

THE ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER

PUNCTUATION

Clarifies Written Communication

A speaker can pause and gesture to relay information to a listener. Punctuation performs this for written communication by telling a reader how a passage should be read.

End punctuation signals a strong pause at the end of sentences.

period •	ends a statement or a command <i>also used in abbreviations (M.D. etc.) and numbers (1.12, \$20.00)</i>	Reading is fun. Read your book.
question mark ?	ends a direct question	Reading is fun? Is reading fun?
exclamation point !	ends a statement of strong feeling	Reading is fun!

Separators signal a softer pause to separate sentence parts.

comma , most frequently used punctuation mark	Signals a slight pause to separate: – compound sentences – items in a list – introductory elements – interrupters – nonrestrictive elements – quoted materials – coordinate adjectives – confusing elements – contrasting elements – parts of names (degrees & titles) – parts of addresses – parts of dates & numbers	Jeff likes reading, but Sue likes math. We had chicken, salad, and beans. In July, the Smiths will go on vacation. Jim, for example, likes to read. Mary Anne, my best friend, left yesterday. Sheila shouted, "Don't run so fast!" It was a cold, snowy evening. They came in, in a cloud of dust. It was John, not Beth, who ran outside. Gerald McSwain, Jr., P.E, was elected. She lives at 22 Oak Street, DeLand, Florida. Jerry won \$10,000 on January 1, 1965.
dash — <i>do not overuse</i>	signals a pause stronger than a comma to separate elements for emphasis also used to show broken speech	Pride — a cumbersome emotion— made her quit. Quigley—not the gorilla—had killed him. John stuttered, "It's a—a sn—snake."
parentheses () <i>do not overuse</i>	signals a pause stronger than a dash to separate less important parts and de-emphasize them also used in numbered lists	The math test is scheduled on Friday (only two days before my chemistry exam). Before bed, you should (1) eat dinner, (2) do your homework, and (3) brush your teeth.
semicolon ; <i>do not overuse</i>	signals a pause stronger than a comma, but softer than a period to separate: – compound sentences – items in a list containing commas	Gene likes baseball; Jill likes football. She lived in Trenton, Ohio; Flint, Michigan; and Boston, Massachusetts.
colon : <i>introduction must be a complete sentence</i>	signals a pause almost as strong as a period used to introduce: – lists – explanations – long quotes also used for correspondence, numbers, time, Biblical citations & bibliographic references	There is one important thing to remember about English: just when you think you know all the rules, you find another exception. Dear Sir or Madam: 2:1 ration 2:00 p.m. Genesis 4:11 New York: MacMillan, 1985

OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS

apostrophe '	forms possessive nouns to show ownership shows omission of letters in contractions	Darren's book disappeared after class. Kathy said she'd like to go if it's possible.
hyphen –	forms some compound words connects some adjectives for clarity connects some prefixes for clarity connects prefixes with proper nouns connects spelled-out numbers divides word syllables at the ends of lines	cover-up man-hour mother-in-law fast-paced work environment re-create verses recreate anti-American non-English speakers thirty-six forty-three seventy-nine After ten hours of studying, Jackson had forgotten it all.
double quotes “ ”	enclose direct quotes enclose titles of short works, such as poems and short stories enclose definitions, special words or phrases.	She said, "I like English better than sports." "The Telltale Heart" is a scary story by Edgar Allen Poe. "Carpe diem" means "seize the day" in Latin.
single quotes ‘ ’	enclose quotes within quotes	Randy asked, "Do you know who wrote the poem about the dog titled 'Rascal'?"
<u>underline</u>	titles of long works, such as books, magazines, and plays	Please read the book <u>To Kill a Mockingbird</u> before next week. We saw the play <u>Cats</u> three times.
brackets []	separate words inserted in direct quotes sets off material already within parentheses	Clinton said, "This [the National Health Program] will ensure health insurance for all Americans." If you go outside, remember to wear warm clothes (hat, gloves [wool if possible], and boots).
ellipses ...	signals that words are left out of a quote signals hesitating speech	Kennedy's words, "Don't ask what your country can do for you ...," changed our view of government in the 60s. "Well ... I guess you can go," he answered.
slash /	separates alternative words written together separates lines of poetry also used in numbers (fractions)	pass/fail and/or in/out give/take Two roads diverged in a wood, and I / I took the one less traveled by / And that has made all the difference. 1/2 2/3 9/10 16/25

The importance of using punctuation to clarify meaning can be seen in this example:

The chemistry lab blew up Mr Thomas.

It sounds like the chemistry class will need a substitute teacher, but when the proper punctuation is added, we discover that Mr. Thomas was not injured at all:

The chemistry lab blew up, Mr Thomas.