GCSE English

Punctuation

Writing

Contents

Introduction

Punctuation

Using accurate punctuation will help to enhance the clarity, purpose and effect of your writing. Whilst most punctuation marks are accompanied by strict usage rules, the conventions of some forms change with time and are a matter of subjectivity and style. On those occasions, writers sometimes have to consult a style guide in order to ensure consistency.

As well as helping you to maximise your marks in examinations, using punctuation accurately is equally important when applying for jobs or university places, writing assignments or reports, and sending emails to colleagues.

Whilst you will no doubt already have a thorough grasp of punctuation, all of the major marks are included on the following pages.

Full Stops

Full stops are used to mark the **ends of sentences** that are straightforward statements of fact or opinion. The first word in the next sentence must **always** have a **capital letter**, and it is crucial to put your full stops in the correct places in order to make your meaning clear, e.g.

Abbreviations and Contractions

Full stops are also sometimes used to punctuate abbreviations. This is one of the occasions when usage tends to be a matter of style or personal preference.

Examples

- Mr. (Mister)
- etc. (et cetera)
- Prof. (Professor)
- Capt. (Captain)
- Ave. (Avenue)
- Weds. (Wednesday)

If you use full stops after abbreviations, there is no need to double the mark if the abbreviation occurs at the end of a sentence, e.g. *The kit contained plasters, bandages, antiseptic wipes, etc.*

You should also use full stops after the **initial letters of names**, e.g. *M. Monroe* or *James A. Taylor* unless you are adhering to *open* punctuation.

Initialisms & Acronyms

An *initialism* is an abbreviated word in which the letters are pronounced individually, e.g. **ITV** for **I**ndependent **T**ele**v**ision.

An *acronym*, meanwhile, is an abbreviated word made up of initials but which is pronounced normally, e.g. *laser* rather than **L**ight **A**mplification by **S**timulated **E**mission of **R**adiation.

It is increasingly common ***not*** to use full stops in these such words.

Initialism Examples

- UFO (yu-eff-oh: **U**nidentified **F**lying **O**bject)
- ASAP (ay-ess-ay-pea: **A**s **S**oon **A**s **P**ossible)
- FBI (eff-bee-aye: **F**ederal **B**ureau of **I**nvestigation)

Acronym Examples

- NATO (nay-toe: **N**orth **A**tlantic **T**reaty **O**rganisation)
- SCUBA (sku-ber: **S**elf-**C**ontained **U**nderwater **B**reathing **A**pparatus)
- RADAR (ray-dar: **Ra**dio **D**etection **a**nd **R**anging)

Try looking at some online style guides to see the variations in the advice given to writers. As ever, of course, consistency is the key to good writing, so pick a style and stick with it.

Now it's your turn.

Add the missing **capital letters** and **full stops** to the following text?

The letter-box clattered as the postman shoved his mail through the door no one must have ever oiled the hinge over the noise of the barking dog, he thought he heard a voice inside "everything alright in there?" he said

there was nothing but another groan he wondered what he should do he shouted again "you OK, Mr Michaels?" perhaps it was time to call a doctor the postman wondered if he should

Question Marks

Question marks are used at the ends of sentences that are *direct* questions, e.g.

- Where is Lena going tonight?
- Just what do you think you are doing, young man?
- Is this the way to Thornfield Hall, please?
- Would you like to go for a walk?

Question marks are **not** used after indirect questions, though. Indirect questions are those which describe or refer to a question, but do not themselves ask one, e.g.

- She was wondering what the future might bring.
- He asked me if I would like to go for a walk.
- I wondered if they could help me.
- I asked if I could use the car.

Question tags can also be used to transform statements into questions. These take the form of short additions to the ends of existing sentences, e.g.

- You should eat fewer cakes, **shouldn't you?**
- I'm not doing very well, **am I?**
- We're going to win, **aren't we?**
- She's Swiss, **isn't she?**
- I don't know where the keys are, **do you?**

Now it's your turn.

The following text has been mispunctuated. Replace the incorrect punctuation with **question marks** where appropriate.

I was wondering if I ought to go to the gym. Sarah had asked me to go with her, but I was really tired after work... or so I thought. But then I stopped and asked myself: why not go. All I was going to do if I didn't go was vegetate at home, and I knew I would feel guilty with myself if I didn't put in at least an hour... well, maybe 30 minutes, and then a quick dip in the pool and a 10 minute sauna. That would do, wouldn't it. I could be happy with myself if that was what I ended up doing. Yes, I thought to myself, I would go. And as I had that thought the phone rang. I wondered if it was Sarah as I fumbled in my bag. One look at the screen told me it was. "Hello," I said. "Yes, I'll see you there in 10."

Exclamation Marks

Exclamation marks only ever appear at the ends of sentences. They are used for emphasis or to show surprise, insults, irony or amusement, and additionally appear in direct speech to identify a raised voice.

Examples

- (*Emphasis*) I hate that kind of behaviour!
- (*Commands*) Stop!
- (*Direct Speech/Shouting*) "Don't you dare speak to me like that!"
- (*Irony*) He actually thought I'd be impressed by a bunch of wilting garage flowers!
- (*Amusement*) That was hilarious!

Exclamation marks are rarely used in formal writing, so ensure you avoid them when writing analytically. However, they can be useful tools in writing to **persuade**, **argue**, **entertain** or **describe**, provided you don't overuse them.

Lastly, although you might use multiple exclamation marks (!!!) in informal emails and text messages, never do so in your written work. One is enough!

Now it's your turn.

The following extract from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* has been mispunctuated. Replace three pieces of incorrect punctuation with **exclamation marks**.

(Note: The mutineers in the story have just realised that the £700,000 of treasure they had long dreamed of has already been dug up and taken by someone else. Bear in mind that £700,000 in the mid-18th century would be worth more than £100 million today!)

Each of these six men was as though he had been struck. But with Silver the blow passed almost instantly. Every thought of his soul had been set full-stretch, like a racer, on that money; well, he was brought up, in a single second, dead; and he kept his head, found his temper, and changed his plan before the others had had time to realize the disappointment.

"Jim," he whispered, "take that, and stand by for trouble."

And he passed me a double-barrelled pistol.

At the same time, he began quietly moving northward, and in a few steps had put the hollow between us two and the other five. Then he looked at me and nodded, as much as to say, "Here is a narrow corner," as, indeed, I thought it was.
...

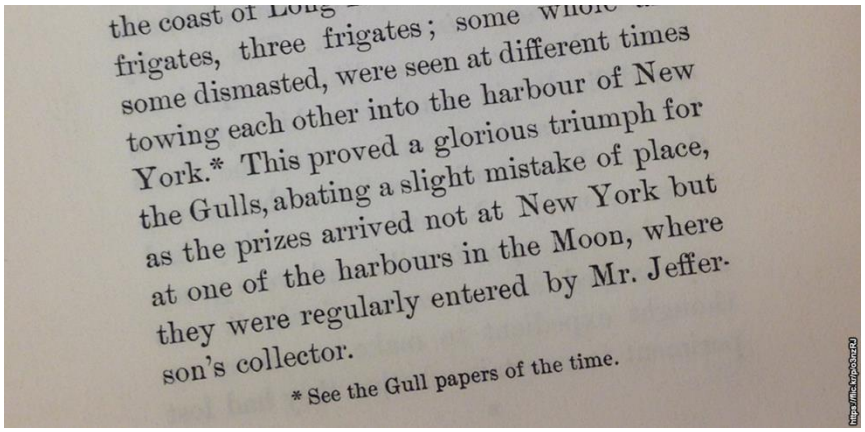
The buccaneers, with oaths and cries, began to leap, one after another, into the pit and to dig with their fingers, throwing the boards aside as they did so. Morgan found a piece of gold. He held it up with a perfect spout of oaths. It was a two-guinea piece, and it went from hand to hand among them for a quarter of a minute.

"Two guineas," roared Merry, shaking it at Silver. "That's your seven hundred thousand pounds, is it? You're the man for bargains, ain't you? You're him that never bungled nothing, you wooden-headed lubber."

"Dig away, boys," said Silver with the coolest insolence; "you'll find some pig-nuts and I shouldn't wonder."

"Pig-nuts," repeated Merry, in a scream. "Mates, do you hear that?"

Asterisks



From the Greek for *little star*, an asterisk is used (as in the above example) to inform the reader that a footnote or marginal comment is available to add detail, explanation or qualification to a word or sentence in the main body text.

Footnotes always appear at the bottom of the same page where their corresponding asterisk appears. Conversely, endnotes are explanations provided after the conclusion of a text, and are usually signified by a superscript number, e.g. superscript[1].

Asterisks tend to be used alongside numbered footnotes in more academic works, and if more than one is needed on any given page they tend to follow a standard convention, e.g. *, **, ***, etc.

1. A letter, number or other indicator written in a smaller font above and to the side of a piece of body text. Often used to denote a foot or endnote. The opposite of subscript.

Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens and dashes tend to be used interchangeably without anyone kicking up much of a fuss, but the suggestions below are a relatively strict interpretation of the formal rules. In practice, as long as you are consistent in your own uses you are unlikely to have any problems.

What's the actual difference?

A hyphen is the shortest, with the *en* and *em* dashes being progressively longer. The latter two are so-named because they are respectively the widths of an upper case N and M.

Hyphen - En Dash – Em Dash —

How can you generate them?

All three horizontal lines can be easily generated by a word processor.

Hyphen: Simply press the key to the right of zero on the main keyboard, or the key above the plus on the numerical pad (numpad).

En Dash: Hold down the Ctrl key and press minus on the numpad.

Em Dash: Hold down both the Ctrl and Alt keys and press minus on the numpad.

Hyphens & Dashes

Hyphens (-)

As the most widely-used of the three marks, hyphens can create the following:

Compound Nouns: *air-crew*, *e-mail*, *show-room*, etc. The way this sometimes works is that when two words are first combined, they are hyphenated to help readers see what has been done. Over time, as people get used to the new word, the hyphen is gradually omitted, and what were two words come to appear as just one, e.g. *aircrew*, *email* and *showroom*.

Compound Adjectives: *ninety-year-old church*, *forty-two* years ago, *good-for-nothing* politician, *a two-thirds* share of the loot, or *state-of-the-art* computer, etc. These word groups should be hyphenated when they appear before the noun or pronoun they are describing, but not if they are used afterwards, e.g.

- The wheat-free biscuit. The biscuit is wheat free.
- My football-mad nephew. My nephew is football mad.
- The booby-trapped treasure chest. The treasure chest is booby trapped.

This helps to avoid confusion. Consider, for example, the differences between *three hundred year-old trees* and *three-hundred-year-old trees*, *a man-eating crocodile* versus *a man eating crocodile* (a diner enjoying, say, a crocodile burger), and *free-range eggs* as opposed to *free range eggs*.

Compound Verbs: These are much rarer, as pairs of words which form a verb tend to be kept separate or just combined into a single word, e.g. to *waterproof*, to *oversee*, to *undertake*, etc.

When hyphenation is used, though, typically hyphenated are verbs made up of two nouns, e.g. *ice-skate*, but not those comprising a verb and an adverb/preposition, e.g. *see through* or *over eat*.

Prefixes: Hyphens are sometimes used when adding prefixes to existing words, e.g. *anti-American, pro-business,* etc. As ever, this is a subjective process with few clear rules. Where a vowel meets another vowel a hyphen tends to be used, e.g. *pre-installed* or *anti-establishment* (though there are exceptions, e.g. *preempt*), whilst where there also might be confusion, hyphens can be used to remove any possible ambiguity: *We're re-covering a chair* (i.e. reupholstering it) as against *We're recovering a chair* (i.e. getting it back). If you are ever unsure, it is safest to use a dictionary to check. As words are always changing, it may be the case that the word you're looking up will be correct both with and without a hyphen!

Shared Elements: Where compound words share a common element, e.g. *first-born* and *second-born*, when used in sequence within a sentence the hyphen of the first is preserved, even though the second part of the compound is omitted, e.g. *We use ten- and twelve-sided dice in our card games* or *Eight- and ten-wheeled locomotives are the most common.*

Hyphens & Dashes

En Dashes (–)

The shorter of the two dashes can be used in lieu of bracketing commas, e.g.

- *The antiques – similar to those seen in the illustration – were stolen during the night of the 14th when the property was empty.*

Likewise, they can also be found alone instead of a solitary comma, colon or semicolon if a writer prefers to use them in such a manner, e.g.

- *That party was awesome – simply out of this world.*

If you ever find yourself writing speech, they can also be used to show an abrupt, unscheduled end to a sentence, unlike an ellipsis (...) which portrays a fading away of someone's speech or thoughts, e.g.

- The detective took a sip before replacing the cup on its saucer. "I was thinking–"
- "I don't care what you were thinking!" screamed the countess, flinging her tea against the wall. "Find my jewels!"

The same mark can also be observed in printed scores, as well as replacing the words *to*, *til* or *through* in relation to times, dates and ranges, e.g.

- Open 9am–5pm.
- The Hundred Years War (1337–1453) was fought between the royal houses of England and France.
- The Rhinos beat the Saints 24–14 in the semi-final.
- Running the gamut from A–Z.

Note, too, that you could instead use hyphens in each of these last four instances, with no one having any real complaints if you did so:

- Open 9am-5pm.
- The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) was fought between the royal houses of England and France.
- The Rhinos beat the Saints 24-14 in the semi-final.
- Running the gamut from A-Z.

Em Dashes

It is arguably due to its unfavourable aesthetics (i.e. to the eye it often appears *too* big), that the longest of the three line marks has largely fallen out of favour, at least in Britain. In the U.S., where the *rules* governing its usage are more fiercely contested, it retains a stronger hold, but in the U.K. its functions have essentially been absorbed by its shorter cousin. If, however, you prefer it, feel free to use — instead of – wherever appropriate. Note, though, that many who do so often omit the accompanying spaces, as to include them would make the gaps between the affected words absurdly wide, e.g.

- *The antiques—similar to those seen in the illustration—were stolen during the night of the 14th when the property was empty.*

Colons and Semicolons

Colons (**:**) and semicolons (**;**) are used for different purposes, but each provides a pause longer than a comma but less abrupt than a full stop. On the next three frames is some guidance on their functions.

Colons

These are used to introduce items in a list, be it on one line or in bullet points.

Examples

- You will need the following ingredients: flour, sugar, eggs and milk.
- Your duties will include:

  • vacuuming
  • dusting
  • polishing
  • ironing

They are also used to introduce explanations, conclusions, balanced contrasts and indented quotations.

Examples

- (Explanation) It was more than mere attraction: it was love.
- (Conclusion) I knew what I had to do: confess my crime.
- (Contrast) Hatred is easy: love is difficult.
- (Indented Quote) Shakespeare gives Edgar some remarkable prose to display his madness:

'Who gives any thing to poor Tom?
whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame,
and through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire.'

Semicolons

This piece of punctuation has various uses, but most often it is used to:

1. link together complete sentences (independent clauses) that are *closely related;*
2. separate units in complicated lists where at least one of the units already contains a comma.

Examples: Linking Independent Clauses

- At that moment, Derek loved his sister very deeply; she was wealthy and he was in debt.
- The deadline is at midday; time is therefore of the essence.

It would, of course, be possible to link these sentences together with words such as **because** or **so** or to punctuate them with a full stop and capital letter, but doing so would create slightly different effects.

Examples: Complicated Lists

- The nominees are: Richie Green, The Haunted Mill; Sally Armitage, Purple Flowers; Lara Benson, Rush for the Hills; **and** Sandeep Daji, Broken Sword.
- The new Auto 8 comes with a six-speed gearbox, trip computer and cruise control for better fuel economy; front and rear heated seats for greater comfort; **and** six separate airbags for unparalleled, all-round safety.

In the last two examples, some people might not put a semicolon before the final **and**. However, we suggest that you separate all the main sections of a complicated list in the same way, i.e. by using a semicolon. Though there is no strictly right or wrong choice, remember to be consistent: either *always* put it in before the final **and** or *always* leave it out.

Semicolons

Semicolons are also used before the appearance of **Conjunctive Adverbs** and **Transitional Words and Phrases.**

These two terms sound complicated, but really they aren't. They just describe words or phrases that are used to move from one sentence to the next in a logical and smooth way, and which create links between your ideas so that readers can more easily understand your writing.

There are loads of words and phrases that fall into these two categories, e.g. **although**, **besides, consequently, conversely, equally, finally, for example, however, in addition, instead, in fact, meanwhile, nevertheless, on the contrary, of course, therefore** and **thus.**

Usage Examples

- He didn't like wearing a hat; **instead**, he took an umbrella.
- I understand why you acted as you did; **therefore**, I will overlook it this time.
- Many test subjects said that the medication helped them; **however**, a significant minority reported that it had no effect whatsoever.
- He didn't listen to a word I said and ran off up the steps; **in addition**, he ignored the warning signs, opened the fire doors and set off the alarm.
- Thumbprint identification is fast becoming an industry standard; **in fact**, it now appears on almost all high-end smartphones.

Note also the **comma** that always appears after these words/phrases when they are used in this manner.

The correct use of colons and semicolons shows that you know how to handle your written language. Do this with confidence and accuracy and it will definitely help you to gain higher marks.

Now it's your turn.

Add colons and semi-colons into the correct places below.

Jim Al-Khalili is one of my favourite TV scientists both he and Brian Cox really make science and the universe engaging and accessible.

It gives me great pleasure to announce the winner of the *Best Triathlete of the Year Award* Kirkby Kickstarters' Ben Williams.

The experiment has been a total failure, Igor nevertheless, I, Professor Hugo Agogo, am not a man to give up easily!

Tech support is the best job in the world in fact, I love nothing more than dealing with people's inane complaints.

Katarina Johnson-Thompson, Dina Asher-Smith and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce the double-barrelled surname squad have certainly made an athletics commentator's life more 'interesting'!

Commas

Commas are primarily used to separate parts of sentences and to make meanings clearer. As you can see from the example below, they are able to totally change the meaning of a sentence depending on their placement.

Some of the time travelers are worried about losing their luggage.

Some of the time, travelers are worried about losing their luggage.

Common uses of commas include the following:

1. Separating an introductory clause, phrase or word from the rest of the sentence, e.g.

- Having read the book, Monica decided to see the film.
- When in doubt, say nothing.
- No, you can't borrow the car.

2. Off-setting names, e.g.

- Are you meeting him tomorrow, John?
- Theresa, where are you?

3. Itemising words in lists, e.g.

- Please place all the towels, costumes, clothing, bags and valuables in the lockers.

Oxford Commas

Note that in most lists there is usually no comma before the word *and*. On occasion, however, you may need to include an *Oxford comma* to make your meaning clear. For example, look at this sentence:

The things I most like to eat are chicken, burgers, mushy peas and fish and chips.

ere, it is not clear whether the writer likes "mushy peas and fish" with chips separate, "fish and chips" together and mushy peas separate, or "mushy peas *and* fish *and* chips" together in a single meal. An extra Oxford comma would make his meaning clear:

My favourite things to eat are chicken, burgers, mushy peas, and fish and chips.

Another example is below.

I like cooking my family and my pets.

I like cooking, my family, and my pets.

Commas

Commas are also used for **itemising word groups**.

Examples

- Place any articles of clothing, swimming equipment, sports equipment and personal belongings in the lockers.
- Today's lunch menu contains beans on toast, fish and chips, and beef and green peppers in black bean sauce.

Equally, if you can put ***and*** between a list of coordinating adjectives, you need to use a comma.

Examples

- *He was a tall and thin and sallow and scowling man* is better rendered as: **He was a tall, thin, sallow, scowling man**.
- *It was a dark and gloomy and miserable day* sounds much better written as: **It was a dark, gloomy, miserable day** or **It was a dark, gloomy and miserable day**.

(Note that there is no comma between the last adjective and the noun it describes.)

Commas also enclose **additional thoughts**.

Examples

- The judges thought it was, **arguably**, one of his finest novels.
- It was, **in my humble opinion**, the best live performance ever.

These commas are used in the same way you would use brackets (sometimes referred to as parentheses) and are sometimes called *parenthetical* commas as a result.

Commas are similarly used to **off-set direct speech, questions and comparative/contrasting phrases**.

Examples

- Julia turned abruptly and said, "If that's how you feel, then I'll go home."
- You'll be going soon, won't you?
- The taller they are, the farther they fall.
- "I must be going," said the doctor, "as it's getting rather late."

Similarly, commas appear before **coordinating conjunctions** (**for**, **and**, **nor**, **but**, **or**, **yet** and **so**), when they separate two independent clauses.

Examples

- He loved her, **but** she did not return his affection.
- She forgot her credit card, **so** she paid with cash.

Lastly, commas should be inserted after the word ***however***, when it means *on the other hand*.

Examples

- My hobby is enjoyable. However, it is very expensive.
- I do love visiting Whitby; however, in winter the winds can be fierce.

The most common of these usages are lists, direct speech, to separate clauses and to enclose additional thoughts. You will, though, see commas additionally used in longer sentences. This is because a comma forces the reader to take a pause, which makes long, complex ideas easier to digest. As ever, it is important not to over-use commas as they can clutter your writing, so only employ them when they are essential.

Commas

Avoid Comma Splices

It is important not to use commas to separate two independent clauses (sentences that can stand by themselves). This error, known as a *comma splice*, is quite common. Independent clauses should instead be separated by full stops or, on occasion, by colons or semi-colons.

Examples

✗	**INCORRECT:** The bus had a puncture, as a result we were delayed by half an hour.
✓	**CORRECT:** The bus had a puncture. As a result we were delayed by half an hour.
✗	**INCORRECT:** The restaurant had run out of sea bass, consequently, I had hake instead.
✓	**CORRECT:** The restaurant had run out of sea bass. Consequently, I had hake instead.

Now it's your turn.

From the sentences below, **highlight** those which are **correctly punctuated**.

1. Taking a moment to glance at her appearance in the mirror, Sylvia smiled.
2. The game was boring, the score was nil-nil.
3. No I'm afraid that the play has sold out.
4. It was a delightful holiday, but it was quite expensive.
5. It was the best performance I'd ever seen. However the audience were quite noisy at times.
6. Will you have a cup of tea, Mia?
7. The vessel the first all-metal warship ever was named HMS Dreadnought.
8. The weather's getting worse don't you think?

9. She ordered succulent Italian sea-bass fillets to start, oak-smoked salmon nestling on a bed of the finest basmati rice for her main, and fresh English blackberries with clotted cream for pudding.

10. "I saw one shop, putting up its Christmas decorations, in August!" said Martina.

Brackets

Round Brackets

Also known as *parentheses*, these punctuation marks are used to separate information that isn't needed in the main body of a sentence. If you remove the bracketed material, the sentence should still work and make sense, e.g.

- Graphs are explained in detail (page 320) so that students can work independently.

Brackets can also be used to enclose a comment or an aside from the person writing, e.g.

- She sadly gave up her diet on holiday (although I understand the temptation).

Often, brackets are used to identify additional information which is still important, but not essential, for the understanding of the sentence, e.g.

- Marianne (a lively redhead) was dating Jules.

(Note that parenthetical brackets may be replaced by a pair of commas or a pair of dashes. Brackets just mark off the extra information more noticeably, which has the effect of making what is inside them seem less important.)

Punctuating Brackets

Also, be aware that if the information inside a pair of brackets forms a complete sentence, the punctuation for that sentence should go inside the brackets, e.g.

- The film was utterly gripping. (It had the best special effects I had ever seen!)

However, when the brackets are at the end of the main sentence and the information inside them is not a complete sentence, the punctuation should go outside the closing bracket, e.g.

- Henry VII could be described as a prudent king (though I think of him as mean and grasping).

Square Brackets

If you find yourself proofreading someone else's work within a word processed file, you can use square brackets to indicate your comments, e.g.

- She turned everyone's head when she walked in wearing *that* [emphasis added] dress, as, of course, she knew she would.
- The paintball team retreaded [retreated?] to the safety of the fort.

Similar brackets are also used when quoting a source which has a mistake in it. Typically, you are expected to quote any material exactly, so the inclusion of an error might make your work look sloppy. To get round this fact, *sic* is an abbreviation of the Latin *sic erat scriptum*, which translates as *thus was it written*. It is used in brackets immediately after an error within a quote, e.g.

- In his essay, Paco stated: 'I writed [sic] a letter to my girlfriend.'

Now it's your turn.

Read this newspaper report and **add pairs of round brackets** in four suitable places.

Andy Simons 45 claimed that the diamond ring had been a present for his wife. Mr Simons a retired maths teacher was unable to produce a receipt for the item. Police Constable Di Blue the arresting officer asked him to accompany her to the station for further questioning. John Dunne the prosecuting solicitor said, 'Things are not looking good for my client.'

Inverted Commas

Also known as speech or quote marks, these pieces of punctuation (‘ ’ or “ ”) are used **to enclose direct speech** and/or a word or words that are **directly quoted** from a source, e.g.

- 'I really enjoyed that film.'
- Mary thought the film was 'dull'.
- 'Best ever' World Cup marred by 'brutal' tackles.

These are direct quotations. They use the exact words of the original speaker/writer.

Remember: Enclose any punctuation that is part of the quotation ***within*** the inverted commas, e.g.

- In her most famous poem, Mary O’Neill asks, ‘What is yellow?’
- 'God bless us, every one!' is the final line of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol.*
- Mr Murphy said that in his view the value of the pound would drop towards the end of the year. ‘I also believe most European countries will follow suit,’ he added.

The underlined statement shows that the speaker's remarks have been partially summarised, whilst the quotation marks in the second line show some of the words he actually spoke.

The use of inverted commas is crucial, as they can significantly alter the meaning of a sentence. For example, what is the difference between the following two statements?

- Jones stated that, ‘he was innocent of the crime.’
- Jones stated that he was, ‘innocent of the crime.’

Due entirely to the position of the inverted commas, the first statement implies Jones is defending another person, whereas the second tells us that Jones is defending himself.

Inverted Commas

Single or Double Marks

In British English, it is more common to use single inverted commas. However, if you are writing a **quotation within a quotation**, you need to use both kinds in order to make the difference between the quotations clear.

Example

- H. P. James comments that, ‘Romeo’s soliloquy, “O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!” is exquisite.’
- Lord Jefferson rebuked the minister for his reply: '"The department does not collect such statistics" is a wholly unsatisfactory response to this crucial matter.'

Other Uses

Inverted commas can likewise be used to **identify a title**, e.g. the ‘Summer Collection’, although these are more often seen in italics: the *Summer Collection*.

They are also used to identify nicknames; indicate doubt, cynicism, disbelief or irony; and indicate a word or phrase that should not be taken literally, e.g.

- (*Nickname*) Ben 'White Water' Williams
- (*Doubt/Cynicism*) The hamburgers allegedly contained a blend of liver, chicken parts and 'organic' beef.
- (*Non-literal*) We are 'giving away' cars this weekend.
- 'It’s a beautiful day!' exclaimed Ellie.
- 'Isn't it a beautiful day?' asked Ellie.

Note: The last two examples contain what are known as dialogue tags (reporting clauses). It can be more effective to vary your dialogue tags than to over-use the word *said*, but, as ever, if you use too many dialogue tags your writing will equally sound too repetitive.

Now it’s your turn.

Punctuate the direct speech below. (Note that some capital letters have been omitted from the direct speech, so you should also correct them where necessary.)

put the flowers over there, please.
this looks like a good place to pitch the tent remarked Sandy.
Chris said he’s a very placid dog, is Bonecruncher.
do you think it’s worth the risk asked Wendy.
bacon is delicious said Jason don’t you like it, Anna?
the problem with bacon Anna replied is that it’s too salty.

Ellipsis

An ellipsis (...) is often used in creative writing to create suspense or mystery in a text. It indicates where a character drifts off from their speech or thoughts (rather than an abrupt break as suggested by a dash).

Examples

- She could see him in the distance, like a small ant doing his duties. Then he was gone…
- Jacob slowly opened the rusty door, the creak seeming louder in the dark. Slowly, agonizingly, he trod across the floorboards, pausing at every creak…
- Gradually, the mist enveloped the loch, blurring the outline of the castle…
- ‘It was on the mantelpiece,’ said Carol. ‘That is, I think it was…’

An ellipsis can also be used to show where a writer has used a quotation but has missed out part of the quoted text because it is irrelevant.

Example

- *Some argue that social networking sites encourage bullying. Mr Green, the deputy head, said, 'We have a number of instances where children are left in a vulnerable situation... and it can lead to serious trauma, so we have to take the matter very seriously.'*

This shows that Mr Green said more than is actually quoted here, but that the writer has missed out some of his words because they are not needed in this particular piece of writing. (Perhaps they were anecdotes and/or duplicated the main point.)

Remember, however, that you should never use an ellipsis like this to change the meaning of the original quotation.

Omissive Apostrophes

Omissive apostrophes are used to show when a letter or letters is/are *missing*. There are a few examples in the table below, but there are also many more such *contractions*. Try to think of 10 that you commonly use.

Contraction	Full Meaning
Don't	Do not
Can't	Cannot
It'll	It will
Won't	Will not
It's	It is / It has

Whilst most contractions follow a regular pattern, there are some unusual ones that do not, e.g. *will not* becomes **won't**. (This is probably because in Middle English *will* was sometimes spelt *woll*.)

In a sentence, the apostrophe typically **replaces** the letter(s) that is/are **missing**. In formal writing, you would always use the full words; however, in informal writing and speech you are more likely to see or use the contractions.

Now it's your turn.

If you feel you have already grasped contractions, please move on to the next frame.

If you would like some more practice, though, below is a list of words, some before they have been contracted and others after. Type in the alternative version of each one in the input box provided.

1. Who is _____

2. It'll _____

3. She would _____

4. We will not _____

5. Might not _____

6. Would have _____

7. You are _____

8. Shan't _____

9. Ought not _____

10. Cannot _____

Possessive Apostrophes

An apostrophe must be used in order to show *possession* or *ownership*. An apostrophe tells the reader that a particular noun belongs to another noun or pronoun.

Examples

Apostrophe being used	Full meaning
Isla's classroom	The classroom belonging to Isla
Daniel's book	The book belonging to Daniel
Rachel's story	The story belonging to Rachel
Somebody's pencil ('Somebody' is a pronoun)	The pencil belonging to somebody

In each of these examples, the apostrophe shows who the item belongs to. As you can see, it's much easier to put the apostrophe in than write out the sentence in full.

Note, however, that possessive pronouns **do not have apostrophes.** *Yours, his, hers, its, theirs* and *ours* might confuse you because they end in *s* and show possession, but none of them need an apostrophe.

Equally, the word **it's** always means **it is** or **it has.** It's a contraction – not a possessor. The apostrophe shows that letters are missing. It's a common mistake to put an apostrophe in this word when it's unnecessary, so watch out for its misuse!

For almost all singular possessors (where there is just one owner) you only need to add an apostrophe and additional *s*.

Examples

Singular noun	Possessor (with possession)
Man	Man's (house)
Paul	Paul's (book)
Thomas	Thomas's (illness)
Boss	Boss's (temper)
Dog	Dog's (toy)
Miss Cole	Miss Cole's (pen)

Possessive Apostrophe

Where it might be awkward to pronounce the additional *s* as a separate sound, however, you can simply add the apostrophe.

Examples

Singular word	Possessive form
Hastings	Hastings' MP
Achilles	Achilles' heel
Los Angeles	Los Angeles' airport
H. G. Wells	H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*
Pythagoras	Pythagoras' Theorem

Plural Possessors

Plural words show that there is *more than one* owner. When these words end in *s*, you just add an apostrophe to the end. You **do not** sound an additional *s* (uz sound).

Examples

Plural word	Possessive form
Friends	Her friends' party
Parents	My parents' cottage
Girls	The girls' choir

For plural nouns that **do not** end in s, add an apostrophe and an *s*. You **do** sound the additional *s* (*uz* sound) at the end of these words.

Examples

Plural word	Possessive form
Women	The women's actions
Children	The children's toys
Men	The men's concerns

Possessive Apostrophe

A Quick Rule of Thumb

It might help if you remember that the apostrophe is always placed directly after the *name* of the owner or owners.

Examples

Sam's book	The apostrophe is directly after Sam. The book belongs to Sam.
Dai Jenkins' lamb	The apostrophe is directly after Dai Jenkins. The lamb belongs to Dai Jenkins.
The man's ties	The apostrophe is directly after man. The ties belong to the man.
The men's ties	The apostrophe is directly after men. The ties belong to the men
Her courage's limit	The apostrophe is directly after courage. The limit belongs to her courage.

Now it's your turn.

Spot the Apostrophe Catastrophes! (Section 1)

In the following sentences, identify the mistakes and correct them. There may be too many apostrophes, not enough, or they may just be misplaced.

My car’s a Ford. Whats your’s?

Caterina claimed that the jacket was her’s.

The mens team didnt do as well as the womens team.

Thomas's friendship with Jeans brother is off.

Pupils expectations today are too low.

George Solti was one of the centurys greatest.

The campaign collapsed during it's final stages.

Now it's your turn.

Spot the Apostrophe Catastrophes! (Section 2)

Again, if you need more practice, identify the mistakes in the following sentences and correct them. There may be too many apostrophes, not enough, or they may just be misplaced.

Its a long way to walk. Should'nt we wait at the bus' stop?

Bobs your uncle is the same as saying *Roberts your mothers' brother*.

Doughnuts are available here on Monday's.

Kings Cross station is on the Victoria line.

Swallows and swifts flitted in the air above the churches spires.

The most capped football players of all time are the USAs' Kristine Lilly and Egypts' Ahmed Hassan.

This years winner was the best wed seen in decades.

Charles Darwins most famous book is *On the Origin of Species*.

Apostrophe

The Greengrocer's Apostrophe: A Word of Warning

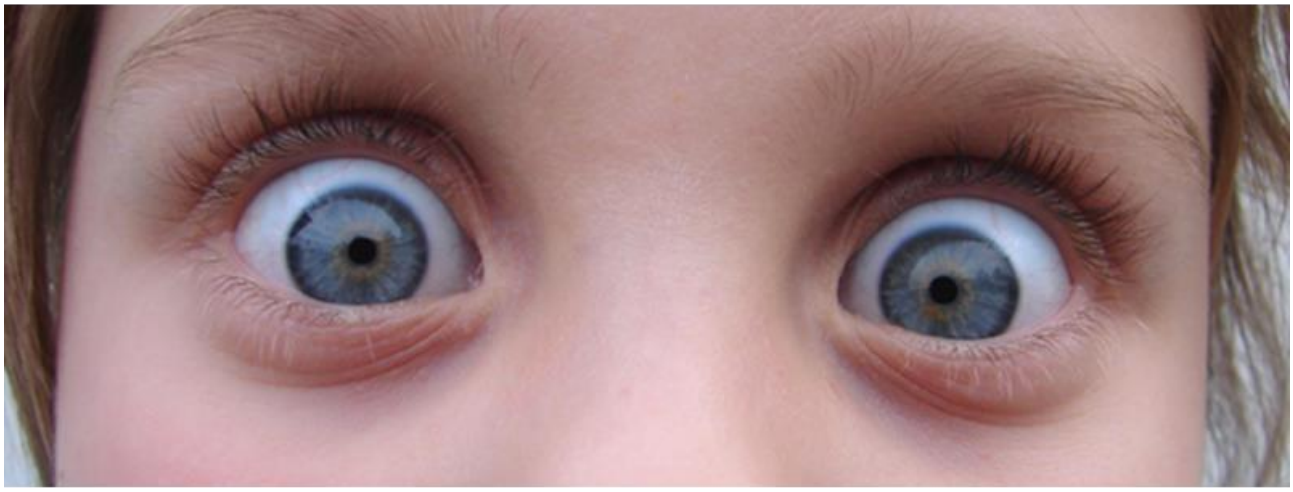
Ordinary plurals that don't show possession **never** need apostrophes. If you don't understand how to use apostrophes, though, there's a temptation to put them into any word that ends with an *s*. Resist!

Because this misuse of apostrophes is often seen on the labels in *greengrocers' shops* and market stalls, it has been nicknamed the *greengrocer's apostrophe*. The next time you're passing a market, look out for examples. It's quite common to see vegetables with labels that say *Cabbage's, Apple's* or *Banana's*. These are straightforward plurals, however, and **should not** have apostrophes.

Why use punctuation?

Punctuation plays a very important role in both reading and writing. It makes meanings clear, assists in organising writing, divides sentences, and signals pauses, questions and emphases. Put simply, punctuation helps to create clarity where there might otherwise be ambiguity.

We're going to cut and paste kids.



We're going to cut and paste, kids.

Think about what these sentences (above) mean, and the difference the comma makes in the latter:

- Due to a missing comma, the first speaker is stating that they want to chop up some young people and glue them back together.
- In the second sentence, however, the speaker is just telling their children about a hobby they're about to enjoy.

Writers often use punctuation to create effects. Think about the effect the punctuation has in the sentences below:

- "Ellie, what are you doing? Stop it now!"
- "Ellie, what are you doing? Stop it now."
- The train plummeted into the station. *Crash!*
- There was only one person who could have done this: Sir Alfred Gray.

The use of the exclamation mark in the first example makes the imperative sentence much more emphatic than the second example. Similarly, the exclamation mark in the third line adds to the drama of the collision. Meanwhile, in the final example, the writer has delayed revealing the name of the perpetrator in order to create suspense. Using the colon creates a dramatic pause and makes the name stand out in isolation from the rest of the sentence.

Full stops . are used at the ends of sentences and after/within many abbreviations (e.g.)

Commas , are used in lists, to offset names, and for bracketing additional thoughts.

Semicolons ; link closely-related independent clauses and are used in complicated lists.

Colons : introduce lists, quotations, explanations, etc.

Brackets () are used to enclose additional or ancillary information.

En & Em Dashes – — can sometimes be used instead of commas and brackets to introduce or enclose aditional information.

Hyphens - are used in many compound words (e.g. cul-de-sac).

Exclamation marks ! are used at the ends of sentences to show heightened emotion.

Question marks ? are used to indicate that a sentence is a question rather than a statement, a command or an exclamation.

Speech marks ‘ ‘’ “” are used to enclose direct speech or quotations.

Ellipses ... are used to show where words have been removed from a passage of text.