

Punctuation marks are important in both written and spoken English. In written English, the correct usage of these symbols helps to express the intended meaning of the sentence. In spoken English, punctuation marks denote the pauses and intonations to be used when reading aloud.

Incorrect punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence.

For instance, compare the following two sentences:

Let's eat Mom.

Let's eat, Mom.

Do you see how the usage of a comma changes the entire meaning in both the sentences? The disappearance of comma in the first sentence indicates that the speaker is asking to eat their Mom, which does not make sense. Whereas, the comma after let's eat in the second sentence helps to convey the meaning that the speaker is suggesting to their Mom to go and start eating, which sounds more sensible and also saves a life.

Symbols of Punctuation

Some of the commonly used punctuation marks are:

Full Stop- (.) Usually used at the end of a sentence.

Question Mark- (?) Usually used at the end of an interrogative sentence to form a question.

Comma- (,) Usually used to denote a pause in a sentence.

Exclamation Mark- (!) Used to denote shock, surprise, anger or a raised voice.

Colon – (:) Used to indicate what is to follow next

Semi Colon (;) Used to link two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction or used to separate two independent clauses in place of comma

Apostrophe- (') Used to show possession or for contraction of word.

Punctuation is a very important aspect of writing; good writing presupposes correct punctuation. Incorrect punctuation is the sign of weak writing, or carelessness. But this sort of thing is eminently avoidable, because punctuation is quite simple to master. Here are some basic rules to keep in mind:

1. Every sentence must end with a full stop.
2. Proper nouns (names of people, places, brands, etc, i.e. unique instances of a class) must always be capitalised.
3. When you use opening quotation marks, do not forget to use closing quotation marks at the end of the quoted word or phrase.
4. Quotation marks are when quoting or sometimes to convey irony, not for emphasis; emphasis is conveyed by boldening or italicisation, followed by an exclamation mark.

5. Do not use an apostrophe when you are pluralising a word. The plural of toy is toys, not toy's. Apostrophes are used to form contractions (it is = it's) and indicate possession.
6. The ellipsis, used to indicate variously the intentional omission of a section of text, an unfinished thought, and a trailing off into silence, consists of only 3 dots. It is pointless to add more dots to an ellipsis. This is excessive punctuation, which is in other words incorrect punctuation.
7. As per the rules of British English, any punctuation mark that is not part of a quoted section of text must be placed outside the quotation marks. However, in the case of direct speech, punctuation marks must be enclosed within the quotation marks.
8. Do not link independent clauses with commas. Independent clauses are groupings of words that can stand alone as sentences. For example, in He knew how to drive, that he didn't do it very often was a matter more nerves, not inability both the parts before and after the comma are full sentences. In such cases, the comma is not the correct punctuation mark of connection. It needs to be replaced with a semi-colon (;). The sentence becomes: He knew how to drive; that he didn't do it very often was matter of nerves, not inability.
9. Use a comma after the introductory element of a sentence. The introductory element is a word or a phrase that begins a sentence by providing background, or simply modifies it. For example, Honestly I don't know how I managed to escape is wrong, because the word 'honestly' modifies the sentence. Hence, it should be Honestly, I don't know how I managed to escape.