



The Writing Success Center

Punctuation

The English writing system uses punctuation marks.

Your choice of a particular punctuation mark will depend on how much you want to emphasize what you are trying to say.

These marks are used to:

- Separate groups of words for meaning and emphasis
- Convey an idea of the variations of pitch, volume, pauses, and intonations of speech
- To help avoid ambiguity

These marks are:

PERIOD	.	QUOTATION MARKS	" "
APOSTROPHE	'	HYPHEN (DASH)	--
ELLIPSES (DOT)	...	QUESTION MARK	?
PARENTHESES	()	EXCLAMATION MARK	!
COMMA	,	COLON	:
SEMICOLON ;		BRACKETS	[]

Punctuation Rules

Use a Period.

1. After declarative and imperative sentences:

DECLARATIVE

We are going.

IMPERATIVE

Go quickly.

I will talk to Joe.

Talk to him.

2. After abbreviations and initials:

Mr. Mrs. Ms. a.m. p.m. Dr. A.J. Gates i.e. etc.

Use a Question Mark ?

1. After an interrogative sentence:

Where is she?

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

Use an Exclamation Point !

1. At the end of a sentence expressing strong emotion:

What a beautiful day!

Let him go, right now!

2. After a short interjection:

Ah! There she is!

Oh! Forget it.

Use a Comma ,

1. To separate a series of words:

We bought candy, ice cream, and soda. Do you prefer cherries, grapes, or berries?

2. To set off an appositive (a word-group that directly follows a noun and gives added information):

Robert Simmons, my friend and classmate, is ill.

3. To set off a noun in direct address (the person spoken to):

Frank, where were you?

4. To separate the clauses of a compound sentence:

Robert went skating after school, and Helen went bowling with Ellen.

5. To set off an introductory phrase:

In the afternoon, we resumed painting the kitchen.

6. After an introductory adverbial clause:

If you want to play a game of checkers tonight, come to my house.

7. To denote separation in dates and addresses:

Ida was born on January 1, 1971, in Detroit, Michigan.

8. After the salutation and the complimentary closing of a friendly letter:

Dear Ruth,

Your friend,

Exercise 1

These sentences lack both end punctuation and inside punctuation. Rewrite each sentence, supplying the necessary marks.

1. I went to the library Tuesday Wednesday and Friday

2. While waiting for the bus with Mary we met Dr Shaw

3. How is your sister feeling Jane inquired

4. Hurray Here comes our train

5. Jimmy go to the store for a loaf of bread

6. For the children we bought some candy ice cream and soda

7. Can you name the five Great Lakes

8. Nellie Wallace a friend of mine went to Chicago Illinois last week

9. Antonia have you finished your homework

10. We were only five miles from home and low on gas but no gas station was open at that hour

Use a Colon :

1. After the salutation of a business letter:

Dear Mr. Brady:

To Whom It May Concern:

2. To introduce a list, an illustration, or a statement:

I serve as a hospital volunteer three times a week: Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

3. To separate the figures denoting hours and minutes when expressing time:

6:15 a.m.

8:30 p.m.

Use a Semicolon ;

1. To separate members of a compound sentence with no conjunction:

You should not be in school with such a bad cold; you should be home in bed.

Nursing requires patience; such care is priceless.

Use Quotation Marks " "

1. To enclose the direct words of the speaker:

"You are right," Miss Jones replied. He said, "Thank you."

2. Be careful of broken quotations. Notice the change in meaning!

The lawyer said, "The witness is a liar!"

"The lawyer," said the witness, "is a liar!"

3. To indicate titles of individual short stories, poems, magazine articles, essays, songs, one-act plays. When indicating the title of a full-length novel, or a collection of plays or poems, or the title of a newspaper or magazine, you may use italics instead of using quotation marks.

	Individual Titles	Full-length books
Story:	"The Gold Bug"	<i>World's Greatest Short Stories</i>
Poem:	"The First Snowfall"	<i>The Viking Book of Poetry</i>
Song:	"Heart of My Heart"	<i>Everybody's Favorite Songs</i>
Article:	"Life on the Fiji Islands"	<i>National Geographic Magazine</i>

Use an Apostrophe

1. To indicate the omission of a letter or letters:

won't, isn't, let's, don't, it's (meaning it is), o'clock

2. To form the possessive case of nouns and indefinite pronouns:

Bob's father, Rosa's mother, Judy's car, women's votes

everyone's favorite, somebody's hat, anyone's choice

3. Caution: Possessive pronouns never take an apostrophe:

its, hers, theirs, ours, yours

Use a Hyphen (Dash) --

1. To show an abrupt change of thought in a sentence:

Relax and sit down, but—here comes our bus!

2. To emphasize a word or group of words by setting it off from the rest:

There is one thing I will not permit—lateness.

Give me the address—the full address—of the bookstore.

Use Ellipses (Dots) ...

1. To show a trailing off in the thought:

There's always time and hope and...

2. To show the omission of words, as in a quotation:

"Silently, one by one[...]blossomed the lovely starts." (NOTE: The three dots show the omission of the phrase "in the infinite meadows of heaven." Because of this, brackets must be inserted around the ellipses.)

Use Brackets[]

1. To insert information into a quotation that was not in the original quote:

"There was a small amount of [berries] in her bucket."

2. To omit information from a quotation to complete a sentence:

Refer to the example in Use Ellipses.

3. To enclose comments, notes, or explanations which are written by someone else, not by the author of the original text.

You have won the election. [Applause]

Use Parentheses

1. To set off explanatory material:

Smoking cigarettes may cause cancer (the deadliest disease) and shorten your life.

Exercise 2

These sentences lack both end punctuation and inside punctuation. Rewrite each sentence, supplying the necessary marks.

1. We left New York on August 4 2011 at 640 am

2. I have read the following books Robin Crusoe Treasure Island and The Call of the Wild

3. When I called at his house to see him I was told he hadnt come home yet

4. There will be an assembly today at one oclock Mr Roberts announced

5. Miss Howard my teacher asked Do you expect to pass your examination

6. Mrs Franklin my brothers employer called our house last night

7. At the theater the sign stated The show will start at three oclock

8. Miss Williams asked Why dont you study more often

9. I bought the following newspapers the News the Monitor and the Times

10. Why didnt you visit Uncle Harry Dad asked
