**Table of Contents**

Each component listed in this Table of Contents includes information on the stated topic as well as examples to help you see what good punctuation should look like and exercises to help you with your own punctuation.

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An Overview of

Punctuation

The plane dipped abruptly and so did Barry's stomach, straight into his worn boots. Then his internal organs jolted just as jarringly back through his system and reorganized within him a chain reaction puzzle clicking together all by itself. He had to grip the armrest his fingers clutched, knuckles palming. Under his sweating palms, he felt the cold metal become slippery. He held to it tighter. Firmly, he closed his eyes, closed the lids so firmly in fact that little lightning bolts flashed across his vision, rising and falling and then dispersing in tiny fragments of color. With the thumb of his left hand, he began tracing the seat release button in tiny circles. One two three. One two three. The woman next to him said, Are you all right? Yes, thank you, Barry muttered, but to himself, he thought I hate flying. Yuck. ---from Dead Metaphors by Daniel Rider.

What is wrong with the paragraph above? The paragraph above is about a man, Barry, who is afraid of flying. Although the paragraph works well in letting the reader see the character's fear, there is a big problem. The problem is that, other than commas, there is no punctuation. There are no periods, no question marks, no quotation marks, and no apostrophes, and that's just the beginning. All in all, there are twenty-five errors in punctuation in this paragraph. (For information about commas and comma usage, go to this website: http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/commas.htm)

Why is punctuation important? Punctuation matters for several reasons. Primarily, it is always important to be correct and neat in your writing for the sake of appearance. Although meaning is important, the appearance of a work can have a strong effect on a reader. Imagine a presidential candidate giving a speech. What do you imagine that person wearing? Probably, you envision a business suit, but imagine if the speaker were actually wearing a Speedo. It would ruin the speech and take away from the speaker's authority and professionalism. It is the same for a piece of writing. No matter how good a piece of writing is, if it is not dressed up with the proper punctuation, it will not be highly regarded. This is why you must use punctuation correctly.

Other than incorrectness, a piece of writing that is not punctuated correctly is often difficult to read. Sentences seem to be bunched together, or words can be misread. In the worst case scenario, the meaning may even disappear, or it will require numerous readings for a reader to discover what the author is trying to say.

It is important to punctuate correctly both to look professional and to make life easy for your reader.
How can I punctuate correctly? The following sections will explain some key points in correct punctuation. Before you begin, though, look over the sample paragraph above and see how many of the twenty-five errors you can find. Then look at the corrected paragraph in the Answer Key at the end of this section. This will show you what you might need to work on in this module.

END MARKS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The period</td>
<td>The question mark</td>
<td>The exclamation point</td>
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</table>

With very little exception (especially in academic writing), every sentence that you write should end with one of the end marks above. Each one is a little bit different.

THE PERIOD

This mark is used after sentences that make statements, such as:

- It is sunny outside.
- I saw a good movie last night.

In writing for a college class, you will almost always use periods to end sentences because you will most often be using your sentences to make statements. *(A possible exception is the narrative essay.)*

THE QUESTION MARK

If your sentence is a direct question (meaning that the question is being asked right now), it should end with a question mark, as in these cases:

- What should be done about global warming?
- Have you ever seen the Eiffel Tower?

If the question is being reported and not asked, it is an indirect question, which is punctuated with periods.

- The teacher asked us what should be done about global warming.
- Jennifer asked me if I had ever seen the Eiffel Tower.

NOTE: Question marks are oftentimes rare in college writing for the simple reason that questions themselves are rare in the essays written for classes. Writers may use a question to catch their readers’ attention at the beginning of an essay, but from that point on, it is generally stronger to make statements. Using too many questions in a composition can have the undesired effect of either A) making it look like the writer doesn’t know the answer, or B) making it look like the writer is talking to him or herself when the writer writes a question and then answers it. *Statements are stronger.*
THE EXCLAMATION POINT
Exclamation points are used after words or sentences that show strong feeling, such as:
   Oh no! My Dad’s going to kill me!
   Yay! My team is winning!

NOTE: Use these very sparingly. In a persuasive or research paper, exclamation points most likely won’t fit the tone of the rest of the paper. Even in a personal narrative essay, you probably won’t use these unless you are writing dialogue.
END MARKS

You try! Choose the correct end mark to complete the sentences in the following two exercises. The answers are in the answer key at the end of this module.

Exercise A

1. John asked when I was coming home
2. Help Help My apartment is on fire
3. If you were president, what would you do
4. Every morning, I wake up and jog
5. Did you know that second hand cigarette smoke is more dangerous for dogs than for humans

Exercise B

I have always enjoyed traveling. Maybe this was because I was born in a bus. In a recent conversation with my mother, I asked why I had been born in a bus. “Why do you want to know?” she asked. “It’s part of my history,” I exclaimed. “Tell me now...”

NOTE: Please notice that every sentence must begin with a capital letter.
QUOTATION MARKS

Quotation marks are used mainly to write down the exact words of a speaker or writer. If you are writing a research paper or persuasive paper, you will include the words of your sources in quotation marks, in one of the following ways:

    Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream.”
    “I have a dream,” said Martin Luther King.
    “I,” King said, “have a dream.”

Please note two points about these examples:

    First, quotations generally don’t stand alone; in a research paper or persuasive paper, you definitely should not put a quote by itself. Instead, use a signal phrase, like “Martin Luther King said” or “said Martin Luther King.”
    Second, commas are used to set the signal phrase apart from the quotation itself. Another point to note is that, if a quotation is a sentence, it is treated like a sentence; this means that the first word inside the quotation will be capitalized and the end mark will come at the end of the quote before the final quotation mark.

NOTE ON USAGE

Quote: verb, to use somebody else’s words in speaking or writing

Quotation: noun, the words or sentences that you are using

If you are writing a personal narrative essay, the rules for using quotation marks will remain the same, but there will be one difference: in a research paper, one paragraph may contain quotes from more than one person or source; a personal narrative may contain dialogue, however, in which case you must skip a line every time a new person speaks, like this:

    “Hello, how are you?” John asked.
    “Not so good,” Terry replied.
OTHER USES OF QUOTATION MARKS

1. Around the titles of short works, such as essays, articles, chapters, songs, and poems. NOTE: Long works, like movies or books, are underlined.

2. Rarely, around words that are special in a sentence. (I have trouble telling the difference between “affect” and “effect.”)

SINGLE QUOTATION MARKS

Single quotation marks are used in only two cases.

1. *A quote within a quote.* (My mother asked, “Didn’t your father say ‘Eat your peas?’”)

2. *Thoughts.* “You look beautiful,” I told May. Then I thought ‘Oh no! I hope she doesn’t think I’m in love with her now!’
QUOTATION MARKS

Exercise A

You try! Answer these questions to check your knowledge of quotation mark usage. (The answers are at the end of this module.)

1. What is the main purpose of quotation marks?

2. “Gerald said” is an example of what type of phrase?

3. If you are writing dialogue and one character finishes speaking and a second begins, what should you do?

4. Where does the end mark go in a quotation?

5. What are single quotation marks used for?

Exercise B

You try! Put quotation marks in the correct places to correct these sentences.

1. Would you like pepperoni on your pizza? asked Tim.

2. Hamlet said To be or not to be, that is the question.

3. Martha yelled, Close the door!

4. Shh, I whispered to my brother, Can’t you see that the movie is starting?

5. After falling down a flight of stairs, Oscar said, Ouch.

Exercise C

You try! Write your own sentences.

1. Write two quotations that appear in the first part of the sentence (before the signal phrase).

2. Write two quotations that appear at the end of the sentence (after the signal phrase).
3. Write two quotations that appear at the beginning and end of a sentence. (The signal phrase should be in the middle.)

**PARENTHESES**

( )

You will use the parentheses in three situations:

1) To set off extra information, or “aside” information, from the rest of the sentence.

   The chapter on art in our textbook (pages 50-67) is a really interesting chapter.

   At my high school (Curtis High School, in Tacoma), there is a very good football program.

   My baby brother can walk (not so well), talk (in gibberish), and cry (way, way too much!!).

2) To show items in a list (either by letter or number).

   My favorite science fiction TV shows of all time are (1) Star Trek: The Next Generation, (2) Red Dwarf, and (3) Doctor Who.

3) To do in-text citation (also known as parenthetical citation) for papers that involve research sources. More information on this can be found in the Writing Center’s MLA Documentation Module. For information on APA, the CBE Number System, and Chicago styles, you can go to [http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/index.html](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/index.html).
PARENTHESES

Exercise A

You try! In the following activity, add parenthesis where needed.

1. All right, everybody. For next week, I would like you all to read Chapters Two and Three in our textbook pages 20-42.

2. To make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you must 1 take out some bread, 2 apply the ingredients, and 3 put the bread together. Voila! You are ready to eat!

3. Some small dogs poodles, bichons, and schnauzers can jump as high as five feet.

4. A recent study showed that people who smoke a lot like my brother have a higher rate of forgetfulness in old age.
APOSTROPHES

Look at the following two sets of sentences which all contain apostrophes (’). Can you see how apostrophes are used from these two sets of examples?

SET ONE
A) I could’ve died when I heard what you did yesterday!
B) Let’s not talk about it.
C) There’s no business like show business.

SET TWO
A) Gertrude’s book is not that interesting.
B) Bobby held the girl’s hand tightly.
C) The king’s death came as a shock to the nation.

SET ONE EXPLAINED: CONTRACTIONS

One use of apostrophes is to show where words have been fused together into one. *Could’ve, Let’s, and There’s* all started out as two words (*could have, let us, and there is*) but were brought together to make the language move faster and have more style. These words are called contractions, and the apostrophe is used to show where letters have been omitted.

Some other contractions are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have + not = haven’t</th>
<th>it + is = it’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I + will = I’ll</td>
<td>it + has = it’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I + am = I’m</td>
<td>is + not = isn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who + is = who’s</td>
<td>could + not = couldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do + not = don’t</td>
<td>I + would + I’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did + not = didn’t</td>
<td>They + are = they’re</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When writing out a contraction, you must always use the apostrophe. Without it, the word will be misspelled.

**Please Note:** It is a common error to write *could’ve* and *would’ve* as *could of* and *would of*. However, this is incorrect. Make sure to use apostrophes.
SET TWO EXPLAINED: POSSESSIVES

The apostrophe may also be used to show ownership or possession. Simply add an ‘s to the possessive noun to show ownership.

Roger’s car
The dog’s bowl
The children’s laughter

HOWEVER, apostrophes don’t go everywhere. Please make note of the following two rules:

1) Possessive pronouns such as its, yours, ours, and hers already show possession. Do not use apostrophes with possessive pronouns.

2) Not every word that ends in s needs an apostrophe. In the sentence The cats are in the house, the s is used to show that the word is plural (or that there is more than one cat). You should not use apostrophes with plural nouns.

Some confusion arises, however, over plural nouns that end in s. With a plural noun like children, all you do is add an s, but if the word already ends in s (as in the two teachers) what you should do is just add an apostrophe after the s: the two teachers’ office.
APOSTROPHEs

You try! Rewrite the following sentences changing the underlined words into either a contraction or a possessive.

1. I do not think the diet of Sara has been healthy for her.
2. I have been told by friends about the wonderful nature of India.
3. The car of Bill uses the rays of the sun as a heating source.
4. The bill of the cable repairman was very high, but his work was awful.
5. The pizza of Pizza Hut did not make me happy.
The colon (:) and the semi-colon (;) are often misunderstood or used incorrectly in writing but when used correctly can be very helpful.

Both have very different functions:

THE COLON

Quite simply, the colon is used to introduce something. It can be used to introduce:

A) A list.

I have so far packed in my suitcase: one toothbrush, three shirts, five pairs of short, and a swimsuit.

B) A long quotation.

In her book, Cooking is the Art of Love, Dorothy Brandsma offers this critique of cookies: “Cookies are often cut in lovely shapes, especially at Valentine’s Day, when supermarkets have offering of heart-shaped cookies complete with shiny red sugary sprinkles. However, it is not heart-shaped cookies that lovers give for Valentine’s Day, but chocolate. With its smooth, rich texture and taste, chocolate is ideal as a metaphor for the richness of love. Only a fool would want a hard, crumbly, piece of dry dough to signify their love for another.”

C) An explanation.

There are two ways to go on this: my way or the highway.
THE SEMICOLON

Semicolons can be used in three ways:

A) Most importantly, semicolons join two sentences together. Although coordinating conjunctions often fulfill this function, a semicolon gives readers the idea that the two sentences joined together are strongly connected.

The pen broke; Tommy had ink all over his fingers.

Gail spun the wheel; the car spun out of control.

B) Join two strongly connected sentences together as in (A), but this time with a transitional word.

The pen broke; thus, Tommy got ink all over his fingers.

Gail spun the wheel; immediately, the car spun out of control.

C) Finally, a minor function of semicolons is that they sometimes take the roles of commas in a series of items but only when the items themselves have commas in them.

This summer, I won’t be working on my wife’s birthday, June 7; my birthday, August 6; or my son’s birthday, September 3.
COLONS VS. SEMICOLONS

You try! Place semi-colons or colons where needed in the following exercise.

1. There’s an old saying about men you can’t live without them but you sure can’t live with them.

2. I think these reality shows are ridiculous; for example, Fear Factor and The Bachelor make people torture and degrade themselves every week.

3. The following authors will always be remembered by my family Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner my brother waited too long to tell us he lost library books by these authors, and my father had to pay $1,000 in late charges!
DASHES, HYPHENS, AND ELLIPSES

Finally, here are three important punctuation marks that you may be using a lot in writing for your classes:

THE DASH (--)  

Usually represented as a straight, unbroken horizontal line, dashes are used, mostly for dramatic effect, to show a pause. Generally, the pause represented by a dash is longer than the pause you would imagine with a comma, but shorter than the pause you would imagine with a period.

Examples:

I want—I mean, I need—the crystal. Give it to me, Johnson—or I’ll shoot you.

The man jumped off the Empire State Building—smiling.

Love, money, and fame—that’s all I want from life.

Note: Use no space between the dash and the words before and after it.

THE HYPHEN ( - )  

Hyphens are used to:

1. Connect words that act as a single unit adjective.

   I’m wearing my grasshopper-green suit today.

   Gus arched one of his Klingon-thick eyebrows at me.

2. Divide a word at the end of a line of typing (but only at an appropriate syllable break).
The greatest thing that King Kong ever did was take Fay Wray in his fist and begin climbing the Empire State Building.

Note: Use no space between the hyphen and the words before and after it.

THE ELLIPSES (…)

This can sometimes be used in the same way as a dash, but most commonly it is used to show that words have been omitted.

For example, if the Senator said “I will not raise taxes in this state even if, whoops, I spilled some water, even if the President tells me to,” it would be appropriate to use ellipses in this way: “I will not raise taxes in this state even if… the President tells me to.”

DASHES, HYPHENS, AND ELLIPSES

You try! In the following three examples, place a dash, hypen, or ellipses where appropriate.

1. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Christopher Reeve these were my heroes as a boy.

2. Tom’s absent minded actions could get us all in trouble one of these days.

3. To be or not to be is the question.
AN OVERVIEW OF PUNCTUATION (page 3)

The plane dipped abruptly and so did Barry’s stomach, straight into his worn boots. Then his internal organs jolted just as jarringly back through his system and reorganized within him— a chain reaction puzzle clicking together all by itself. He had to grip the armrest; his fingers clutched, knuckles paling. Under his sweating palms, he felt the cold metal become slippery. He held to it tighter. Firmly, he closed his eyes, closed the lids so firmly in fact that little lightning bolts flashed across his vision, rising and falling and then dispersing in tiny fragments of color. With the thumb of his left hand, he began tracing the seat release button in tiny circles. One... two... three... One... two... three... The woman next to him said, “Are you all right?” “Yes, thank you,” Barry muttered, but to himself, he thought ‘I hate flying. Yuck!’ ---from Dead Metaphors by Daniel Rider

END MARKS (page 6)

Exercise A

1. John asked when I was coming home.

2. Help! Help! My apartment is on fire!

3. If you were president, what would you do?

4. Every morning, I wake up and jog.

5. Did you know that second hand cigarette smoke is more dangerous for dogs than for humans?
Exercise B

I have always enjoyed traveling. Maybe this was because I was born in a bus. In a recent conversation with my mother, I asked why I had been born in a bus. “Why do you want to know?” she asked.

“It’s part of my history!” I exclaimed. “Tell me now!”

QUOTATION MARKS (page 9)

Exercise A

1. What is the main purpose of quotation marks? They set aside words of other speakers or writers.

2. “Gerald said” is an example of what type of phrase? It is a signal phrase.

3. If you are writing dialogue and one character finishes speaking and a second begins, what should you do? Start a new paragraph.

4. Where does the end mark go in a quotation? At the end of the quotation, but before the final quotation mark.

5. What are single quotation marks used for? They are used either to show that a work is a short work or to show a thought (as opposed to something said).

Exercise B

1. “Would you like pepperoni on your pizza?” asked Tim.

2. Hamlet said, “To be or not to be; that is the question.”

3. Martha yelled, “Close the door!”

4. “Shh,” I whispered to my brother, “Can’t you see that the movie is starting?”

5. After falling down a flight of stairs, Oscar said, “Ouch.”
Exercise C

Here are some possible answers.

1. Write two quotations that appear in the first part of the sentence (before the signal phrase).
   “I’m happy,” said Joy.
   “Please pass the salt,” Terry requested.

2. Write two quotations that appear at the end of the sentence (after the signal phrase).
   Joy said, “I’m happy.”
   Terry requested, “Please pass the salt.”

3. Write two quotations that appear at the beginning and end of a sentence (the signal phrase should be in the middle).
   “If you don’t stop hitting me,” Bob said, “I’ll scream.”
   “The answer to the question,” the teacher explained, “is three.”

PARENTHESIS (Page 11)

Exercise A

1. All right, everybody. For next week, I would like you all to read Chapters Two and Three in our textbook (pages 20-42).

2. To make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you must (1) take out some bread, (2) apply the ingredients, and (3) put the bread together. Voila! You are ready to eat!

3. Some small dogs (poodles, bichons, and schnauzers) can jump as high as five feet.

4. A recent study showed that people who (like my brother) smoke a lot have a higher rate of forgetfulness in old age.
APOSTROPHES

1. I don’t think Sara’s diet has been healthy for her.
2. I’ve been told by friends about India’s wonderful nature.
3. Bill’s car uses the sun’s rays as a heating source.
4. The cable repairman’s bill was very high, but his work was awful.
5. Pizza Hut’s pizza didn’t make me happy.

COLONS VS. SEMICOLONS (Page 17)

1. There’s an old saying about men: you can’t live without them but you sure can’t live with them.

2. I think these reality shows are ridiculous; for example, *Fear Factor* and *The Bachelor* make people torture and degrade themselves every week.

3. The following authors will always be remembered by my family: Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner; my brother waited too long to tell us he lost library books by these authors, and my father had to pay $1,000 in late charges!
DASHES, HYPHENS, AND ELLIPSES (Page 19)

1. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Christopher Reeve—these were my heroes as a boy.

2. Tom’s absent-minded actions could get us all in trouble one of these days.

3. To be or not to be… is the question.

Acknowledgement

Some of the exercises in this module have been adapted from the text Sentence Skills, Form A, Seventh Edition, by John Langan. This text is strongly recommended to students who want to have more practice and get more information concerning punctuation and sentence-level concerns.