

Good punctuation is crucial for successful academic writing. The full stop (.) and the comma (,) are the two most important punctuation marks. But to be restricted to just two forms of punctuation mark, when writing your essay, is like building a house using only a hammer and a saw: you can do it, but not very well. By learning to use more, or all, of the available forms of punctuation you will be able to communicate and express your ideas, and arguments, more clearly.

<p>Full Stop (.)</p> <p>Full stops have three distinct uses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To mark the end of a sentence. 2. To indicate abbreviated words (unless first and last letters of the word are shown). 3. To punctuate numbers and dates. 	<p>Example</p> <p>The cat is completely black.</p> <p>The teacher will be John Smith (B. Sci.).</p> <p>All assignments should be submitted by 6. 6. 13.</p>
<p>Colon (:)</p> <p>A colon can be used to indicate that a list, quotation or summary follows.</p> <p>A colon can also be used to separate an initial sentence/clause from a second clause, list, phrase or quotation that supports the first in a particular way.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>The equipment you need includes: a hammer, a packet of nails, a screwdriver, and a saw.</p> <p>Writing an assignment is not easy: to begin with you have to do a lot of research.</p> <p>The job of the colon is simple: to introduce.</p>
<p>Semicolon (;)</p> <p>Separates two complete sentences that are closely linked. The semicolon can be replaced by a full stop, but the direct link between the two parts is lost.</p> <p>A semicolon also serves as a second level of punctuation in a series of words or phrases which already have commas, making some internal divisions.</p>	<p>Example</p> <p>To err is human; to forgive, divine.</p> <p>Don't go near the lions; they could bite you.</p> <p>Each group should take a portable stove, preferably with one spare gas bottle; enough freeze-dried, light weight, pre-prepared food for two nights; enough water for two days; and at least one loaf of bread.</p>

Apostrophe (') Two uses:

1. Contractions

A contraction is a shortened version of a word. An apostrophe is used to show that something has been left out, and where it has been left out.

2. Possessives (ownership)

An apostrophe is used to indicate ownership/possession with nouns. To show ownership by a single individual, insert the apostrophe between the noun and the 's'. To show ownership by more than one individual, use the apostrophe at the end of the word.

(**Be careful:** It's is the contraction of 'it is'.)

For a more detailed explanation of apostrophes see our guide "Using apostrophes (with exercises)"

Example

don't (do not) It'll (It will) she'll (she will)
It's too cold to go swimming today.
I don't think she'll come to the party.

the dog's tail (belonging to a single dog)
the women's magazines
the boys' football boots (belonging to more than one boy)
Einstein's theory of relativity

(The dog is chasing its own tail! Possessive pronoun **its** like **his**, **hers**, so no apostrophe.

Question Mark (?)

A question mark is used at the end of a sentence that is a question.

Example

Have the students completed the exam?

Comma (,)

Commas are used in longer sentences to separate information into readable units. A single comma ensures correct reading of a sentence which starts with a long introductory element.

Pairs of commas help in the middle of a sentence to set off any string of words which is either a parenthesis, or in contrast, to whatever went before.

A set of commas is a means of separating items in a list within a sentence.

Sometimes a comma is needed between the last two items to ensure clarity.

Example

When the Rugby World Cup was held in NZ in 2012, the final was a close fought contest between the All Blacks and the French team.

In the storm, although nobody was killed, a number of people were badly injured.

The details required are name, date of birth, address and telephone number.

The main divisions of the economy are agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries.

Hyphen (-)

A hyphen links two or more words that normally would not be placed together so that they work as one idea and these are called compound nouns.

Example

Stonier's post-industrial economy is a service economy.
There are four types of information-related machines.

Parentheses ()

In citation systems like APA, parentheses are used for in-text referencing.

Example

Larsen and Greene (2007) studied the effects of pollution in three major cities.

The effects of pollution were shown to be significant (Larsen & Green, 2007).

Parentheses are brackets used to include extra or non-essential material in sentences. Parentheses should be used sparingly and always appear in

The colour of the sky (red and yellow) indicated that there was bad weather on the way.

Exclamation Mark (!)

An exclamation mark is used at the end of a sentence and indicates surprise, anger, or alarm.

Exclamation marks should be used very sparingly and are not often used in academic writing.

Example

The police stormed in and arrested her. How disgraceful!

Ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis consists of three full stops. It indicates that material has been left out of a quotation.

When quoting, it is sometimes necessary to leave out words or lines for reasons of relevance or length.

Using an ellipsis makes any omissions known to your reader.

Example

"But to be restricted to just two forms of punctuation mark ... is like building a house using only a hammer and a saw: you can do it, but not very well".

Adapted from Collinson, I., Mort, P., & Downey, T-L. (2011). *A rough guide to punctuation*. Sydney, Australia: The University of New South Wales.



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