

# PUNCTUATION JUNGLE

## PERIOD

The **period (.)** is placed at the end of declarative sentences, statements thought to be complete and after many abbreviations.

As a sentence ender:  
*Jane and Jack went to the market.*  
After an abbreviation:  
*Her Mar. birthday came and went.*

## EXCLAMATION POINT

The **exclamation point/mark (!)** is used when a person wants to express a sudden outcry or add emphasis.

Within dialogue: *"Holy cow!" screamed Jane.*  
To emphasize a point: *My mother-in-law's rants make me furious!*

## HYPHEN

A **hyphen (-)** is the same symbol as the endash. However, it has slightly different usage rules. A hyphen is used between the parts of a compound word or name or between the syllables of a word, especially when divided at the end of a line of text. Examples of a hyphen in use include:  
Between a compound name:  
*Mrs. Smith - Reynolds*  
Within a compound word:  
*back - to - back*

## QUESTION MARK

Use a **question mark (?)** to indicate a direct question when placed at the end of a sentence.

*When did Jane leave for the market?*

## SEMICOLON;

The **semicolon (;)** is used to connect independent clauses. It shows a closer relationship between the clauses than a period would show.

*John was hurt ; he knew she only said it to upset him.*

## DASH

An **endash (-)** is a symbol that is used in writing or printing to connect numbers or to connect elements of a compound adjective, such as *1880 - 1945* or *Princeton - New York trains*.

The **emdash (—)** looks like the endash but has more complicated grammatical use. The symbol of is used to:

- Indicate a break in thought or sentence structure
- Introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition, or explanation
- Separate two clauses

*We only wanted to get two birds - but the clerk talked us into four pregnant parakeets.*

## COMMA

The **comma (,)** is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence. Additionally, it is used in letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Separating elements within sentences:  
*Suzi wanted the black , green , and blue shoes.*

Letter Salutations: *Dear Uncle John ,*  
Separation of two complete sentences:  
*We went to the movies, and we went to the beach.*

## COLON

A **colon (:)** has two main uses: After a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series. It is also often used after the salutation of a business letter. Within time expressions. Within time, it is used to separate out the hour and minute:  
*12:15 p.m.*

## PARENTHESES

**Parentheses ( )** are curved notations used to contain further thoughts or qualifying remarks. However, parentheses can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning in most cases.

*John and Jane ( who were actually half brother and sister ) both have red hair.*

## BRACKETS

**Brackets ([ ])** are the squared off notations used for technical explanations. YourDictionary uses them when you look up word definitions. At the bottom of each definition page, brackets surround a technical description of where the word originated.

## BRACES

**Braces ({} )** are used to contain two or more lines of text or listed items to show that they are considered as a unit. They are not commonplace in most writing, but can be seen in computer programming to show what should be contained within the same lines.

## QUOTATIONS MARKS

**Quotations marks ( " " )** are a pair of punctuation used primarily to mark the beginning and end of a passage attributed to another and repeated word for word. They are also used to indicate meanings and to indicate the unusual or dubious status of a word.

**Single quotation marks ( ' )** are used most frequently for quotes within quotes.

## ELLIPSES

The **ellipses mark ( . . . )** is generally represented by three periods, although it is occasionally demonstrated with three asterisks (\*\*\*).

- Ellipses are used:
- In writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words.
  - Within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning.
  - Students writing research papers or newspapers quoting parts of speeches will often employ ellipses to avoid copying lengthy text that is not needed.

## APOSTROPHE

An **apostrophe ( ' )** is used to indicate the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case, or the plurals of lowercase letters. Examples of the apostrophe in use include:

- Omission of letters from a word:  
*An issue of nat'l importance.*  
Possessive case: *Sara's dog bites.*  
Plural for lowercase letters:  
*Six people were told to mind their p's and q's.*

It should be noted that, according to Purdue University, some teachers and editors enlarge the scope of the use of apostrophe, and prefer their use on symbols (&'s), numbers (7's) and capitalized letters (Q&A's), even though they are not necessary.