

Punctuation

The sole purpose of punctuation is to help the reader to understand clearly the meaning of what is written. Errors in punctuation can create confusion and lead to failure in communication. If you are using rather a lot of punctuation marks in your writing, you can be sure that errors are being made and you should begin again.

When we speak, we automatically use punctuation by inserting pauses to allow our listener to understand our conversation. We also give our listener many other clues to help him or her understand our message. Punctuation enables us to do the same writing. It helps us to make sense of what we read and understand our writing. It separates one group of words from another and gives the reader clues and special information.

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All of these symbols indicate the end of a sentence.

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Commas are used to separate two or more nouns.

Please order some paper, pencils and ink cartridges.

To mark off two separate clauses.

I did not realise it was poor quality, otherwise I would not have bought it.

They also separate a descriptive group of words, separate a word or group of words from the main part of the sentence and to mark off words like **'therefore', 'however'**, at the beginning or in the middle of sentences.

Janice, the new assistant, started work today.

A word processor is, in my opinion, all I need for my work.

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Semi-colons

It is possible to write perfect English without any semi-colons but they can sometimes be useful.

Semi-colons represent a pause longer than a comma and shorter than a full stop. They are used to separate two parts of a sentence where a comma

would be insufficient. A semi-colon is also used to separate items in a list which already contains commas:

We must buy the new directory; it will be very valuable for reference purposes.

Three new employees will be needed in personnel, purchasing and sales; one in marketing; two in administration and one in computing.

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Colons

Is most commonly used to indicate that something will follow, for example a list or a quotation:

Many qualities are required: tact, diplomacy and patience.

Confucius said: 'Success can only be achieved through thorough preparation. Without such preparation there is sure to be failure.'

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Dash

Used to show a change in thought in a sentence or as an alternative to brackets:

I never thought I would pass my exam – but I was wrong!

Everyone – and that includes you – must attend the staff meeting.

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Hyphens

Mainly used in compound words, where two or more words are treated as one:

Self-centred, user-friendly, large-scale, up-to-date.

