

PUNCTUATION

Universitas Esa Unggul
Intermediate Grammar
Nyoman Putra Antara

PUNCTUATION is the system of signs or symbols given to a reader to show how a sentence is constructed and how it should be read.

Sentences are the building blocks used to construct written accounts. They are complete statements. Punctuation shows how the sentence should be read and makes the meaning clear.

Every sentence should include at least a capital letter at the start, and a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark at the end. This basic system indicates that the sentence is complete.

The use of punctuation in English can change from place to place and from time to time, for the rules in use at that location. Modern typography suggests that punctuation should only be used when there is a need. That results in less punctuation than was the case in the early 20th century.

The use of these marks is often decided by a group or organization and then written down into a style guide of format rules. Newspapers have a style guide to make their content use the same rules (for consistency).

Becoming familiar with the basic punctuation marks in the English language will allow you to express yourself better in your writing. Punctuation marks will also make your sentences clearer and more understandable to the reader.

A. British vs. American English

There are a few differences between punctuation in British and American English. The following charts details some of those differences:

	British English	American English
The " ." symbol is called	a full stop	a period
The " ! " symbol is called	an exclamation mark	an exclamation point
The " () " symbols are called	brackets	parentheses
The " [] " symbols are called	square brackets	brackets
The position of quotation marks	Joy means "happiness".	Joy means "happiness."
The punctuation for abbreviations	Dr, Mr, Mrs, St, Rd, Ct	Dr., Mr., Mrs., St., Rd., Ct.

B. Punctuation in English Grammar

There are 14 punctuation marks that are commonly used in English grammar. They are the **period, question mark, exclamation point, comma, semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, parentheses, brackets, braces, apostrophe, quotation marks, and ellipsis**. Following their correct usage will make your writing easier to read and more appealing:

B.1. Terminal Points (Sentence Endings)

Three of the fourteen punctuation marks are appropriate for use as sentence endings. They are the period, question mark, and exclamation point.

The period (.) is placed at the end of declarative sentences, statements thought to be complete and after many abbreviations.

As a sentence ender: Jane and Jack went to the market.

After an abbreviation: Her son, John Jones Jr., was born on Dec. 6, 2008.

Use a question mark (?) to indicate a direct question when placed at the end of a sentence.

When did Jane leave for the market?

The exclamation point (!) is used when a person wants to express a sudden outcry or add emphasis.

Within dialogue: "Holy cow!" screamed Jane.

To emphasize a point: My mother-in-law's rants make me furious!

There are enough exceptions to this general rule, however, to warrant the following chart, which shows nearly all of the scenarios you are likely to face.

Most authorities, including The Chicago Manual of Style, have traditionally rejected any situation where a question mark and exclamation point both appear at the end of a sentence, even when such usage was logical. In a break with tradition, the latest (16th) edition of The Chicago Manual of Style now allows for both punctuation marks to appear. Such usage is reflected in the chart below:

End of sentence	Sentence is a statement	Sentence is a question	Sentence is an exclamation
Abbreviation	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation; do not add an additional period.</p> <p>Please meet us at 10:00 a.m.</p>	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation; end the sentence with a question mark.</p> <p>Are we supposed to meet at 10:00 a.m.?</p>	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation; end the sentence with an exclamation point.</p> <p>She told us to be there at 5:00 a.m.!</p>
Name or title of work ending with a question mark	<p>Rule: The question mark ends the sentence; no additional period.</p> <p>His first appearance on Broadway was in <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i></p>	<p>Rule: The question mark in the name or title ends the sentence; no additional question mark.</p> <p>Who plays the lead in <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i></p>	<p>Rule: Place the exclamation point immediately after the question mark.</p> <p>I can't stand <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?!</i></p>
Quotation ending with a question mark	<p>Rule: The question mark (inside the closing quotation mark) ends the sentence; no period.</p> <p>She kept asking, "Why me?"</p>	<p>Rule: The question mark (inside the closing quotation mark) ends the sentence; no additional question mark.</p> <p>Did you just ask, "Why me?"</p>	<p>Rule: Place the exclamation point immediately after the closing quotation mark.</p> <p>Stop asking, "Why me?!"</p>

<p>Name or title of work ending with an exclamation point</p>	<p>Rule: The exclamation point ends the sentence; no additional period.</p> <p>He works at Yahoo!</p>	<p>Rule: Place the question mark immediately after the exclamation point.</p> <p>Does he still work at Yahoo!?</p>	<p>Rule: The exclamation point in the name or title ends the sentence; no additional exclamation point.</p> <p>I can't believe you're still using Yahoo!</p>
<p>Quotation ending with an exclamation point</p>	<p>Rule: The exclamation point (inside the closing quotation mark) ends the sentence; no period.</p> <p>She ended the letter with a cheerful "Good luck!"</p>	<p>Rule: Add a question mark after the closing quotation mark.</p> <p>Who screamed, "The house is on fire!"?</p>	<p>Rule: The exclamation point (inside the closing quotation mark) ends the sentence; no additional exclamation point.</p> <p>Her letter of resignation was a single sentence: "I'm out of here!"</p>
<p>Quotation ending with a period (not an abbreviation) or no punctuation</p>	<p>Rule: The sentence ends with a single period inside the closing quotation mark.</p> <p>He called Vienna the "most cultured city in the world."</p>	<p>Rule: No period inside closing quotation mark; question mark after closing quotation mark.</p> <p>Who said, "I think, therefore I am"?</p>	<p>Rule: No period inside closing quotation mark; exclamation point after closing quotation mark.</p> <p>Even though half the building was on fire, they told us to "keep calm and carry on"!</p>

<p>Quotation ending with a period as part of an abbreviation</p>	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation (inside the closing quotation mark); no additional period.</p> <p>She said, "The flight leaves at 10:00 a.m."</p>	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation (inside the closing quotation mark); add a question mark after the closing quotation mark.</p> <p>Didn't he tell us to be there "no later than 7:30 a.m."?</p>	<p>Rule: Keep the period for the abbreviation (inside the closing quotation mark); add an exclamation point after the closing quotation mark.</p> <p>This ticket says to arrive "no later than 5:00 a.m."!</p>
<p>Parenthetical</p>	<p>Rule: The main sentence takes a period outside the closing parenthesis no matter what punctuation is included inside the parenthetical element.</p> <p>She worked as an executive in the automotive industry (at Ford) and in the tech sector (at Yahoo!).</p>	<p>Rule: The main sentence takes a question mark outside the closing parenthesis no matter what punctuation is included inside the parenthetical element.</p> <p>Can you believe how much money he has made from his <i>Where's Wally?</i> series of books (published in the US as <i>Where's Waldo?</i>)?</p>	<p>Rule: The main sentence takes an exclamation point outside the closing parenthesis no matter what punctuation is included inside the parenthetical element.</p> <p>He will not accept any papers submitted even one minute past the deadline (5:00 p.m.)!</p>

B.2. Pausing Points (Comma, Semicolon and Colon)

The comma, semicolon and colon are often misused because they all can indicate a pause in a series.

The comma (,) is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence. Additionally, it is used in numbers, dates and letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Direct address: Thanks for all your help, John.

Separation of two complete sentences: We went to the movies, and then we went out to lunch.

Separating lists or elements within sentences: Suzi wanted the black, green, and blue dress.

Whether to add a final comma before the conjunction in a list is a matter of debate. This final comma, known as an Oxford or serial comma, is useful in a complex series of elements or phrases but is often considered unnecessary in a simple series such as in the example above. It usually comes down to a style choice by the writer.

The semicolon (;) is used to connect independent clauses. It shows a closer relationship between the clauses than a period would show.

John was hurt; he knew she only said it to upset him.

A colon (:) has three main uses. The first is after a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series.

He was planning to study four subjects: politics, philosophy, sociology and economics.

The second is between independent clauses, when the second explains the first, similar to a semicolon:

I didn't have time to get changed: I was already late.

The third use of a colon is for emphasis:

There was one thing she loved more than any other: her dog.

A colon also has non-grammatical uses in time, ratio, business correspondence and references.

B.3. Dash and the Hyphen

Two other common punctuation marks are the dash and hyphen. These marks are often confused with each other due to their appearance but they are very different.

A dash (-) is used to separate words into statements. There are two common types of dashes: en dash and em dash.

En dash: Slightly wider than a hyphen, the en dash is a symbol (-) that is used in writing or printing to indicate a range or connections and differentiations, such as 1880-1945 or Princeton-New York trains.

Em dash: Twice as long as the en dash, the em dash can be used in place of a comma, parenthesis, or colon to enhance readability or emphasize the conclusion of a sentence. For example, She gave him her answer - No!

Whether you put spaces around the em dash or not is a style choice. Just be consistent.

A hyphen is used to join two or more words together into a compound term and is not separated by spaces. For example, part-time, back-to-back, well-known.

B.4. Other Points (Brackets, Braces and Parentheses)

Brackets, braces and parentheses are symbols used to contain words that are a further explanation or are considered a group.

Brackets ([]) are the squared off notations used for technical explanations or to clarify meaning. If you remove the information in the brackets, the sentence will still make sense.

He [Mr. Jones] was the last person seen at the house.

Braces ({}) are used to contain two or more lines of text or listed items to show that they are considered as a unit. They are not commonplace in most writing, but can be seen in computer programming to show what should be contained within the same lines. They can also be used in mathematical expressions. For example, $2\{1+[23-3]\}=x$.

Parentheses (()) are curved notations used to contain further thoughts or qualifying remarks. However, parentheses can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning in most cases.

John and Jane (who were actually half brother and sister) both have red hair.

B.5. Quotations (Apostrophe, Quotation Marks and Ellipsis)

The final three punctuation forms in English grammar are the apostrophe, quotation marks and ellipsis. Unlike previously mentioned grammatical marks, they are not related to one another in any form.

An apostrophe (') is used to indicate the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case, or the plurals of lowercase letters. Examples of the apostrophe in use include:

Omission of letters from a word: I've seen that movie several times. She wasn't the only one who knew the answer.

Possessive case: Sara's dog bit the neighbor.

Plural for lowercase letters: Six people were told to mind their p's and q's.

It should be noted that, according to Purdue University, some teachers and editors enlarge the scope of the use of apostrophe, and prefer their use on symbols (&'s), numbers (7's) and capitalized letters (Q&'s), even though they are not necessary.

Quotations marks (" ") are a pair of punctuation marks used primarily to mark the beginning and end of a passage attributed to another and repeated word for word. They are also used to indicate meanings and to indicate the unusual or dubious status of a word.

"Don't go outside," she said.

Single quotation marks (' ') are used most frequently for quotes within quotes.

Marie told the teacher, "I saw Marc at the playground, and he said to me 'Bill started the fight,' and I believed him."

The ellipsis is most commonly represented by three periods (. . .) although it is occasionally demonstrated with three asterisks (***) . The ellipsis is used in writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words. Ellipses are frequently used within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning. Students writing research papers or newspapers quoting parts of speeches will often employ ellipsis to avoid copying lengthy text that is not needed.

Omission of words: She began to count, "One, two, three, four..." until she got to 10, then went to find him.

Within a quotation: When Newton stated, "An object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion..." he developed the law of motion.

C. World Without Punctuation

This is how confusing world will be without punctuation:

“Let’s eat Grandpa!”
“Let’s eat, Grandpa!”

The significance of punctuation lays within the difference between announcing dinner and a suggestion for cannibalism. “Let’s eat, Grandpa!” vs. “Let’s eat Grandpa!” are two totally different things. For the sake of Grandpa’s life, use proper punctuation.

“I’d like to thank my parents, Tiffany and God”
“I’d like to thank my parents, Tiffany and God”

Some people love it, some people hate it, but the Oxford comma does make a difference. Let’s say you’re writing your graduation speech, and you’d like to thank your parents, Tiffany, and God. Without that comma after Tiffany, it’d read, “I’d like to thank my parents, Tiffany and God.” Are Tiffany and God your parents? Probably not. Missing Oxford commas can also lead to lawsuits

“A woman, without her man, is nothing”
“A woman: without her, man would be nothing”

This is a big one. Depending upon where you place your comma, your sentence could convey an entirely different meaning. Like in this sentence, “A woman, without her man, is nothing.” Now, let’s change up where we’re placing the commas, “A woman: without her, man is nothing.” See? An entirely different sentence.

“Day old ‘bread”
“Day old bread”

Quotation marks are primarily meant to go around quotes or a parenthetical reference. So, when you see a sign in a grocery store that says, “Day old ‘bread” it has to make you wonder...is it actually bread? Why is bread in quotation marks? Is it something disguised as bread? We’ll never know because of those confusing quotation marks.

“I’m sorry I love you”

“I’m sorry; I love you”

Let’s pretend that you and your significant other got into an argument, but you want to sort things out. You send them a text saying, “I’m sorry; I love you.” Then, all is well in the world. You’ve apologized and expressed your love for them. But if you hadn’t placed that semicolon after “sorry,” you would’ve said, “I’m sorry I love you.” Hence, you’re feeling sorry that you love them. As in, you don’t want to love them. Add a semicolon, **save a relationship.**

“I love baking my family and my friends”

“I love baking, my family, and my friends”

If you’re writing a biography on a dating website, the lack of a comma could lead to an immediate left swipe. Take this for example, “I love baking, my family, and my friends.” Without the commas, the sentence would be, “I love baking my family and friends.” And right there is why commas are absolutely necessary. **Again, punctuation saves lives.**

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