

Punctuation

The use of punctuation greatly contributes to the clarity of a message. The correct use of punctuation is therefore essential when it comes to successfully communicating ideas in a paper.

Apostrophe ' no space before | no space after

The apostrophe replaces letters in a contraction. However, contractions should be avoided in formal contexts such as academic writing.

Cannot becomes *can't*.

Colon : no space before | one space after

The colon concludes the salutation in a letter.

To whom it may concern:

The colon introduces an explanation after a complete sentence.

There was only one choice left: to sell the family farm.

The colon introduces a list after a complete sentence.

I visited three countries this summer: England, Scotland, and Ireland.

The colon introduces the subtitle of a document.

The American Century: International Politics

Comma , no space before | one space after

The comma is used after introductory words, phrases, and dependant clauses.

After returning from my trip, my mailbox was overflowing.

The comma joins the items that precede the conjunction in a list. A serial comma (also called *Oxford comma*) can precede the conjunction in a list of three or more items if it improves clarity or rhythm.

I like baseball, football and hockey.

I like baseball, football, soccer, and hockey.

The comma separates two independent clauses joined by a conjunction.

Gina prefers coffee, whereas Margaret prefers tea.

The comma surrounds non-restrictive relative clauses, i.e. non-essential information.

My sister, who is an aspiring musician, is always writing new songs.

To know more, see *The Canadian Style*, *The Canadian Writer's Handbook*, *Checkmate*, or similar writing guides.

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Ellipsis . . . one space before | one space after

The ellipsis indicates the end of an incomplete list. The abbreviation *etc.* can also be used to indicate the end of an incomplete list, but not a combination of the two.

I like baseball, football, soccer . . .

I like baseball, football, soccer, *etc.*

The ellipsis indicates that words have been removed from a quotation.

Churchill said, "We will fight them . . . and we shall never surrender."

Period . no space before | one space after

The period indicates the end of a declarative sentence, including statements and indirect questions.

Sally is shopping for a new car.

I wonder if Sally bought a car.

The period is used after most abbreviations.

I saw Mr. Brown walking his dog this morning.

Quotation Marks " " one space outside | no space inside

Quotation marks, like italics, can be used for emphasis.

The word "hello" comes from the word "hola" in Old French.

Quotation marks surround article titles, chapter titles, and other section titles mentioned in a text. However, book titles and periodical titles are in *italics*, not within quotation marks.

This paper will analyze the poem "Here I Lay" from the anthology *Stopwatch* by Rachel Grace.

Quotation marks surround quotations* that are integrated in a text—with the exception of block quotations. Unless the quotation is followed by an in-text citation, the closing quotation mark is inserted after the period or comma.

Watson contemplated the case: "This one is a puzzler, Holmes."

*If a quotation already contains words within quotation marks, replace them by 'single' quotation marks.

Semicolon ; no space before | one space after

The semicolon joins the items in a list of elements that already contain punctuation.

I have several pets: Fido, a dog; Bessie, a cow; and Jimmy, a boa constrictor.

The semicolon joins two independent clauses that are closely related.

This restaurant does not serve meat; it is a vegan establishment.

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