

Punctuation Marks

Application of signs, spacing and typographical devices is used for effective reading, interpretation and comprehension. These signs and symbols are known as punctuation marks.

There is only one reason to use punctuation correctly – and it is a vitally important reason: to make oneself understood with clarity. In speech, we have a variety of devices for clarifying our meaning: stress, intonation (raise and fall of the tone), rhythm (creation of parallels), pauses (during our thoughts) and hand or body movement in speech. In writing, people refer to non-verbal communication or the para-verbal communication and use punctuations as an aid.



Punctuation consists of both rules and conventions. There are rules of punctuation that should be followed; but there are also punctuation conventions that give writers greater choice.

In text, we have only the words and the punctuation; and poor punctuation enables the same words to have different or unclear meanings. There are clear rules for the use of punctuation marks and they are not difficult to learn and to apply.



The most common punctuation marks in English are following:

27.1. Full Stop/Period (.)

There are only two uses of the full stop (or, as the Americans call it, the period):

- To mark the end of a sentence expressing a statement. For example:

- "I live in Islamabad."
- "Please come at the station."
- "Have some tea."
- "Listen to me."
- "Don't drink and drive."
- "Please come here."
- "Eat your meal."
- To signify an acronym. For example:
 - N.A.T.O. for North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 - U.S for United States
 - N.A.S.A for National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Note: A common mistake is to use a comma where a full stop should be used, as in the linking of statements or sentences.

27.2. Question Mark (?)

There are only two uses of the question mark:

- At the end of a direct question/an interrogative sentence
 - "Where do you live?"
 - "Would you like to have some tea?"
 - "How old are you?"
 - "Don't you like chocolate ice cream?"
- To show that something is uncertain (when it should be inside round brackets or parentheses)
 - "He was born in 1952 (?) and died in 2011."

Note: Question marks should not be used to end an indirect question (declarative structure). Use a question mark at the end of a direct question.

27.3. Exclamation Mark (!)

There is only one use of the exclamation mark and it is reserved for an exclamation of surprise, shock or dismay. This is portrayed in generally a short sentence or phrase, expressing very strong feeling (especially one beginning with 'What' or 'How')

- "Do not call on this number again!"
- "Silence!"
- "Go!"
- "Help!"
- "Stop!"
- "Don't call me again!"

Note: Exclamation mark should not be used in formal writing.

27.4. Comma (,)

The comma is used very frequently and used incorrectly almost as frequently.

There are, in fact, four distinct uses of the comma:

- For separating and listing the items. A listing comma is used as a kind of substitute for the word 'and' or sometimes for the word 'or' in a list when three or more words, phrases or even complete sentences are joined by the word 'and' or 'or'. For example:
 - “The three primary colors in RYB model are red, yellow and blue.”
 - “I like coffee, soda, milk, and tea.”
- To join two complete sentences alongside conjunctions ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘nor’, ‘but’, ‘while’, ‘so’, ‘yet’, etc. For example:
 - “I can tell you the reason, but I will not.”
- To show that one or more words have been left out being a repetition of previous words/phrases for example:
 - “Some students use punctuations correctly; others, do not.”
- **Bracketing Comma:** To insert additional information without affecting the actual meaning of a sentence. Bracketing Commas used as a pair within a sentence and is used to mark off a weak interruption of a sentence – that is, an interruption which does not disturb the smooth flow of the sentence and could be removed, still leave the sentence complete and makes good sense.
 - “This job fair, I would suggest, would be very helpful for job seekers.”
- One comma in the beginning
 - “Although, often wet, Britain has lots of sunshine.”
- In case of listing, use Serial or Oxford Comma before ‘and’. Generally, the serial comma is not used in Britain where it is regarded as unnecessary, but it is commonly used in the United States where it is thought helpful. This practice is followed in these handouts.
 - “I need a paper, pen, and a pencil.”

27.5. Semicolon (;)

- Used to separate equal parts of a sentence
 - “Ehsan is at office; Hasnain is at home.”
 - “Mary is at home; Bob is at school.”
- Used to join two complete and closely related sentences without any connecting word such as ‘and’, ‘but’
 - “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.”
 - “Road construction in Islamabad has hindered travel around town; streets have become covered with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.”
- Used to join two complete sentences where the second sentence begins with a conjunctive adverb: ‘however’, ‘nevertheless’, ‘accordingly’, ‘consequently’, and ‘instead’
 - “I wanted to make my speech short; however, there was so much to cover.”
- Used to separate items in a list when one or more items are with a comma.
 - “The speakers included: Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the Prime Minister; Ahsan Iqbal, the Minister of Interior; and Chaudhry Nisar, Ex-Minister of Interior.”
 - Recent sites of the Olympic Games include Athens, Greece; Salt Lake City, Utah; Sydney, Australia; and Nagano, Japan.

27.6. Colon (:)

- Used to indicate that what follows is an explanation of what precedes it and the pattern goes from General Information to Specific Information, i.e., General: Specific. For example,
 - “There is one challenge above all others: the alleviation of poverty.”
 - “I have very little time to learn the language: my new job starts in five weeks.”
- A colon is also used to introduce a list
 - “There are four nations in the United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.”
 - “The bookstore specializes in art, architecture, and graphic design.”

Note:

- A colon is never followed by a hyphen (-).
- A colon is never preceded by a white space.
- It is always followed by a white space.

27.7. Hyphen (-)

- To separate syllables to make a word easier to read. This, however, is not the American English standard.
 - Co-ordinate, Re-elect
- Used in writing compound words which are hard to read and excessively long
 - No-smoking sign, black-cab driver
- To join words or parts of words
 - Up-to-date, hybrid-related, get-together.
- Sometimes, to change the meaning
 - Re-cover vs. Recover
- Used when a number forms part of an adjectival compound
 - Nineteenth-century novelist

Note:

- A hyphen (-) is different from a dash (–); the latter is a little longer.

27.8. Dash (–)

Dash is used:

- To indicate a break in thought
 - “I’ll have a hot dog with mustard – no, make that ketchup.”
- To separate a strong interruption from the rest of sentence. This, thus, adds parenthetical statements (in pair within a sentence and a single dash when the statement comes either at the beginning or end). However, a dash is considered less formal compared with brackets
 - “All nations desire economic growth – some even achieve it – but it is easier said than done.”
- To add emphasis or drama
 - “He said that he would go – and he did.”
- To indicate a range of numbers
 - 900–1000
 - You will find this material in chapters 8–12.

- The 2016–2017 season was our best yet.

Note: In this case and the case that follows, there is no space before and after the dash. If a dash is cushioned between blank spaces, it is called an em-dash; otherwise, it is called an en-dash.

- To link two connected words
 - Sydney–Melbourne Train
 - The Los Angeles–London flight.
 - There is a north–south railway in the same area as the highway that runs east–west.

27.9. Parenthesis/Brackets ()

Parenthesis or brackets are added to explain extra information without interrupting the flow of a sentence. It follows from the previous section that brackets are considered more formal, compared with the use of a dash.

- “Awais (my brother) is coming to the party.”
- “The president (and his assistant) traveled by private jet.”
- Parenthesis are also used to set off an interruption
 - “I knew that he would come (and I was right) to join us in the evening.”
 - “After three weeks on set, the cast was fed up with his direction (or, rather, lack of direction).”
- Furthermore, they are used to enclose an acronym
 - (EU) for European Union
 - “Adil Hashmi has been appointed CKO (Chief Knowledge Officer) of the merged company.”

27.10. Quotation Marks/ Speech Marks/ Inverted Commas (“ ”)

- To enclose the exact words of a person
 - Maria said, “The keys are on the table.”
 - Hamlet's most famous speech begins: “To be or not to be”
 - Buddha says, “Even death is not to be feared by one who has lived wisely.”
- In case of quotation within quotation, use single quotation marks within double quotation marks
 - “Your use of the phrase ‘in this day and age’ is hackneyed.”
 - The author’s final argument is less convincing: “When Brown writes of ‘interpreting the matter through a “structuralist” lens,’ he opens himself to the same criticism he made earlier in his own paper.”
- These quotes are used to express irony and sarcasm
 - Daniyal was assured that he would be “safe” in the lion's den.
 - He rarely spoke of the “incident” that caused him to leave his previous employer.
 - The think tank’s “analysis” of the issue left much to be desired.
- Used when one wants to talk about a word or phrase
 - One of my friends overuses the word “actually”.

27.11. Ellipsis/Suspension Marks/Omission Marks (...)

An ellipsis is a set of three periods (...) indicating an omission of speech or writing. For example:

- “To be or not to be. That is the question” may be changed to “To be or not...the question”
- If only she had ...On, it doesn't matter now.
- I wasn't really ... well, what I mean ... see, the thing is ... I didn't mean it.

27.12. Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe (') has three uses: contractions, plurals, and possessives.

- To indicate a contraction (formed by the omission of letters)

Contraction	Phrase
Isn't	Is not
Aren't	Are not
Can't	Cannot.
Determin'd (this practice is out of use now)	Determined
I'll	I will
I'm	I am

- To indicate possession. Examples include:
 - Dilawar's Room
 - The lawyer's fee
 - The child's toy
 - Anyone's guess
 - A week's vacation
- In case of a plural, place the apostrophe at the end of a word, after the "s"
 - Workers' rights
 - children's toys
 - The twins' parents
 - The student teachers' supervisor
 - The Smiths' vacation house
 - The boys' baseball team

Note: Contractions should be avoided in formal writing.

27.13. Run-On Sentence

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are combined without correct punctuation. An independent clause is a complete, simple sentence, meaning that it contains a subject, a verb, and a complete thought. For example

Run-On: I love to play tennis I would play one match everyday if I had the time.

Run-On: The grocery store was really packed with people there must have been a big sale today.

- **Comma Splice:** Category of Run-On Sentence in which a comma is used to join two independent clauses
 - Participants could leave their session at any time, they needed to indicate their preferences.
- Comma Splice also involves the use of transitional expression along with the use of a comma

- The findings of the analysis are incomplete **therefore**, further research is needed.

27.13.1. Correcting a Run-On Sentence

There are a few ways to correct run-on sentences. Consider the following run-on sentence and the following options for revising it.

- Using a full stop/period
 - I love to play tennis. I would play one match everyday if I had the time.
 - The grocery store was really packed with people. There must have been a big sale today.
- Using a semicolon
 - I love to play tennis; I would play one match everyday if I had the time.
 - The grocery store was really packed with people; so there must have been a big sale today.
- Using a comma and coordinating conjunction (and/or/but)
 - I love to play tennis, **and** I would play one match everyday if I had the time.
- Using a subordinating conjunction (changing one independent clause to dependent clause)
 - **Because** I love to play tennis, I would play one match everyday if I had the time.
 - **Because** the grocery store was really packed with people, there must have been a big sale.

Some more example of run-on sentence.

- **Correcting a sentence using a period and a capital letter**
Run-On: Tyler delivered newspapers in the rain he got very wet.
Corrected: Tyler delivered newspapers in the rain. He got very wet.
- **Correcting a sentence using a semicolon**
Run-On: Kevin and his dog went for a walk it was a beautiful day.
Corrected: Kevin and his dog went for a walk; it was a beautiful day.
- **Correcting a sentence using a comma & a conjunction**
Run-On: On Monday, we went outside for recess it was fun.
Corrected: On Monday, we went outside for recess, and it was fun.

27.14. Determiners

Determiners are words placed in front of a noun to make it clear what the noun refers to. Thus, there are words placed at the beginning of a noun phrase. Determiners generally classified as follows:

- Indefinite Articles (a, an)
- Definite Article (the)
- Demonstratives (this, that, these, those)
- Possessive Pronouns (my, your, his, her, its, our, their)
- Quantifiers (a few, a little, much, many, a lot of, most, some, any, enough)
- Numbers (one, ten, thirty)
- Distributives (all, both, half, either, neither, each, every)

27.14.1. Indefinite Articles

Indefinite articles are used to generalize the noun phrase and to talk about persons and things in general.

- A (in case of a consonant in the following word)
 - A report, a letter, a buffalo, a big apple, a year
- A (in case of a word which sounds like it starts with a consonant)

- A euro, a university
- An (in case of a vowel in the following word)
 - An email, an application, an orbit, an uprising
- An (in case of a word which sounds like it starts with a vowel)
 - An hour, an F
- Both are used before phrases of time and measurement
 - Four times a week
 - 100 kilometers an hour
 - Rs. 40 a kilo
 - I'd like an orange and two lemons please.
 - You can't run a mile in 5 minutes!
- Before phrases of jobs
 - A doctor
 - An engineer
 - A car mechanic
 - Mary is training to be an engineer.
 - He wants to be a dancer.
- With a noun complement
 - A good boy
 - A smart girl
 - She's such a beautiful girl.
- Before phrases of nationality
 - An American
 - A Canadian
- With words 'half' and 'quite'
 - Half a pound of sugar
 - Quite an interesting story

Note: If a phrase indicates a quantity that is unmeasurable or uncountable, then avoid the indefinite article. For example, "Aayaan gives a good advice" would be incorrect because advice is not countable.

27.14.2. Definite Articles

Definite article (the) is used to specify the noun phrase, when we believe the listeners and readers know what we are referring to. "The" is pronounced differently based on the following vowel/consonant, and takes the sound of either "thee" or "thu".

- The beginning vs. The Ending
- The life of Bill Clinton vs. life is too short
- The Smiths live in Chicago vs. Mr. Smith lives in Chicago

27.14.2.1. Use of Definite Articles

- **Names of Countries in plural, mountain ranges, regions:**
 - She is visiting the United States.
 - Aiman is from the Republic of Ireland.
 - Asim trekked in the Highlands,
 - The Rocky Mountains cover Motorway.
 - Humaira is going to the Middle East.

- I have never been to the Netherlands.
- Do you know anyone who lives in the Philippines?
- **Groups of Islands:**
 - the Bahamas,
 - the British Isles,
 - the Canaries
- **Names with of-phrase:**
 - the Statue of Liberty,
 - the Tower of London
- **Names of Rivers, Seas and Oceans:**
 - the Nile,
 - the Arabian,
 - the Atlantic
- Can be used with the names of the four seasons e.g. the summer, the winter, the spring and the autumn
- Must be used with the American alternative for autumn, viz. "fall"

27.14.2.2.

- **With a country name (if singular)**
 - Germany is an important economic power.
 - He's just returned from Zimbabwe.
- **With names of languages**
 - English uses many words of Latin origin
 - French is spoken in Tahiti.
 - Indonesian is a relatively new language.
- **With titles and names**
 - President Hussain
 - Prince Charles
 - Queen Elizabeth (the Queen of England)
- **With years**
 - 1990 is a special year for my family.
 - Do you remember 2000?
- **With the names of individual mountains, lakes and islands**
 - Margalla Hills are located in Islamabad.
 - She lives near River Jhelum.
 - Have you visited Churna?
- **Mostly with the names of towns, streets, stations and airports**
 - Faizabad is in the center of the Twin Cities.
 - Can you direct me to Park Road?
 - She lives in Lahore.
 - They're flying from Dubai.

References:

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