Notes on Punctuation

Punctuation marks are the "traffic signals" of a language. When correctly used, they guide the reader through the text and makes comprehension easier. However, when incorrectly placed, they can also change the meaning of a sentence. Consider the following example:

Original text: A woman without her man is nothing.

Punctuated text 1:   A woman**,** without her man**,** is nothing.
Punctuated text 2:   A woman**:** without her**,** man is nothing.

Below is a discussion on the uses of different punctuation marks such as the comma, apostrophe, semicolon, colon, hyphen, quotation, and ellipses.

Use of the period

There are only two uses of the period (also known as "full stop" in British English):[3]

- To mark the end of a sentence expressing a statement (if you are unsure whether the words constitute a sentence, look for a verb which is an essential component of a sentence)
- To signify an acronym - [N.A.T.O. for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (although increasingly it is acceptable and even preferable not to use full stops in such cases)]

Note: A common mistake is to use a comma where a full stop should be used,

The following are the uses of some common punctuation marks as discussed by Prof. Rosella Torrecampo during the "Basic Onine Writing Training" for SUC Writers:[1]

Uses of a Comma:

1) In a list
   Oxford comma ~ the comma before "and" or "or" in a series of items.
   Example: Ham**,** eggs**,** and chips

2) Before dialogue
   Example: Mark said**,** "Good morning!"

3) Mark out additional information
   Example: The girl**,** who is wearing a pink shirt**,** is my sister.

4) Before a conjunction (e.g. and   but   or   for   while   yet) introducing an independent clause
   Example: The boys wanted to stay up until midnight, but they grew tired and fell asleep.

5) Enclose parenthetic expressions (additional information) between commas
   Example: The best way to see a country, unless you're pressed for time, is to travel on foot.

Note: When in doubt over where to use a comma, try reading the sentence out loud and, generally speaking, commas should be used where you pause for clarification or breath.

Uses of the Apostrophe

1. Indicates a possessive in a singular noun
   Example: The café's menu

   But when the possessor is a regular plural, the apostrophe follows the "s."
   Example: The cafés' menus

Note: With modern names ending in "s" (including biblical names and any foreign name with an unpronounced final "s"), the "s" is required after the apostrophe.

> Keats's poems
> St. James's Square
> Charles's coffee mug

> With names from the ancient world, it is not.
> > Achilles' heel
> > Archimedes' screw

> If the name ends in an "iz" sound, an exception is made:
> > Bridges' score
> > Moses' tablets
> > Jesus' disciples

2. Indicates time or quantity.
   Two Week's Notice
   The Café will open in two month's time.

3. Indicates the omission of figures in dates
   Example: Batch '08 is so excited to graduate.

4. Indicates the omission of letters
   Examples: The training starts at 8 o' clock every day.
   The gov't is set to battle the insurgents in Basilan.

   It's (it is) your turn.
   It's been several years (It has been several years).

5. Featured in Irish names such as O' Neal and O' Casey.
    'O = Of (?)
    'O = anglicisation of "ua" meaning grandson

6. Indicates the plural of words
   The do's and don'ts of speaking
   She didn't welcome his but's and and's.

Note: The apostrophe doesn't have to appear in the plurals of abbreviations (e.g. DVD's) or plural dates (e.g. 1980's)

Remember: Possessive pronouns do not require an apostrophe
> <u>Possessive Pronouns</u>:

Mine	Ours
Yours	Yours
His	Theirs
Hers	Theirs
Its	Theirs

Uses of Semi-colon

1) Separate two related sentences where there is no conjunction (such as "and" or "but"), and where using only a comma would be ungrammatical.
   Example: She is a good writer**;** she has published several books.

2) Organizes syntax thought where many commas are used
   Example: We bought dairy products like milk, butter, and cheese; vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, and spinach; and some fruits like bananas and mangoes.

3) Linking words such as "however," "nevertheless," "also," "consequently," and "hence" require a semi-colon.
   Example: He spent a lot for the campaign; however, the majority of the public saw through his pretense and did not vote for him.

Uses of Colon:

1) Separates statements "placed baldly in dramatic opposition"
   a. Lawrence could not speak: he was drunk.
   b. Man proposes: God disposes.
   It is also used when the second statement reaffirms, explains or illustrates the first

2) Starts lists
   a. Please purchase the ff: furniture, glassware, ingredients, and linen.

3) Sets off book and film sub-titles from the main titles
   a. Gandhi II : The Mahatma Strikes Back

4) Separates dramatic characters forming a dialogue:
   Philip: How do you get to Cebu?
   o Anne: You can go there by plane, by ship, or by bus.

Uses of the Hyphen[3]

1) Use a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun:
   Examples: a one-way street
                chocolate-covered peanuts
                well-known author

   However, when compound modifiers come after a noun, they are not hyphenated:
   Examples: The peanuts were chocolate covered.
                The author was well known.

2) Use a hyphen with compound numbers:
   Examples: forty-six
                sixty-three
                Our much-loved teacher was sixty-three years old.

3) Use a hyphen to avoid confusion or an awkward combination of letters:
   Examples: re-sign a petition (vs. resign from a job)
                semi-independent (but semiconscious)
                shell-like (but childlike)

4) Use a hyphen with the prefixes ex- (meaning former), self-, all-; with the suffix -elect; between a prefix and a capitalized word; and with figures or letters:
   Examples: ex-husband   anti-American
                self-assured   T-shirt
                mid-September   pre-Civil War
                all-inclusive   mid-1980s
                mayor-elect

5) Use a hyphen to divide words at the end of a line if necessary, and make the break only between syllables:
   Examples: pref-er-ence
                sell-ing
                in-di-vid-u-al-ist

6) For line breaks, divide already hyphenated words only at the hyphen:

Examples: mass-   self-
               produced   conscious

7) For line breaks in words ending in -ing, if a single final consonant in the root word is doubled before the suffix, hyphenate between the consonants; otherwise, hyphenate at the suffix itself:

Examples: plan-ning
               run-ning
               driv-ing
               call-ing

8) Never put the first or last letter of a word at the end or beginning of a line, and don't put two-letter suffixes at the beginning of a new line:

Examples: lovely (Do not separate to leave ly beginning a new line.)
            eval-u-ate (Separate only on either side of the u; do not leave the initial e- at the end of a line.)

Uses of the Dash

When you type two hyphens together (--), most word processors automatically combine them into a single dash. The dash (or em-dash) should be used for a specific reason, and not be overused in academic writing.

1) Use a dash to take the place of the more formal colon, particularly when you want to emphasize a point:

   Example: Students were asked to bring their own supplies—paper, pencils, and calculator.

2) Use a pair of dashes in place of parentheses when you want to place more emphasis on the content:

   Example: The participants—two from group A and two from group B—tested negatively.

3) Use a dash at the beginning and end of a series separated by commas:

   Example: The students—Jim, Marla, and Sara—were told they could leave.

4) Use a dash to mean *namely, in other words, or that is* before an explanation:

   Example: The man—the one with his hand in the air—looks desperate.

5) Use a dash to indicate an abrupt break in thought:

   Example: The professor was unwilling to change the due date—even for a candy bar!

6) If the sentence resumes after the break, use a second dash:

   Examples: The professor was unwilling—even for a candy bar!—to change the due date.

   After the professor made her statement—"I'll extend the due date, but just this one time." —we applauded.

7) Use a dash to interrupt the main idea in a sentence to insert another, related, idea:

   Example: The student—the one dressed in black, sitting in the corner—let out a cry.

The en dash is used between equal weighted words in a compound adjective. It is made by typing the first adjective, followed by a space, a hyphen, another space, and the second adjective:

   Examples: The Yankee – Red Sox rivalry

   The New York – Beijing flight

Most often the en dash is used to express a range:

   Examples: pages 10 – 23
   100 – 300 participants
   January – May 2009.

It can also stand for the words *and, to,* or *versus* between two words of equal weight:

Example: *The Israeli – Palestinian Peace Conference.*

Uses of Quotations

"The primary function of quotation marks is to set off and represent exact language (either spoken or written) that has come from somebody else. The quotation mark is also used to designate speech acts in fiction and sometimes poetry. Since you will most often use them when working with outside sources, successful use of quotation marks is a practical defense against accidental plagiarism and an excellent practice in academic honesty."[2]

A direct quotation is the inclusion of another person's exact words into your own writing. The following are some general rules on the use of quotations as given in the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) website:

1. Quotation marks always come in pairs. Do not open a quotation and fail to close it at the end of the quoted material.

    Example: Martha replied, "I will try to be there before noon."

2. Capitalize the first letter of a direct quote when the quoted material is a complete sentence.
    Example: Mr. Johnson, who was working in his field that morning, said, "The alien spaceship appeared right before my own two eyes."

3. Do not use a capital letter when the quoted material is a fragment or only a piece of the original material's complete sentence.
    Example: Although Mr. Johnson has seen odd happenings on the farm, he stated that the spaceship "certainly takes the cake" when it comes to unexplainable activity.

4. If a direct quotation is interrupted mid-sentence, do not capitalize the second part of the quotation.
    Example: "I didn't see an actual alien being," Mr. Johnson said, "but I sure wish I had."

5. In all the examples above, note how the period or comma punctuation always comes before the final quotation mark. It is important to realize also that when you are using MLA or some other form of documentation, this punctuation rule may change.

When quoting text with a spelling or grammar error, you should transcribe the error exactly in your own text. However, also insert the term sic in italics directly after the mistake, and enclose it in brackets. Sic is from the Latin, and translates to "thus," "so," or "just as that." The word tells the reader that your quote is an exact reproduction of what you found, and the error is not your own.

    Example: Mr. Johnson says of the experience, "it's made me reconsider the existence of extraterestials [sic]."

6. Quotations are most effective if you use them sparingly and keep them relatively short. Too many quotations in a research paper will get you accused of not producing original thought or material.

Sources:

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