Basic Punctuation

A guide to basic punctuation.

This is a short guide to refresh your knowledge of basic punctuation. Don't be afraid – it's not that bad!
If you have any other questions, please feel free to come and find me, or email me!
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FULL STOPS.

When do we use a full stop?

- To end a sentence (a sentence is a group of words that contains a verb and has a complete meaning).
- To separate one sentence from another.

When a word is written in a shortened form it is called an abbreviation. Some abbreviations need full stops; others do not.

When the FIRST letter and only PART of the words are used, a full stop is added to show that part of the word is missing. For example:

Monday => Mon.
Captain => Capt.

Sometimes people use an initial for their first name rather than writing it in full.

John Mark Smith => J.M. Smith.

A full stop follows EVERY follows every name that is abbreviated or shortened.

Some abbreviations DO NOT need to be followed by a full stop.
When the FIRST and LAST letter of an abbreviation are used, no full stop is needed.
For example:

Mister => Mr
Doctor => Dr
Street => St

ACRONYMS are abbreviations made up of the first letters of each word in the name. They do not include unimportant words like 'of' or 'the'.
For example:

Unidentified Flying Object => UFO
British Broadcasting Corporation => BBC
United States of America => USA

ACRONYMS are not followed by a full stop.

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CAPITAL LETTERS.

When do we use capital letters?

Capital letters are used at the start of a sentence and for PROPER nouns (names of people and places). You should also write 'I' (I go to school in term time) as a capital letter.

X rebecca was born in maidstone and then moved to ashford when she was six years old. i met her when she moved in next door. she has a brother called thomas.	✓ Rebecca was born in Maidstone and then moved to Ashford when she was six years old. I met her when she moved in next door. She has a brother called Thomas.

QUESTION MARKS.

Question marks are used when:

! We end a sentence that is a question:
How many players are there in a rugby team?
Do you know the way to the airport?

! At the end of direct speech when a question is asked:
"What time do you think you will be home?" asked Mum.
"Do you need be back by a certain time?" replied Sarah.

! When we are not sure of detail:
I asked the midwife (or it could have been a nurse?) how to get to the maternity ward.

! For a single word question:
How? When? Where?
Why? Who?

EXCLAMATION MARKS.

When do we use an exclamation mark? We use them to draw attention to certain words or phrases.

! Strong feelings: Strong feelings or emotions are often written as single words or very short sentences. This helps them to stand out.

Congratulations! That's fantastic!
No!
Ouch!

! Amazement: You can use an exclamation mark when something surprising happens.

I just saw a wrestler wearing ballet shoes!
Jessica has just won the lottery!
Look at how fast that car is travelling!

! Giving orders.

Line up in silence!
Look out!
Help!

! Humour: An exclamation mark can show that you are joking.

I thought he was really clever, driving the wrong way up a one way street!
Dinner is so late, I'm now in the mood for breakfast!
You look so lovely, covered in mud and bruises!

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COMMAS.

When do we use commas? There are four particular situations...

1. Commas can LINK two sentences.

Without commas, we would have many short sentences and our writing would be full of stops and starts. For example:

Without commas	With commas
Tom has a job for one year. He will work in a garage.	Tom has a job for one year, working in a garage

2. Commas separate ADJECTIVES and ADVERBS.

When more than one ADJECTIVE describes a NOUN, or more than one ADVERB describes a VERB, we put in commas to separate the ADJECTIVES or ADVERBS.

- It was a damp, wet, miserable day.
- The two boys drove noisily, carelessly and thoughtlessly through the village.

3. Commas are used in LISTS.

Commas are used to separate items in a list.

- Mum bought apples, bananas, bread, butter, milk and sugar at the shop.
- I have travelled by car, bus, coach, train, aeroplane and boat.

4. Commas separate extra information inside a sentence.

When a word or group of words is added to a sentence to give us more information, or to make it more interesting, commas are added BEFORE and AFTER the extra word or group of words.

- I was walking to town with my friend, Emily, when I saw Neil, my brother-in-law, driving to work.
- I thought it would be a good idea, renting my own place, but I found it lonely.

APOSTROPHES.

An apostrophe is used to show OWNERSHIP and OMISSION (when we miss something out).

✐ POSSESSION

Singular (when there is only one owner)

When we mean: The house belonging to Susan, we can keep it short by saying:

'*Susan's house.*'

To show that the house belongs to Susan, we put an apostrophe and an 's' after the word Susan. We do this whenever the own is a single person or thing.

✐ Plural (more than one owner)

When we mean: The bedroom slept in by the girls, we can keep it short by saying:

'The girls' bedroom.'

Notice that because more than one girl sleeps in the bedroom, the apostrophe goes after the 's'. Had the bedroom been slept in by only one girl only, it would have been written 'the girl's bedroom'.

✐ COMMON MISTAKE: The word its does not have an apostrophe for possession.

Example: she saw its teeth glinting.

SPEECH MARKS.

Speech marks are used to show…

- Words that are actually spoken (direct speech).
- Speech marks are sometimes called quotation marks. They mark the beginning and end of words spoken.
- When we are writing the words that are actually spoken, we place speech marks (two inverted commas “) before and speech marks (two inverted commas”) after those words.

“Oh no. Not cabbage again!” said Tom.

- Speech marks are NOT used for indirect speech.

Tom said that he did not want sprouts again.

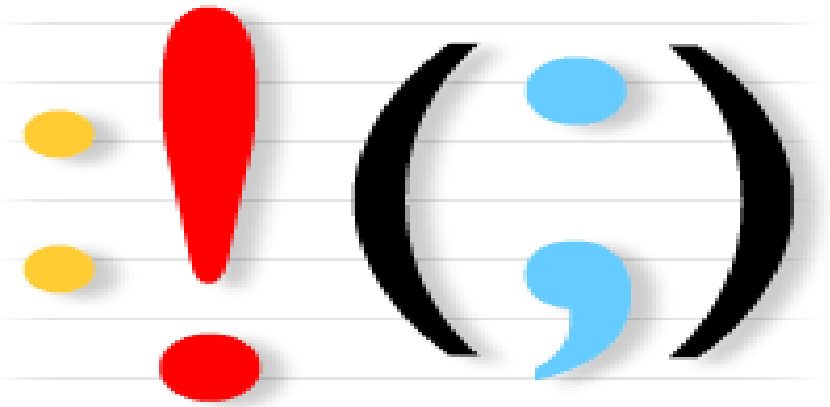
<u>Punctuation with speech marks.</u>

The first word inside the speech marks should have a capita letter.

If a speech is broken in two, the second part need not have a capital.

“No one,” said Annabel, “wants to go out on Saturday night. How boring is that!”

All punctuation marks (commas, question marks etc) should be placed inside the speech marks.



COLONS.

Colons are used at the following times.

- To introduce a word or phrase that adds more detail to a sentence. *The man was blind: he had been injured in the Gulf War.*
- To introduce lists. *Please buy the following items: milk, bread, eggs and tea.*
- To introduce a well-known expression. *Three of us tried to fix the computer. In the end, we left Jack to it: 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.'*
- After certain key words or phrases. *In other words:... As follows:... Below:...*
- To express ratio. *1:3, 3:8.*

SEMI-COLONS.

Semi colons are mid-way between a FULL STOP and a COMMA.

Semi-colons are used in three different situations.

To separate parts of a sentence.

Normally, you would separate two parts of a sentence with a full stop and write them as two separate sentences.
However, when the first part links to or has something to do with the second part, they are separated by a semi-colon.

To separate items in a complicated list.

Semi colons can be used in the place of commas in a list. For example:

For your journey to the rainforest, you will to pack a light, cotton shirt; a pair of cool cotton shorts; a hat; rubber soled shoes; binoculars; mosquito net and sun tan lotion.

Before certain key words or phrases (particularly, CONNECTIVES or LINKING words).

Examples are:

Therefore	Consequently	Moreover
Nevertheless	However	For example