

Alphabetical Punctuation Guide

Punctuation	Name	Meaning/ Purpose	Background and Tips
&	Ampersand	Shorthand <i>and</i>	The ampersand was invented as a space saver in the 1700s and was used frequently for a time. Now its use is confined to names that contain it, such as A&W Root Beer or as a decoration. <i>My phone was with AT&T.</i>
'	Apostrophe	Shows possession or contraction or deleted letters	Looking like an elevated comma, the apostrophe: • shows possession (<i>Carlos's pencil, the book's cover</i>); or • shows a contraction or deletion of letters. (<i>Don't do that too often 'cause it sounds too casual.</i>)
:	Colon	Announces a surprise or a list; acts as a drumroll for something to follow	Capitalize the first word after a colon if it's a name; if what follows is a complete sentence, the first word may be capitalized or lowercase, depending on which style guide you use.
,	Comma	Separates but also joins	The comma, the most used punctuation mark , can • separate items in a series, • enclose asides or interrupters, • join sentences when used with one of the FANBOYS, and • separate openers and closers from sentences.
—	Dash	Shows a break in thought or sets off something with emphasis	The dash can often be replaced by a comma, colon, semicolon, or parentheses. Don't overuse our friend—the dash—because it will lose its emphatic effect.
...	Ellipsis	Indicates omission or hesitation	Use three dots for an ellipsis. If you're ending a complete sentence with an ellipsis or inserting the ellipsis after a complete sentence, keep the period. It may look like four dots, but it's really three with a period. <i>Being on the lam was a whole lot of fun . . . for about five minutes.</i> —Christopher Paul Curtis, <i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> (36)
!	Exclamation mark	Indicates extreme pain, fear, astonishment, anger, disgust, or just plain yelling	Don't overuse exclamation points! Really!! Cut it out!!!
—	Hyphen	Indicates that two words should be thought of as one, especially when using two adjectives or groups of words that are acting as a unit	Use hyphens to • join compound adjectives before a noun (<i>ten-year-old student</i>) • join compound nouns and two-word and multiple-word concepts (<i>mother-in-law, know-how, skin-deep</i>) • add a prefix to a word when clarity is needed or to avoid doubling vowels (<i>anti-intellectual</i>) • divide lettered words (<i>T-shirt, L-shaped, X-ray, U-turn</i>) • divide a word between syllables at the end of a line: <i>When in doubt about hyphen-ation, check your dictionary</i> <i>Most sources no longer recommend hyphenating proper nouns and adjectives relating to geography or nationality (Mexican American, Italian American).</i>

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Alphabetical Punctuation Guide *(continued)*

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()	Parentheses	Indicates an aside or something nonessential (parenthetical)	Parentheses may be used for • clarification of technical terms, • conversions or translations, and • asides.
.	Period	Indicates what the British call a “full stop.” The sentence is over. Abbreviations and initials may also use periods.	<i>When you reach the period, it's all over.</i> —Patricia O’Conner, <i>Woe Is I</i> (134) <i>Mr. Chips, Ms. Pacman, Dr. Pepper, or gov.</i> No periods between initialisms such as CIA or NBA, or when a person’s entire name is replaced with initials, such as JFK or RBG.
?	Question mark	Indicates, you guessed it, a question. It can also show doubt.	Need I say more? Genuine questions deserve their own mark. Don’t use a question mark for indirect questions: <i>The principal is always asking me questions.</i>
“ ”	Quotation marks	Encloses direct speech or direct quotes from sources	<i>“Dialogue brings writing to life,” said the student.</i> (Use single quotation marks to indicate a quote within a quote.)
;	Semicolon	Links sentences with similar ideas. May be needed when there are already too many commas in a sentence.	Between the period and the comma lies the semicolon. When items in a series contain commas, separate them with a semicolon for clarity. Ships came and went; men and women did their chores, talked, and sought relief from the heat and insects; the markets and shops hummed with activity; children played; and the city, state, and federal governments went about their business. —Jim Murphy, <i>An American Plague</i> (9)
/	Forward slash	Shows the end of a line in quoted poetry and may be used to separate alternatives like either/or	Though the slash is used in legal documents, most mavens refrain from using it in prose, unless showing line endings in poetry. For example, dealing with the gender issue by inserting his/her will get a rise out of many a maven. Web addresses use the forward slash constantly.
:-)	Smiley face and other emoticons	Indicates emotions	Don’t use an emoticon in writing other than in e-mail, a sticky note, or extremely informal communication :-). Emoticons are a bit outdated now, but your mom and dad might still use them because they can’t figure out GIFs.