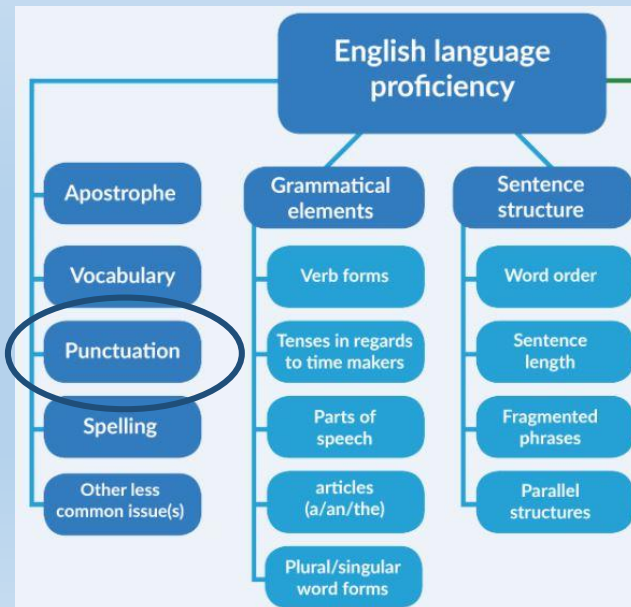


Punctuation

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Updated 6 February 2017



What do we mean by effective punctuation?

A speaker can vary their speed or tone of voice to convey meaning, and can pause to create a separation between ideas. In writing, the use of punctuation indicates a separation or connection between the elements of a sentence, and distinguishes different sentences within the text.

Effective use of punctuation can clarify ideas, demonstrate your skill as a researcher, and create textual variety with sentences of different lengths.

This article, although interesting, was not relevant evidence for my essay.

In this sentence, the commas are used to indicate the separation between essential and non-essential information.

Effective punctuation in academic writing: full stops and commas

mark	name	function	example
.	full stop	The full stop indicates the end of a sentence.	<i>Students love learning about punctuation.</i>
,	comma	The comma separates items in a list.	<i>Students bought snacks, water bottles and sunscreen.</i>
		The “Oxford comma” is often used before <i>and</i> in academic texts to avoid any misunderstanding of the number of things in the list.	<i>The twins, Anne, and Julie went to the lecture. (refers to 4 different people)</i>
		The comma is used with numbers higher than 999.	<i>There were 1,000 students who preferred to stay on campus.</i>
		The comma is used for introductory words or phrases.	<i>According to my lecturer, referencing is not difficult.</i>
		The comma is used after dependent clauses.	<i>If a dependent clause comes before the main clause, it needs to be separated by a comma.</i>
		The comma is used for sentence elements providing additional information which can be easily removed without interfering with the meaning.	<i>Despite the warning, students missed several classes.</i>

Effective punctuation in academic writing: confusing colons and semi-colons

mark	name	function	example
:	colon	The colon is used to introduce a list or series	<i>There are three crucial aspects of writing a good academic sentence: the focus on one main point, appropriate word choices and correct punctuation.</i>
		The colon is also used before an explanation or elaboration.	<i>The factory fire was devastating: almost 1,000 workers and over 40 office staff have been displaced.</i>
;	semi-colon	The semi-colon can be used to connect two closely independent clauses which can be written as separate sentences as well.	<i>Career popularity comes and goes; however, there will always be a need for teachers.</i>
		The semi-colons can be used in lists where the items in the list are very long or already contain commas.	<i>Two main themes emerged: girls had a lack of confidence with, but not competence in, ICT; and boys had more interest in ICT, particularly game related activities.</i>

Effective punctuation in academic writing: marks and dots

mark	name	function	example
“ ”	Double quotation marks	The quotation marks enclose the exact words that are being quoted.	<i>Finally, “constant, regular evaluation ... to adapt to the changing needs of groups” was also recommended (Leder et al., 1996, p. 793).</i>
...	Ellipsis (or dot-dot-dot)	The ellipsis indicates that something has been left out of a sentence.	
()	Parentheses or Brackets	Parentheses enclose in-text citation details such as author name and date of publication or any additional information	<i>Weisgram and Bigler (2007) suggested this may have been due to “the physical appearance or mannerism of the female presenters [which] led some girls to endorse gender stereotypes about women in science” (p. 267).</i>
[]	Square brackets	Square brackets indicate that something has been added to the original words of a quote.	

Punctuation and citation

In-text citations and entries in a list of references should be made according to your recommended style guide.

In-text citation	Reference list entry
Podorova et al. (2015) believe that “referencing is easy if you know how to follow the style guide” (p. 101).	Podorova, A., McLeod, A. B., & Ford, A. (2015). Referencing tips and tricks. <i>Super useful academic literacy journal</i> , 13(1), 11-27. doi: 123456789101

Please note that we usually leave one space after full stops, commas, colons and semi-colons.
Please also note the use of capital letters with names and titles.

Quick tips

Quick tips

Punctuation is important in referencing. Ensure you understand the correct referencing punctuation for both in-text and reference list citations in your discipline.

Remember the difference between colons and semi-colons.

Remember that commas are not used to combine sentences. Commas are used to separate sentence elements. Commas are never used between subject and predicate.

Learn more section

Useful links on punctuation

[Monash Editorial Style Guide](#)

[Monash University Library APA referencing guide](#)

[Language and learning online, writing good sentences](#)

[The Writing Centre, University of Wisconsin](#)

[English Club: punctuation](#)

[University of Sussex](#)

[Edufind](#)

Face-to-face support

Who can help with English at Monash?

English Connect –

conversational circles,
peer feedback on your
writing and grammar
workshops



Grammar books



Azar, B. S. & Hagen, S.A. (2009). *Understanding and using English grammar (4th ed.)*. USA: Pearson Longman.

Borjars, K. & Burridge, K. *Introducing English grammar (2nd ed.)*. London: Hodder Education.

Foley, M. & Hall, D. (2012). *MyGrammarLab (Advanced)*. England: Pearson.

Hewings, M. (2012). *Advanced grammar in use: a reference and practice book for advanced students of English (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, R. (2011). *English Grammar in Use (Intermediate) (3 ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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