incomplete sentence separately quoted.

Example:

Rhuigbach had devised what she referred to as an “unorthodox method of elucidating the ineffable,” but Northfeather declared the idea “an empty pretense.”

- Before or after a run-in quotation of a complete sentence or several sentences.

Example:

Mid way through his essay, after having observed that “Wiznowski’s theorem was no extraordinary breakthrough,” Canatelli apologized for what he called his “earlier enthusiasm.”

- Before a block quotation, whether it begins with a grammatically complete sentence or not.

Example:

Briggs notes that Emerson believed that the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population
...

- After a block quotation ending with a grammatically complete sentence.

Example:

Briggs Notes that Emerson believed that the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population,
is timid, and merely defensive of property.

Quotation marks “ ”

Single ‘ ’

Double “ ”

Usage

1. To enclose directly quoted material and words of dialogue

Example:

One critic ended his glowing review with this superlative: “It is simply the best film ever made about potato farming.”

May replied, “This is the last cookie.”

2. To enclose thought, imagined dialogue and other interior discourse (often, but not always, used)

Example:

I suppose he’s telling her right now, “Morgenstern is not to be trusted.”

3. To set off certain titles, usually those of minor or short works -- essays, short stories, short poems, songs, articles in periodicals, etc. Television and radio programs are in quotation marks. File names are italicized.

Example:

Once when I was sick, my father read me a story called “The Happy Flower,” which was later made into a movie entitled *Flower Child*, starring Tiny Tim.

4. To set off specific words:

- Words used to define a foreign word or phrase

Example:

French le cheval ‘the horse’ represents a replacement for Latin equus.

- Words used in an ironic sense

Example:

The “debate” resulted in three cracked heads.

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- Words used as slang

Example:

Had it not been for Bryce, “the copper’s nark,” Collins would have made his escape. (Copper’s nark is slang for a police informer.)

- Words used as technical terms

Example:

In offset printing, “proofs” of illustrations come from the darkroom, not the proof press.

- Words that are used as words or terms, and not used functionally to convey meaning

Example:

“Correct” and “just” are not synonyms.

5. To mark an epithet when used within the full name

Example:

Jenny Lind, “the Swedish Nightingale”

Punctuation

- Quotation marks enclose commas and periods.

Example:

I know you are fond of the story “Children of the Corn,” but is it an appropriate subject for your essay?

“At last,” said the old woman, “I can say I am truly happy.”

Exception: Periods may be excluded if quoted words and phrases fall at the end of the sentence and could cause confusion.

- Quotation marks never enclose semicolons and colons.

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Example:

She never liked the poem “Dover Beach”; in fact, it was her least favorite piece of Victorian literature.

He clearly states his opinion in the article “Of Human Bondage”: he believes that television has enslaved and diminished an entire generation.

- Question marks, exclamation marks and dashes go inside quotation marks when they are part of the quotation, and outside when they are not.

Example:

Where is your copy of “The Raven”? OR “How cold is it outside?” my mother asked.

Fred shouted, “Look out for the bull!” OR When I was subsequently gored, all Timmy said was “this is kinda boring”!

- The end-punctuation of the quotation makes way for sentence punctuation unless the quote matter coincides with the end of the sentence and ends in an exclamation or question mark.

Example:

“I wonder why they don’t impeach newscasters,” said Grandpa. Grandpa used to listen to Walter Cronkite every evening and constantly scream, “Horsefeathers!”

- When quoting a long passage involving more than one paragraph, quotation marks go at the beginning of each paragraph, but at the end of only the final one.

Don’t

Quotation marks are not used in the following circumstances:

- Use quotation marks for block quotations.
- Use quotation marks in indirect quotation.

Solidus /

Also referred to as diagonal, oblique, slash, slash mark, slant, stroke, or virgule

Usage

1. To indicate alternative words

Example:

and/or inside/outside

2. To indicate alternative spellings or word forms

Example:

Hercules/Heracles

3. To indicate singular or plural form

Example:

rock/s book/s

4. To denote abbreviations

Example:

c/o for 'in care of' *A/Director* for 'Acting Director'

5. To indicate periods or seasons extending over parts of two successive calendar years

Example:

362/361 B.C. fiscal year 1991/92.

6. In mathematical copy:

- Instead of the word *per*

Example:

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100 km/hr.

- To set fractions in text, where it stands for upon

Example:

$x/a + y/b$ $\frac{1}{2}$

7. Typographical use:

- To indicate line endings when verse is quoted without indentation, within a regular prose paragraph.

Note: In the opposite direction (\\), these marks are sometimes used to enclose phonemes.