

HOW TO PUNCTUATE

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK

FOR STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The Use of Punctuation Marks.


Punctuation is like magic tools that help writers put their thoughts on paper! They make reading super fun and easy. Without punctuation, reading turns into a big jumble, and it's hard to figure out what anything means. Punctuation also helps us group words together so they make sense, like putting puzzle pieces in the right spots!

Look at this sentence without Punctuation:

 let's eat grandma

This sentence could be interpreted in two ways depending on punctuation. Without punctuation, it sounds like someone is suggesting eating their grandmother, which is quite alarming!

The sentence should be written like this with punctuation:

 Let's eat, Grandma!

Now, with the comma, it's clear that the speaker is inviting Grandma to join them for a meal.

Without punctuation, our sentences can get all mixed up and might even mean something totally different! Punctuation marks, like commas, periods, and question marks, are like helpful little signs that tell us how to read things. They're like traffic lights for our words, showing us when to take a

little break, stop, or zoom ahead! So, don't forget to sprinkle in punctuation to make your writing super clear and fun for everyone to read!

But watch out! If you use too many punctuation marks, that can make things tricky too!

Simple Guidelines for Punctuation!

When you're not sure where to put a punctuation mark or if you even need one, just remember these two fun rules:

1. Choose the punctuation that makes your sentences super clear and easy to read, like a sunny day!
2. If your sentence is already super clear and makes sense without any punctuation, then you can just leave it out, like not wearing a jacket when it's warm outside!

Happy writing! 😊✍️

The Fun of Pausing!

When we want to figure out where to pause in a sentence, we start by thinking about what the pause feels like all by itself. But that's not all! We also have to think about how we paused in the parts before it. Sometimes, a little comma is just right, but other times a bigger pause with a semicolon is needed. And guess what? A colon can even jump in where the semicolon usually goes! It might sound a bit tricky, but we'll look at some examples later that will make it super easy to understand!

THE FULL STOP

- I. **Every time we finish a normal sentence, we put a period at the end, unless it's a question or an excited shout!**

Nowadays, writers like to keep their sentences short and sweet! Back in the day, writers like Milton and Jeremy Taylor would keep adding details until the very end of the sentence, while Macaulay would share each idea one by one, giving you little pauses to think, just like you would if you were solving a puzzle yourself! You could even squish them all together like this:

But remember, using too many punctuation marks can make things super confusing too!

- II. **Usually, you don't put a period at the end of a sentence until it's all put together and makes sense.**
- III. **If a sentence is meant to be left hanging, a dash can stand in for a period!**
- IV. **You put a little dot after most short forms, after the first letters of names, and after those fancy number words like first, second, and third!"**

Example:



"Hey there! So, once upon a time, in the year 1883, around snack time at 3 o'clock, something super cool happened! There were two whole pounds of yummy treats! And guess what? The smart guy J.S. Mill, who was a real brainiac, was involved too! Oh, and we can't forget about King William III., who ruled over England like a boss! And there's a special paper, but it's called MS and LL.D. (not M.S. and L.L.D., silly!). Yay for fun facts!"

Note: Mr," "Messrs," "Dr"—abbreviations which retain the last letter of the whole word—are written without a point.

THE COMMA

A comma is like a tiny stop sign in a sentence! It helps us take a quick little break when we want to separate words that are together but still keep the sentence flowing smoothly.

⌋ When Jimmy got back to his home, he saw that everyone was getting ready to stop him!

RULES:

- I. Use commas to separate three or more items in a list. A comma before the and (known as the Oxford comma) is optional but often recommended for clarity.**

⌋ I need to buy apples, bananas, oranges, and grapes.

- II. Use a comma before coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) when they connect two independent clauses.**

⌋ I wanted to go for a walk, but it was too cold outside.

- III. Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause to separate it from the main part of the sentence.**

⌋ After dinner, we played a game.
She loves to dance, and he enjoys playing the guitar.

IV. Use commas to enclose nonessential clauses or phrases that provide additional information but can be removed without changing the main meaning of the sentence.

Think of commas as giving a hug to extra information that does not change the meaning of the sentence. If the clause is super important for understanding the sentence, it stands alone without any commas.

My brother, who lives in New York, is visiting this weekend. (NE)

My dog, who loves to play fetch, is very friendly. (non-essential)

The dog that barks loudly is mine. (essential)

Sarah, who is my neighbour, is a great baker. (non-essential)

The students who study diligently will pass the exam. (essential)

The movie, which was a comedy, made everyone laugh. (non-essential)

V. Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that equally describe a noun (if you can put and between them, use a comma).

The tall, handsome man walked into the room.

VI. When you add little bits of words to pause a sentence just a tiny bit, you can use commas to give them a cozy spot!"

Examples:

1. The movie was, surprisingly, much better than I expected. (The phrase surprisingly adds a little extra information and creates a pause for emphasis.)
2. Honestly, I didn't think I would enjoy the book. (the word "Honestly" gives a small pause before the main idea of the sentence.)
3. Wow, that was an incredible performance! (Wow is an interjection that expresses excitement, and the comma creates a pause before continuing with the sentence.)

The following are some of the words and phrases that come under this rule: *therefore, too, indeed, however, moreover, then, accordingly, consequently; in short, in fine, in truth, in fact, to a certain extent, all things considered.*

- VII. When you say some words or phrases in one part of a sentence but not in the others, you can use a comma to show that those words are missing. It's like a little helper for readers, letting them know that you're thinking the same thing even if you don't say it twice!**



I like *apples*, and she likes them too.

John went to the store, and Lisa went as well

The cat is hungry, and the dog is too.

- VIII. When words or phrases are placed in a sentence in a manner that is not their usual order, a comma is often used to separate them and clarify the sentence.**



In the garden, we found beautiful flowers.

The car, surprisingly, broke down just after we left.

After dinner, we went for a walk.

- IX. When you have a special group of words called adjective clauses that add extra details to a sentence, you should put commas around them, just like giving them a hug! But if the adjective clause is super important for understanding the sentence, like the secret ingredient in a recipe, then no commas are needed.**



My brother, who lives California, is coming to visit.


The book that you lent me was fascinating.

The car, which is red, belongs to my sister.

Students who study hard often achieve good grades.

The concert, which was held in the park, was amazing.

X. When you have two words that go together like best buddies, you usually put a little comma hug between them!



It was a long, tiring day.


She wore a bright, colourful dress.

The cake was rich, chocolatory, and delicious.

He is a smart, dedicated student.

The weather was warm, sunny, and perfect for a picnic.

XI. When you use "or" to give choices, you don't need a comma in front. But if you're using "or" to link two words that mean the same thing, you should put a comma there!



It's like saying, "You can have ice cream or cake," versus "You can have yummy ice cream, or delicious cake!" Fun, right?

I can help you study for the exam, or you can do it by yourself.


For dessert, we have cake, or we have pie, but only one will be available.

You can take the bus, or you can walk to the park.


The book is a mystery or a thriller, depending on your perspective.

Her favourite colours are blue, or they are green, depending on her mood.

XII. When you call out to someone, like saying their name, you put a comma right after it. But if you're really excited and use an exclamation point, or if you wait until you take a little break in your sentence, then you don't need the comma right away.

 I am, Sir, Malcolm John.

XIII. When you say a word over and over to make it super special, you put a comma each time it pops up! But if you're repeating an adjective before a noun, you don't need a comma after the last one. Isn't that fun?

 He travelled a long, long way. He had to walk, walk, a long way.


Putting commas in the right spots makes your sentences super clear and fun to read! Each comma has a special job, so when you're writing, remember to ask yourself if a comma will help your friends understand what you're saying better!

THE SEMICOLON

A semicolon is like a little bridge in a sentence! It helps to connect two parts that are really different but still best friends, so we don't want to split them into two separate sentences.

- I. **When you have a sentence with two or more complete thoughts all by themselves, but they're not holding hands with connecting words, you can use a semicolon to give them a little space!**

- II. **When you're writing, if you've already used commas for other stuff, you can use a semicolon to show a little break instead. It's like giving your sentence a quick rest!"**



For lunch, I had a sandwich with turkey, lettuce, and tomatoes; my friend chose a salad with mixed greens, cucumbers, and dressing.

The concert featured a rock band, a jazz ensemble, and an orchestra; the variety kept everyone entertained.

She enjoys hiking in the mountains, biking on roads, and swimming in the ocean; her favourite activities keep her active.

My favourite fruits are apples, which are crunchy; bananas, which are sweet; and strawberries, which are juicy.

We visited Paris, France; Rome, Italy; and Berlin, Germany during our European tour.

THE COLON

A colon is like a big stop sign that tells you to take a bigger pause than a semicolon! It's a special way to help your sentences take a breath!"

- I. **You usually put a colon before a quote when you give a little hint with some special words first. Sometimes, you can even use a dash instead!**

(The teacher emphasized an important lesson: Practice makes perfect.

- II. **When you want to share something, someone said in a fancy way, you can use a colon and a dash together! It's like giving a special invitation to the words!**

(The author shared her secret to success: “Persistence is the key to achieving your dreams” — and she lived by those words every day.

- III. **You can put a colon after words like "Again," "Further," "To continue," "To wrap it up," or "To start again" when you're moving on to a new part of your story or argument!**

Some more examples.

- I need to buy several items for the picnic: sandwiches, drinks, fruit, and chips. (Introducing a list)
- She had one goal in mind: to win the championship. (explanation or elaboration)
- He had only one thing to say: he would never return. (separating independent clauses when the second clause explains the first)
- There was only one option left: surrender. (emphasizing a statement)
- Dear Hiring Manager. (formal letter salutations)
- The train departs at 3:45 PM. (Time)
- The recipe calls for a water to rice ratio of 2:1. (ratio)

INTERROGATION

You put a question mark at the end of a sentence when you're asking something!

Where are you going?

- I. **Indirect questions are like sneaky little questions that don't really ask for answers, so they don't need a question mark at the end!**

(He asked me whether I had seen his friend.
This is unlike:
He asked me: "Have you seen my friend?"

- II. **When you have a sentence with lots of questions, you can decide where to put the question mark! Sometimes, you put one after each question if they're all super different and need their own answers. But if they're kind of buddies and just need one answer, you only put the question mark at the end!**

(Do you think it's the colourful crayons that make your drawings come to life, or that it's the art supplies that spark your creativity? No! Surely no! It's the imagination inside you that makes all the magic happen!

When you ask a question that's really excited, you put a happy exclamation mark at the end instead of a question mark! Yay!

When you see a question mark tucked inside brackets, it can mean that someone isn't sure if what was just said is really true, or if the words were used right. Sometimes, it can even show that the person is being a bit silly or joking around!

THE EXCLAMATION MARK

- I. **An exclamation mark goes at the end of words that show big feelings! It's like when you say something surprising, scary, or when you really want something to happen, like a wish or a command, or even when you're saying a prayer! Yay for exclamation marks!**

Get out of here!

Heaven help us!

O Lord, be merciful unto me, a sinner!

- II. **Sometimes, when we use interjections like "Wow!" or "Yay!", we don't always put an exclamation mark right after them.**

There are a couple of things to remember:

(1) If you say your interjection with a little pause, then you can use an exclamation mark after it, but if you rush it, maybe leave it out!

And

(2) Only use an exclamation mark if the sentence really feels exciting or surprising.

Also, there's a fun little difference between "O" and "Oh"! You see, "O" is special because you only use it when you're calling someone, like "O, friend!" And guess what? You never put an exclamation mark or any other punctuation right after "O." So, remember to be careful with those little words! They're super important!



Oh no! All our hopes are dashed. Look, he is coming! Oh, Sue, dear Sue, so unfortunate! Unhappy wife, and even more so as a widow! Please, don't hold me responsible for that old debt today!

III. You put an exclamation point at the end of a sentence that asks a question but is actually super exciting!

How could he have been so foolish! Will he never find an end to this situation! Will he never receive the fair reward for his hard work! Will relentless taxation always keep him in misery, a wretched being starving in the midst of plenty, weak and fading away with hunger's faint cries, surrounded by a world full of joy!

You can think of this rule like a fun game! When we ask what's called a rhetorical question, we don't really want an answer. It's more like we're shouting out our feelings, so we use an exclamation mark instead of a question mark! But not all rhetorical questions need an exclamation mark—sometimes, a question mark is just more exciting! For example, if we took some sentences and put exclamation marks on them, they wouldn't be nearly as powerful. So, it's like a little puzzle where we have to figure out if we feel like asking a question or if we're just super excited about something!

IV. You might put a happy shouty mark after a silly joke!

"They didn't battle like a big team of ten against a giant crowd of thousands! They weren't fighting to save their families; they wanted treasure and cool places to explore. That's why they're super-duper heroes!"

The exclamation point adds a fun touch that makes everything sound super serious, which is what makes it all so silly! (It is the essence of irony)

V. You can put a big, happy exclamation point after something super silly! 🤪

He has been working hard to prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays!

You can also add an exclamation point after anything that makes you go "Wow, that's amazing!" ✨

(The spooky Angel of Sleepytime has been flying all around: you can almost hear the flutter of his soft, fuzzy wings!

Sometimes, you might wonder if using an exclamation point really helps much. I mean, a really cool sentence should sound exciting all on its own or get some extra oomph from what comes before or after it! It's a bit risky, you know, because some folks think that using punctuation can fix up their writing without putting in the effort to make it great. When it comes to sentences that are meant to be super impressive, we get to use our imagination and decide how to use those fun marks!

VI. If a sentence has a bunch of excited shouts, you might see one happy face at the end or a bunch of them! It all depends on whether each shout is really super-duper excited or just pretending to be!"

(We won the game! Yay! Hooray! I can't believe we did it! Look at all those happy faces cheering!
I just got a puppy. I'm the luckiest kid in the world!

THE DASH

- i. **The main job of a dash is to show that something is not quite done yet! It's like a little pause that tells us there's a surprise or a twist coming in the sentence!**

(And all this long story was about—what do you think?

You don't put a period when you use a dash for a sentence that isn't done yet! But it's totally okay to add a question mark or an exclamation point! Yay!

- II. **A dash is like a little pause in talking when someone is unsure or stutters a bit.**

(Well—I don't know—that is—no, I cannot accept it.

- III. **If someone suddenly changes what they were thinking, a dash can help show that twist!**

(He comes in with a big grin, and —looking a bit shy. He reaches out to shake your hand—then quickly pulls it back!

- IV. **Sometimes, if a sentence has a really long or tricky subject, it can get a bit lost when we get to the verb. So, instead of keeping that long bit, we just leave it hanging and use a simple little phrase to sum it up! And guess what? We put a dash right after that subject when we do this!**

(The tall, mysterious figure standing in the shadows, cloaked in darkness and staring intently at the crowd — was no one we recognized.

Sometimes, we can use a colon like a little helper in sentences, but as you see a dash is way more fun!

V. You can use a dash like a fun pair of brackets to hug a little note in the middle of a sentence!

(The cake — with its rich chocolate frosting and sprinkles — was the highlight of the party.

VI. Sometimes, a dash can take the place of a colon, especially when you're thinking of the word "like" but you don't actually say it out loud.

(I have one goal in mind — to become the best student I can be!

VII. Dashes are great for playing a game of repetition! They let you say something again and again, like a catchy song, while keeping the rest of the sentence on a little adventure.

(The music was playing — thump-thump, thump-thump — as we danced across the floor, lost in the rhythm, thump-thump, thump-thump, feeling every beat of the night.

VIII. If there's a title before a paragraph, you pop a dash right after the period and before the paragraph starts!

(The Secret Garden — In this enchanting story, a young girl discovers a hidden garden that transforms her life.

IX. When you quote someone and want to say who said it, just put a period and then a dash, just like before!

("I will always find you." — Emily whispered, her voice barely above a breath.

X. Dashes can be super fun! Sometimes, they replace other punctuation marks or join in with them to show a bigger pause than normal, like taking a little breath in between!

(After a long day at work — a day filled with meetings, phone calls, and deadlines — I finally settled down on the couch to relax.

BRACKETS (OR THE PARENTHESIS).

- I. If you add a little extra bit to a sentence that's not really part of it, like a fun side note, you can put that bit in brackets!"**

The cake was delicious (especially the chocolate frosting), and everyone asked for seconds.

The puppy (full of energy and excitement) raced around the yard, chasing after anything that moved.

Hey, guess what? In the first example, the comma is all snuggled up after the parentheses, not before them! That's because the parentheses are part of the first part of the sentence, like a little buddy hanging out with its friend, not the second part!

Sometimes, when you're writing a story, you can put a whole sentence in little brackets (like a cozy hug for words) to make it extra special!"

Hey there! Just a quick reminder: when you see a period, it needs to go inside the little brackets, not outside.

- II. If you want to add a little extra comment while quoting something, you can use those square brackets.**

The teacher said, "The test results will be available [for all students] next week."

INVERTED COMMAS

- I. **When we want to share something someone else said exactly how they said it, we put their words in little quotation marks, like this! "Wow, that's super cool!" But if we just tell what they meant or change it a bit without using their exact words, we don't need those special marks at all. It's like telling a story in our own way!**

Just then, the crowd stormed in and asked, "What have you done for the community?"

Just then, the crowd stormed in and asked what you had done for the community.

He states, "Any property that is justly owned has its basis in labor."

He often refers to them as "ridiculous" and uses terms like "nonsense", "gibberish", and others.

You could say the last part without using quotation marks. But when we use them, it's like we're putting a big spotlight on the exact words that were used, showing they're not just similar words but the real deal!

- II. **When someone is talking and you want to share what they said, you put their words in funny little marks called inverted commas. If the conversation is broken up, just keep using those marks around each part!**

"Pardon me, Miss," asked Henry, "May I be excused (I am not feeling well)."

- III. **If you're quoting someone who is already quoting someone else, you use tiny single marks for the first person's words. It's like a quote-caption!**

"What are you doing?" asked Marcia. "Let me sleep, as it is written, 'Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise?'"

IV. Whenever we come across a word that isn't like the fancy old English or is used in a funny way, we put it in silly quotes or make it slanty (italicized)!"

(The author describes the character as a “*slacker*” who always takes the “easy way out” instead of putting in hard work.

Foreign words are always italicized.

V. When we talk about book titles, essay names, magazine titles, or even the names of cool ships, we like to make them stand out! We can either put them in funny little quotation marks or give them a special slant by writing them in italics. Yay for making words fancy!"

(It appeared in the "Gazette" (or *Trinidad Gazette*).

VI. When you have a quote that asks a question, you put the question mark right inside the quotes!

(She kept asking, "Will you come with me? Will you come?"

VII. If you finish your asking sentence with a quote, then the question mark goes outside the quotes, like a little friend standing guard.

(What do you mean by "he is concern about us"?

VIII. And if your asking sentence ends with a quote that also asks a question, the question mark sits outside the quotes, like it's waving to everyone!

(Mom, did you say, "Do you want to go to the mall"?

The thing is, the real question isn't the one that's all fancy in quotes. It's actually, "Do you want to go to the mall?" But guess what? No one has dared to add two question marks! Silly, right?

Hey there! Guess what? The last three fun rules work for happy shouty sentences too!"

1. But I passionately exclaimed, Shame on this town!
2. Oh, how many of them can honestly say, I have given my all!
3. How desperate was the plea: Save us, or we will die!

IX. When you have a question that ends with a quote that's super exciting, or if you have an exciting sentence that finishes with a quote that's asking something, it's best to put both a question mark and an exclamation point at the end! The question mark goes inside the quotes, and the exclamation point goes outside. How fun is that?

- Did she really just say, "Are we winning?"!
- Did she really just say, "We're going to the amusement park today"
How exciting is that!

When we don't use quotation marks, it's okay to just have one little dot at the end, and that dot should be the main one for the whole sentence, not just for the words someone said.

ITALICS

- I. **If you want to make certain words pop out, you can use *squiggly letters* (that's what we call italics). When you're writing and don't have squiggly letters, you can use wavy lines instead (that's underlining!).**

(I'm chatting about Lucy—the one in the bright red *dress*—not the fancy lady dressed in red!

You can totally tell which words are super important just by listening to someone talk! But using italics is like a weak little crayon when you really need a bright, bold marker. You should only use italics if you've run out of better ways to make your words pop! Even some really smart writers say it's not good to use them too much.

- II. **Now, if you come across words that are from other languages and aren't super-duper famous in English yet, you should use *squiggly letters* for those too!**

(Knowledge of French is a *sine qua non*.

When words from other languages join the English club, they stop wearing their fancy italics! Some examples of these cool words are *rationale*, *aide-de-camp*, *quartette*, *naïve*, and *libretto*. Deciding if a word has fit in enough to drop its italics is like playing a game of dress-up—it's up to you to decide when it's ready to wear normal clothes!

- III. **Oh, and when you talk about newspapers, magazines, or even cool ships, you should also use *squiggly letters* for their names!**

(Like, check out *the Times*, *the Fortnightly Review*, or that big boat called *the Great Eastern*!

THE HYPHEN

- I. You use a hyphen when putting together some special words!

Paper-knife; book-keeping; coal-pit; water-carrier; printing-press; sea-water; man-of-war; now-a-days; high-art decoration; good-looking.

- II. If one part of a word ends with a vowel and the next part starts with the same vowel, you need a hyphen in between! This shows that the vowels are like best buddies, but they don't want to stick together when you say them!

Co-operative; co-ordinate; pre-eminently; re-establish; re-echo.

Just like a little magic line, a hyphen helps us say two consonants all by themselves! It's like in fun words like "book-keeping," "shell-less," "cock-crow," and "sword-dance." Isn't that neat?

- III. Usually, don't put a hyphen after a simple little prefix! Like in the words "contravene," "preternatural," "hypercritical," and "bilateral." They like to be alone!

Some exceptions:

- anti-religious,
- ultra-liberal,
- semi-lunar,
- co-eval,
- pseudo-critic,
- non-existent,
- pre-eminent,
- non-ego.

Compare: antiseptic, semicircle, pseudonym, nonentity

- IV.** When you spell out a number instead of writing it as digits, and it has more than one word, sometimes you get to use a hyphen to keep the words apart! Isn't that neat?

(Example: twenty-one, twenty-first, ninety-nine, ninety-ninth, four-and-thirty, six-and-fortieth, etc.

- V.** When we write about little parts of a whole, we use words and put a tiny dash in between the top number and the bottom number, like saying "two-thirds" or "three-sixteenths."

- VI.** Sometimes, we can stick words together with hyphens like glue, so everyone knows to read them as one big happy word!

(I had the most-never-to-be-forgotten day today.

- VII.** When you see the little "a" in front of a verb ending in "ing," don't forget to add a hyphen!

(They went a-hunting.

(I lay a-thinking.

- VIII.** If you have to split a word because it's too long for one line, just pop a hyphen at the end of the line, and the next part can dance its way to the next line!

THE APOSTROPHE

- I. An apostrophe is like a little magic hat that shows when we've taken away some letters from a word!

("E'er" for "ever," "can't" for "cannot," "don't" for "do not," "'gin" for "begin."

- II. The apostrophe is also a special sign that tells us when something belongs to someone. Here are some fun rules to help you know where to put it:

Nouns in the singular number—

1. **The letter "s" is added, and the apostrophe is placed before it.**

(The boy's toy. A lady's bag.

2. If a noun has a name that ends with an "s," you don't need to add another "s" when you want to show it's more than one, because that might sound funny! Instead, just put an apostrophe at the end of the word, like magic!

(Hercules' club. Augustus' dignity.

When it comes to words with just one little sound, we have a simple rule: like in "James's share." For words that have two sounds, some stick to the first rule and some like to use the second: like "the princess's birthday" and "Francis' style."

People use these rules differently, but you don't have to worry too much about them! When we chat, we usually forget about the rules anyway. So why should we bother with them when we write? Let's just have fun with words!

Nouns in the plural number—

- **The apostrophe is placed after the "s" of the plural.** Boys' clothing. Our friends' troubles.
- **If the plural does not end in "s," an "s" is added, and the apostrophe is placed before it.** Women's clothes. The children's toys

(You put a little squiggle before the "s" when you're talking about single letters like they're their own special words!"

(Mind your p's and q's.

He does not dot his i's nor cross his t's.

ELLIPSIS

When you're reading a quote and you need to skip a bit, you can use a bunch of stars or dots all in a row to show that something's missing!



(When he was young, he fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow ... now he never sleeps above an hour without waking.