



Punctuation

Punctuation is using special signs, and certain typographical devices to help the understanding and correct reading of written texts.

< beginner Intermediate **Advanced**

>

What Is Punctuation?

Punctuation is the use of standardized marks and symbols in writing to *clarify meaning* and *indicate the structure and organization* of sentences. Punctuation is a crucial aspect of written communication as it helps to **convey meaning** and **prevent ambiguity**.

Common Punctuation Marks

Here is a list of common punctuation marks in English:

- full stop (.)
- question mark and exclamation mark (?) and (!)
- comma (,)
- colons and semicolons (: and ;)
- quotation mark (" ")
- hyphens and dashes (-)
- brackets, braces, and parentheses ([] and { } and ())
- apostrophe (')

Full Stop

Full stop is also called **period** in American English. it is a punctuation sign that is used at the end of a **statement** or in some abbreviations. Keep in mind that there is no space before full stop and one space after it.

Abbreviations

There are three kinds of abbreviations:

1. Abbreviations with **no full stops**, like CIA, CNN, MTV
2. Abbreviations that **always** have a full stop, like **e.g.**, **i.e.**, or **etc.**
3. Abbreviations that **sometimes** have a full stop, like **Mr./Mr a.m./AM Dr./Dr**

In British English, **titles and honorifics** are usually written without full stops. But in American English, they are written with full stops. British English usually uses **a.m.** and **p.m.** in lowercase and with full stops. In American English, however, they are written with uppercase letters and without full stops (AM and PM). They both are correct and you can use them according to the variety of English you are using.

I know you well.

She wakes up at 5 a.m. everyday.

Mr. Johnson is on his way to the office.

Question Mark & Exclamation Mark

Question mark (?) is used at the end of a direct question whether it is a wh-question or a yes/no question. The direct question is a sentence that asks a question directly from the addressee. For example:

Where are you?

Are you ok?

An **exclamation mark (!)** is used in at the end of a sentence expressing *strong emotions* such as anger, surprise, joy, etc. Notice that what and how are commonly used at the beginning of a sentence to make an exclamatory phrase.

Oh no! I can't believe it!

What a mistake!

How stupid you are!

Comma

Commas are used for three main purposes:

1. To separate **items on a list**
2. Before certain conjunctions (and, but, so, or)
3. To add **non-essential information**

To Separate Items on a List

We use commas to separate items on a list. To introduce the last item on the list, the comma is followed by an 'and'.

I have bought some rice, milk, bananas, **and** bread.

We need to take water, fruits, sleeping bags, canned food, **and** tent for camping.



I have bought some rice, milk, and bananas.

using comma to separate the items of a list

Before Certain Conjunctions

We can use commas before certain conjunctions: '**and**', '**but**', '**so**', and '**or**'.

Take a look at the examples:

You can tell her, **but** she'll get upset.

This was his last chance, **so** he took it.

To Add Non-essential Information

We can use a comma, or sometimes two commas, to separate non-essential information from the rest of the sentence. Non-essential information can be removed from the sentence without changing its overall meaning. For example:

Usually, I go to school.

Apparently, he was a very good painter.

Beijing, **which is the capital of China**, has a mixture of modern and ancient architecture.

Commas can be used for many other purposes. They are used in dates and numbers, after [adverbs](#), in direct reported speech, and between [adjectives](#). You can see some examples below:

3,000,000

* numbers

April 1st, 1999, she left him.

* date

He said, "I am not going to do that."

* in direct reported speech

There was a big, fascinating, marvelous wedding there.

* between adjectives

Colons & Semicolons

Colons (:) are used to introduce *examples, explanations, or details*. The main idea is expressed before the colons and the explanation or examples appear right after it. Colons can be used to introduce **a list, a dialogue, a title**, or to show **emphasis**.

The power outage has caused many problems: darkness, burnt out electric devices, transportation disruption, and so on.

* Here, the general idea is the power outage problems, and after the colons we can see the explanations or examples.

I can be sure of one thing: she won't let you to get a dog.

* show emphasis

What we need for the cake is: butter, flour, water, etc.

* introducing a list

She played: 3GA.

* introducing a title

Semicolons (;) are similar to a full stop in that they are both used at the end of a full sentence. But the difference is that the semi-colon shows that the sentences before and after the semi-colon are connected and express the same idea. For example:

The weather is so hot; it's impossible to get out of the house without getting a heatstroke.

As you can see in the example, semicolons are used to join two [independent clauses](#). They can also appear:

1. Before conjunctive adverbs, like 'however', 'thereafter', 'therefore', etc.
2. Before coordinating conjunctions, like 'but', 'or', 'and'.

We couldn't go; **however**, we really wanted to.

* conjunctive adverbs

We were looking for what they called us for; **and** the result was disappointing.

* coordinating conjunctions

Quotation Mark

Quotation marks (" ") are used when reporting a direct speech. They are also used to avoid repetition in a list. There are two kinds of quotation marks: **single (')** and **double (")**. They are usually used interchangeably. But in some cases, it's better to use one of them in particular. For example, it's better to use double quotation marks when you are quoting what someone said.

He laughed and said, **"you'll kill me with these jokes"**.

She **asked,** **"Who is the lead actor."**

* direct speech

Here is another example of how quotation marks are used to **avoid repetition**:

names of fathers	
Steve	Max
Rhone	"
Mia	"

When we want to put **emphasis** on a word or phrase in a sentence, we use single quotation marks. For example:

This is a sentence where the **'adverb'** plays the central role.

We can also use the quotation mark to indicate **irony, skepticism, and sarcasm**. For example:

My **"friends"** left me there all alone.

* Here, "friends" in quotation marks to indicate irony because they did not act as real friends.

The **"clean"** sheets smelled like mold.

You can also use quotation marks when the words are not used in their literal meaning.

The TV '**knows**' when I have homework, it starts playing all the good shows.

* Clearly the TV cannot know anything, it's used metaphorically.

You can use quotation marks when you refer to words as 'words' and not for what they mean. For example:

How do you spell '**whitening**'?

* We don't use the word for what it means and we show it by using the quotation marks.

Hyphens & Dashes

Even though hyphens and dashes look a lot alike, they are different and serve different functions.

Dashes

We have two kinds of dashes: en dashes (–) and em dashes (—).

- **En dashes (–)** are used to replace the words like "and", "through", and "to" when indicating **numerical ranges**, **describing directions**, **relationships**, or **scores**

The world war one (**1914–1918**) was a great disaster.

Midwest-southwest bridge

Sometimes, in British English, the **en dash** does the same thing as the **em dash**. In these cases, there are **spaces** on both sides of the en dash to add **extra information** to the sentence. Commas can be used for this purpose too, but dashes are preferable when the information we are adding doesn't fit well in the sentence.

Jeff – **who is my best friend** – already went back home.

- **Em dashes (—)** work like parenthesis and commas, they add **non-essential information** to the sentence and this usually happens when the information we are adding doesn't fit well in the sentence. The em dashes can be used with space on either side or without spaces.

My best friend—**who I haven't seen in years**—got married yesterday.

Years ago — **never mind how long precisely** — I thought I could run all around the globe.

We can also use dashes when repeating an **emphatic** part or phrase in a sentence. In this case, we can use a dash at the beginning of the emphatic part. Check out these examples:

The beautiful sky—the clear blue sky—was her dream.

Hyphens

The first thing about hyphens (-) is they are not the same as dashes (– and —). Hyphens are used to:

- form **compound modifiers** before a noun

It is a **short-term** plan.

I went for a **full-body** massage.

- form **compound adjectives** with nouns

Why are you wearing these **old-fashioned** clothes?

Have you seen that **six-feet** girl?

- with some prefixes

I saw my **ex-wife** yesterday.

She is a **self-made** girl.

- enhance **clarity and readability** of sentences

I will **re-design** the whole place.

* meaning to design again

They wanted to **re-elect** him.

* instead of writing 'reelect' which is hard to read.

Brackets, Braces, & Parentheses

There are four types of brackets:

1. square brackets []

2. curly brackets { } or braces
3. angle brackets < >
4. round brackets or parentheses ()

Square brackets are used to add Information, comments, or definition in a sentence:

They said the **[cancer]** patients are not satisfied with the services.

* Information

We need a doctor **[an expert]** to do the surgery.

* comments

The indolent **[lazy]** man spent all day at home.

* definition

Braces are usually used in mathematical, chemical, and statistical equations.

$2\{1 + [32 + 3]\}$

Round brackets or parentheses are used for two purposes:

1. Give Information (date/answer/statistics).
2. Set off numbers and letters (give options).

The doctors did what was possible (they couldn't do more).

* Giving Information

The world war one (1914–1918) was a great disaster.

* date

Remember to take: (1) pen (2) ruler (3) hair brushes.

* Three items are needed: pen, ruler, hair brush

Write your opinion(s) here.

* the reader can choose how to read it.

Tip!

Try to avoid using parenthesis to add long ideas in your sentences, for that purpose you can use commas or dashes accordingly.

Apostrophe

Apostrophe (') is used in two cases:

1. Create contracted forms
2. Form possessive nouns

Isn't → is not

* contracted form

Sarah's father

* possessive nouns

Tip!

We can never use an apostrophe to make plurals, unless we are referring to multiple letters. For example:

How many **M's** are there in 'common'?

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Full Stops

A full stop or period is usually used to show the end of a sentence. In this lesson, we will learn all about this punctuation mark.

