

# Punctuation

Taking the time to check over your punctuation will ensure that the reader can understand your sentences and follow your arguments; it will also improve the reader's impression of your essay.

Keep your punctuation simple and clear. Below is a reference table to double-check that you have used appropriate punctuation:

| Punctuation   | Usage   | Example(s)  |
|---|---|---|
| Apostrophe<br>'   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Possession (singular and plural).</li> <li>b. Contraction.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Queen's University / Students' Union</li> <li>b. Don't go / I'm thirsty / It's your round<br/>Contractions generally should not be used in academic writing.</li> </ul>   |
| Brackets / parenthesis<br>a. [Square brackets]<br>b. (Round Brackets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For adding your own words inside a quotation.</li> <li>b. To set apart explanatory information.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. "The [Mc Clay] library officially opened in 2009."</li> <li>b. Library fines can (and do) get out of control.</li> </ul>  |
| CAPITAL LETTERS   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To start sentences.</li> <li>b. To name places / people / acts of parliament / organisations</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I like cake. It makes me happy.</li> <li>b. Malone Road, Belfast / Tom Selleck / The Good Friday Agreement / National Health Service</li> </ul>   |
| Colon<br>:  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Leads from one clause (full sentence) to another where the second clause acts as an explanation of the first.</li> <li>b. Introduces a list.</li> <li>c. Introduces a quotation, diagram or picture.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The tutor said my work was careless: I don't pay enough attention to punctuation.</li> <li>b. I went to the shop for several things: a sandwich, a paper and a strawberry yogurt.</li> <li>c. According to Bob Dylan: "Money doesn't talk, it swears."<br/><br/>..., as the diagram (below) reveals:</li> </ul> |

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| <p><b>Comma</b></p> <p>,</p>            | <p>a. Separates words in a list (replaces and/or).</p> <p>b. Joins parts of a sentence (used with a connecting word such as because/or/and/but/so).</p> <p>c. To represent missing words.</p> <p>d. To mark an interruption within the sentence.</p> <p>e. Marks introductory clauses and <b>adverbs</b>.</p> | <p>a. I'll have bacon, egg, sausage, beans and toast.</p> <p>b. I intended to finish my coursework on Monday, but I have not read the required books.</p> <p>c. In Italy people speak Italian and in France, French.</p> <p>d. Getting ready to go out, generally speaking, is the highlight of my week.</p> <p>We had a problem, to put it mildly.</p> <p>e. <b>Arguably</b>, my results could improve.</p> |
| <p><b>Dash</b></p> <p>–</p>             | <p>Marks an aside/addition <i>without</i> using a comma or colon.</p>   | <p>Wikipedia is – quite understandably – frowned upon by University tutors.</p>  |
| <p><b>Elipsis</b></p> <p>...</p>        | <p>Marks words omitted from a quotation.</p>  | <p>According to Bob Dylan: "Money [...] swears".</p>   |
| <p><b>Exclamation Mark</b></p> <p>!</p> | <p>Indicates shock, forcefulness or surprise.</p>   | <p>Avoid using exclamation marks in academic writing!</p>  |
| <p><b>Full Stop</b></p> <p>.</p>        | <p>a. Marks the end of a sentence.</p> <p>b. Marks an abbreviation.</p>   | <p>a. They called last orders at the bar.</p> <p>b. Prof. / Alc. % / Uni. / P. (Initial –used in some referencing systems)</p>   |
| <p><b>Hyphen</b></p> <p>-</p>           | <p>a. Joins a <b>single letter</b> or <b>prefix</b> to a word.</p> <p>b. Joins numbers and fractions.</p> <p>c. Compound adjectives to describe nouns.</p>  | <p>a. <b>X</b>-ray / <b>semi</b>-conscious</p> <p>b. I only use two-thirds of my brain.</p> <p>c. Accident-prone (noun+adjective) man; custom-built (noun+participle) car; bad-tempered (<b>adjective + participle</b>) child; nineteenth-century (<b>adjective+noun</b>) art.</p>   |

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| <b>Italics</b>  | <p>a. Adds emphasis or contrast to text, distinguishing certain key words or phrases.</p> <p>b. Distinguishes book, film or journal titles.</p>  | <p>a. Irish weather is wet and windy but it rains in Belfast <i>all</i> the time.</p> <p>b. <i>Hamlet</i> is a masterpiece but I love reading <i>Harry Potter</i>.</p>                       |
| <b>Question Mark<br/>?</b>  | Ends sentences that ask a direct question.   | <p>Can I use a dictionary?</p> <p>Generally, you should not directly address the reader with a question in academic writing.</p>   |
| <p><b>a. 'Inverted Commas'</b></p> <p><b>b. "Quotation Marks"</b></p> | <p>a. Single quotation marks (or inverted commas) mark exact words printed in a text.</p> <p>b. Double quotation marks place a quotation within a quotation.</p> <p>Double check the quotation mark conventions in the referencing system you use!</p> | <p>a. 'This is a direct quotation.'</p> <p>b. 'This is a "quotation within" a quotation.'</p> <p>It is vital to be consistent about when you use the two types.</p>                          |
| <b>Semicolon<br/>;</b>  | <p>a. Separates two or more clauses (full sentences) of equal importance. It implies a relationship between them.</p> <p>b. Separates listed items, especially if it is a complicated list.</p>  | <p>a. They won the battle; the other side won the war.</p> <p>b. There were people from Belfast, Co. Antrim; Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh; Cookstown, Co. Tyrone; and Newcastle, Co. Down.</p> |