



Punctuation

Punctuation marks are signposts that establish or clarify the relationships of elements in a sentence.

APOSTROPHES serve two purposes:

To show omitted letters between two words (contraction)

We **are not** home. → We **aren't** home.

It is clear outside. → **It's** clear outside.

To show ownership (possession)

The book of the student → the student's book (singular noun)

The house of my parents → my parents' house (plural noun)

Caution: From looking at the cat, **it's [it is]** clear that **its fur [the fur of the cat]** is ruffled.

NOTE: **Its** is possessive by form and does not need an apostrophe.

DASHES are used in two ways:

To set off or emphasize content.

My proposals may seem radical—even revolutionary.

To set off a phrase that includes commas.

The cousins—Tina, Todd, and Sam—arrived at the party together.

HYPHENS are most often used to join words into adjectival or adverbial phrases.

Our summer was fun. → We had a fun-filled summer.

PARENTHESES set off nonessential material, such as dates, clarifying information, or sources, from the rest of the sentence.

All the students in the class (except Alexander) arrived on time.

QUOTATION MARKS are used in three ways:

To enclose direct quotations. (Commas and periods are placed **inside** the closing quotation mark, and colons and semicolons are placed **outside**.)

He asked, "When will you be arriving?" I answered, "Sometime after 6:30."

To indicate an unusual, ironic, or otherwise special use of a word.

History is stained with blood spilled in the name of "justice."

To mark the titles of short poems, song titles, short stories, magazine or newspaper articles, essays, speeches, chapter titles, short films, and episodes of television shows or podcasts.

"Self-Reliance," by Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Just Like a Woman," by Bob Dylan

"The Smelly Car," an episode of Seinfeld

COLONS serve three purposes:

To join two independent clauses (complete sentences) when you wish to emphasize the second one.

Road construction in Dallas has hindered travel around town: parts of Main and West Streets are closed now.

To set off a list, quotation, or other element that follows an independent clause.

Julie went to the store for some groceries: milk, bread, coffee, and cheese.

I know the perfect job for her: a politician.

To conclude a business letter greeting.

To Whom It May Concern:

SEMICOLONS have two uses:

To join two closely related independent clauses (complete sentences), including cases when the second clause is introduced with a conjunction or transitional phrase.

Road construction in Dallas has hindered travel around town; streets are covered with bulldozers, trucks, and cones.

Terrorism in the United States has become a recent concern; in fact, the concern for America's safety has led to an awareness of global terrorism.

Hint: A semicolon consists of a period (which is used to separate sentences) and a comma (which shows a connection between elements of a sentence).

To join elements of a series when individual items of the series already include commas.

Recent sites of the Olympic Games include Athens, Greece; Salt Lake City, Utah; Sydney, Australia; and Nagano, Japan.