



STUDY GUIDE

PUNCTUATION

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Punctuation is used to guide the reader in the natural pauses in writing. It is also there to show how the grammar of a sentence is supposed to work:

A capital letter should be at the beginning of all sentences with **a full stop at the end.**



Colon :

Is most often used to introduce a quotation or a list.



Full stop .

Use full stops more than you expect to. When in doubt, your instinct should always plump for a full stop.



Semicolon ;

Represents a pause longer than a comma but shorter than a full stop (if in doubt about its use do not use it).

Semicolon is used between clauses when the second clause expands or explains the first, e.g. *neither of them moved; they waited to see if the intruder made a quick exit.*

It is also used before clauses which begin with “nevertheless”, “therefore”, “even so”, and “for instance” e.g. *He looked before he leaped; even so he landed in the water.*

It is used to mark off a series of phrases or clauses which themselves contain commas, e.g. *You will need the following ingredients: four eggs, preferably size 3; 4oz caster sugar; a few drops of vanilla essence; and 2oz almonds, which must be ground.*



Question mark ?

Use a question mark every time there is a genuine direct question. E.g. *are you going?* But not in the case of *I asked if he was going?* (Wrong because it is a reported question).



Dashes -

Use dashes but do not overdo them. You can use a pair of dashes - in place of brackets - or a single dash to mark a break in the sentence before a punch line or a throwaway remark: *In life, two things are never with us - death and taxes.*

Apostrophes ‘

They do not make things plural. Incorrect use *1990's, MP's HQ's* should read *1990s, MPs and HQs*.

The general rule is: if something belongs to someone you write *someone's* or for example, the *student's*.

If it belongs to several people (e.g. *the students*), you write the *students'*.

Plurals like *children* that are not written with an 's', take apostrophe's' i.e. *children's*.

Contractions use apostrophes to show where letters are missed out - *can't play, won't play*. *It's* is short for *it is*. Beware of: *its*, (meaning "of it") *yours, hers, ours, theirs, and whose*. None of these have an apostrophe. Contractions are not permitted in academic writing unless written within a quote.

Commas (,)

Commas, like buses, often come in pairs. It is wrong to write, *The reason is as it always was, to save money'*. Two commas should be used, like brackets, either side of the phrase *as it always was*.

The test is whether, grammatically, the sentence would hold up if the section between the commas were removed. The common mistake is to forget the second comma.

Commas are needed, and are not optional, when someone or something is being addressed. *Kiss me, Hardy* should have the comma after me. *Yes Minister* should be *Yes, Minister*.

Pairs of commas should be used when however, say, *meanwhile* and *for instance* are interjected into sentences e.g. *he might be paid, say, £50,000 a year*.

At the beginning of a sentence, some words or phrases need to be cordoned off with a single comma - *However, investigations into..., For instance, if we look at....*

Commas are used to mark off separate items in a list, except for the last two items generally. You can put a comma in before if it is needed to make the sentence clear e.g. *Goods are transported by lorry, horse and cart, and even handcart*.

A strong adjective usually takes commas after each one except the last e.g. *old, crabby, pedantic Dr Johnson*.

For additional help contact the **HE Study Support team** on **01803 540780** or email **hestudy@southdevon.ac.uk**

Double quotation marks/ speech marks “ “

Speech marks are punctuation marks that indicate direct speech in a sentence.

Quotations direct from a book or journal also need to have double quotation marks. Davis et al. (1991, p. 243) stated that “Equilibrium is the sense which tells you when your body is balanced and when it is tipping, turning or inverting”. If the length of the quotation is more than three lines of your text, it should be indented without quotation marks.

Brackets ()

The use of brackets should be kept to a minimum. They are used to indicate a supplementary remark, or a qualification of some sort. Grammatically they work like commas, but the remarks inside the brackets tend to be less important than those inside commas.

Brackets are always used in pairs.

If the brackets only surround part of the sentence, the full stop goes outside. This is the procedure you should follow (under normal circumstances).

Square brackets []

Square brackets are used to indicate your changes or your own comments on somebody else’s writing. The report that 25000 had been killed in battle [a figure shown to be greatly exaggerated] changed the course of the war.

