



THE MAIN USES OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

The following passage shows the main punctuation marks in use:

Italics for the book title *Why Study English?* question mark is the title of a book; semi-colon it is also a question. full stop

capital An hyphen English-speaking pupil, or a student, might answer, quotation marks "Because I've got to!" apostrophe – especially dash

brackets if they are at school (where it is part of the syllabus; colon compulsory until the age of sixteen).

TYPES OF PUNCTUATION

FULL STOP

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- a) A full stop is used to end a sentence. The next sentence begins with a capital letter.
- b) An abbreviation ends in a full stop when the final letter of the abbreviation is not the last letter of the word. One editor is abbreviated to **ed.**, but two editors are abbreviated to **eds** (without a full stop), since "s" is the final letter of the word.

- You can find this reference on **p. 20** of **ch. 3** in **vol. 1**.

- c) A full stop is sometimes, but not always, used in acronyms (abbreviations of names).

- The **S.L.S.S.** is an important part of Flinders University. You can make an appointment to see an **S.L.S.S.** advisor if you need help with essay writing or grammar.
- There is an **ATM** on the campus. You can find the **ATM** outside the bank.

COMMA

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Together with the full stop, the comma is the most commonly used punctuation mark. Basically, it separates parts of the sentence. It is used:

- a) to separate a non-defining relative clause (a clause which adds extra information, introduced by a word such as *that*, *which* or *who*) from the rest of the sentence.
 - It is years since I read *Anna Karenina*, **which** is my favourite novel.
 - *Anna Karenina*, **which** is my favourite novel, was written by Tolstoy.
- b) when a subordinate (less important) clause comes before the principal clause.
 - If you do not understand, please tell me.
- c) to separate phrases in apposition (describing the same person or thing mentioned earlier) from the rest of the sentence.
 - Mr Obama, **the President**, said that he approved of the policy.



- d) to separate some non-defining adjectival phrases from the rest of the sentence.
- The speaker, **getting to his feet**, began to introduce his talk.
- e) to separate items in many kinds of lists.
- I shall need a book, some paper, a pencil and a ruler.
- f) to separate a number of connectives from the rest of the sentence: *too, however, nevertheless, though, of course, then*, etc.
- You can, **however**, do it if you wish.
 - Nevertheless**, these results must be interpreted within their context.
 - This is, **of course**, the best action to take.
- g) before a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*) linking two main clauses, when this clarifies the meaning.
- The first vendor was selling ice cream with chocolate chips, **and** worms were available from the second vendor.
- h) between coordinate adjectives not joined by *and*.
- Informative, imaginative, appealing** writing can sell your ideas.
- i) when some adverbs or adverbial expressions are placed within a sentence (instead of at the beginning or end of the sentence).
- They tried, **in spite of my advice**, to climb the mountain.

COLON

:

A colon is not often used. It indicates a fairly close interdependence between the units that it separates. The sentence before the colon should be complete in itself, not a sentence fragment.

- a) It indicates that what follows it is an explanation or amplification of what precedes it

- I have some news for you: John's father has arrived.

- b) It can be used to introduce a list of items.

- Please send him the following items: a passport, a visa application and the correct fee.

SEMI-COLON

;

- a) A semi-colon joins two independent but related clauses or sentences.

It is possible to avoid using the semi-colon here, by:

- replacing it with a word such as *and* or *because*
- creating two separate sentences.

- The lecture was badly delivered; it went on far too long.

- The lecture was badly delivered **and** went on far too long.

- The lecture was badly delivered. **It** went on far too long.

- b) It is used in lists to separate items made up of several words.

- To make a cake you will need a hundred grams of butter; a hundred grams of sugar; a hundred grams of flour; and two eggs.

- c) It can separate main clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs such as *however, therefore, moreover*,

- Ernest Hemingway was a master of style; **however**, opinions about his work vary widely.



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nevertheless, then, thus. This applies even when the conjunctive adverb is moved.

- Ernest Hemingway was a master of style; opinions about his work, **however**, vary widely.

HYPHEN

-

DASH (OR EM RULE)

—

EN RULE

–

- a) A **hyphen** separates, in some cases, the prefix from the second part of the word.
- b) It also joins some compound words.
Note: You should always check in a dictionary to see if a hyphen is needed
- c) A dash is used to indicate a break, often informally, or to add parenthetical information.
Note: Generally, it is better to avoid using a dash in academic writing.
- d) An **en-rule** indicates a range.

- co-opt
- self-control, twenty-one
- He received a prize — and a certificate as well.
- His research output included two books — both on astronomy — as well as numerous articles.
- 1939 – 1945

APOSTROPHE

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- a) An apostrophe is most frequently used to indicate possessive singular or plural.
It is possible to avoid using the semi-colon here, by:

- When there is one owner, the apostrophe comes before the “s”.
- When there is more than one owner the apostrophe comes after the “s”.

- The student's books.
(The books belonging to one student.)
- The students' books.
(The books belonging to more than one student.)

- b) An apostrophe is also used to indicate that a letter is missing.

Note: This use should be avoided in academic writing. It is better to say:

- **It's** a well-known fact.

- It is a well-known fact.

- c) The apostrophe should always be included when telling the time.

- It is nine o'clock.
(This is short for 'nine of the clock')

- d) The apostrophe is **not** needed to indicate a plural

- That shop sells bananas.
(NOT: That shop sells banana's.)

QUESTION MARK

?

- a) A question mark is used after a direct question
- b) It is **not** used after an indirect question.

- What time is it?
- Can you tell me the answer?
- Please tell me what time it is.
- I need to find out where the books are.



QUOTATION MARKS (QUOTES) OR INVERTED COMMAS

They may be single ‘ ’ Or double “ ” (single marks are more common.)

- They show when someone is being quoted directly.
- They show the titles of journal articles.

- ‘We must put a stop to the illegal exportation of mahogany,’ said the Minister of the Environment.
- Ferdinand de Saussure separated language into ‘langue’ and ‘parole’
- ‘New method of laser detection’ 1994, Laser Technology, vol. 25, p. 309.

EXCLAMATION MARK



- The exclamation mark is not often used in academic writing. It is usually appropriate after real exclamations or short commands.

- Oh dear!
- Get out!

BRACKETS



- Square brackets are used within a quotation to explain, clarify or correct the original words.
- Rounded brackets (parentheses) are used to provide additional, non-essential information in a sentence.
- Rounded brackets enclose author-date references in the text.
- Rounded brackets enclose the number of an equation, and bracket parts of an equation together.

- According to Smith (1998, p. 10), ‘the first use of wombats in [rocket] technology occurred in the 1987 guided missile program’.
- French, Italian and Spanish (but not Portuguese) may be studied at this University.
- A number of experiments (Smith 1987; Tan 1990; Wong 1991) indicate that this is correct.
- $X = 2 (a+b)$



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EXERCISES



Complete the below exercises to test your skills and see what you've learnt!

EXERCISE 1

In the following sentences, put the correct punctuation marks in the underlined spaces. Also add capital letters where necessary.

- a) the average hotel room has numerous items in its bathroom _ soap_ shampoo _body lotion_ towels_ a hair dryer_
- b) some people always obey the road rules _ others say they are law_ abiding drivers but when the police aren_ t looking_ they break the roadrules_

EXERCISE 2

Now rewrite and add the correct punctuation marks in the following sentences. Remember to use capital letters where appropriate.

- a) some people will dress up to go shopping water the plants empty the garbage answer the phone read a book and get the mail others will only dress up for weddings and funerals

- b) Some students study best late at night other students study best in the mornings

ANSWERS

Exercise 1

- a) The average hotel room has numerous items in its bathroom: soap, shampoo, body lotion, towels and a hair dryer.
- b) Some people always obey the road rules; others say they are law-abiding drivers but when the police aren't looking, they break the road rules.
or
Some people always obey the road rules. Others say they are law-abiding drivers but when the police aren't looking, they break the road rules.

Exercise 2

- a) Some people will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the garbage, answer the phone, read a book and get the mail; others will only dress up for weddings and funerals.
or
Some people will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the garbage, answer the phone, read a book and get the mail. Others will only dress up for weddings and funerals.
- b) Some students study best late at night; other students study best in the mornings.
or
Some students study best late at night. Other students study best in the mornings.