PUNCTUATION

Full stop (BrE)

Period (AmE)

1. At the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation:

I knocked at the door.

There was no reply.

1. Sometimes in abbreviations:

Jan. a.m. e.g. etc.

1. In internet and e-mail address [called ‘dot’]

<http://www.oup.com>

Comma

1. After sub-ordinate clause in a sentence if the clause comes at the start:

If the taxi is here, we must go.

When electricity fails, we can’t do anything.

1. For a noun in apposition:

Ram Bahadur, the son of Shyam Bahadur, is a good student.

Gopal, not Shyam, is going to attend the meeting.

1. For a non-defining relative clause:

Mukesh, who has stood first in the exam, is a very intelligent student.

Mt. Everest, which lies in Nepal, is the highest peak in the world.

1. To separate a word of address:

Bring a chair for me, Shyam.

Shyam, bring a chair for me.

1. Between three or more than three same parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, verb, etc.):

I want a pen, a book and a diary.

She arranged all her books, put them into her bag and went to school.

She is beautiful, kind and gentle.

He writes slowly, carefully and well.

1. Before tag question:

He is clever, isn’t he?

I am a student, aren’t I ?

1. To separate geographical names:

His factory is in Kathmandu, Bagmati.

She lives in Jhapa, Mechi, Nepal.

1. Between a person’s name and his title:

Prof. Shrestha, M.A., Ph.D., has joined our college.

Mr. Thapa, B.A., B.Ed., is a good teacher.

1. In direct speech:

She said, ‘I’m happy’.

‘I am happy,’ she said.

BUT

‘Did you do that?’ he said.

1. To separate date from the year:

March 10, 2009

January 5, 2010

1. To avoid the repetition of a verb:

Mukesh is a dancer; Harish, a singer.

She is a doctor; he, an overseer.

1. After sentence adverb ( yes, no, however, for example, for instance, in fact, etc. ):

In fact, he is an honest person.

However, she went for swimming.

Semi-colon

1. In order to join two independent clauses (if there are not any linking words such as ‘and’, ‘but’ or ‘so’ between the clauses):

He worked hard; he passed his exam.

You are reading; he is writing.

You are a girl; he is a boy.

1. To give greater emphasis to different clauses:

As he was brave; I honour him.

As she loved me; I weep for her.

1. Between main clauses joined by the connectives like besides, however, moreover, therefore, etc.:

I don’t need a big car; besides, it is too costly.

You have committed a grave offence; however, I excuse you this time.

Colon

1. For any list:

I want the following: T-shirt, vest, pant, handkerchief and towel.

The subjects I like most are: English, mathematics and physics.

1. For a quotation:

Wordsworth writes: ‘The child is the father of the man’.

Bacon says: ‘Writing maketh a man perfect’.

1. To separate two contrasted sentences:

Man proposes: God disposes.

To err is human: to forgive is divine.

Dash

1. To indicate a break in thought:

I read a play—a play by Shakespeare.

He writes a letter—a letter to his beloved.

You’ve admitted that you lied to me—how can I trust you again?

Hyphen

1. To form compound words:

Sister-in-law

Brother-in-law

Commander-in-chief

Man-of-war

1. To form a compound from a prefix and a proper name

Pre-Raphaelite

Pro-European

1. When writing compound numbers between 21 and 99 in words

Seventy-three

Thirty-one

1. To separate a prefix ending in a vowel from a word beginning with the same vowel

Co-operate

Pre-eminent

Sign of interrogation / Question mark

1. After the sentences asking questions:

Where do you live?

What do you like most?

Sign of exclamation / Exclamation mark (BrE) / Exclamation point (AmE)

1. After the sentences or words expressing sudden feeling or emotion:

What a beautiful garden!

How handsome he is!

Oh!

Well done!

Bravo!

Hurrah!

Excellent!

Really!

Apostrophe

1. To show possession:

This is Amit’s bag.

The boy’s book was lost.

These are the boys’ books.

The women’s coats

King James’ crown

King James’s crown

1. In a contracted form:

I’ll go.

We’re reading our books.

He’s an engineer.

He’s a new bag.

We don’t want to go.

The summer of ’89 (1989)

1. Sometimes with s to form the plural of a letter, a figure or an abbreviation:

There are two r’s in ‘roar’.

Delete the last two 8’s from 288.

Brackets (BrE) / Parentheses (AmE)

1. To enclose a word, a phrase or a clause:

At the age of ten (such is the power of genius) he could read Sanskrit fluently.

The other boy (Ramesh Thapa) broke that window.

Inverted commas / Quotation marks

In American English double quotation marks are used, and in British English single quotation marks are used.

1. To indicate the exact words of a speaker:

He says, ‘Truth is bitter’.

She asked me, ‘Why are you laughing?’

1. For the titles of articles, books, poems, plays, etc.

Keats’s ‘Ode to Autumn’

I am watching ‘Colours’.

1. For short quotations or sayings

Do you know the origin of the saying ‘A little knowledge is a dangerous thing’?

Exercise

Punctuate the following sentences correctly.

1. What a hot day! Let’s stay at home.
2. A nice mess you’ve made of it.
3. Tell us a story which we haven’t heard.
4. George, who is a great fisherman, is coming to stay with us.
5. If you can’t understand, tell me.
6. Jones, softly opening his door, peered out into the street.
7. We, too, have never made that mistake.
8. She has, to my surprise, married him after all.
9. They came, they looked at, and they went away.
10. These are the things we shall need: three cups of coffee, some sandwiches and some fruit.
11. ‘I just wanted to know’, he said.
12. How can I forget your kindness!