

Punctuation

• full stop (BrE) (NAme period)

- at the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation:
 - *I knocked at the door. There was no reply. I knocked again.*
- sometimes in abbreviations:
 - *Jan. e.g. a.m. etc.*
- in internet and email addresses (said 'dot')
 - *http://www.oup.com*

, comma

- to separate words in a list, though they are often omitted before *and*:
 - *a bouquet of red, pink and white roses*
 - *tea, coffee, milk or hot chocolate*
- to separate phrases or clauses:
 - *If you keep calm, take your time, concentrate and think ahead, then you're likely to pass your test.*
 - *Worn out after all the excitement of the party, the children soon fell asleep.*
- before and after a clause or phrase that gives additional, but not essential, information about the noun it follows:
 - *The Pennine Hills, which are very popular with walkers, are situated between Lancashire and Yorkshire.*

(do not use commas before and after a clause that **defines** the noun it follows)

- *The hills that separate Lancashire from Yorkshire are called the Pennines.*
- to separate main clauses, especially long ones, linked by a conjunction such as *and*, *as*, *but*, *for*, or:
 - *We had been looking forward to our holiday all year, but unfortunately it rained every day.*
- to separate an introductory word or phrase, or an adverb or adverbial phrase that applies to the whole sentence, from the rest of the sentence:
 - *Oh, so that's where it was.*
 - *As it happens, however, I never saw her again.*
 - *By the way, did you hear about Sue's car?*
- to separate a tag question from the rest of the sentence:
 - *It's quite expensive, isn't it?*
 - *You live in Bristol, right?*

- before or after 'he said', etc. when writing down conversation:
 - *'Come back soon,' she said.*
- before a short quotation:
 - *Disraeli said, 'Little things affect little minds.'*

: colon

- to introduce a list of items:
 - *These are our options: we go by train and leave before the end of the show; or we take the car and see it all.*
- in formal writing, before a clause or phrase that gives more information about the main clause. (You can use a semicolon or a full stop, but not a comma, instead of a colon here.)
 - *The garden had been neglected for a long time: it was overgrown and full of weeds.*
- to introduce a quotation, which may be indented:
 - *As Kenneth Morgan writes:
The truth was, perhaps, that Britain in the years from 1914 to 1983 had not changed all that fundamentally.
Others, however, have challenged this view ...*

; semicolon

- instead of a comma to separate parts of a sentence that already contain commas:
 - *She was determined to succeed whatever the cost; she would achieve her aim, whoever might suffer on the way.*
- in formal writing, to separate two main clauses, especially those not joined by a conjunction:
 - *The sun was already low in the sky; it would soon be dark.*

? question mark

- at the end of a direct question:
 - *Where's the car?*
 - *You're leaving already?*
- Do not use a question mark at the end of an indirect question:
 - *He asked if I was leaving.*
- especially with a date, to express doubt:
 - *John Marston (?1575–1634)*

! exclamation mark (especially BrE) (NAmE usually exclamation point)

- at the end of a sentence expressing surprise, joy, anger, shock or another strong emotion:
 - *That's marvellous!*
 - *'Never!' she cried.*
- in informal written English, you can use more than one exclamation mark, or an exclamation mark and a question mark:
 - *'Your wife's just given birth to triplets.' 'Triplets!?'*

' apostrophe

- with *s* to indicate that a thing or person belongs to somebody:
 - *my friend's brother*
 - *the waitress's apron*
 - *King James's crown/King James' crown*
 - *the students' books*
 - *the women's coats*
- in short forms, to indicate that letters or figures have been omitted:
 - *I'm (I am)*
 - *they'd (they had/they would)*
 - *the summer of '89 (1989)*
- sometimes, with *s* to form the plural of a letter, a figure or an abbreviation:
 - *roll your r's*
 - *during the 1990's*

- hyphen

- to form a compound from two or more other words:
 - *hard-hearted*
 - *fork-lift truck*
 - *mother-to-be*
- to form a compound from a prefix and a proper name:
 - *pre-Raphaelite*
 - *pro-European*
- when writing compound numbers between 21 and 99 in words:
 - *seventy-three*
 - *thirty-one*
- sometimes, in British English, to separate a prefix ending in a vowel from a word beginning with the same vowel:
 - *co-operate*
 - *pre-eminent*
- after the first section of a word that is divided between one line and the next:
 - *decide what to do in order to avoid mistakes of this kind in the future*

— dash

- in informal English, instead of a colon or semicolon, to indicate that what follows is a summary or conclusion of what has gone before:
 - *Men were shouting, women were screaming, children were crying — it was chaos.*
 - *You've admitted that you lied to me — how can I trust you again?*
- singly or in pairs to separate a comment or an afterthought from the rest of the sentence:
 - *He knew nothing at all about it — or so he said.*

; dots/ellipses

- to indicate that words have been omitted, especially from a quotation or at the end of a conversation:
 - *... challenging the view that Britain ... had not changed all that fundamentally.*

/ slash/oblique

- to separate alternative words or phrases:
 - *have a pudding and/or cheese*
 - *single/married/widowed/divorced*
- in internet and email addresses to separate the different elements (often said 'forward slash')
 - *<http://www.oup.com/elt/>*

“ ” quotation marks

- to enclose words and punctuation in direct speech:
 - *'Why on earth did you do that?' he asked.*
 - *'I'll fetch it,' she replied.*
- to draw attention to a word that is unusual for the context, for example a slang expression, or to a word that is being used for special effect, such as irony:
 - *He told me in no uncertain terms to 'get lost'.*
 - *Thousands were imprisoned in the name of 'national security'.*
- around the titles of articles, books, poems, plays, etc:
 - *Keats's 'Ode to Autumn'*
 - *I was watching 'Match of the Day'.*
- around short quotations or sayings:
 - *Do you know the origin of the saying: 'A little learning is a dangerous thing'?*
- in American English, double quotation marks are used:
 - *"Help! I'm drowning!"*

() brackets (BrE) (also parentheses NAmE or formal)

- to separate extra information or a comment from the rest of a sentence:
 - *Mount Robson (12972 feet) is the highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies.*
 - *He thinks that modern music (i.e. anything written after 1900) is rubbish.*
- to enclose cross references:
 - *This moral ambiguity is a feature of Shakespeare's later works (see Chapter Eight).*
- around numbers or letters in text:
 - *Our objectives are (1) to increase output, (2) to improve quality and (3) to maximize profits.*

[] square brackets (especially BrE) (NAmE usually brackets)

- around words inserted to make a quotation grammatically correct:
 - *Britain in [these] years was without ...*

italics

- to show emphasis:
 - *I'm not going to do it—you are.*
 - *... proposals which we cannot accept under any circumstances*
- to indicate the titles of books, plays, etc:
 - Joyce's *Ulysses*
 - the title role in Puccini's *Tosca*
 - a letter in *The Times*
- for foreign words or phrases:
 - the English oak (*Quercus robur*)
 - I had to renew my *permesso di soggiorno* (residence permit).

Quoting conversation

- When you write down a conversation, you normally begin a new paragraph for each new speaker.

Quotation marks enclose the words spoken:

- *'You're sure of this?' I asked.
He nodded grimly.
'I'm certain.'*

- Verbs used to indicate direct speech, for example *he said, she complained*, are separated by commas from the words spoken, unless a question mark or an exclamation mark is used:

- *'That's all I know,' said Nick.*
- *Nick said, 'That's all I know.'*
- *'Why?' asked Nick.*

When *he said* or *said Nick* follows the words spoken, the comma is placed inside the quotation marks, as in the first example above. If, however, the writer puts the words *said Nick* within the actual words Nick speaks, the comma is outside the quotation marks:

- *'That', said Nick, 'is all I know.'*

- Double quotation marks are used to indicate direct speech being quoted by somebody else within direct speech:
 - *'But you said you loved me! "I'll never leave you, Sue, as long as I live." That's what you said, isn't it?'*