



**The  
punctuation  
book**



**Sue Palmer**

Punctuation marks  
help make  
**meaning clear** in  
written texts.

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**

See also The Sentence Book  
The Complex Sentence Book

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- **full stop** shows the end of a **statement**

Three  
punctuation  
marks can show  
the end of a  
sentence.

- ?
- exclamation mark** shows
- \* raised voice
  - \* strong feelings
  - \* an **exclamation**
- !

# The comma ,

separating the **items in a list**

*I bought **eggs**, **a pint of milk**, **tea** and **sugar**.*

separating the **direct speech** from a reporting clause

See explanation on **direct speech** page.

separating off **'tag phrases'** and **names**

*This is great, **isn't it?**  
How old are you, **John?***

Within a sentence a **comma** shows where one chunk of meaning ends and another begins...

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.

marking off **extra information** embedded in the sentence

See also comma splice.

*Jill, **my boss**, is 28 years old.*

# Dash -

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

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

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

# Brackets ( )

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

marking off **extra information** embedded in the sentence

*e.g. On Monday (the first day of our holidays) we explored the beach.*

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

marking off extra facts like **dates** or **dimensions**

*e.g. Elizabeth I (1553 – 1603)  
Mount Everest (8850 m)*

Brackets are sometimes called **parentheses**. Information in brackets is said to be in **parenthesis**. Commas and dashes can also enclose parenthetical information.

# Semicolon ;

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.*

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

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.*

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.*

*e.g. I love the first lines of 'Jabberwocky':  
"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe..."*

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.*

# Direct Speech

- \* Each new speaker on a new line.
- \* Speech marks (“ ”) round the **direct speech**.
- \* Comma between **direct speech** and **reporting clause**...
- \* ...unless there's a ? or !
- \* **Direct speech** begins with a capital letter...
- \* ...unless a sentence is interrupted by the **reporting clause**.

comma before the speech marks

“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.

See also The Sentence Book, pages 8 – 9.

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# Speech marks

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 a **quotation**

*Wordsworth wrote about an 'inward eye'.*

to show that a word is being used **ironically** or **'oddly'**

*There were many 'experts' in the audience.*

to show when you are **talking about** a word or phrase

*The word 'exit' is the Latin for 'he goes out'.*

to indicate the **title** of a book, film, etc

*The book 'Black Beauty' was also made into a film.*

“ ”

‘ ’

**Double and single speech marks.**

Double marks are usually used in handwritten texts. Single marks are often used in printed texts.

# Hyphen -

A **hyphen** links words or parts of words

when they are put together to make a new word

when a word is **split** between two lines of print

*e.g.*

*e.g. mother-in-law  
Irish-American  
co-operation*

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.

a comma splice

Rule of thumb:

If you could substitute a full stop, a comma is probably wrong.

Rule:

A comma cannot be used to separate two main clauses.

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

omission

possession

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 '

cannot    should **have**    you **are**  
can't    should've    you're

it **is**    I **will**    does **not**  
it's    I'll    doesn't

the **girls'** coats

the coats **belonging to the girls**

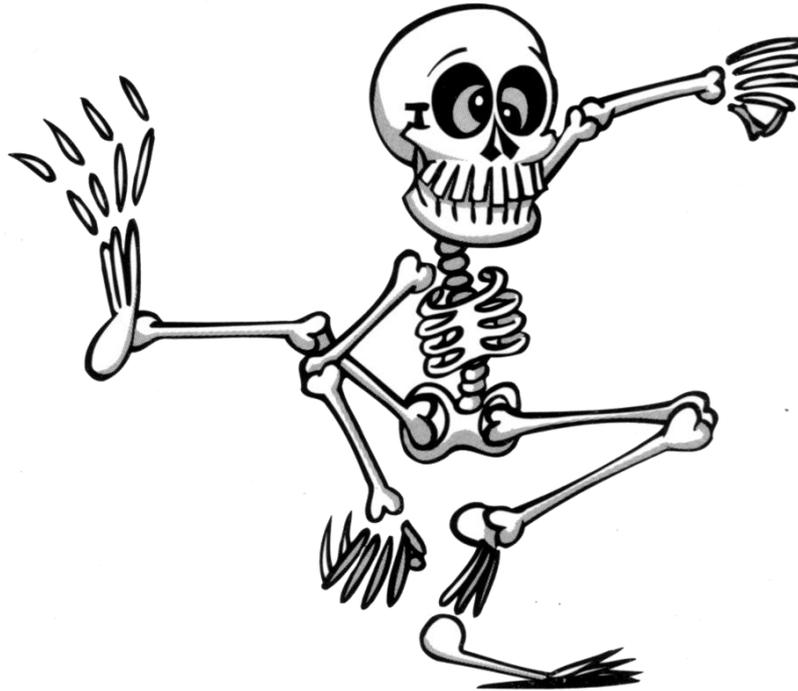
the **princesses'** hats

the hats **belonging to the princesses**

# 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**

End Show