

4. Semicolon — joins connected statements and phrasal lists

The semicolon joins independent but related statements in a sentence not joined by a conjunction to indicate a close connection.

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. [Dickens]

Let us honour him with a plaque; let us present him with a festschrift; let us continue his noble and honourable fight for fairness for all.

I used to be insufferable, but then I met Susana; now I'm ineluctable.

Separating phrases in a series or list

The teacher gave us some examples of oxymorons: an unselfish banker; a truthful politician; a ubiquitous grammarian; and free healthcare.

Used with the linking words **however**, **nevertheless**, **consequently**...

The swingeing cuts introduced by management were severe; however, no staff were made redundant on this occasion.

It may have been a pyrrhic victory; nevertheless, Ethan won the case.

My printer broke down; consequently, I had to resort to pen and ink.

5. Question Mark — asks a direct question

A question mark is used for all direct questions in sentences

How much do the tickets cost? Where can I find a good restaurant?

Who ordered all this expensive stationery? Who called you just now?

No question mark is used in a sentence that has an indirect question

I wonder how many British bankers ended up in prison for fraud.

She asked me why I adored the late French actress Françoise Dorléac.

Request and demands do not require a question mark

Would you be quiet, please. Would you leave now, please. [Requests]

Will you be quiet! Will you please leave the room! [Demands]

6. Exclamation Mark — use to express strong feelings or emotions

Avoid using the exclamation mark when writing formal documents such as reports, statements, proposals, essays, CVs and so on.

Good heavens! Here's Johnny! It's show time! Yikes! Help!

Leave now! Stop! Be quiet! Look out! Run! It's behind you!

7. Dash — use to separate a phrase or comment in a sentence

Use a dash for emphasis or to signal a surprise or interruption

Griselda has just one passion in life – cobalt blue tarantulas.

For my dog Grippa and me there is only one sport – cricket.

What McQwerty needed most he never got – a thrashing.

There is no sport – absolutely none – more enjoyable than cricket.

Use a dash as a linking device in a sentence

My uncle was killed in the 1914–1918 war. But From 1914 to 1918.

Please refer to pages 6–28 for guidance on using apostrophes.

I wrote an A–Z guide to English grammar, which no one bought.

8. Parentheses — use to set off a phrase or clause in a sentence

Keep punctuation for the parenthesised text within the round brackets

Flinty McQwerty (who is he?) dispenses jokes of profound feebleness.

The English Grammar Card (a free guide) is available on the web, now.

Please bring galoshes (if you have a pair), a raincoat and a compass.

9. Hyphen — use to divide, combine and join words

Use to create compound adjectives

He is a top-class batsman and a happy-go-lucky character in the team.

The five-match one-day cricket series starts in 11 days' time.

Use for all compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine

Ninety-five commuters had never heard of the legend of Sisyphus.

I counted twenty-four misspellings in Flinty's Guide to Spelling book.

10. Ellipsis — indicates the omission of one or more words or phrases

Creating a trailing off effect

Emily boarded the yacht draped in a diaphanous turquoise kaftan ...

McQwerty was easy to work with ... most of the time.

The JJ Sisters sang about the three keys to a woman's heart ...

11. Colon — introduces lists, contrasts, direct speech and amplifications

Introducing a list

The Eight Parts of Speech include the following word classes: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

Susana had three positive characteristics: wit, warmth and wistfulness.

Amplifying a previous clause

There is one exception to the rule: if the lawyer is used, knowingly or unknowingly, to commit or cover up a crime or serious fraud, then she can disclose what she knows.

My parthian shot to Griselda was quite telling: a solar-powered facial hair remover; a year's supply of tummy-tuck tights and a pot of putty.

Presenting a conclusion

All the coaching and training I gave to the APES members had one aim: to find and fine people who abuse and misuse apostrophes on signs.

The point I'm trying to make is this: punctuation helps your readers to understand what you are trying to convey in your writing.

Contrasting statements

Man proposes: woman disposes: peace reigns. Write less: edit more.

Introducing direct speech

She left me with a question: "I will return, but will you wait for me?"

Biblical references and website addresses

Traditionally a colon is used between the bible chapter and verse(s)

The talking-donkey story is found in the book of Numbers 22:21-39.

Visit the websites <http://www.tes.co.uk> or <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.

12. Quotation Marks — indicates the exact words spoken or quoted

Quotation marks, or inverted commas, are always used in pairs to enclose the words spoken by a person or taken as a quote from literature.

After the sherry trifle, I turned to my beloved, "Darling," I gushed, "your hair is like a herd of goats skipping down the mountainside and your teeth are like sheep bounding up from the dip." Griselda glared at me and growled, "Shut up, eat your prunes, and take Tubby for a walk!"

I asked Griselda if she had ever imagined in her wildest dreams that one day I would be the president of the Stop Neutering Our Baboons Society [SNOBS]. "Dickie," she said, "you never feature in my wildest dreams!"

When Griselda eventually left me because of what she called "involuntary servitude", I found solace and succour in the soothing and searing words of the poet Christina Rossetti: "Better by far that you should forget and smile, than that you should remember and be sad."

A quotation within a quotation — double, single, single, double marks.

Susana asked, "Did Flinty say 'schadenfreude' or 'sauerkraut'?"

My mother urged me to ask Griselda to go blackberry picking with me. "Remember what that man said, 'Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid.' Besides," my mother assured me, "she can only say no."

When I asked Griselda, she sneeringly replied, "Dickie, I would sooner use caustic soda as a moisturiser than be seen out with you!"

Punctuation can add the merit of clarity and vibrancy to your writing

While I waited for Susana, I glared at a passing greengrocer who was sporting a bright green tabard with the printed bold alliteration: "Abolish apostrophe's altogether!" [sic]

I cleared my nares and bawled at the brute: "I say, one should never use an apostrophe to create a plural noun; not even for assonance."

Suddenly, the illiterate dolt turned on me. "Apostate!" he yelled.

*In the ensuing fracas, I was bitten twice on my right pinna; separated from my all-weathers flip-flops (just a day old); my prized kidney donor card was defaced by a mutt – corgi – and my bronze pencil sharpener was contorted into a novel device for the instant depilation of people who still can't tell the difference between the words **its** and **it's**.*

When Susana found me with a hank of hair in my hand, she shrieked, "What the... I say, poppet, have you been imbibing to excess again?"