Punctuation marks help make meaning clear in written texts.
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They show the reader:

* where one chunk of meaning ends and another begins

* where to pause or change tone when reading aloud.
A sentence
* starts with a capital letter
* ends with a .
* makes complete sense.

question mark shows the end of a question

exclamation mark shows
* raised voice
* strong feelings
* an exclamation

full stop shows the end of a statement

Three punctuation marks can show the end of a sentence.

See also The Sentence Book
The Complex Sentence Book
The comma, ' within a sentence, a **comma** shows where one chunk of meaning ends and another begins...

- **separating the items in a list**
  - *I bought eggs, a pint of milk, tea and sugar.*

- **separating the direct speech from a reporting clause**
  - *This is great, **isn't it?** How old are you, **John?**

- **separating off 'tag phrases' and names**
  - *This is great, **isn't it?***  
  - *How old are you, **John?**

- **marking off extra information embedded in the sentence**
  - *Jill, **my boss,** is 28 years old.*

- **separating off an introductory 'chunk'**
  - *Anyway, I decided **not to go.** Three weeks later, **James was born.** Although she was only **three,** Gemma knew **her tables.**

The introductory 'chunk' could be a word, a phrase or a subordinate clause. If you remove it, the main clause would still make sense.

See explanation on direct speech page.
A dash gives a break halfway between , and .

showing a sharp break between two chunks of meaning

Both these chunks are main clauses. A comma cannot separate two main clauses.

e.g. It was great to see you -- we must meet again.

marking off extra information embedded in the sentence

e.g. On Monday -- the first day of our holidays -- we explored the beach.

The dash is a feature of informal writing, which echoes speech patterns. For the formal equivalent, see semicolon.
Brackets ( )

Brackets show information which is extra to the main text...

marking off extra information embedded in the sentence

marking off extra facts like dates or dimensions

- e.g. On Monday (the first day of our holidays) we explored the beach.
- e.g. Elizabeth I (1553 – 1603)
  Mount Everest (8850 m)

As brackets are very noticeable, they are used when the writer wishes to draw attention to the extra information.

Brackets are sometimes called parentheses. Information in brackets is said to be in parenthesis. Commas and dashes can also enclose parenthetic information.
A semi-colon gives a break halfway between , and .

- to separate two main clauses
  
  e.g. It was a great pleasure to meet you yesterday; I hope we meet again soon.

- to separate lengthy items in a list
  
  e.g. I surveyed John Street: small, redbrick houses; an ancient church; three brand new bungalows, and a Victorian town house, gone to seed.

The semicolon here is like a formal version of the dash.

When semicolons are used in a list, there is usually a comma before the and.
Colon :

A colon marks a break where there is a feeling of balance between the elements on either side:

to introduce a list, an example or a quotation

e.g. I surveyed John Street: small, redbrick houses; an ancient church; three brand new bungalows, and a Victorian town house, gone to seed.

to separate two main clauses, where the second clause expands on or illustrates the first

e.g. It was very cold: the temperature was below zero.

e.g. I love the first lines of ‘Jabberwocky’:
“’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe...”
It’s late,” said Cinderella.

The prince smiled and answered, “Yes, but we have all the time in the world.”

“What time is it?” asked Cinders. “I must leave before midnight.”

“If you must go,” said the prince, “you’d better hurry. It’s 5 to 12.”

“Oh no!” cried Cinders.
Speech marks are also called quotation marks or inverted commas and may be used...

- To mark the words in direct speech:
  "Hello," said the cat.

- To show that a word is being used ironically or 'oddly' (There were many 'experts' in the audience.)

- To indicate the title of a book, film, etc (The book 'Black Beauty' was also made into a film.)

- To show a quotation (Wordsworth wrote about an 'inward eye'.)

- To show when you are talking about a word or phrase (The word 'exit' is the Latin for 'he goes out'.)

Double and single speech marks:
Double marks are usually used in handwritten texts. Single marks are often used in printed texts.
A hyphen links words or parts of words when they are put together to make a new word. For example, "mother-in-law" and "Irish-American co-operation".

When a word is split between two lines of print, the hyphen is used. For example, "mother-in-law".

The hyphen differs from the dash in that:
- you do not leave a space between the words and the hyphen;
- it is half as long.
Ellipsis ...

An *ellipsis* is three dots...

- To show that a sentence is *unfinished*
  - *e.g.* to show that a sentence is...

- To show that words have been missed out in a quotation
  - *e.g.* The hyphen differs from the dash in that... it is half as long.
The comma splice

Gemma was worn out, she curled up on the ground and went to sleep.

Rule of thumb:
If you could substitute a full stop, a comma is probably wrong.

You could use alternative punctuation:
Gemma was worn out. She curled up on the ground and went to sleep. (see Sentence)
Gemma was worn out—she curled up on the ground and went to sleep. (see Dash)
Gemma was worn out; she curled up on the ground and went to sleep. (see Semicolon)
Gemma was worn out: she curled up on the ground and went to sleep. (see Colon)

or you could add a conjunction, e.g.

Gemma was worn out so she curled up on the ground and went to sleep.
The Apostrophe

In shortened forms of words, the apostrophe shows where letters have been missed out.

's shows ownership

the girl's coat

the coat belonging to the girl

the children's home

the home belonging to the children

If the owner-noun is a plural ending in 's, just add '

the girls' coats

the coats belonging to the girls

the princesses' hats

the hats belonging to the princesses

cannot should have you are

can't should've you're

it is I will

it's I'll

does not

doesn't
Other devices for helping make written language easy to read and understand:

* the use of space
e.g. paragraphing

* organisational devices
e.g. bullet points

* presentational devices
e.g. italic print,
   bold print,
   underlining,
   enlarged print,
   CAPITAL LETTERS.
Skeleton Poster Books for GRAMMAR

The End