

Study Advice Service

Student Support Services

Punctuation checklist

A handy list of punctuation marks, with examples of their use

If you want to know more about punctuation see the Study Advice Service leaflet "Punctuation — Elementary Guidance".

Punctuation mark	When to use it	For example
Apostrophe ,	<p>i) To show that something belongs to someone or something (possession).</p> <p>ii) To replace missing letters in words (omission).</p>	<p>The boy's coat. This is Christine's book. The students' names. The children's toys.</p> <p>NOTE. 's for singular, s' for plural unless the plural does not end in an s e.g. children's, people's.</p> <p>NOTE. There is no apostrophe used with its, his, hers, ours, yours, whose. you are = you're. I am = I'm. we have = we've. it is = it's. who is = who's. will not = won't.</p>
Brackets ()	<p>Used in pairs around groups of words that introduce an extra idea e.g. an explanation or afterthought, but that you want to keep separate from the rest of the sentence. A sentence should still make complete sense without the words in brackets.</p>	<p>The city centre was empty (it was Christmas Day) and not a single shop was open.</p>
Capital letter A	<p>i) At the beginning of a sentence.</p> <p>ii) For names (proper nouns).</p>	<p>The rain continued all afternoon. The cricket match was cancelled. Mary Jones. London. The Bible.</p>
Colon :	<p>i) To introduce something that is to follow, which may be a list.</p> <p>ii) To introduce the second half of a sentence when it explains or expands what comes in the first half.</p>	<p>Students are expected to: attend lectures, attend tutorials, produce written work, meet deadlines for essays and sit examinations. Mediterranean cookery is considered healthy: it uses olive oil, fresh tomatoes and fish.</p>

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Comma ,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) To mark a brief pause within a sentence, such as where you would naturally pause if you were speaking. ii) To separate lists of words in a sentence (but do not put a comma before “and” or “or”). 	<p>We cannot catch an early train, unless you can take the afternoon off work.</p> <p>The picnic included sandwiches, crisps, lemonade, biscuits and apples.</p>
Dash –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) To give a pause for dramatic effect ii) to introduce something surprising or unexpected. iii) Used in pairs in a similar way to brackets (see above). 	<p>I opened the matchbox carefully and inside it was - a spider.</p> <p>I hear he is a good pianist - I have never heard him - but he is shy about playing for people.</p>
Exclamation mark !	At the end of an exclamation — that is an outburst of feelings such as surprise, anger, joy etc.	<p>I cannot believe it! Quick!</p> <p>NOTE. This would not normally be used in formal academic writing.</p>
Full stop .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) At the end of a sentence. ii) To show an abbreviation. 	<p>The cat sat on the mat. etc. e.g. Mrs. B.B.C.</p>
Hyphen -	To join two words together to make a compound word.	Part-time, take-away.
Question mark ?	At the end of a sentence that asks a question.	How are you feeling today?
Quotation marks (also called inverted commas/ speech marks) “ ” or ‘ ’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) To show that you are using someone else’s words. ii) Around words that are actually spoken (also called inverted commas or speech marks). iii) Around titles of books, films etc. 	<p>Nelson Mandela said “I have a dream.”</p> <p>“Hello,” she said.</p> <p>“The Wind in the Willows” is a book by Kenneth Grahame.</p>
Semi-colon ;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) To link two sentences and turn them into one sentence when a full stop would be too abrupt. ii) As a separator in lists of phrases. 	<p>He never took any exercise; consequently he became overweight. The door burst open; the headmaster walked in.</p> <p>Go down the road; turn left at the traffic lights; keep going for about a mile; take the second on the right.</p>

All web addresses in this leaflet were correct at the time of publication.

The information in this leaflet can be made available in an alternative format on request. Telephone 01482 466199.