THE MAIN USES OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

The following passage shows the main punctuation marks in use:

**FULL STOP**

a) A full stop is used to end a sentence. The next sentence begins with a capital letter.

b) An abbreviation ends in a full stop when the final letter of the abbreviation is not the last letter of the word. One editor is abbreviated to ed., but two editors are abbreviated to eds (without a full stop), since “s” is the final letter of the word.

• You can find this reference on p. 20 of ch. 3 in vol. 1.

c) A full stop is sometimes, but not always, used in acronyms (abbreviations of names).

• The S.L.S.S. is an important part of Flinders University. You can make an appointment to see an S.L.S.S. advisor if you need help with essay writing or grammar.
• There is an ATM on the campus. You can find the ATM outside the bank.

**COMMA**

Together with the full stop, the comma is the most commonly used punctuation mark. Basically, it separates parts of the sentence. It is used:

a) to separate a non-defining relative clause (a clause which adds extra information, introduced by a word such as that, which or who) from the rest of the sentence.

• It is years since I read Anna Karenina, which is my favourite novel.
• Anna Karenina, which is my favourite novel, was written by Tolstoy.

b) when a subordinate (less important) clause comes before the principal clause.

• If you do not understand, please tell me.

c) to separate phrases in apposition (describing the same person or thing mentioned earlier) from the rest of the sentence.

• Mr Obama, the President, said that he approved of the policy.
d) to separate some non-defining adjectival phrases from the rest of the sentence.
   • The speaker, getting to his feet, began to introduce his talk.

e) to separate items in many kinds of lists.
   • I shall need a book, some paper, a pencil and a ruler.

f) to separate a number of connectives from the rest of the sentence: too, however, nevertheless, though, of course, then, etc.
   • You can, however, do it if you wish.
   • Nevertheless, these results must be interpreted within their context.
   • This is, of course, the best action to take.

g) before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) linking two main clauses, when this clarifies the meaning.
   • The first vendor was selling ice cream with chocolate chips, and worms were available from the second vendor.

h) between coordinate adjectives not joined by and.
   • Informative, imaginative, appealing writing can sell your ideas.

i) when some adverbs or adverbial expressions are placed within a sentence (instead of at the beginning or end of the sentence).
   • They tried, in spite of my advice, to climb the mountain.

**COLON :**
A colon is not often used. It indicates a fairly close interdependence between the units that it separates. The sentence before the colon should be complete in itself, not a sentence fragment.

a) It indicates that what follows it is an explanation or amplification of what precedes it
   • I have some news for you: John’s father has arrived.

b) It can be used to introduce a list of items.
   • Please send him the following items: a passport, a visa application and the correct fee.

**SEMI-COLON ;**

a) A semi-colon joins two independent but related clauses or sentences. It is possible to avoid using the semi-colon here, by:
   • replacing it with a word such as and or because
   • creating two separate sentences.

b) It is used in lists to separate items made up of several words.
   • The lecture was badly delivered; it went on far too long.
   • The lecture was badly delivered and went on far too long.
   • The lecture was badly delivered. It went on far too long.
   • To make a cake you will need a hundred grams of butter; a hundred grams of sugar; a hundred grams of flour; and two eggs.
PUNCTUATION

c) It can separate main clauses joined by conjunctive adverbs such as however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, then, thus. This applies even when the conjunctive adverb is moved.

• Ernest Hemingway was a master of style; however, opinions about his work vary widely.
• Ernest Hemingway was a master of style; opinions about his work, however, vary widely.

**HYPHEN**

- A hyphen separates, in some cases, the prefix from the second part of the word.
- It also joins some compound words.
  **Note:** You should always check in a dictionary to see if a hyphen is needed

b) A dash is used to indicate a break, often informally, or to add parenthetical information.
  **Note:** Generally, it is better to avoid using a dash in academic writing.

d) An en-rule indicates a range.

**DASH (OR EM RULE)**

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**EN RULE**

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**APOSTROPHE**

A) An apostrophe is most frequently used to indicate possessive singular or plural.

- It is possible to avoid using the semi-colon here, by:
  - When there is one owner, the apostrophe comes before the “s”.
  - When there is more than one owner the apostrophe comes after the “s”.

b) An apostrophe is also used to indicate that a letter is missing.

**Note:** This use should be avoided in academic writing. It is better to say:

c) The apostrophe should always be included when telling the time.

d) The apostrophe is not needed to indicate a plural

**APOSTROPHE**

- The student’s books.
  (The books belonging to one student.)
- The students’ books.
  (The books belonging to more than one student.)
- It’s a well-known fact.
- It is a well-known fact.
- It is nine o’clock.
  (This is short for ‘nine of the clock’)
- That shop sells bananas.
  (NOT: That shop sells banana’s.)

**QUESTION MARK**

A) A question mark is used after a direct question

- What time is it?
- Can you tell me the answer?

b) It is not used after an indirect question.

- Please tell me what time it is.
- I need to find out where the books are.
### QUOTATION MARKS (QUOTES) OR INVERTED COMMAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They may be single</th>
<th>Or double</th>
<th>(single marks are more common.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- ‘They show when someone is being quoted directly.
- “They show the titles of journal articles.

#### a)
- “We must put a stop to the illegal exportation of mahogany,” said the Minister of the Environment.
- Ferdinand de Saussure separated language into ‘langue’ and ‘parole’

#### b)

### EXCLAMATION MARK

#### a)
- The exclamation mark is not often used in academic writing. It is usually appropriate after real exclamations or short commands.

- Oh dear!
- Get out!

### BRACKETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Square brackets are used within a quotation to explain, clarify or correct the original words.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rounded brackets (parentheses) are used to provide additional, non-essential information in a sentence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rounded brackets enclose author-date references in the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rounded brackets enclose the number of an equation, and bracket parts of an equation together.</td>
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- French, Italian and Spanish (but not Portuguese) may be studied at this University.
- A number of experiments (Smith 1987; Tan 1990; Wong 1991) indicate that this is correct.
- X = 2 (a+b)
EXERCISE 1

In the following sentences, put the correct punctuation marks in the underlined spaces. Also add capital letters where necessary.

a) the average hotel room has numerous items in its bathroom: soap, shampoo, body lotion, towels, a hair dryer.

b) some people always obey the road rules; others say they are law-abiding drivers but when the police aren’t looking, they break the road rules.

EXERCISE 2

Now rewrite and add the correct punctuation marks in the following sentences. Remember to use capital letters where appropriate.

a) some people will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the garbage, answer the phone, read a book, and get the mail; others will only dress up for weddings and funerals

b) Some students study best late at night; other students study best in the mornings.

ANSWERS

Exercise 1

a) The average hotel room has numerous items in its bathroom: soap, shampoo, body lotion, towels, and a hair dryer.

b) Some people always obey the road rules; others say they are law-abiding drivers but when the police aren’t looking, they break the road rules.

Exercise 2

a) Some students study best late at night; other students study best in the mornings.

b) Some students study best late at night. Other students study best in the mornings.