

Punctuation Marks

APOSTROPHES

The apostrophe is used with possessives. Possession means that someone or something owns or has someone or something else. Look at the following example:

The woman's shoes are made of leather.

The woman owns shoes. In other words, the woman possesses shoes, so the possessive case must be used: *woman's*. Use this simple test to determine if a word shows possession:

woman's shoes = shoes of the woman

The *of* phrase indicates ownership.

Use the apostrophe to show possession.

- 1. Words that do not end in -s:** Add an apostrophe followed by an -s.

Singular Noun: The *cat's ears* are small.

Plural Noun: The *children's teacher* is young.

Indefinite Pronoun: She was *everybody's friend*.

No one's answer was correct.

- 2. Words that end in -s:** Add an apostrophe only.

Plural Noun: *Students' questions* need to be answered.

Singular Noun: *Mr. Oates' contribution* was a large one.

You could also use *Mr. Oates's contribution* in the last example; however, if adding another -s makes pronunciation difficult, omit the second -s.

- 3. Nouns of more than one word:** Add an apostrophe followed by an -s to the last word in the group:

Her *mother-in-law's visit* begins tomorrow.

Our *department chairperson's approval* is necessary.

- 4. Words that show individual possession:** Add an apostrophe followed by an -s to each word:

Karen's and David's doctors have offices in the same building.

The sentence shows individual possession. Karen has a doctor, and David has a doctor.

- 5. Words that show joint possession:** Add an apostrophe followed by an -s to the last word:

Randall and Donna's friendship is something they cherish.

Randall and Donna possess something together—friendship.

6. Personal pronouns (*his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs, whose*): Do not use the apostrophe:

The copy of the agenda is *yours*.

The soccer ball is *theirs*.

7. Plural nouns that are not possessive: Do not use the apostrophe:

The *trees* are green and beautiful.

Mark owns two *cars* and three *houses*.

8. Verbs ending in -s: Do not use the apostrophe:

The dessert *looks* delicious and fattening.

The horse *races* across the field.

A contraction is a way to combine two words into one word by omitting some of the letters and replacing those letters with an apostrophe.

Use the apostrophe for contractions. Here are some examples:

It's time for the news report. (*It's* is a contraction for *it is*.)

They're not going to the game. (*They're* is a contraction for *they are*.)

I won't be at the meeting. (*Won't* is a contraction for *will not*.)

Using contractions is usually considered appropriate for informal writing. If you are writing a formal paper, you should avoid using contractions. As always, you should let your topic, your purpose in writing, and your audience determine the level of formality of your writing.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Write the correct possessive form in the blank.

Example: (mother) I like to wear my mother's shoes.

- (week) We lost a _____ work on the computer during the power failure.
- (soldiers) The _____ boots were shined.
- (men) The _____ locker room is being painted.
- (women) She checked the _____ baggage claim tickets.
- (theirs) The Winton account is _____.



EXERCISE 2 ▶ Write your own sentences using the contraction formed by the words in parentheses.

Example: (I + have) I've worked for twelve hours without a break.

- (you + are) _____

- (will + not) _____

- (they + have) _____

- (I + will) _____

- (who + is) _____

- (it + is) _____

QUOTATION MARKS

There are two kinds of quotations: direct and indirect. A direct quotation is exact repetition of what someone has said or written. An indirect quotation states what someone has said or written but not in the exact words. Look at the following examples:

Direct Quotation: Dr. Marks said, “My platform includes opposition to mandatory drug testing.”

Indirect Quotation: Dr. Marks said that his platform includes opposition to mandatory drug testing.

Use quotation marks around direct quotations. Quotation marks are always used in pairs. It is important to use other punctuation correctly when you use quotation marks.

1. Put commas and periods inside quotation marks.

Comma: “I did not like his jokes,” she remarked.

Period: I said, “You have no place to go.”

Notice that the first word of the direct quotation is capitalized.

Split quotation (one sentence): “I cannot take you to the airport,” he said, “because I have to work late.”

The second part of the direct quotation begins with a lowercase letter because the speaker’s words make up only one sentence.

Split quotation (two sentences): “I will meet you Friday,” Tom said. “The meeting begins at noon.”

There is a period after *said*, and the second sentence begins with a capital letter.

2. Put question marks and exclamation points inside quotation marks only if they belong to the quoted words.

Part of quotation: Paul asked, “Where is she now?”

“Leave me alone!” he shouted.

If the question mark or exclamation point applies to the entire sentence, put it outside the quotation marks.

Applies to entire sentence: Who wrote, “All the world’s a stage”? He said, “I forgot”!

Use quotation marks around certain titles. The titles requiring quotation marks are the following:

1. Articles in periodicals (magazines)

“Waiting in the Wings” (in *Saturday Review*)

2. Articles in newspapers

“Concert Honors Berlin” (in *The Daily Oklahoman*)

3. Short stories

“The Lottery” (by Shirley Jackson)

4. Poems

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (by Robert Frost)

5. Essays

“On Keeping a Notebook” (by Joan Didion)

6. Chapters or subdivisions of books
“Youth and Chivalry” (Chapter 3 in *A Distant Mirror* by Barbara W. Tuchman)
7. Songs
“Lazybones” (by Johnny Mercer and Hoagy Carmichael)
8. Episodes of television and radio programs
“The Coronado Mob” (on *60 Minutes*)



EXERCISE 1 ► Punctuate the direct quotations below. If the sentence includes an indirect quotation, do not use quotation marks.

Example: “I insist,” he said.

1. When are we going to eat lunch he asked.
2. It’s raining again I grumbled.
3. Hannah said that her mother worries too much.
4. The author writes like everything else, childhood escapes a flat generalization.
5. Your problem is laziness he said there is nothing I can do to help you.

COLONS

A colon is usually used to introduce a list or an explanation. Do not confuse the colon with the semicolon. What precedes the colon is usually a complete sentence, but what follows the colon is often not a complete sentence.

Use the colon to introduce items in a series. Here is an example:

We sell three popular brands of watches: Bulova, Seiko, and Fossil.

If you are typing, two spaces follow the colon.

The colon often takes place of a word or phrase like *namely*, *for example*, or *such as*:

We sell three popular brands of watches, namely, Bulova, Seiko, and Fossil.

Use the colon to introduce a series or statement with *the following* or *as follows*. Look at the following examples:

Series: Her most impressive characteristics are the following: intelligence, sincerity, and innocence.

Statement (complete sentence for explanation of preceding sentence):

The only conclusion the supervisor can reach is as follows: the quality of the work depends upon the working conditions.

The sentence following the colon can begin with either a lowercase letter or a capital letter.

Do not use the colon following a verb:

Incorrect: My major fields of study are: accounting and economics.

Correct: My major fields of study are accounting and economics.

To avoid using a colon after a verb, you should make sure you have a complete sentence preceding the colon or a clear signal like *the following*:

Correct: I have two major fields of study: accounting and economics.

Correct: My major fields of study are the following: accounting and economics.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Insert colons where needed in the sentences below.

Example: He told me a lie three times: last week, yesterday, and today.

1. The computer test bank included three subject areas history, economics, and world geography.
2. She is an amazing woman she walked almost 1,000 miles as a refugee.
3. Three Baroque composers are as follows Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel.
4. The Southwest Studies program offers two courses I will take next semester Plains Indians and Trans-Mississippi West.
5. The effect of the film on Hugh was a surprise to his wife he was crying silently.

DASHES

Just like the comma, the dash can show an interruption of the main idea in a sentence. However, the dash is a less formal punctuation mark. You should determine your purpose in writing and analyze your audience to determine the degree of formality you need in your writing. Try not to overuse the dash; otherwise, it loses its powerful effect.

Use the dash to set off a modifier or appositive with a number of internal commas. Look at the following example:

The church of her childhood—small, adorned with stained glass, filled with the sounds of organ music—still exists in her memory.

If you are typing, you can make a dash by using two hyphens. There is no space preceding or following the dash.

Use the dash to set off a complete sentence used parenthetically within another sentence. A parenthetical element is one that interrupts the sentence but is not part of the main clause. Look at the following example:

The purpose of the project—I called it the lack of purpose—was obvious from the beginning.

Use the dash to give special emphasis to a word or phrase, particularly at the end of a sentence. Look at the following example:

After thirty years, she knew what she wanted to be for the rest of her life—free.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Insert dashes where needed in the sentences below.

Example: I think I'm beginning to understand how to use some punctuation marks—commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes.

1. The concert begins I thought at 7:30 P.M.
2. All these things studying many hours a week, writing lengthy reports, working under pressure are necessities if one is going to be a successful student.
3. The exceptions to the rules cause Robert to feel one thing confused.
4. My bedroom painted a light blue, filled with sunlight, and decorated with flowers and plants is my favorite room.
5. The dilemma trying to work two full-time jobs and go to night classes is more stressful than one can imagine.

PARENTHESES

Parentheses are used to set off relatively unimportant information from the rest of the sentence. Parentheses are always used in pairs. **Use parentheses to set off information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence but is interesting, such as an idea mentioned in passing.** Look at the following examples:

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was a great composer of operas.

In 1961 my father joined Clement Corporation (formerly Alton Corporation).

Since the information in parentheses in the preceding example is not a complete sentence and falls at the end of the entire sentence, the period falls after the closing parenthesis.

Language barriers (see page 499) can affect international business communication.

The information in parentheses in this example is a complete sentence; however, since it falls in the middle of another complete sentence, it does not need to begin with a capital letter, and it does not need to end with a period.

I read all the information about the new printer several times. (I did not want to damage such a complicated machine.)

If an entire sentence is written separately and enclosed in parentheses, the period falls inside of the closing parenthesis.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Insert parentheses where needed in the sentences below.

Example: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) composed more than six hundred works.

1. The director outlined the guidelines her second explanation of the same material for the coming fiscal year.
2. He seemed to discuss the salary issue effectively or so I thought.
3. *The Elements of Style* first published in 1959 is an excellent book for every college freshman.
4. Her former employer editor of a small newspaper gave her a glowing reference.
5. The sales merchandise is not returnable, so you must select your purchases with care. Most department stores have such a policy.

ITALICS (UNDERLINING)

In handwritten or typed papers, italicized material is indicated by underlining. **Use italics (or underlining) for certain titles.** The titles requiring italics are the following:

1. Books

The Grapes of Wrath (by John Steinbeck)

Note that the Bible and other sacred writings do not require italics.

2. Long poems

Paradise Lost (by John Milton)

3. Plays

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (by Tennessee Williams)

4. Periodicals

Newsweek

5. Newspapers

The New York Times (Do not underline *the* if it is not actually part of the title.)

6. Pamphlets

Carcinogens

7. Published speeches

On Signing the Constitution (by Benjamin Franklin)

8. Long musical works (symphonies, operas, ballets, record albums)

Sleeping Beauty (ballet by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky)

9. Works of art

Madonna with a Carnation (painted by Leonardo da Vinci)

10. Movies

Casablanca

11. Television and radio programs

60 Minutes

Use italics (or underlining) for the names of trains, ships, and spacecraft. Look at the following example:

U.S. carrier *Intrepid*

Use italics (or underlining) for foreign words. Look at the following example:

The American otter's scientific name is *Lutra canadensis*.

Your dictionary will tell you whether or not a word from a foreign language should be underlined.

Use italics (or underlining) for words, letters, or numbers named as words. Here are three examples:

The word *frustrated* is sometimes mispronounced.

Your *g* looks like a *j*.

The number *8* was painted on each window.



EXERCISE 1 ► Underline the titles and words as needed in the sentences below.

Example: We watched Fantasia three times.

1. I like to read the fiction in the Atlantic Monthly.
2. He listens to B.B. King's compact disk To Know You Is To Love You every day.
3. Vincent van Gogh's The Starry Night is one of his most famous paintings.
4. A common fault in logic is the post hoc fallacy.
5. Does Dave always mispronounce the word library?