

Punctuation is the act and the effect of punctuating, i.e. using punctuation marks.

Question

"What do you call an ant who skips school?"

parentheses

QUOTE MARKS

To show that words have been spoken by someone, they are enclosed in quotation marks (quote marks). This is called direct speech. Some publications use single quotation marks ('Hi'), while others including The Mercury use double quotation marks ("Hi"). The Mercury uses single quote marks if there is a quote within a quote ("I thought to myself 'she'll go far,'" he said). Double quote marks are also sometimes used to highlight unusual or slang words ("Widgits" are a type of computer program).

BRACKETS

There are different sorts of brackets (also called parentheses), but round brackets are the most common. They enclose useful information that is not part of the main sentence.

For example:

Mary (whose fear of spiders was well-known) screamed as the redback scurried across the floor.

The information in the brackets adds meaning and depth to the sentence, but does not interrupt its flow. It is important that the sentence will still make sense and be complete without the information contained within the brackets. Any punctuation that is part of the main sentence must remain outside the brackets.

There are also square brackets, which editors use to add text to a writer's text [correct, ed.]. Other sorts of brackets include curly brackets (used in mathematics), angle brackets <sometimes used in emails> and slash brackets /used in dictionaries/. They are all used to enclose information.

Punctuation

Butterflies are small, soft and very beautiful.



COMMA

Commas make sentences clearer by indicating small breaks or pauses. They divide words, phrases and clauses so the meaning of the sentence is easy to grasp.

Use a comma to avoid ambiguity.

They sang sadly / They sang, sadly.

To separate items in a list.

They took sleeping bags, torches, can openers and matches.

Note that the comma after the second to last item in the series is left out unless it is needed for clarification. (They were offered cereal, muffins, eggs, and bacon rolls).

To separate lists of adjectives

It was big, green, and very ugly.

To separate spoken words from the text around them.

The style at The Mercury is to use it inside the quotation marks when reporting direct speech.

"I am certain my colleague is telling the truth," he said.

• In letters (Dear Mr Smith,)

• For dates (September 8, 1965)

• For addresses (8 March St, Parkside)

• To separate numbers that have more than four numerals (The robot has 2978 and 29,780 moving parts).

SEMI-COLON

Semi-colons separate two parts of a sentence more strongly than a comma does. They are used to link two ideas within a sentence, and often have the effect of making the second idea more dramatic.

For example:

It wasn't the first time he had been injured in a fight; she feared it wouldn't be the last. Both parts of the sentence above could stand alone as sentences.

The sentence could also correctly be written like this:

It wasn't the first time he had been injured in a fight, and she feared it wouldn't be the last. But written this way puts less emphasis on the second part, and the sentence is less dramatic.

Semi-colons can also be used:

- At the end of items in a bulleted list (like this);
- To separate a series in a sentence (He hated all his teammates: Tim, the boring whinger; Mike, the cruel bully; and Joe, the coach's favourite).

HYPHEN

Hyphens are used to join or separate words. Sometimes words that start out as two separate words (dark room) are used together so often they become hyphenated (dark-room) and may eventually become one word (darkroom).

The best way to determine whether words like this should be hyphenated is to consult an up-to-date Australian dictionary.

Hyphens are also sometimes used:

- To join descriptive terms together (the nine-year-old dog or the greyish-white cat)
- In surnames (Emily Ross-Smith)
- In job titles (Attorney-General)
- To break words if the entire word will not fit on a line.

QUESTION MARK

Question marks are used for questions in direct speech and rhetorical questions.

When used in direct speech, the question mark sits inside the quotation marks ("How did that happen?" she asked). A rhetorical question is one that does not require an answer, but is used to make a point ("Can a leopard change its spots?").

ELLIPSIS

An ellipsis is three dots in a row, and can be written with or without spaces in between (. . . or ...).

Ellipses (the plural of ellipsis) are most often used in quotations to show:

- That some speech is missing ("I hope my colleagues will come to see that I am right... and that I always have been," he said). Words are removed if they are not a crucial part of the speech. It is very important that the meaning of the quote remains the same.
- That the speaker was interrupted ("I wanted to go, but..." "No buts!" she said).
- That there is more to come ("If you just come over here for a minute..." he whispered).

DASH

A dash may look like a hyphen, but it is longer (a hyphen is the width of the letter n and a dash is the length of the letter m, which is why it is sometimes called an em-rule) and it performs a very different job. Dashes are similar to brackets — they are used to add extra information — but they are less formal.

You can also use just one dash to emphasise the information you are adding:

He shouted and sprinted to the gate — but the sheep were long gone.

APOSTROPHE

It's easy to learn how to use apostrophes, but mistakes are commonplace. This may be because the apostrophe has two distinct uses, and people often get them confused.

Contractions.

The first use for apostrophes is in shortened words, which are called contractions. Some of the most common contractions are can't (cannot), won't (will not), I'm (I am), and she's (she is). The apostrophe shows where letters have been left out.

Possession.

The second use for apostrophes is to show possession — to show that something or someone owns something. For example: Jamie's hat (the hat belonging to Jamie), or the dog's tail (the tail of the dog). It is very important to remember that apostrophes are never used to pluralise nouns (bananas not banana's), or for possessive pronouns (the monkey scratched its head, not the monkey scratched it's head).

FULL STOP

A full stop's main job is to end a sentence. It comes right after the last letter of the last word in a sentence. There should be a space after a full stop before the next sentence begins. Sometimes full stops are used to show a word has been shortened (Aug. 28). The full stop, the exclamation mark and the question mark are known as terminating marks, and every sentence needs one of them. The full stop is also called a period or a dot. Here is one now.

COLON

Use a colon to introduce a phrase: or to add more details to the previous phrase (His career was cut short by illness: a great loss to the scientific community).

Colons are also used to introduce lists.

There were four flavours: chocolate, lemon, strawberry and vanilla.

Usually the phrases on each side of the colon need to be able to stand alone as sentences. Only use a capital after the colon if the phrase is a complete sentence.

CAPITALS

Many words must start with a capital (or upper case) letter. Use capitals for the first word in a sentence (The cat did it) and for proper nouns and proper names (Tim Rogers, Hobart, The Mercury) and the personal pronoun (I). Other words that require capitals include (but are not limited to):

- Acronyms (SCUBA)
- Headings and subheadings (See on this poster)
- Days and months (Friday, February 9)
- Titles (Mr Jones, Ms Smith)
- Religions and holidays (Christianity, Christmas)
- Events (the Commonwealth Games)
- Institutions (the Department of Health)
- The first word in direct speech (He turned around and said: "Wait, I've had a better idea.") Capital letters can just be a bigger version of the lower-case version (vV), while sometimes they are quite different (bB).

yuck!

EXCLAMATION MARK

Use an exclamation mark to show:

Surprise.
I can't believe it!

Urgency.
Stop!

Excitement.
He arrives tomorrow!

Disgust.
Yuck!

An exclamation mark is also sometimes used after greetings (Hello!). It is a very strong punctuation mark, so use it sparingly.

{2,3,4,5,6,7}



gi-ants!

