

PUNCTUATION JUNGLE

COMMA ,

The **comma (,)** is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence. Additionally, it is used in letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Separating elements within sentences: *Suzi wanted the black , green , and blue shoes.*

Letter Salutations: *Dear Uncle John ,*
Separation of two complete sentences: *We went to the movies, and we went to the beach.*

PERIOD .

The **period (.)** is placed at the end of declarative sentences, statements thought to be complete and after many abbreviations.

As a sentence ender: *Jane and Jack went to the market.*

After an abbreviation: *Her Mar. birthday came and went.*

QUESTION MARK ?

Use a **question mark (?)** to indicate a direct question when placed at the end of a sentence.

When did Jane leave for the market?

EXCLAMATION POINT !

The **exclamation point/mark (!)** is used when a person wants to express a sudden outcry or add emphasis.

Within dialogue: *"Holy cow!" screamed Jane.*

To emphasize a point: *My mother-in-law's rants make me furious!*

SEMICOLON ;

The **semicolon (;)** is used to connect independent clauses. It shows a closer relationship between the clauses than a period would show.

John was hurt ; he knew she only said it to upset him.

COLON :

A **colon (:)** has two main uses: After a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series. It is also often used after the salutation of a business letter. Within time expressions. Within time, it is used to separate out the hour and minute: *12:15 p.m.*

HYPHEN -

A **hyphen (-)** is the same symbol as the endash. However, it has slightly different usage rules. A hyphen is used between the parts of a compound word or name or between the syllables of a word, especially when divided at the end of a line of text. Examples of a hyphen in use include:

Between a compound name:

Mrs. Smith - Reynolds

Within a compound word:

back - to - back

DASH —

An **endash (–)** is a symbol that is used in writing or printing to connect numbers or to connect elements of a compound adjective, such as *1880 - 1945* or *Princeton - New York trains.*

The **emdash (—)** looks like the endash but has more complicated grammatical use. The symbol of is used to:

- Indicate a break in thought or sentence structure
- Introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition, or explanation
- Separate two clauses

We only wanted to get two birds - but the clerk talked us into four pregnant parakeets.

PARENTHESES ()

Parentheses () are curved notations used to contain further thoughts or qualifying remarks. However, parentheses can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning in most cases.

John and Jane (who were actually half brother and sister) both have red hair.

BRACKETS []

Brackets ([]) are the squared off notations used for technical explanations. YourDictionary uses them when you look up word definitions. At the bottom of each definition page, brackets surround a technical description of where the word originated.

BRACES { }

Braces ({}) are used to contain two or more lines of text or listed items to show that they are considered as a unit. They are not commonplace in most writing, but can be seen in computer programming to show what should be contained within the same lines.

QUOTATIONS MARKS “ ”

Quotations marks (" ") are a pair of punctuation used primarily to mark the beginning and end of a passage attributed to another and repeated word for word. They are also used to indicate meanings and to indicate the unusual or dubious status of a word.

Single quotation marks (') are used most frequently for quotes within quotes.

ELLIPSES ...

The **ellipses mark (. . .)** is generally represented by three periods, although it is occasionally demonstrated with three asterisks (***).

Ellipses are used:

- In writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words.
- Within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning.
- Students writing research papers or newspapers quoting parts of speeches will often employ ellipses to avoid copying lengthy text that is not needed.

APOSTROPHE ’

An **apostrophe (’)** is used to indicate the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case, or the plurals of lowercase letters. Examples of the apostrophe in use include:

Omission of letters from a word:

An issue of nat'l importance.

Possessive case: *Sara's dog bites.*

Plural for lowercase letters:

Six people were told to mind their p's and q's.

It should be noted that, according to Purdue University, some teachers and editors enlarge the scope of the use of apostrophe, and prefer their use on symbols (&'s), numbers (7's) and capitalized letters (Q&A's), even though they are not necessary.