



CHESSWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL

A guide to use of higher level punctuation



Brackets (Parentheses)

- 1) **To clarify or inform.** □ Jamie's bike was red (bright red) with a yellow stripe.
- 2) **For asides and comments** □ She said that she was innocent (well they all say that!).

Brackets contain material that could be omitted without destroying or altering the meaning of a sentence (in most writing, overuse of parentheses is usually a sign of a badly structured text).

A milder effect may be obtained by using a pair of commas, though if the sentence contains commas for other purposes, visual confusion may result.

Brackets may be nested (generally with one set (such as this) inside another set). This is not commonly used in formal writing (though sometimes other brackets [especially square brackets] will be used for one or more inner set of parentheses [in other words, secondary {or even tertiary} phrases can be found within the main parenthetical sentence]).

Hyphen

The hyphen (□) is a punctuation mark used for a variety of purposes:

1) With some pre-fixes and suffixes

Certain prefixes (*co-*, *pre-*, *mid-*, *de-*, *non-*, *anti-*, etc.) may or may not be hyphenated. Many long-established words, such as *preamble*, *degrade*, and *prefix*, do not require a hyphen since the prefix is viewed as fully fused. In other cases, usage varies depending on individual or regional preference. British English tends towards hyphenation (*pre-school*) whereas American English and Australian English tend towards omission of the hyphen (*preschool*).

- To avoid multiple letter e.g. re-evaluate
- If a root word is capitalized e.g. pre-Christmas
- With specific prefixes and suffixes e.g. all-seeing, vice-chairman, self-sacrificing
- To avoid ambiguity e.g. un-ionised and (unionised); re-creation and recreation
- To avoid awkward pronunciation e.g. re-read
- Where a list of words each have the same pre-fix or siffix e.g. pre- and post-war, over- and under-weight.

2) To form compound words

- For clarity e.g. sit-in, Mother-in-law
- In compound adjectives that modify what they precede e.g. devil-may-care attitude, up-to-the-minute news

3) With fractions, numbers and initial letters



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- With fractions and numbers between 21 and 99 e.g. three-quarters, sixty-four
- Words that start with a capital letter e.g. T-shirt, X-ray, U-turn

4) To divide words at the right hand margin if they need to go to the next line.

The use of hyphens is called hyphenation. The hyphen should not be confused with dashes (–, —, —, —), which are longer and have different uses, or with the minus sign (–) that is also longer.

The rules of when and how to use hyphens are changing all the time and often can be used with or without a hyphen e.g. co-operation or cooperation are both acceptable. Often it is clear in context whether a hyphen is necessary.

Examples of semantic changes caused by the placement of hyphens make the use of hyphens clear:

- *Disease-causing poor nutrition*, meaning poor nutrition that causes disease
- *Disease causing poor nutrition*, meaning a disease that causes poor nutrition
- *A man-eating shark* is a shark that eats humans.
- *A man eating shark* is a man who is eating shark meat.
- *A blue-green sea* is a sea whose color is somewhere between blue and green.
- *A blue green sea* is a contradiction, unless "blue" or "green" are used contextually to mean something other than a color.
- *Three-hundred-year-old trees* are an indeterminate number of trees that are 300 years old.
- *Three hundred-year-old trees* are three trees that are 100 years old.
- *Three hundred year-old trees* are 300 trees that are 1 year old.

Ellipsis

An ellipsis is series of three dots (...) to indicate an intended omission. It can also indicate an unfinished thought.

If a sentence ends with an ellipsis, you leave a small space after the ellipsis and then add a full stop.

It is often used to build tension or show that the sentence has been left unfinished or unstarted.

Occasionally, it would be used in pulp fiction and other works of early 20th C. fiction to denote expletives that would otherwise have been censored.

An ellipsis may also imply an unstated alternative indicated by context. For example, when Count Dracula says, "I never drink . . . wine", the implication is that he does drink something else.

In reported speech, the ellipsis is sometimes used to represent an intentional silence, perhaps indicating irritation, dismay, shock or disgust.



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In news reporting, it is used to indicate that a quotation has been condensed for space, brevity or relevance.

Dashes

The em dash

There are many different sort dashes but for our purposes we will focus on the em dash (so called as it's the width of a capital M, as opposed to the shorter en dash, the length of the letter n)

The following are two key ways to use a dash:

1) To indicate interrupted speech in dialogue

"But I—But you said— ... wait, what?" stammered Edna.

2) Dashes can also be used to emphasize a sentence.

'Of course, I'll help you with your homework—as long as you tidy up your room afterwards.'

Slashes

There are many uses of the slash but it is most commonly used to substitute the word 'or' e.g. he/she.

Additionally the use of the slash is to replace the hyphen to make a clear, strong join between words or phrases, such as "the Hemingway/Faulkner generation".

The slash is also used to avoid taking a position in a naming controversy, allowing the juxtaposition of both names without stating a preference e.g. Matilda/Tilda had no preference over which name was used.

Colon

1) Before a list or summary

The most common use of the colon is to inform the reader that what follows the colon proves, explains, or lists elements of what preceded it.
e.g.

- **Before a list.** □ I could only find three of the ingredients: sugar, flour and coconut.
- **Before a summary.** □ To summarise: we found the camp, set up our tent and then the bears attacked.



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2) Appositive colon

Apposition is a grammatical construction in which two elements, normally noun phrases, are placed side by side, with one element serving to define or modify the other.

Colons are often used to separate appositive independent clauses e.g.:

Bob could not speak: He was too exhausted.

3) To introduce speech

The colon indicates that the words following an individual's name are spoken by that individual. This is often used within a playscript.

Patient: Doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains.

Doctor: Pull yourself together!

4) To introduce logical consequences

The colon introduces the logical consequence, or effect, of a fact stated before.

There was only one possible explanation: the train had never arrived.

Do we capitalise after a colon?

In British English, the word following the colon is in lower case unless it is a proper noun or an acronym, or is normally capitalized for some other reason.

Semi-colon (also acceptable to write semicolon with the hyphen)

When a semi-colon marks the right boundary of a constituent (e.g., a clause or a phrase), the left boundary is marked by punctuation of equal or greater strength. (i.e. It can't follow a clause which has a comma preceding it; hence the following sentences have a colon, then two independent clauses separated by a semi-colon)

There are two main uses for the semi-colon

- In a list that already contains commas, where the semicolons function as serial commas:

She saw three men: Jamie, who came from New Zealand; John, the milkman's son; and George, a gaunt kind of man.

Several fast food restaurants can be found within the cities: London, England; Paris, France; Dublin, Ireland; and Madrid, Spain.

Examples of familiar sequences are: one, two, and three; a, b, and c; and first, second, and third.

She stood at the edge, but then decided otherwise; she walked home.

This is by far the most frequent use currently.



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- Between closely related independent clauses not conjoined with a coordinating conjunction:

I went to the basketball court; I was told it was closed for cleaning.

I told Kate she's running for the hills; I wonder if she knew I was joking.

Nothing is true; everything is permitted.

A man chooses; a slave obeys.

I told John that his shoe was untied; he looked.

At the shop I bought four things; my sister bought only two things.