

Punctuation Guidelines – Elizabeth Owens

The basic punctuation marks are:

- . period (declarative sentence makes a statement; imperative sentence gives a command)
- ? question mark (interrogative sentence asks a question)
- ! exclamation point (exclamatory sentence shows emotion of some kind)
- , comma
- ' apostrophe
- : colon
- ; semicolon
- “ ” quotes
- ‘ ’ single quotes
- hyphen or – dash
- () parentheses (single = parenthesis)
- ... ellipsis marks (ellipses for plural)

The **period .** is also called a full stop. It signals the end of a thought. When reading aloud, stop, breathe, and then continue reading.

I am going to school today. (declarative) Give me my sweater. (imperative)

The **question mark ?** is asking something. Like a period, you stop, breathe, and then continue reading.

Are you going to school today? What will you wear? (interrogative)

The **exclamation point !** shows emotion. Like the period and question mark, you should stop for a breath before continuing reading. The following sentences are exclamatory.

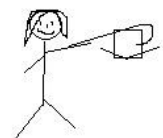
I hate going to school! I am so excited that it's the last day! Watch out for that car!

The **comma ,** separates a clause, phrase, or extra information from the rest of the sentence, and is also used when making a list. With a conjunction (and/but), it joins two sentences. You should pause slightly before continuing reading.

- If you are done with that, please throw it away. (conditional clause – “if”)
- I ran away, rather quickly, when I saw the bear coming toward me. (phrase)
- I was born in Ft. Hood, TX, in 1963. (explanatory information – what state it's in)
- The leader, Capt. Jones, was doing a great job. (additional information that can be taken out)
- I need eggs, milk, and butter. (a list)
- The test is starting, and I didn't even study. (two sentences – subject verb, conj subject verb)

The **apostrophe '** shows possession or indicates a contraction. It is NEVER used for plurals unless to indicate possession of a plural. (**two babies, both tables, 10 hats, the two babies' toys**)

Possessives – the apostrophe shows ownership – the *hook* (') is the apostrophe grabbing the hat to show that the hat belongs to the boy
The cat's tail... (the cat owns its tail)
The teachers' classrooms... (the teachers – plural – own their classrooms)



The boy's hat

Contractions – two words combined into one

- do not = don't (' replaces the o)
- she's = she is (' replaces the i)
- would've = Would have (' replaces the ha)
- wouldn't = would not (' replaces the o)
- they're = they are (' replaces the a)
- they'll = they will (' replaces the wi)

The **colon** : indicates “list follows” or a clause that can stand alone. Pause briefly, longer than comma.

I need three items from the store: eggs, milk, butter.

There’s only one thing left to do: start the project from the beginning.

The **semicolon** ; joins two complete thoughts or separates confusing lists. Breathe or pause a bit longer than with a comma.

The test is starting; I didn’t even study. (there should be a subject verb before and after)

The teachers are from Mt. Pleasant, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; and Washington, D.C.

The **quotation mark** “” is used to show someone’s exact words (as citation) or as spoken word (dialogue), and for titles of books, movies, poems, etc. Usually, punctuation goes inside the quotes.

The girl said she was “tired of looking haggard” before she left. (indicates exact words)

The girl said, “I am tired of looking haggard.” Then she left. (indicates dialogue)

“I am,” she said wearily before leaving, “so tired of looking haggard.” (indicates split dialogue)

“I am tired,” she said. “I am leaving now!” (dialogue with two sentences)

Her book starts out “...a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in

want of a wife” (Austen 1). (MLA citation of a quote from a book)

Jane Austen’s book, “Pride and Prejudice,” is a satire on marriage. (book title)

“The Ultimate Gift” was an excellent movie. (movie title)

Who is the author of “The Road not Taken”? (Poem; question is part of the sentence, not title)

The **single quote** ‘ ’ is used within double quotes, when indicating differences, or for computer keys.

“I was going home, but she told me, ‘You can’t!’ and held me back,” the girl complained.

“I love the book ‘Lord of the Rings,’ but the movie was terrible,” I said to the student.

The author wrote, “You need to get the magazine ‘Discover’ and read my article.”

The words for ‘to be’ are sometimes confused with ‘being.’

The keys to restart the computer are ‘ctrl – alt – del’.

The **hyphen - / dash – are** two different marks. The hyphen connects words to be used for compounds, numbers, and multiple modifiers before a noun; the dash is used to set off/emphasize material within a sentence.

Hyphen You must use self-control if you expect to enforce anti-smoking laws.

I saw about twenty-three birds flying over the house.

The three-year-old boy was reading very well.

I saw my 11th- and 12th-grade teachers yesterday.

The yellow-orange sun was bright today.

My son-in-law is a great father toward my grandchildren.

Dash Yesterday – much against my will – I cleaned my refrigerator!

The dress – yes, that one I just bought! – was ruined when I spilled my coffee.

The **parentheses ()** are used to de-emphasize material. It is not needed, but included anyway.

Miss Owens (yes, that crazy ESL teacher) believes in reading and writing every day.

The dog (white and gray) was hard to see as he lay on the carpet.

The **ellipsis marks or ellipses ...** indicates that words are left out within a direct quotation.

Austen starts her book with the words “. . . a single man . . . must be in want of a wife.” (The beginning of her sentence is missing, as are the words “in possession of a good fortune” after “man”.)

He was thinking . . . then thinking more, that maybe . . . no, it’s not a good idea.

(In this case, the ellipses indicate a train of thought.)