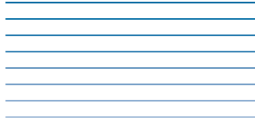


UNIT
2.11

Punctuation



Accurate punctuation and use of capital letters help the reader to understand exactly what the writer meant. While some aspects of punctuation, such as the use of commas, can be a matter of individual style, correct punctuation in areas such as a quotation is vital.

1 Capital letters

It is difficult to give precise rules about the use of capital letters in modern English, where there is a trend to use them less. However, they should always be used in the following cases:

- (a) The first word in a sentence *In the beginning . . .*
- (b) Days and months *Friday 21 July*
- (c) Nationality words *France and the French*
- (d) Names of people/places *Dr Martin Lee from Sydney*
- (e) Book titles (main words only) *Power and the State*
- (f) Academic subjects *She studied Biology and Mathematics*
- (g) Names of organisations *Sheffield Hallam University*

2 Apostrophes (')

These are one of the most confusing features of English punctuation. They are mainly used in two situations:

- (a) to show contractions *He's the leading authority on Hegel.*

NB: contractions are not common in academic English.

- (b) with possessives *The professor's secretary* (singular)
 Students' marks (plural words ending in 's')
 Women's rights (for irregular plurals)

NB: **It's** is the contraction of **it is** *It's possible the course will be cancelled.*

The possessive form is **its** *Civilization and its Discontents* (Freud)

3 Semicolons (;)

Semicolons are used to show the link between two connected phrases, when a comma would be too weak and a full stop too strong:

Twenty people were interviewed for the first study; thirty-three for the second.

Nobody questioned the results; they were quite conclusive.

Semicolons are also used to divide up items in a list when they have a complex structure, as in a multiple citation:

(Maitland, 2006; Rosenor, 1997; New Scientist, 2006b; University of Michigan, 2000).

4 Colons (:)

- (a) to introduce explanations *The meeting was postponed: the Dean was ill.*
- (b) to start a list *Three aspects were identified: financial, social and ethical.*
- (c) to introduce a quotation *As the Duchess of Windsor said: 'You can never be too rich or too thin.'*

5 Commas (,)

These are one of the commonest punctuation marks, but also the hardest to provide guidance for. Comma use is partly a matter of individual style. It is useful to think of commas as providing a brief pause for readers, to give them a chance to make sense of a chunk of text. Overuse can slow down the reader, but equally a lack of commas can be confusing.

Some instances of comma usage are:

- (a) after introductory words or phrases:

However, more cases should be considered before reaching a conclusion.

- (b) around examples or comments:

Certain crops, for instance wheat, are susceptible to diseases.

Nationalism, it is widely recognised, has a positive and negative side.

(c) with conjunctions:

Three hundred people were interviewed, but only half the responses could be used.

(d) in lists:

Tomatoes, beans, cabbages and potatoes were all genetically modified in turn.

6 Quotation marks/inverted commas (“...”/‘...’)

(a) Single quotation marks are used to emphasise a word:

The word ‘factory’ was first used in the seventeenth century.

The Swedish ‘third way’ or the welfare state . . .

to give quotations from other writers:

Goodwin’s (1977) analysis of habit indicates that, in general, ‘It will be more difficult to reverse a trend than to accentuate it.’

to show direct speech:

‘Can anyone find the answer?’ asked the lecturer.

Longer quotations are usually indented (i.e. have a wider margin) and/or are set in smaller type.

(b) Double quotation marks are used to show quotations inside quotations (nested quotations):

As Kauffman remarked: ‘his concept of “internal space” requires close analysis’.

NB: American English uses double quotation marks to show standard quotations.

(c) In references, quotation marks are used for the names of articles and chapters, but book or journal titles normally use italics:

Russell, T. (1995) ‘A future for coffee?’ *Journal of Applied Marketing* 6: 14–17.

► See [Unit 1.8](#) References and Quotations

7 Full stops (.)

These are used to show the end of a sentence:

The first chapter provides a clear introduction to the topic.

They are also used with certain abbreviations, when they are the **first part** of a word:

govt./Jan./p. 397

But do not use full stops with acronyms such as:

BBC/UN/VIP

► See **Unit 3.2 Abbreviations**

8 Others

Hyphens (-) are used with certain words, such as compound nouns, and certain structures:

A well-researched, thought-provoking book.

Her three-year-old daughter is learning to read.

Exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?):

'Well!' he shouted, 'who would believe it?'

Brackets or parentheses () can be used to give additional detail, without interfering with the flow of the main idea:

Relatively few people (10–15 per cent) were literate in sixteenth-century Russia.

9 Practice A

■ Punctuate the following sentences.

- (a) the study was carried out by christine zhen-wei qiang of the national university of singapore
- (b) professor rowans new book the end of privacy 2014 is published in new york
- (c) as keynes said its better to be roughly right than precisely wrong
- (d) three departments law business and economics have had their funding cut
- (e) as cammack points out latin america is creating a new phenomenon democracy without citizens
- (f) thousands of new words such as app enter the english language each year
- (g) the bbcs world service is broadcast in 33 languages including somali and vietnamese
- (h) she scored 56 per cent on the main course the previous semester she had achieved 67 per cent

10 Practice B

- Punctuate the following text.

the school of biomedical sciences at borchester university is offering two undergraduate degree courses in neuroscience this year students can study either neuroscience with pharmacology or neuroscience with biochemistry there is also a masters course which runs for four years and involves a period of study abroad during november and december professor andreas fischer is course leader for neuroscience and enquiries should be sent to him via the website
