

Punctuation Basics

A straightforward guide to the most common punctuation marks

Punctuation Mark	Name	Most common use	Any other information
.	Full stop	To conclude a sentence	
,	Comma	To separate out parts (clauses) of sentences, to separate out items on a list	
?	Question Mark	To finish a sentence which is or includes a question.	
!	Exclamation Mark	To finish a sentence which is an exclamation (something said loudly), or where a character is shouting, or to create a dramatic effect.	A row of !!! is too much. One will do.
:	Colon	Pauses a sentence to introduce a quotation, an illustration or further information about the subject matter just before the colon.	Sometimes a colon balances two (opposing) ideas in a sentence. One side of the colon will be one idea or point of view (called the <i>thesis</i>) and on the other side of the colon will be an opposing idea or point of view (called the <i>antithesis</i>).
;	Semi-colon	Usually used to create a slightly longer pause than a comma, or to introduce a list, or to separate out the major parts of a list.	
-	Single Dash	Much the same as the same as a colon: Pauses a sentence to introduce a quotation, an illustration or further information about the subject matter just before the colon.	Can sometimes be used to create a pause
...	Ellipsis	To show that the sentence is unfinished. This can leave the reader to keep thinking about the topic and to wonder what happens next.	In direct speech ellipsis is used to show when a character is being interrupted or is hesitating

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()	Brackets	When additional information is included within a sentence inside brackets this is called <i>parenthesis</i> . The sentence should still make sense if the bit inside the brackets is lifted out.	Parenthesis can also be created by double dashes - - or by commas.
'	Apostrophe	This is used to show ownership or possession, eg <i>the boy's book</i> . It is also used to show when letters are omitted eg: <i>shouldn't</i> where the apostrophe is used to replace the missing letter 'o'.	The most common mistake is to use apostrophes for plurals: eg <i>DVD's</i> , when <i>DVDs</i> is correct. <i>I have two cat's.</i> when <i>I have two cats</i> is correct.
“ ”	Speech Marks	These go around the exact words someone says, or the exact words being quoted from a text.	The most common mistake is to put the punctuation outside of the speech marks when someone is speaking rather than inside. Eg <i>"Is that your book"?</i> is incorrect. The correct way is <i>"Is that your book?"</i>
' ’	Single inverted commas	Go around the titles of books, films, plays etc...	Eg 'Of Mice and Men' is a great book by John Steinbeck