

Rules of punctuation

Capital letters

A capital letter is used:

- to begin a sentence. *It is cold today.*
- for days of the week, months and public holidays.
Sunday, August, May Day Bank Holiday
- for names of people and places.
This is Paul and he's from New York.
- for people's titles.
Mr and Mrs Jones, Dr Miller, Prince William, etc.
- for nationalities and languages.
She is Mexican.
Can you speak Spanish?
Note: The personal pronoun *I* is always a capital letter.
Jenny and I are friends.

Full stop (.)

A full stop is used to end a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation.

Sue is away on holiday. She's in Brazil.

Comma (,)

A comma is used:

- to separate words in a list.
There's lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and olives in the salad.
- to separate a non-essential relative clause (i.e. a clause giving extra information which is not essential to the meaning of the main clause) from the main clause.
Mary, who has moved here, is a teacher.
- after certain joining words/transitional phrases (e.g. **in addition to this, moreover, for example, however, in conclusion**, etc).
For example, I like playing tennis and swimming.
- when a complex sentence begins with an **if-clause** or other dependent clauses.
If Bob isn't there, ask for Ann.
Note: No comma is used, however, when they follow the main clause.
- to separate questions tags from the rest of the sentence.
It's hot, isn't it?
- before the words **asked, said**, etc when followed by direct speech.
Max said, "It was late to call them."

Question mark (?)

A question mark is used to end a direct question.

What time does Sheila arrive?

Exclamation mark (!)

An exclamation mark is used to end an exclamatory sentence (i.e. a sentence showing admiration, surprise, joy, anger, etc).

He's so tall!

What a nice dress!

Quotation marks (" ", ' ')

- Double quotes are often used in direct speech to report the exact words someone said.
"Nora called for you," Mark said to me.
- Single quotes are used when you are quoting someone in direct speech (nested quotes).
"She got up, shouted 'I'm late' and ran out of the room," Bob said.

Colon (:)

A colon is used to introduce a list.

To make an omelette we need the following: eggs, milk, butter, cheese, salt and pepper.

Semicolon (;)

A semicolon is used to join two independent clauses without using a conjunction.

We can go to the aquarium; Tuesdays are quiet there.

Brackets ()

Brackets are used to separate extra information from the rest of the sentence.

The Taj Mahal (built between 1622 and 1653) is in India.

Apostrophe (')

An apostrophe is used:

- in short forms to show that one or more letters or numbers have been left out.
She's (= she is) *sleeping now.*
This restaurant opened in '99. (= 1999)
- before or after the possessive **-s** to show ownership or the relationship between people.
Charlee's dog, my dad's sister (singular noun + 's)
the twins' sister (plural noun + ')
the children's balls (irregular plural + 's)