

**Dear students:** The following is a summary of advice on common punctuation marks, i.e. a full-stop, a comma, a semi-colon ... etc. The summary gives a brief explanation for each punctuation mark with of an example(s) on each. The summary is extracted from a book by Tony Smith (1981) entitled CLEAR PUNCTUATION.

**When you read through the summary and the examples, try to think of other examples yourself and see how the punctuation marks are used in your textbooks, stories and other published materials. We hope that the list will prove useful and informative. Good luck.**

Later on in the course you will be given some exercises on such punctuation marks. So you had better read them carefully.

1 A **full stop** is used to mark the end of a sentence.

The door was open.

2 If a sentence asks a question, it ends with a **question mark**.

What lay inside?

3 An **exclamation mark** is used for emphasis when something is said sharply or with strong feeling.

Watch out!

What a pity we did not arrive sooner!

4 Every sentence begins with a **capital letter**.

**S**he entered cautiously.

5 The word **/** is always written with a capital letter.

I ran away.

- 6 A **capital letter** is used to begin the names of people and places, and describing words formed from these names.

Next year **Hilary** is going to stay in **St Ives** on the **Cornish** coast.

- 7 **Capital letters** are used to begin the names of days, months and festivals.

This year **Boxing Day**, **December 26th**, will fall on a **Friday**.

- 8 A **full stop** is normally used to show that a word has been shortened, unless the abbreviation includes the first and last letters of the shortened word.

Mr **W. A. Brett** works for the **Orwell Heating Co.** in **Bedford**.

- 9 A **comma** is used to divide items in a list.

Activities at the new sports centre include squash, badminton, judo and fencing.

During their holiday they swam in the sea, walked along the beach, climbed the hills and toured on hired bicycles.

- 10 A **comma** may be used to give a pause which will help the reader make sense of a sentence.

On the table were cups and saucers, and the waiter brought tea.

- 11 **Commas** are used to enclose words which give additional information in a sentence.

The owner, Mrs. Blackmore, was in the shop.

- 12 **Commas** are used to enclose words or phrases that interrupt a sentence.

Their attempt, nevertheless, was unsuccessful.

- 13 **Commas** are used to enclose words showing-the person or persons to whom someone is speaking.

The news, my dear, is very terrible.

- 14 Spoken words are divided from unspoken words by being enclosed in **inverted commas**.

She said, 'I am pleased to meet you.'

- 15 Each spoken sentence begins with a capital letter, even if unspoken words introduce it.

He answered, 'This is a great honour for me.'

- 16 When unspoken words interrupt a spoken sentence, you **do not need to use a capital letter at the point when the spoken words continue**.

'If we had not seen it ourselves,' she said, '**we** would never have believed it.'

- 17 Spoken words are always divided from unspoken words by another punctuation mark, as well as by inverted commas.

'What is your name?' she asked.

'He replied, 'I am Richard.'

18 The spoken words in a sentence may end with a **question mark** or an **exclamation mark**, but if the sentence continues with unspoken words, the unspoken words do not begin with a capital letter.

'Get out immediately!' **he** shouted.

'What right have you to give me orders?' **she** asked.

19 A sentence which includes the words of a new speaker begins a new paragraph.

'Have you read this book before?' asked Eleanor, taking a copy from the shelf.

**Dorothy** replied, 'No, but I should like to read it.'

20 All **titles** of **books**, **places**, **poems**, **newspapers**, **pictures** and **songs** are enclosed in **inverted commas**.

In the gallery she saw "The Fighting Temeraire".

21. **Capital letters** are used to begin all the important words in titles.

He was reading "The **L**ion, the **W**itch and the **W**ardrobe".

22 When a set of **inverted commas** is **placed** around a title, other punctuation marks are put after the inverted commas.

George Eliot's novels include "The Mill on the Floss", "Daniel Deronda" and "Middlemarch".

23 An **apostrophe** is used to show that a letter or letters have been missed out.

It's a pity you're not able to be there.

- 24 An **apostrophe** is used to show that one thing or person belongs to another.

The lady's coat  
The ladies' coats  
The women's hats

- 25 The **colon** is used to introduce a list.

In the garden grew the following flowers: crocuses, daffodils, narcissi, jonquils and tulips.

- 26 The **colon** is also used to introduce a quotation or a long speech:

Hamlet said:  
The time is out of joint. O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right.

- 27 If a word or phrase is explained later in a sentence, it may be followed by a **colon**.

The church was exceptionally beautiful: its magnificent ceiling was vaulted, its carvings were delicate and its stained glass was exquisite.

- 28 A **colon** may be used to underline a contrast in an emphatic statement.

Some see merit in the plan: I reject it entirely.

- 29 A **semi-colon** is used in place of a **full stop** when two statements are closely connected.

The door opened; I stood up quickly.

- 30 **Semi-colons** are used to avoid confusion that might result from the use of commas alone in lists.

The following people were in the room: Mr Jenkins, a retired accountant; Mr Phillips, who used to work for the council; Mr Thwaite; the man who lived on the corner, whose name I have forgotten, and Mr Tomkinson.

- 31 A **hyphen** is used to show that two or more words, when joined together, have come to be considered as a single expression.

I saw my brother-in-law yesterday.

32. A **hyphen** may be used to make the pronunciation of a word clear.

We tried to co-ordinate our efforts.

- 33 A **hyphen** may be used to avoid confusion where an expression might have more than one meaning.

Four year-old horses.  
Four-year-old horses.

- 34 Pairs of **brackets** may be used to divide an insertion from the rest of a sentence.

My cousins (Gerard, aged seven; Michael, aged five, and three-year-old Mary) are staying with us for the day.

- 35 **Dashes** may also be used to divide an insertion from the rest of a sentence.

The two leading dramatic companies - the National Theatre Company and the Royal Shakespeare Company are facing financial problems.

Britain was not among the Common Market's six original members - Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, Luxembourg and West Germany.

36. **Dashes** may be used to show the disjointed way in which

Someone is talking.

'Norwich - at least I think so - would be the best place for you to go - pleasant city - attractive area.'

37 A **dash** may be used to stress a contrast.

They expected hundreds to attend the meeting – few came.