

# PUNCTUATION MARKS IN ENGLISH

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### What is Punctuation?

- Punctuation is the system of symbols (. , ! - : ; etc) that we use to separate sentences and parts of sentences to make their meaning clear. Each symbol is called a “punctuation mark”
- Essential in writing.
- Show where sentences start and finish.
- Make writing easy to understand.

### Why to punctuate?

- Punctuation marks are symbols that indicate the structure and organization of written language, as well as intonation and pauses to be observed when reading aloud.
- In written English, punctuation is a vital to disambiguate the meaning of sentences.

## THE POWER OF PUNCTUATION

An English professor asked the students to punctuate the following:

“A woman without her man is nothing.”

All of the males in the class wrote:

“A woman without her man, is nothing.”

All of the females in the class wrote:

“A woman: without her, man is nothing.”

## PUNCTUATION MARKS IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

- Period (full stop)
- Question Mark.
- Exclamation Point/Mark.
- Comma.
- Semicolon.
- Colon.
- Dash.
- Hyphen.
- Parentheses.
- Brackets.
- Braces.
- Apostrophe.
- Quotation Marks.
- Ellipses.

## **SPACING WITH PUNCTUATION**

- **Rule 1.** With a computer, use only one space after commas, semicolons, colons, exclamation points, question marks, and quotation marks.
- **Rule 2.** Use no spaces on either side of a hyphen.

### **Example:**

We borrowed twenty-two sheets of paper.

## **HOW TO USE THESE PUNCTUATION MARKS?**

### **1. Period or Full Stop.**

- Full stops are used to mark the end of a sentence that is a complete statement:

“After leaving school, she went to work in an insurance company.”

- If the last word in the sentence ends in a full stop, do not use another full stop after it.

### **Example:**

I know that M.D. She is my sister-in-law.

### **2. Comma.**

The most popular mark of punctuation, the comma (,).

In Greek, the comma was a “piece cut off” from a line of verse ---what in English today we’d call a phrase or a clause.

Since 16<sup>th</sup> century, comma has referred to the mark that sets off words, phrases, and sentences.

### When is Comma used?

- To avoid confusion, use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more.

**Example:** My property is to be split among my husband, daughter, son, and nephew. (Omitting the comma after son would indicate that the son and nephew would have to split one-third of the property)

- Use a comma to separate two adjectives when the word *and* can be inserted between them.

**Example:** He is a strong, healthy man.

- Use comma before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.

**Example:** Will you, Aisha, do that assignment for me?

Yes, Doctor, I will.

- Use comma to separate the day of the month from the year and after the year.

**Example:** She talked to her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California.

(If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma.) They talked in December 2003, in Mill Valley.

- Use comma to set off expressions that interrupt the flow of the sentence.

**Example:** I am, as you have probably, very nervous about this.

- If something or someone is sufficiently identified, the description following it is considered nonessential and should be surrounded by commas.

**Example:** Freddy, who has a limp, was the only person available with required qualification.

- When starting a sentence with a weak clause, use a comma after it. Conversely, do not use a comma when the sentence starts with a strong clause followed by a weak clause.

**Example:** If you are not sure about this, let me know no.

Let me know now if you are not sure about this.

- Use a comma to separate two strong clauses joined by a conjunction—*and, but, for, nor*. You can omit the comma if the clauses are both short.

**Example:** I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors.

I paint and he writes.

- Use comma to separate two sentences if it helps to avoid confusion.

**Example:** I chose the colors red and green, and blue was his first choice.

- Use commas to introduce direct quotations shorter than three lines.

**Example:** He actually said “I do not care”

- Use comma to separate a statement from a question.

**Example:** I can go, can't I?

- Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence.

**Example:** That is my money, not yours.

- Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as *well, now, or yes*.

**Examples:** Yes, I do need that report.

Well, I never thought I'd live to see the day.

- Use commas surrounding words such as *therefore* and *however* when they are used as interrupters.

**Examples:** I would, therefore, like a response.

I would be happy, however, to volunteer for the Red Cross.

- After the words like Yes, No, Oh, Ah, etc.

### 3. The question mark ?

- Use question mark only after a direct question.

**Example:**

Will you go with me?

- Use question mark when a sentence is half statement and half question.

**Example:**

You do care, don't you?

### 4. The Exclamatory Mark.

- Use exclamatory points to show emphasis or surprise. Do not use the exclamation point in formal business letters.

**Example:**

I'm truly shocked by your behavior!

- It is used by writers to convey an emotion to the reader.
- An exclamatory mark is used after a strong imperative sentences.

Example: keep quiet!

After the words expressing anger, joy, surprise, sorrow, etc.

Example: What a victory!

Oh, that was a terrible accident!

What a wastage of money on these elections!

#### **5. Colon :**

- A mark of punctuation (:) used after a statement (usually an independent clause) that introduces a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series.
- Use the colon to introduce a list of items when introductory words such as *namely, for example, or that is* do not appear.

#### **Example:**

I want the items namely, butter, sugar, and flour.

I want the following items: butter, sugar, and flour.

- A colon should not precede a list unless it follows a complete sentence.

#### **Example:**

I want an assistant who can (1) input data, (2) write reports, and (3) complete tax forms.

I want an assistant who can do the following:

- a. Input data.
- b. Write reports, and
- c. Complete tax forms.

#### **6. Semicolon (;)**

A mark of punctuation (;) used to connect independent clauses and show a closer relationship than a period does. Use a semicolon when you want to form a bond between two statements, typically when they are related to or contrast with one another.

If you have two independent clauses, meaning they could stand alone as their own sentences, it's okay to use a semicolon. For example: "My aunt also had hairy knuckles; she loved to wash and comb them.

- Use semicolon in place of full stop to separate two sentences, where the conjunction has been left out.

**Example:**

Call me tomorrow; I will give you my answer then.

I have paid my dues; therefore, I expect all the privileges listed in the contract.

- Use the semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.

**Example:**

This conference has people who have come from Lahore, Pakistan; Bombay, India; and Jadhah, Saudi Arabia.

- Use the semicolon between two sentences that are joined by a conjunction but already have one or more commas within the first sentence.

**Example:**

When I finish here, I will be glad to help you; and that is a promise I will keep.

If she can, she will attempt that feat; and if her husband is able, he will be there to see her.

**7. Dash (—)**

- A mark of punctuation (—), technically known as an en dash, used to set off a word or phrase after an independent clause or to set off words, phrases, or clauses that interrupt a sentence.
- Sometimes, however, you might wish to place special emphasis on the component, but commas are too weak to serve this purpose. If this is the case, you may wish to use dashes for added emphasis.

*“Linda Simpson, the president’s most trusted economic advisor, will resign her office during today’s press conference”*

*“Linda Simpson—the president’s most trusted economic advisor—will resign her office during today’s press conference.”*

**8. Hyphen (-)**

A short horizontal mark of punctuation (-) used between the parts of compound word or name or between the syllables of a word when divided at the end of a line.

*“His **out-of-tune** bagpipes are giving me a headache.”*

- To check whether a compound noun is two words, one word, or hyphenated, you may need to look it up in the dictionary. If you can’t find the word in the dictionary, treat the noun as separate words.

**Examples:**

Eyewitness.

Eye shadow.

Eye-opener.

- Hyphenate all compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.

**Example:** The teacher had thirty-two children in her classroom.

Only twenty-one of the children were bilingual.

- Hyphenate all spelled-out fractions.

**Example:** You need one-third of a cup of sugar for that recipe.

- When adverbs other than –ly adverbs are used as compound words in front of a noun, hyphenate. When the combination of words is used after the noun, do not hyphenate.

**Example:**

The well-known actress accepted her award.

The actress who accepted her award was well known.

He got a much-needed haircut yesterday.

His haircut was much needed.

- Generally, hyphenate between two or more adjectives when they come before a noun and act as a single idea.

**Example:**

Friendly-looking man. (Compound adjective in front of a noun.)

**9. Hyphen with prefixes.**

- The current trend is to do away with unnecessary hyphens. Therefore, most prefixes and suffixes are used without a hyphen.

**Example:** noncompliance, semiconscious.

- Hyphenate prefixes when they come before proper nouns.

**Example:** Un-American.

- When a prefix ends in one vowel and a root word begins with a different vowel, generally attach them without a hyphen.

**Examples:** anti-aircraft, proactive.

- Hyphenate prefixes ending in an *a* or *i* only when the root word begins with the same letter.

**Example:** ultra-ambitious, semi-invalid.

- Prefixes and root words that result in *double e's* and *double o's* are usually combined to form one word.

**Examples:** preemployment, coordinate.

**Exceptions:** de-emphasize, co-owner.

- Hyphenate all words beginning with self except for selfish and selfless.

**Examples:** self-assured, self-respect, self-addressed.

- Use a hyphen with the prefix *ex*

**Example:** His ex-wife sued for nonsupport.

- Use the hyphen with the prefix *re* only when the *re* means again AND omitting the hyphen would cause confusion with another word.

**Examples:**

Will she recover from her illness? Re does not mean again.

I have re-covered the sofa twice. Re does mean again AND omitting the hyphen would have caused confusion with another word.

### **10. Brackets/Parentheses/Braces**

- Use parentheses to enclose words or figures that clarify or are used as an aside.

**Example:** I expect five hundred dollars (\$500)

He finally answered (after taking five minutes to think) that he did not get the question.

(Comma could have been used in the above example. Parentheses show less emphasis or importance.)

- Use full parentheses to enclose numbers or letters used for listed items.

**Example:**

We need an emergency physician who can (1) think quickly, (2) treat patients respectfully, and (3) handle complaints from the public.

- Full stop go inside parentheses only if an entire sentence is inside the parentheses.

**Example:**

Please read the analysis (I have enclosed it as Attachment A.)



Please read the analysis (Attachment A).

Note: Generally, parentheses refers to round brackets ( ) and brackets to square bracket [ ]. However, we are more and more used to hearing these referred to simply as ‘round brackets’. We shall also learn about the difference between parentheses, brackets, and braces.

### 11. The slash or Oblique /

- Most often used to represent exclusive or inclusive or, division and fractions, and as a date separator in writing.
- As a period sometimes in written poetry. The shift of lines is conveyed by the use of slash, i.e. the sun came/spoke of light to me/the sun gave us fame/....
- It can also be used in a fraction, particularly involving large numbers, e.g. 67/89.
- A Backslash\ is used for programming/coding in computer languages.

### 12. Ellipsis Marks (...)

- The three-dot method is used for ellipsis marks. Use no more than three marks whether the omission occurs in the middle of a sentence or between sentences.

#### Example:

**Original sentence:** The regulation states, “All agencies must document overtime or risk losing federal funds.”

**Rewritten using ellipsis:** The regulation states, “All agencies must document overtime...”

### 13. Quotation marks “ ”

- Full stops and commas always go inside quotation mark.

**Example:** She said, “you need to hurry up.”

- The placement of question marks with quotes follows logic. If a question is in quotation marks, the question mark should be placed inside the quotation marks.

**Example:** She asked, “Will you still my friend?”

Do you agree with the saying, “All’s fair in love and war”?

(Only one ending punctuation mark is used with quotation marks. Also, the stronger punctuation mark wins. Therefore, no full stop after war is used.)

- When you have a question outside quoted material AND inside quoted material, use only one question mark and place it inside the quotation mark.

**Example:** Did she say, “May I go?”

- Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

**Example:** He said, “Danial said, ‘Do not treat me that way.’”

- Use quotation marks to set off a direct quotation only.

**Example:** “When will you be here?”, he asked.

He asked when you will be here.

- Do not use quotation marks with quoted material that is more than three lines in length.

#### **14. Apostrophe ’**

- Use the apostrophe with contractions. The apostrophe is always placed at the spot where one or more letters have been removed.

**Example:** don’t, isn’t.

She’s a great teacher.

- Use the apostrophe to show possession. Place the apostrophe before the *s* to show singular possession.

**Example:** one boy’s hat. One child’s hat.

(Names ending in *s* or an *s* sound are also required to have the second *s* added.)

Mr. Jones’s golf clubs.

Mrs. Lees’s books (name is Lees)

- Use the apostrophe where the noun that should follow is implied.

**Example:** This was his father’s, not his jacket.

- To show plural possession, make the noun plural first. Then immediately use the apostrophe.

**Example:** Two boys’ hats. Two women’s hats

Two children’s hats.

- With singular compound noun, show possession with ’s at the end of the word .

**Example:** My mother-in-law’s hat.

- If the compound noun is plural, form the plural first and then use the apostrophe.

**Example:** My two brothers-in-law’s hats.

- Use the apostrophe and *s* after the second name only if two people possess the same item.

**Examples:** Sara’s and Anna’s job contracts will be renewed next year. (indicates separate ownership.)

Sara and Amna's job contracts will be renewed next year. (indicates joint ownership of more than one contract.)

- Never use apostrophe with possessive pronouns: *his, hers, its, theirs, ours, yours, whose*. They already show possession so they do not require an apostrophe.

**Example:**

Correct: This book is hers, not yours.

Incorrect: Sincerely your's.