

Punctuation Glossary



Term	Guidance	Example
apostrophe '	<p>Apostrophes have two completely different uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing the place of missing letters (e.g. <i>I'm for I am</i>) Marking possessives (e.g. <i>Hannah's mother</i>). 	<p><i>I'm going out and I won't be long.</i></p> <p><i>Hannah's mother went to town in Justin's car.</i></p>
brackets ()	<p>Brackets are used to separate off a word or phrase from the main text; they are always used in pairs. They contain information which is not part of the main flow of the sentence, and which could be omitted without altering the meaning.</p>	<p><i>His stomach (which was never very quiet) began to gurgle alarmingly.</i></p>
capital letters A	<p>Capital, or uppercase letters are used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To begin sentences To begin proper nouns (names of people and places) To begin days of the week and months of the year. When referring to God To write the pronoun 'I' 	<p><i>The fox was dashing across the field.</i></p> <p><i>Ben and Amy were going to visit London.</i></p> <p><i>My birthday is on Wednesday, 21 May.</i></p>
colon :	<p>A colon is used to introduce an example or explanation within a sentence.</p> <p>The part of a sentence after a colon should illustrate, explain, or expand on what comes before it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colons can come before a single comment or description. Colons can also introduce a list of people or items, or a range of options. 	<p><i>These words were scratched in blood: 'Do not return without the gold.'</i></p> <p><i>It wasn't much of a holiday: two weeks of constant rain in a leaky tent.</i></p> <p><i>What would you like on your sandwich: mayonnaise, butter, or margarine?</i></p>
comma ,	<p>Commas are used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To mark a pause in a sentence, especially to separate a subordinate clause from the main clause. To separate items in a list or series. In pairs before and after the name of someone who is being introduced or described. To mark a pause in a compound sentence. 	<p><i>When the howling stopped, we ventured out from the cave.</i></p> <p><i>I've packed a bikini, flippers, snorkel, and a periscope.</i></p> <p><i>The guitarist, Jimi Hendrix, once lived here.</i></p> <p><i>The film is rated 15, but it's not that scary.</i></p>
dash -	<p>A pair of dashes can be used to separate extra information in a sentence.</p> <p>The dashes go around the extra bit of information. They are more commonly used in less formal writing and indicate a stronger pause than a comma.</p>	<p><i>Mason – the builder – arrived before Nathan.</i></p>

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ellipsis ...	Ellipsis is used to show: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pause in someone's speech or thoughts • To build tension • To show that a sentence is not finished • A pause in speech • At end of a sentence to create suspense 	<i>I'm not sure... maybe I'll wait until later.</i> <i>A hollow scream pierced the silence...</i> <i>"Help, I think I'm going to ..."</i> <i>"The sight was awesome... truly amazing."</i> <i>Mr Daily gritted his teeth, gripped the scalpel tightly in his right hand and slowly advanced...</i>
exclamation mark !	An exclamation mark is used to indicate shouting, surprise, or excitement in direct speech. It can also be used to express surprise, alarm, or excitement in a narrative.	<i>'Stop! Don't drink! The goblet is poisoned!'</i> <i>The sun was coming up. She must hurry! Soon the spell would wear off!</i>
full stop .	A full stop shows where a sentence ends, when the sentence is neither a question nor an exclamation. Full stops go within quotation marks in direct speech. Full stops go within parentheses, when these surround a complete sentence.	<i>Our story begins in 1914, on the eve of the First World War.</i> <i>He said, 'I'll meet you outside the cinema.'</i> <i>The waiter arrived with a plate of toast. (I had ordered waffles.)</i>
hyphen -	Hyphens connect two or more words which make up a compound noun or adjective.	<i>close-up; an ultra-huge sandwich.</i>
inverted commas ‘ ’ “ ”	Inverted commas occur in pairs and can surround a single word or phrase, or a longer piece of text. They are also known as speech marks. Inverted commas are also known as speech marks, quotation marks, or (informally) quotes. Pairs of quotation marks can be single ('...') or double ("..."), but are never mixed.	<i>'Look!' said a voice behind me. 'Look at the sky!'</i>
lowercase letters a	Lowercase letters are used unless capitalisation is required.	<i>Apart from the initial capital letter, the remaining words in this sentence are all lowercase.</i>
Parentheses ()	Parentheses are used to enclose optional or additional material in a sentence that could be removed without destroying the meaning of the main text.	<i>"George Washington (the father of his country) was not the wooden figure with wooden teeth that many think him."</i>
punctuation	Punctuation is the use of special marks to make a piece of writing easier to read and understand. Punctuation marks show divisions and connections between sentences, clauses, or individual words.	<i>Examples of punctuation marks are found in each column of this glossary.</i>
question mark ?	Question marks are used to mark a sentence that is a question. Question marks usually come at the end of a sentence.	<i>Are there wild animals in this wood?</i>

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semicolon ;	<p>A semicolon can be used to mark a break in a sentence that is longer, or more important, than a break made with a comma.</p> <p>Semicolons can separate a series of connected clauses introduced by a colon.</p> <p>A single semicolon can also separate two contrasting or balancing clauses.</p>	<p><i>The castle was desolate; no one had lived there for three centuries or more.</i></p> <p><i>There were three clues: there was mud on the carpet; the door had been forced; and the air in the room smelled of fish.</i></p> <p><i>You bring cups and plates; I'll bring juice and sandwiches.</i></p>